Spaces of Imagination

Associational Life and the State in Post-War, Urban Liberia

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CONTENTS

List of Acronyms 4

Maps 6

Preface 8

1. Introduction and Conceptual Outline 10

1.1. Agency and the Social Imaginary 13

1.1. State and Society 24

1.2. Associational Life 29

Outline of the Book and the Chapters 35

2. Sharing Experience and Long Conversations: On the Setting and Methodology 40

2.1. Entering the Post-War, Urban Context 40

2.2. Researching in and on the "Concrete Forest" 52

2.3. Methods 57

2.5. Conclusion 68

3. State Formation, the Making of History and *Normal Days* 70

3.1. Formation of the Centralized State and the 'Americo-Liberian' Imagery 70

3.2. Politicization of Ethnicity in a Historical Perspective 75

3.3. The Mandingo and Social Constructions of Belonging 79

3.4. William V.S. Tubman - Self-proclaimed Father of the Nation 81

3.5. William R. Tobert - Socialism and the End of 'Americo-Liberian' Hegemony 84

3.6. Samuel K. Doe: Power to the 'Natives' 87

3.7. Charles G. Taylor: Rebel Leader, *Papay,* President 94

3.8. Conclusion: The End of *Normal Days* 98

4. "A little hope will give you a greater hope". Emic Imaginaries of War and Peace 99

4.1. James' Life History in War and Peace 102

4.2. The Intricacies Along the Continuum of War and Peace 110

4.3. Imaginaries of War and Peace 112

4.4. War Anecdotes and Peace Rhetoric 117

4.5. Discursive Formation of a War Frame in a Post-war Context 118

5. Shaping an Imagery of the Post-war Liberian State 122
5.1. Urban Imaginaries, Modernities and Expecations 122
5.2. Having the People "At Heart": Johnson Sirleaf and the Arrangements of Power 128
5.3. (In)Security 136
5.4. Fostering Gender Equality - Empowering Women? 141
5.5. Elections Between Democratization and Economic Opportunities 145
5.6. More than Roads: Arteries of Social Life 150
5.7. Normal Days and the Politics of Making the Future 153
6. Crafting a Present and a Future 158
6.1. *Big People* and Social Networks 159
6.2. *Trying* 164
6.3. *Hustling* 166
6.4. Studying 172
6.5. Associational Life 176
6.6. Conclusion 182
7. Disbanded Soldiers in the Shadows of the State 184
7.1. No Longer Soldiers, Not Truly Civilians 185
7.2. Lifeworldly Realities and Everyday Life of Disbanded Soldiers 190
7.3. Contested Actors of a Contested Past 197
7.4. Seeing the State Like Soldiers: Formation of UDAFOL 202
7.5. Election Time! The Making of 'Good Guys' and 'Bad Guys' 207
7.6. Popular and Counter-Images: The Discursive Formation of UDAFOL 211
7.7. Aiming For a Better Future 214
7.8. Conclusion 217
8. Mandingo's Contested Belonging: The Story of COMASL 219
8.1. Politics of Belonging 220
8.2. Ethnicity and Politicization in Recent History 223
8.3. Ordinary Everyday – Emic and Etic Articulations of Ethnicity 226
8.4. The Concerned Mandingo Society of Liberia (COMASL) 230
8.5. Formation of COMASL 232
8.6. Elections 241
8.7. COMASL Imaginaries 242
8.8. State's Production of Images of Efficiency, Change and Unity 244

8.9. Conclusion 247

9. The West Point Women: At the Heart, but yet at the Margins 250

9.1. Brave Women, Vulnerable Women - Agency of Women Along the War-Peace Continuum 252

9.2. “People from West Point are very United. We Put Our Community First” 256

9.3. Formation of the West Point Women for Health and Development Organization 261

9.4. Addressing the State and Claiming Election Promises 274

9.5. Associational Life: Sociality, Networks and Politics 277

9.6. Back to *Normal Days*? 279

9.7. Conclusion 281

10. Three Associations Claiming State Action 285

10.1. Spatial and Temporal Contexts 286

10.2. Frames and Labels 289

10.3. Marginality and Belonging 290

10.4. Seeing the State in their Mind’s Eyes 291

11. Associational Life, Social Imaginaries and State Relations 295

11.1. A State Imaginary Informed by *Normal Days*, an Insecure Present and an Uncertain Future 296

11.2. Associational Life in Post-war Monrovia 300

11.3. Spaces of Imagination 305

References 309

Websites and Newspaper Articles 326

Appendix: Timeline 332

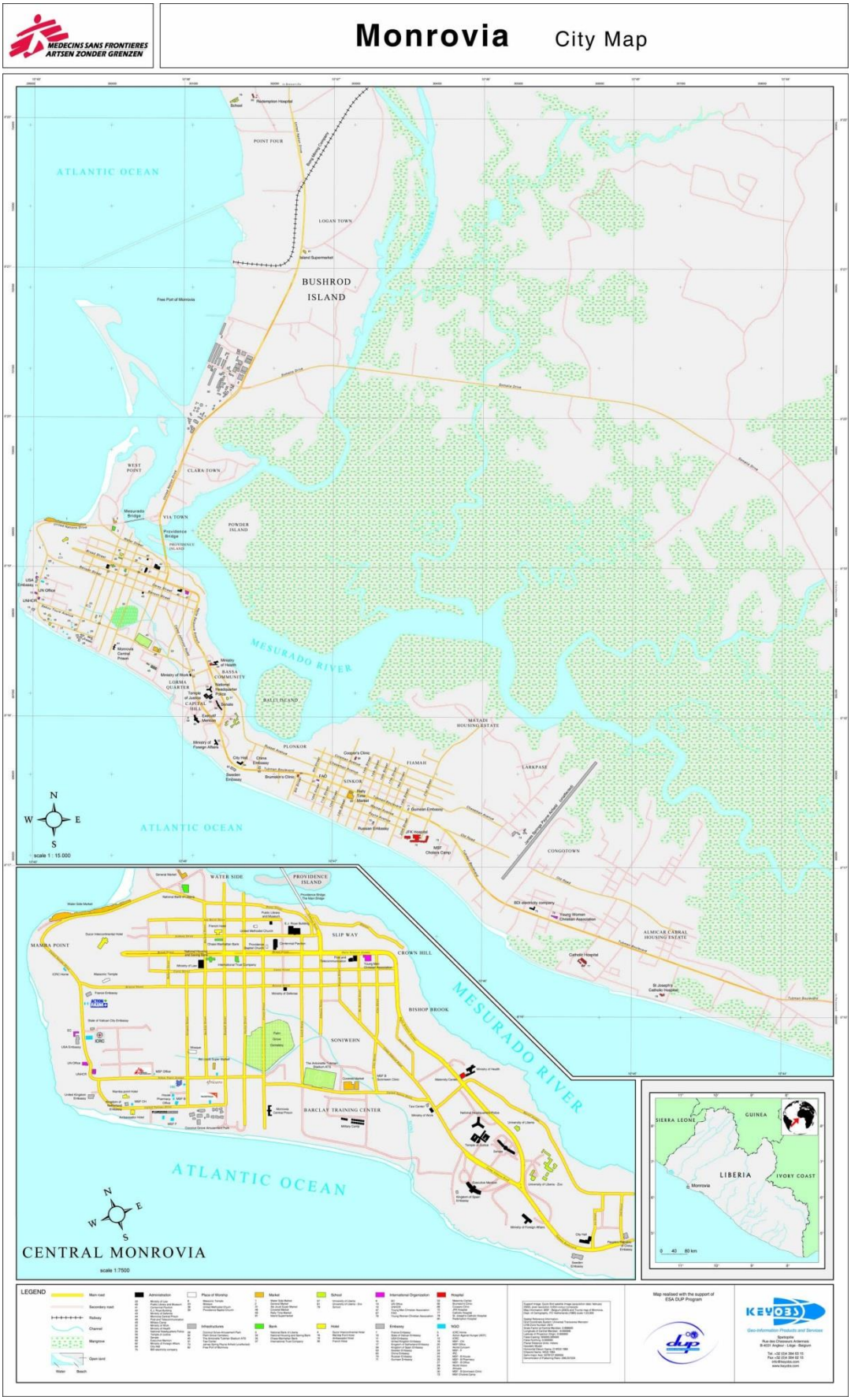
LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACDL	Association for Constitutional Democracy in Liberia (ACDL)
AFELL	Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia
AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
AU	African Union
BTC	Barclay Training Center “the Barracks”
CDC	Congress for Democratic Change (Political party with Chairperson George Weah)
COMASL	Concerned Mandingo Association of Liberia
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DDRR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West Africa
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Cease-Fire Monitoring Group
EEA	Emic Evaluation Approach
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GOL	Government of Liberia (often in reference to Charles Taylor led government)
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICGL	International Contact Group on Liberia
INPFL	Independent National Patriotic Front (rebel faction, Prince Y. Johnson, 1990-1993)
KAICT	Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation
LEC	Liberia Electricity Corporation
LFF	Liberian Frontier Force (precursor of the Armed Forces of Liberia)
LNP	Liberian National Police
LPC	Liberia Peace Council (LPC)
LPRC	Liberia Petroleum Refining Company
LU	University of Liberia (LU or UL)
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy

NCDDRR	National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration
NEC	National Election Commission
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia (founded by Thomas Quiwonkpa, later led by Charles Taylor and changed to NPP in 1997)
NTGL	National Transitional Government of Liberia
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
MOJA	Movement for Justice in Africa (Founding members include Togba-Nah Tipoteh and Amos Sawyer)
NDP	United Nations Development Programme
NPP	National Patriotic Party (Chairperson Charles Taylor)
PAL	Progressive Alliance of Liberia (Founding members include Gabriel Baccus Matthews)
PRC	People's Redemption Council (Military junta and political party, Chairperson Samuel K. Doe)
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TWP	True Whig Party (ruling party between 1869 and 1980)
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UDADOL	Unconstitutionally Disbanded Armed Forces of Liberia
UP	Unity Party (Political party with Chairperson Ellen Johnson Sirleaf)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WEPIF	West Point Intellectual Forum
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation
WPHD	West Point Women Health and Development Organization (West Point Women)
WONGOSOL	Women NGOs Secretariat of Liberia
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SSR	Security Sector Reform

MAPS

Map 1: Liberia Source: UN Cartographic Section http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/liberia.pdf



Map 2: Map of Monrovia. Source: http://spaceinimages.esa.int

PREFACE

Monrovia was in a gray and foggy mood, and although the rainy season had ended long ago, heavy rains fell weekly in January. The relaxing calm of the Christmas holidays had ended, and the hustle and bustle of everyday life continued. The New Year of 2010 heralded the pre-election period, which had already found its way into public debates. One such popular issue was the Threshold Bill that needed to be passed.[1] A range of politically engaged organizations and activists had been drawing attention to this topic for a while and the bill had become their metaphor. The passing of the Threshold Bill was claimed to be a precondition for the elections and it was to be marked accordingly in the constitution, went some of the argumentation. Many people doubted that the bill would pass, as it was in the interest of some of the parliamentarians only, and the bill was sent back and forth between the president and the parliament for a good while. A demonstration was announced over the nationwide Star Radio on January 11, 2010. Though I had repeatedly been warned to avoid crowds in this war-affected city, public claims making, such as the one surrounding the Threshold Bill, was of central interest to my research, and I decided to observe the gathering from a certain distance due to the cautious advice of my research assistant, Mr. Swaray. We went to observe the scene, planning to talk to some participants either during or after the event. Well before 9 am, the official start-off of the demonstration, there was already a busy crowd of people dressed in white shirts and preparing colorful cardboard posters in the street. A taxi with an inbuilt sound system supported the group acoustically with the aim of arousing attention towards it. The scene was quite hectic; the preparations went fast, and on time, the group started to march in a firm pace down Camp Johnson Road towards the Capitol Hill, the governmental heart of power. We followed the group, and Mr. Swaray proposed we take a shortcut and enter the fenced parliament grounds from the University Campus side, so that we could observe the group arriving towards the parliament building. Indeed, the entrance fence to the parliament from the direction of the demonstrators had already been closed and was guarded by six armed UNMIL soldiers. Besides that, there were about six Liberian police officers, a number of presidential security staff and informal security personnel present. My research assistant pointed out the latter two categories of securities, as they were not clearly identifiable by me – only that they were facing the demonstrators in opposition. The group of demonstrators had grown in number; I counted about one hundred and fifty persons, mostly men. Mr. Swaray pointed out a number of what he called civil society activists and leaders of NGOs. They were accompanied by a group of drummers dressed in a shade of brown and green uniform shirts with pleated black trousers. The

[1] The argument was that electoral constituencies require adjustment according to population shifts and growth. The passing of the Bill would mean that demarcations would have to be drawn anew and would have administrative and financial consequences. According to the increase in the threshold, it would also lead to more seats in parliament. The parliament and the president finally came to an agreement and the Bill was signed on August 02, 2010 by President Johnson Sirleaf, which held that in addition to the sixty-four seats established in 2005, the most populated counties would in total get nine new electoral constituencies (Executive Mansion 02.08.2010).

taxi with the sound system had vanished. The demonstrators were transmitting three main messages that were visibly displayed on poster boards: the parliament should pass the Threshold Bill, implement the TRC Report, and reform the Constitution. These messages were supported by smaller paper posters with slogans such as “we are tired, act now” or “we are tired of empty promises”. On the shortcut to the parliament, I had observed a smaller number of demonstrators sitting at the university campus entrance of the parliament. They were mostly women holding banners requesting the dismissal of the Minister for Gender and Development who had been criticized for reasons of corruption. Interested in this broad range of political activities, I remained concentrated on the Threshold Bill demonstrators who were in the meanwhile resigned to stand around the Parliament entrance, while some even sat down. An energetic man was relentlessly discussing with the security personnel at the entrance using lively gestures. The group had a petition signed by more than fifty leaders of so-called civil society organizations, as told to me by one of the activists afterwards.[2] Though the interest in the passing of the Threshold Bill seemed to be a concern of a wide range of Liberians, the group of demonstrators was rather small, and Mr. Swaray thought the low turn up was due to misinformation. We gathered further information from radio call-in programs, in public spaces and among a number of informants. A rather common argument was that the people just have too much to do and too many more severe problems that preoccupy them. Yet another person assumed that people were afraid to demonstrate,[3] which was, in fact, an answer that I had anticipated against the backdrop of people’s past experiences of political action in a context of violence and civil war. Many recall that “too many things have happened” in past demonstrations and other forms of contestation. By the same token, much was achieved through collective action such as the Threshold Bill demonstration. The story ends with the arrival of two representatives who had been informed and subsequently came towards the demonstrators. The group was able to make a brief statement and passed the signed document over to the parliamentarians. After that, the group dissolved.

I had been spellbound by the unique situation of Liberia in the West African context. Having been founded for freeborn and freed slaves from the USA, and with its long history of political struggles and war, my interest laid in the political engagement of social actors against this particular backdrop. A new imagery of Liberia emerged after the end of the war. It featured the first elected female president of Africa, Ma Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and an enormous international enthusiasm to rebuild the war-torn country. Despite vast restructuring efforts, Liberia still appeared quite seldom in scholarly works and conferences, the media or in historiography. Making sense of the chronicles of war and embedding them in a wider context, which allows meaningful interpretation, as well as an in-depth description of the social life, becomes challenging without solid

[2] Interview with a human rights activist (Monrovia, 13.01.2010).
[3] Informal discussion with a Liberian intellectual (Monrovia, 13.01.2010).

textual references. War reporting media positioned Liberia and its combatants as a greed-driven "doomsday carnival" (Utas 2000), a simplified perspective that portrayed the phenomenon as beyond human rationality, an imagery that is persistent until today and initially informed my own ethnographic gaze upon the social and political condition present. However, with the lived experience of shared daily reality this context revealed itself as an exciting arrangement of a sprawling agency of spaces of imagination, future plans and social engagements on various dimensions of everyday life. The interlocking between the state and society seemed persistent on all levels, but hard to point out. The Threshold Bill demonstration serves as a vital illustration and introduction into this research theme of collective action in post-war Monrovia; it also exhibits challenges in doing competent research in this context. It is not properly a case of "fieldwork under fire" (Nordstrom 1995), but still it is set in a context of insecurities. As social actors in post-war Liberia, the researchers' agency builds on knowledge and experiences which needs to be updated according to a novel context in order to generate a sense of familiarity. This research is about ordinary social actors in the context of the insecurity and uncertainty of post-war Liberia. The everyday is marked by their quest to secure and foster their own personal and their families' life situation. Yet, there exist formulated explicit and also implicit imaginaries of how the social is expected to be like. These imaginaries are not only discussed and debated, often in voluntary associations; they also subsequently become translated into collective actions such as the Threshold Bill demonstration. Understanding how and when people make claims, including bodily practices of protest and dissent situated at the heart of the centralized state, became the core of my research interest.

1. Introduction and Conceptual Outline

This book explores social imaginaries in urban Liberia, a social and physical environment in which the everyday remains intricate for many people even a decade after the end of the civil war. I demonstrate in what ways people join forces towards common goals to overcome daily hurdles and in what role they expect the state to play a part. How do Liberians imagine the social to be and how are these social imaginaries transformed into practice? Liberia's recent and longer history is characterized by a continuum of war and peace (Richards 2005a, Utas 2005a), particularly by two civil wars between 1989-1996 and 1999-2003.[4] The last war ended with the defeat of President - and former rebel leader - Charles Taylor in 2003. Since then, the process of state formation took a new turn under the auspices of Africa's first elected female President and 'donor darling' Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, in office since 2006. Despite the presence of international actors and related money influx to move Liberia along the "peacekeeping-to-statebuilding continuum" (McGovern

[4] A timeline of the Liberian war is found in the appendix, as well as in Chapters 3 and 4. For a deep analysis of the Liberian civil wars, see the work of the historian Stephen Ellis (2007), the social anthropologist Mats Utas (2003), and the political scientist Felix Gerdes (2013).

2008: 338), a range of problems remain. The functioning of the public sector remains precarious; the infrastructure is in bad condition, unsteady electricity is only partially available, fresh water and sanitary facilities are scarce, whereas the majority of Liberians have only marginally experienced the state as being beneficial in any way over the last few decades. The economy is recovering slowly and consequently jobs are few and far between while working conditions remain unsecure; life is "on hold" (Diouf 2003) for a wide range of social actors in the aftermath of a war.[5] Yet despite this intricate context, I will bring to light how social actors engage in situational *hustling* activities and *try* to forge a living, motivated by imaginaries of a better future, encouraged by opportunities that come along in the changing urban context. Many collective efforts based on shared imaginaries inform particular agency in order to enhance change. Yet the state plays a particular role both empirically as well as in the analysis of state-society relations. As the demonstration described in the preface showed, social actors ascribe to the state a great deal of responsibility, and make claims towards political leaders to catalyze change. State and society are not monolithic black boxes but rather they are composed of individual actors with various experiences and knowledge, and are very closely interwoven into a "state in society" (Migdal 2001), formed and shaped by multidimensional relationships of claims making and according responses. Still there exist official norms that underlie the expectations towards the powerful political leaders that give the state a concrete imagery (Olivier de Sardan 2008). These norms emerge from the political history of the Liberian state and the experiences from other governments, notably within the continuum of war and peace and in the pockets of everyday life of post-war Monrovia, in which social actors have formed associations for collective action from within the shadows of the state.[6]

This book provides insights into particular social spaces of everyday life in post-war Monrovia and disentangles this context of two interlocking dimensions of intricacies, one relating to the violent conflict, and the other relating to the urban space. I will briefly elaborate on this distinction before introducing the relevant analytical concepts. The urban context poses challenges due to a high level of poverty and the absence or overuse of public goods and services such as sanitation, water wells, street lights and maintenance, or security. These issues are not particularities of Monrovia only, but generate a challenge to urban governance in many cities around the world. Monrovia, however, experienced a rapid increase of inhabitants and almost doubled its size during the war. The dimension of the post-war on the other hand generates intricate challenges which are more subtle, deep-ranging and hard to locate, identify and address. Examples are the frictions along lines of politicized ethnicity which lead to regional and situational interpersonal conflicts, small scale violence, or sexualized violence against women and girls, which some considered as a symptom of the aftermath (Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen 2001a, Cockburn 2013). As I will highlight in the following chapters,

[5] However, it can likewise be argued that life had been on hold for many people in the years previous to the civil war due to economic and political exclusion of the broader population.

[6] Literature is reviewed in the respective chapters. Here, only the most important literature is introduced in order to embed the outline of the book.

urban and post-war intricacies are interlocked and not easily differentiated empirically and analytically. The growing population challenges infrastructures of all kinds, requiring novel solutions to old and new problems.

These complex problems are addressed from various levels. The first refers to the governmental level of policy makers and implementers in public institutions with plans for reforms to enhance change. The second are the numerous international organizations and actors engaging in multiple ways to facilitate humanitarian aid, starting development assistance, and conducting post-conflict peacebuilding focusing on structural reforms. Powerful national and international actors boost change from the top-down through national reforms and programs. However, as the manifold complexity of problems persist and change is considered slow by many ordinary Liberians, the third level comes into play: the ordinary people, who individually or through groups of collective action address these issues from the grassroots level. All these three levels of actors are interwoven, as societal problems and power relations cut across the various milieus within society. The third level, the local population, stands at the center stage of this book. The demonstration illustrated in the preface shows how grievances are formulated into claims towards the state, always against the backdrop of an imagined better future. However, as I extensively discuss in the next chapters, there remain sticky issues to be considered; the 'civil society' in Liberia is far more heterogeneous than is often assumed, as this book will clearly show. Post-war societal processes such as reconciliation are debated and the procedures, reports and recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) remain largely contested (James-Allen, Weah and Goodfriend 2010 or Gberie 2008). By demanding the implementation of the TRC, the 'civil society organizations' mentioned in the preface display that they are merely one fragment of the Liberian perspective on this matter where as many others have different views or priorities.

Empirical inquiry revealed that a vast majority of Liberians are part of at least one, but more often several associations of which they are actively or passively part of and to which they attribute essential importance. In fact, associations and their political engagement play a vital role in the political history of Liberia, especially since the time of the socialist government of the 1970s. Innovative forms of collective action have emerged during and after the war. In the post-war context, many associations remain politically active. They aim at improving their members' social position and often draw upon a repertoire of contestation - such as public demonstrations which regularly fill the streets of Monrovia. Other associations have transformed into NGOs and now primarily focus on welfare and service delivery. A number of social anthropologists have problematized the funding-driven engagement of international actors in "training of trainers training trainers" in "talkshops" (Baaz and Utas 2012b: 6), "aid business" (Fuest 2007) and the various "blue prints" (Utas 2008) and "plans for Liberia" (Bøås 2009a) that are being produced. Post-war reconstruction is often criticized as being based on concepts that often neglect the local particularities (Autesserre 2010, 2014).

Besides the residual impressions from the war, the fast growth of Liberia's capital city complements new and old intricacies, urban and post-war challenges to the everyday life of its inhabitants. Monrovia has increased in density of inhabitants. During the war, the capital was imagined to be a safe haven due to the presence of intervention forces and international actors. Since the end of the war, it contains possibilities for higher education, chances to work for an NGO and the prospects of formal employment in a public institution. The growing population challenges infrastructures of all types asking for new strategies to solve old and new problems. Demands, hopes and expectations are addressed towards political leaders as the ultimate center of power which should not only provide goods and services, but also solve a range of societal problems, such as the marginalization of certain groups. This book aims at contributing to this field of study and generating insights into social agency from the fringes of the state. I explore how political transition has opened up spaces in which imaginaries are shared and formulated into political claims. Often, tensions arise at the nexus between images and practices of the state, and the imaginaries of ordinary people. There exist imaginaries of how the social is and how it should be; these are linked to and composed of assumptions about what the state is supposed to do for its citizens, or which authorities bear the responsibilities.

At this nexus, I link social imaginaries and contrast them with the practices of the state and the imagery that it produces, embedding the imageries in the wider context of imagination. Imagination is a practice, and hence, what is imagined varies from day to day and from event to event. But imagination may produce more stable images when there is a societal need for such images, which are shared among social actors. These collections of images around a certain theme are referred to as imagery (Förster 2011a: 3). I will elaborate how social actors forge their lives within the intricacies of the everyday in post-war Monrovia. Based on my findings, its inhabitants have quite high expectations towards the state, its role and its representatives, towards whom social actors state their claims. As such, this research is theoretically situated in the *state and statehood* debate, and it combines it with scholarly reflections on *imagination*, which, despite the almost inflationary use of the term, is only seldom made use of conceptually. Combining both strands of thought, I propose a broad non-normative approach on socio-political processes in an urban post-war context of insecurity and uncertainty.

1.1. Agency and the Social Imaginary

The actor-perspective and the focus on agency[7] have served as an empirical and analytical lens to study social life and how social actors shape their environments marked by intricacies and uncertainty. However difficult and demanding the everyday life is, social actors have subjective projects for themselves and the setting that they live within. Agency will consequently serve as the lens through which I analyze the ways in

[7] Scholarly debates on this crucial aspect of social and human sciences are broad and have a long history. For a critical and extensive literature review, see the seminal work of Emirbayer and Mische (1998), which I use as a main source in the following.

which the social actors engage with their *lifeworld*.[8] I draw upon Emirbayer and Mische (1998) who disaggregated agency into three empirically interrelated elements and defined it as follows:

> "[T]he temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the temporal-relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations." (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 970)

This definition of agency emphasizes its temporal and relational contextualization. I lean on this understanding of agency to analyze how social actors perceive, reproduce and transform structures and lifeworldly realities in order to cope with the complexities posed by the setting they face in the urban, post-war context. According to this definition, agency is composed of different temporal elements, but all components can be found in one act to varying degrees. This means that there is a degree of imagination in all human agency. Each component of agency only exists through the interplay of the other components through which the actors shape and reshape their responsiveness to a situation. The illustration of the Chordal Triad of Agency visualizes this interplay of the three elements.

I assume that actors do not merely react or respond, nor are they simply resilient. They do not always take rational decisions to handle a certain problem. However, action as the fulfillment of prior intentions in ultimate authority of the actor is not always possible in a context presently marked by intricacies and a future determined with uncertainty (Johnson-Hanks 2005: 364). Social actors have to find ways of handling difficult circumstances and make use of their capabilities, knowledge, experiences[9] and imagination even in very limited situations of high unpredictability in times of war (Utas 2003: 23). On the other hand, even where the post-war everyday seems consuming and filled with

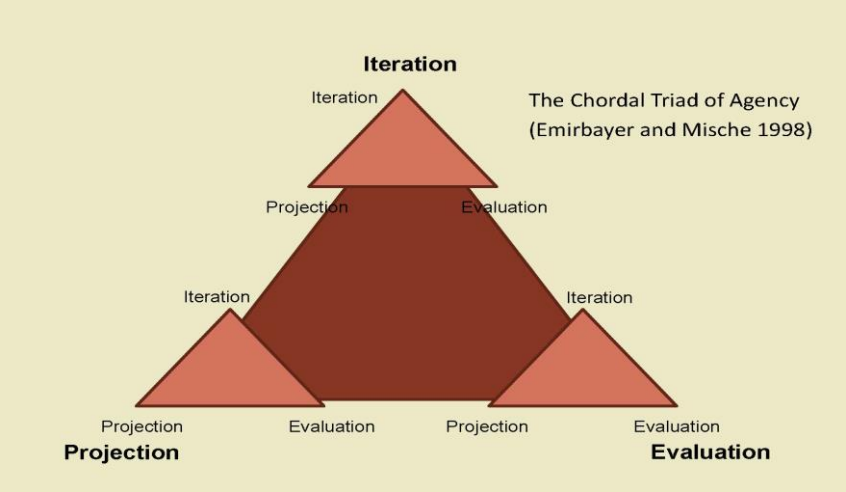


Figure 1: Adapted Chordal Triad of Emirbayer and Mische (1998)

[8] I draw on phenomenological definitions of lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) as the taken for granted social, natural or cultural reality of a social actor. It is shaped by the individuals' stock of knowledge, experiences, and typifications. Social reality (*Soziale Wirklichkeit*) is created by the engagement of individuals with one another, which creates intersubjectivity or overlapping perspective in shared practices and experiences. Everyday life is derived from the *Alltag*, which is the primary reality of social actors (Förster 1997, 2011b, Schütz and Luckmann 1985 [1973]).

[9] In post-war settings, trauma is a relevant, however very delicate phenomenon, which is not dealt with here centrally. In psychological terms, trauma is an experience of extreme stress that is managed by dissociation or repression. As such, traumatic experiences do not stay in memory, or they are saved in a remote area where only a trigger can activate them. Otherwise, traumas would not be endurable for social actors. A vast literature exists on this subject: for an overview in psychology of post-traumatic stress disorder see for example Deistler and Vogler (2002).

deficiencies, many actors have short-, mid-, and long term plans as well as tangible or diffuse aims in mind and imagine ways to achieve them. Some of the prospects are believed to be opened up through pursuing education, accessing religious institutions or associations; emic concepts such as *trying* and *hustling* are meaningful aspects of agency in the midst of a challenging present and an uncertain, but possibly better future. These avenues of social engagement indicate that these aims are situated on a temporal continuum of presently limited options and imaginaries of the future.[10] However, not only personal aims are imagined; the state and society at large are imagined and are strongly linked to these personal aims. In between the continuum of the individual and the state, there are groups that share common grievances and a shared goal, which they form into claims and mobilize among a wider public, and direct towards the state. Some personal or social plans are not immediately realizable, and then again, unexpected opportunities or obstacles occur and lead a social actor or group to adjust their agency, their plans or their time frame (Johnson-Hanks 2005).

The past plays a central role as the habitual component,[11] which refers to past patterns of thought and action. Through routines and iterations, a feeling of stability and a sense of order is established. Habits are executed to a large extent beyond consciousness. Often, and particularly in relation to an insecure present context, the past is referred to as 'normal', as expressed with the notion of 'good old times' or the Liberian concept of *normal days*. These expressions speak for themselves, as they refer to a shared understanding of order and continuity that are believed to have existed in the past. This "schematization of social experience" (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 975) is structured through the sedimentation of experience (Schütz and Luckmann 2003 [1974]: 147), which made the everyday familiar and to a large degree predictable with the social actors being reliable. In a particular past such as pre-war Liberia marked by exclusion, marginalization and discrimination, why does the past appear in such a positive light? Imagination plays a crucial role in regards to the past dimension: for their orientation, actors draw on past experiences and routines. They remember the past from the present point of view, so there must be an imaginative element in remembering. I will dwell on the differentiation of imagining and remembering later in this text; for the moment, it is noteworthy that some aspects of the social memory are reshaped in the course of time. For example, negative aspects of the past are situationally left out or emphasized at other instances. The agentic dimension of the past becomes clearer as the past is constantly shaped as memories are retrieved and simultaneously restored in a changed, updated version in the act of remembering.[12] Memories of the past change as the social

[10] I avoid the concept of livelihood in this context as it is normative, to the extent that it is embedded in developmental theory: it comprises the capabilities, assets and activities that are essential for survival and resilience (Haan 2006). The understanding of agency that comes to use here leaves activities open to all directions (economic, collective, etc.).

[11] The concept of *habitus* was coined by Pierre Bourdieu Bourdieu (1976 [1972]), Bourdieu (1983 [1979]): habitus is a system of dispositions that social actors have developed through bodily incorporation of past experiences.

[12] There exists a range of literature on this topic: for example, Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), Schwartz (1991), Halbwachs (1992), Olick and Levy (1997). As rightly observed by Mead (1932: 12): "the past (or the meaningful structure of the past) is as hypothetical as the future".

world does; routines require adjustment due to new experience in the changing social world (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 998), in which old routines might not be applicable anymore. This new situation is experienced as uncertain and unpredictable. The Eastern German *Ostalgia* is comparable in that the imagined past sometimes contradicts present memory-making (Berdahl 1999: 206): "The East was not only Stasi files and barbed wires". Hence, there must be at least two processes at work; a dominant, hegemonic one, and an opposing, countering one. Depending on the context, the time and space of remembering, calling into consciousness an instance of the past generates a new mental image of it as the person reflects upon it. Hence, changes, in particular changes of practices, are not only considered to be good.

The second element of agency is *evaluation,* which refers to the capacity to make practical and normative judgments among various trajectories of action. This element has remained under-theorized (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 971). It is situated mostly in the present. However, it is strongly linked to the past as well as the future. Though the lifeworldly reality is largely familiar to the actors and many parts of it are taken for granted, some have been changing over time and have led the social actors to adjust and reconstitute their practices and routines. This dimension corresponds to the notion of tactical agency, a rather extreme type of agency required in challenging situations: for example, women in war as portrayed by Mats Utas (2005b), or the notion of social navigation of youth by Henrik Vigh (2006, 2009a), which are all cases of agency in a war environment of "motion in motion and life-threatening unpredictability and uncertainty.[13] In post-war settings, predictability increases and social actors orient their agency gradually towards the future.

The third element of agency will be conceptualized in more detail below. It is directed towards the future, and the focus lies on the hypothesizing of experience (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 984), as social actors aim at reconfiguring past patterns towards alternative avenues against problematic situations (Johnson-Hanks 2005: 364). As rightly pointed out by Emirbayer and Mische:

> "Projectivity is thus located in a critical mediating juncture between the iterational and practical-evaluative aspects of agency. It involves a first step toward reflectivity, as the response of a desirous imagination to problems that cannot satisfactorily be resolved by the taken-for-granted habits of thought and action that characterize the background structure of the social world." (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 984)

These taken-for-granted habits are founded on internalized norms and values (Dahrendorf 1974), which are not fixed but subject to change. *Imagination* draws on the capacity to imagine future possibilities (Casey 2000), and may be reshaped in hopes, fears, or desires for the future. Not only past events make social actors adapt and reorient their agency; imagination of the future or how the social should be have changed

[13] Under uncertainty, as Johnson-Hanks (2005: 364) conceives, one can understand the real or possible threat to dis-link intention and fulfilment of an act, which makes everyday events unpredictable. Many seemingly simple aspects of everyday life are difficult to plan and to foresee, like a traffic jam and scarce means of transportation, the uncertain revenue of the petty business, death or sickness and such many more uncountable challenges. Uncertainty is not a post-war phenomenon only. There is uncertainty in many people's lives to a certain degree; Johnson-Hanks (2005: 364) speaks of uncertainty in times of crisis in Cameroon, and Ferguson (1999) explores uncertainty among the Zambian mine workers, just to name two examples. But uncertainty does not disempower social actors from agency, hence formulating and sharing personal and social imaginaries.

and continue to change agency accordingly (Förster 2012a). This last notion will be looked at more closely in the following section in order to combine the conceptualization of agency with imagination and comprehend why groups of social actors take action towards change or at least toward a claim.

IMAGINATION

Imagination often appears as a diffuse and elusive term, but at the same time it is assumed to be part of common sense. In the past, imagination has been neglected as being considered "old-fashioned idealism" against the rational and the real (Jansen 2010: 147). I make use of the conceptualization of imagination as an element of agency, hence as a process itself. Imagining is a way of temporally diving into a better environment, thereby escaping a harsh reality, which may contribute to bearing and overcoming it. But imagination is about possibilities, in contrast to utopias, which are not expected to become real (Casey 1971: 478). I will use imagination to depict how social actors imagine a better life in a caring state, but also as possibilities of decline, decay or war. At times, they might be engaged in both practices, and the boundaries between the two get blurred.

In this work, I elaborate my understanding of imagination mainly on the basis of phenomenologists, especially the philosophical work of Edward Casey (1971, 2000a, 2003), and the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (2002, 2004), as well as the social anthropological perspective developed by Till Förster (2011a, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a.[14] Though there exists a body of literature dealing with imagination and imaginaries, these concepts need to be reframed and updated.

Since the cognitive turn in psychology in the 1970s, imagination has become an object of interest in phenomenological and cognitive theory, and interdisciplinary studies (Jansen 2010). In social anthropology, imagination and related concepts remain vague.[15] They are often used as a kind of vessel to refer to elusive and vaguely known dreams or futures. Social anthropologists have identified this deficit, cf. Crapanzano (2004, Vigh 2006: 174, endnote 3). Imagination or imaginary has been explored within a range of topics, in particular in the context of migration and imagined better lives elsewhere (Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen 2009), especially the article therein of Vigh (2009b), or the work of Salazar (2010a), and in scholarly literature about tourism (Salazar 2010b). Imaginary, in this strand of scholarship, can mean to look at possibilities in other places, which are transmitted in the media or by travelers that confirm this possibility. Hence, imagination is linked to the discourses around globalization; for example, Arjun Appadurai (1998) speaks of "imagined worlds" and the global community, leaning on (Anderson 2006)'s imagined communities. In political anthropology, scholars looked at emic understandings and perceptions on states and "states of imagination" (Hansen and Stepputat 2001b), the nation (Anderson 2006 or Cubitt 1998), civil society (Comaroff and Comaroff

[14] Other disciplines, mainly philosophy, has dealt in greater depth with the concept; see for example Castoriadis (1998 [1975]).
[15] For a comprehensive literature review, see the volume of the Irish Journal of Anthropology (McLean 2007) as well as Claudia Strauss's article on the imaginary, building mostly on the philosophical conceptualizations by Cornelius Castoriadis and Charles Taylor, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and the political scientist Benedict Anderson's notions (Strauss 2006).

1999b), post-colonization (Spencer 1997) or apartheid (Friedman 2011). Political imagination offers an alternative into looking at political processes from an emic perspective, which in fact is not a recent approach, considering Abram's state-ideas and state-system (Abrams 1988 [1977]). As such, the imaginary is central to the understanding of the social and the political in Africa (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 49), an aspect that will be reconsidered in the next chapter on state and society. Scholars look at urban imaginaries as a space of creativity: particularly in urban spaces (Förster 2013b), the city specter reveals itself "as a series of refractions among real life, artifice, imagination, and action whereby residents hedge their bets as to what events, relationships, resources, and opportunities actually mean to their everyday navigation of the city" (Simone 2004: 92). Much of what happens in cities remains invisible, unexplainable, and sometimes intentionally so (Myers 2010: 18).

A further theme of scholarship in which imagination plays a role has to do with subjective futures, often framed as dreams or imagined opportunities (Johnson-Hanks 2005 or Fuh 2012), just to name a few.[16] In their conceptualization of imagination in terror and violence, Strathern and Stewart draw on Crapanzano's imaginative horizons to define violence as the unimaginable behind the horizon of what is imaginable (Strathern, Stewart and Whitehead 2006). I make use of imagination as an analytical concept suitable to frame the elusive but powerful motor - or less technically, a motivator - behind the agency of my case studies. In Cornelius Castoriadis's words: "This doing [for example a movement] is lucid when it does not alienate itself to an already established image of this future situation" (Castoriadis 1998 [1975]: 87). Hence, imaginaries are not just there, but are constantly produced and shaped in subjective and intersubjective processes of imagination.

As a practice that is predominantly directed towards the future, imagination is a capacity to envisage alternative avenues and horizons, to contextualize past habits and to evaluate a present situation (Förster 2012a: 42). Edward Casey provides deeper insight into the *process* of imagination. As a starting point he investigates how to "account for the experience of having a 'blurred image' of someone's face?" (Casey 1971: 482). The person's face is certainly not blurred, so there is a need to look at the process of imagining the person's face. Thus, he divides imagination into an act phase and an object phase, which are both prerequisites for the mental act of imagining (Casey 2000a: 40). The act phase, to which he draws particular attention, has at least three main forms in which it may occur. "Imaging" is one of the basic ways in which we imagine something's sensuous specificity, that is, "seeing with the mind's eye", "hearing with the mind's ear", and so on. It comes close to the common notion of visualizing; however, this would be just one particular mode of imaging, hence the visual. The second form is "imagining-that": a certain object or event constitutes a circumstance or situation; a state of affairs, to which it relates to. In using his examples, we can imagine-that sensuously,

[16] Though Deborah Durham (2000) utilizes the terms 'youth' and 'social imagination' prominently in her work, she does not conceptualize social imagination.

such as dolphins swimming in the sea; but we can also imagine-that non-sensuously, i.e. imagining-that a person is lecturing while one visualizes something else in the same context. He further differentiates "imagining-how", which differs from the second form in that it refers to imagining how one feels, thinks, speaks, and so on, and thereby includes the imaginer in this form of imagination (Casey 2000a: 40–48).[17]

The object phase (Casey 2000a: 49–60) is defined by its imagined content. The imagined content is composed of a world-frame and its particular imagined entities, events and states of affairs. It is embedded in an imaginal space, time, and margin, and then finally it entails the mental image. The image in Casey's sense is the mode of givenness of the imaginative presentation (Casey 2000a: 55). Therefore, when I speak of an image in this study, I mean the mental presentation, hence, a "mental image". The object is defined as follows:

> "[W]hen we imagine, we always imagine something in particular; we apprehend, however dimly, an imaginative presentation having a certain content. Imaginative experience always involves an object phase or 'intentional correlate' that answers to the act of imagining. We might say that, qua intentional act, imagination is the act of imagining an imagined object." (Casey 2000a: 49)

We can imagine but also remember someone's face. These are two processes that need to be differentiated, and as a starting point, Casey puts both faculties as produced by perception; they both build on perceived content and both appear controlled or spontaneous (Casey 2003: 67). As there are similarities, there are also a number of differences, and Casey (2003) differentiates five realms of dissimilarity between imagining and remembering. Firstly, memory normally must borrow from past perception, whereas imagination is less constricted on the past; we do not have to imagine what is past or real. Secondly, the field of experience and the field of recollection are part of a temporal continuum, whereas in imagining, there is not necessarily stability, if compared to the remembered content. There is not necessarily a link to factual points in the past. Imagining can occur freely. Thirdly, there is no equivalent for imagination for the content that is put at disposition of the memory. Fourth is what he calls familiarity: we can only remember something that we are familiar with, but we can imagine something that we are not familiar to. This is the main difference between imagination and memory. The last difference is the belief that what is remembered is existent in the personal past. In imagining, one does not posit imagined content as having been (Casey 2003: 67–72). For these reasons, imagination is an autonomous process: any social actor can imagine autonomously from the experienced reality, unlike remembering. This dialectic and interplay of imagining and remembering becomes clear in cases brought to us from visual anthropology in the work of artists that make the past visible. In painting, they produce a past that has been reflected by them from the present point of view, thereby providing the

[17] Casey (2000: 46-47) gives an example that illuminates the different forms of imagination. He starts by *imaging* Jupiter in a certain way; dressed in a specific manner and standing fixed in a pose. Jupiter may also be imaged speaking, or moving. Here, complexity is added to the imaged content. Then, he goes on *imagining-that* Jupiter is in company of other gods lounging in a pool; he is imagining a certain state of affairs. He can imagine that the gods are envious of each other, and hereby, the content of imagining-that is non-sensory. Lastly, he *imagines-how* it would be like to walk as a god or to envy other gods. In the last form, the person of the imaginer is placed within the scene.

artist's interpretation of how the past is imagined to have been (Fabian 1996, Förster 2012b). In doing so, specific aspects may be emphasized, whereas others are withheld by the artist. Other examples were given above, such as the East-German *Ostalgia* (Berdahl 1999: 206), the presidential promise of the return to "normalcy"[18] after World War I by Warren G. Harding, or the Liberian narratives of *normal days*.

In imagination, social actors most often project their agency towards the future or a situation of how something should be. Something imagined is not necessarily real or unreal. Actors imagine an unreal object that they do not expect to be real, but there is a *possibility* that it could become real. In this, imagination differs from fantasy or utopia (Casey 1971: 478), which are not considered possible. What marks the border of the imaginable and unimaginable? Vincent Crapanzano differentiates horizons and the hinterland that lies beyond the horizon of imagination: the contingency of the hinterlands is frightening (2004: 17). As such horizons mark the frontiers of imagination which cannot be crossed and which mark the border of the reachable and representationable (Crapanzano 2004: 14). "Shocking events" in Strathern and Stewart's terms, reveal and shift these frontiers and expose the unimaginable (Strathern and Stewart 2006: 9). How does this relate with Charles Taylor's conceptualization of imagination as something completely impossible to achieve (Taylor 2002: 110)? For Taylor, there must be a common understanding of order that underlies such possibilities: only a common understanding leads to common practices, which is how he defines the *social* imaginary (2004: 22). The social imaginary is situated within a continuum of implicit, routinized practices on one side, and explicit doctrines and commonly shared meanings on the other. It links the subjective actor to the social through what Taylor calls "the background" and "moral order" (Taylor 2004: 107, cf. Gaonkar 2002: 11), which becomes related to understandings of culture, or as the lifeworldly reality (Schütz and Luckmann 1984). I do not consider the social imaginary as congruent with culture:[19] it builds on a shared cultural background and on an understanding of how things are and supposed to be. I argue with Castoriadis that the imaginary is strongly linked to the social reality and that social institutions cannot be understood by their functions only. Rather, they are situated in a triangle of the social reality, symbolism and the imaginary: the symbolic requires the imaginary to express itself and to exist, whereas the imaginary takes imaginary capacities for granted (Castoriadis 1998 [1975]: 127).[20] According to Castoriadis, the social imaginary is composed of the signifier, which are the symbols, and the signified, which are the real things (Castoriadis 1998 [1975]:

[18] Normalcy is a term coined by the former US president Warren G. Harding in his promise of a "return to normalcy" after World War I (Wilson 1962).

[19] Of the various definitions of culture, I agree with Hörning and Reuter (2004: 10): "statt Kultur als Mentalität, Text oder Bedeutungsgewebe kognitivistisch zu verengen, oder sie als fragloses Werte- und Normensystem strukturalistisch zu vereinnahmen, wird in anti-mentalistischer und ent-strukturierender Weise von Kultur als Praxis gesprochen." In this definition, the cultural dimension becomes linked to the social, which lives up to the dynamic and actor-centered understanding of lifeworldly realities.

[20] Cornelius Castoriadis makes use of language and religion to illustrate this. As an example drawn from the Old Testament, a man who was working on a Sabbath was consequently stoned after God had manifested himself onto Moses and demanded such action. This story cannot be explained from a functionalist perspective but asks for socially shared meaning found in the imaginary. It can be debated if God is imaginary or considered real by some social actors (Castoriadis 1998 [1975]: 128).

127-128). Creation of social imaginaries is not about *discovering* the new, but *constituting* something new (Castoriadis 1998 [1975]: 133).

In line with this body of literature, I understand the imaginary as a process and one of the three temporal-structural dimensions of agency. It has a stronger future-oriented dimension of what is not yet, but could be, and it is likely to be informed by new inputs and hence more subject to uncertainty than culture is.[21] Imagination has to have both an individual and a social side, since the two are intrinsically linked (Förster 2012a); imagination can be implicit and explicit, in the sense that some things are imagined and uttered or even debated, whereas other aspects remain as a mental image in the realm of the personal or secret. Actors imagine subjectively, although they draw upon experience and knowledge of the lifeworld shared with others (Förster 2011a). The future can be imagined, but social actors cannot foresee the future by solely relying on the basis of past experiences and habits. There remains a certain unpredictability offered by social change, which contains the fearful that lures in the "hinterland" in Crapanzano's sense (2004: 16).[22] Social actors imagine their environments in mental images that have a source in narratives and collective memory, which in turn are informed by mental images. If shared by a number of people, imaginary becomes social imaginary: in Taylor's words it is "the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings", and he goes on to explain that it is "carried in images, stories, and legends […] what is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society" (Taylor 2002: 106). Whereas an imaginary as a whole might change, parts of older or alternative ones might persist (Gaonkar 2002: 11). However, imaginaries are shared to *a certain degree* at least in order to become a *social* imaginary. As I do not consider society to be a homogenous block, but rather composed of individuals with varying personal histories, present experiences and future projects, deviations from the commonly shared imaginary are surely extant. I am particularly attentive to those parts which form the social imaginary that are *convincing*, hence shared to a higher degree. When these "images, stories and legends" are shared to some degree, they inform the social practice of the individual and collective actors.

> "[T]he social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy. In addition, we should note that what start off as theories held by a few people may come to infiltrate the social imaginary, first that of elites, perhaps, and then of society as a whole." (Taylor 2002: 106)

Though powerful elites aim at constructing the social, the nation-state, or the city according to their plans, instances of resistance emerge from society in cases where diverging plans and imaginaries exist. The social imaginary therefore builds on or contrasts norms, in the sense that the actors share a common understanding of how the social should be like. This normative understanding often takes its shape in a negative sense,

[21] Though I avoid a teleological understanding of modernity and tradition in which culture is often situated at the latter end, I consider elements of culture to be rather rooted in the present and past dimension of agency.
[22] This is where we can locate worst case scenarios and other forms of fantasies that work back into the present.

in that it is informed by perceived negative conditions of decay or danger and normative expectations to change.

> "[S]ocial imaginary [...] is something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking rather of the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations." (Taylor 2002: 106)

Social actors share a tacit understanding of how things usually go and how they should go in contrast to ideal cases which stand for the moral or normal order (Taylor 2002: 107). In absence of such orderly action, actors engaged through a social imaginary will lead to opposing or resisting practices of some kind. They would not act the same way if it were impossible, hence utopic. Imagination is closely linked to the normative expectations social actors have towards each other. For example, a leader might be expected to provide certain goods or services to the people he/she leads. In absence of such production, the actors might evaluate the leader according to the comparison of past leaders and imagination of a better (imaginary or real) leader. Social memory often builds upon the past to legitimate a present social order; social actors can only share experiences and assumptions based on a shared knowledge and imaginaries, as well as experiences of the past (Connerton 1989: 5). In order to imagine, the (collective) memory of something is often taken as a basis to draw upon, to compare, to draw expectations from, or to direct change towards.

The concept of imagination and shared social imaginary allows for analyzing social actors' engagement with possibilities and opportunities in the making of the future despite a challenging present and past. This is a vital part of the discursive formations of the social and the political in post-war, urban Liberia. On the one hand, the object of imagination is at center stage (Casey 1971: 490): the better life in a better state in which the ground work laid and provided by an efficient state is at stake almost on a daily basis. Besides, the process of imagination helps to understand the formation of collective practices; social actors do have dreams, fantasies or utopias and use these fictitious elements to underline or emphasize their claim and mount pressure on political leaders. The past may be important to specific degrees. However, empirical work has shown that it is not necessary to have personally experienced a past good leader or state to imagine a better one in a bad present situation, as recent studies of post-war Côte d'Ivoire (Förster 2012a) or Sierra Leone (Jackson 2008) demonstrate.

IMAGERY

We find three realms of the term imagery in the everyday semantic field: "1a) the product of image makers […] also the art of making images; 1b) pictures produced by an imaging system; 2) figurative language; and 3) mental images; especially: the products of imagination."[23] Borrowing from art history and visual anthropology, I rely upon selected scholarly contributions to outline my understanding of imagery. Seminal works in

[23] http://www.merriam-webster.com (15.03.2013).

distinguishing between pictures and images include the work of (Mitchell 1996) or (Mitchell 2005) who initiated the *pictorial turn*, a call to draw attention to the realm of the visual, not only the textual. "'Word and image' is the name of a commonplace distinction between types of representation, a shorthand way of dividing, mapping, and organizing the field of representation" (Mitchell 1996: 3). He proposes a distinction and differentiation of pictures as "the constructed concrete object or ensemble (frame, support, materials, pigments, facture) from an image as the virtual, phenomenal appearance that it provides for the beholder" (Mitchell 1996: 4, FN 5). Pictures may be damaged, changed or destroyed, but the images live on. In his work "What Do Pictures Want?" (Mitchell 2005), he exhibits the seductive, attractive and powerful aspects of mental representations beyond their materiality. Pictures and beholders may stand in a "magical relationship", thereby quoting the experiment of letting students take a photograph of their mothers and ask them to cut out the eyes (Mitchell 2005: 9). A different example is the imagery of a "greener pastures" in Europe that may motivate a person for a risky migration endeavor (Förster 2010b: 294). Other imagery lacks such power, for example counter-imagery of devastating conditions of immigrants in Greece or Italy, or of the risky way to go there (Vigh 2009b). Therefore, of crucial interest is the question of: when are images powerful and when are they not? Mitchell's range of examples illustrates the power behind such pictures as they inform a range of social and cultural constructions and beliefs. As such, the power and use of imagery plays a role in various construction sights of the social world (Mitchell 2005: 301), as well as of the physical environment. As such, the imagery serves as an analytical lens of how texts and pictures can work, be used, and thus gain importance in the study of discursive formations. For the purpose of the argumentation of this research, I adopt this perspective and will insert the notion of imagery in a wider conceptualization of imagination. Imagination may be informed by powerful material pictures and mental images, which in turn inform imagination (Förster 2010b: 312). Imagination as defined above, notably as a practice, may produce more stable images when there is a societal need for or interest in such images. These images are used in communication, but also in articulation (Förster 2012b). In such cases, images around a certain topic are used and shared among social actors, and Mitchell's examples of the 9/11 attacks may serve as an exemplary case of such discourse. Shared experience and knowledge is sedimented and constitutes the lifeworldly background. This world, loosely connected by groups of image-clusters, is what we call imagery (Förster 2011a). An image can be reflected through a narrative such as a story or legend of an experienced historical situation. It remains a mental representation, but it may also be produced and reproduced in many other forms. Artists may produce pictures of it, musicians may sing about it, parents may tell stories to their children or, for the purpose of my argument, states may stage a performance drawing upon it or in contrast to it. I follow Taylor (2002: 106) in his differentiation of narratives and images, although I consider the two as inherently linked to each other, and often connected to power (Mitchell 1996: 5) and hence part of a *discursive formation*.

Michel Foucault defines a discursive[24] formation as a "system of dispersion" of related statements that are arranged in a certain order. They are embedded in a specific setting defined by rules and power, but also disruption and conflict, "the conditions of unity of discursive statements […] may also be conditions of disunity" (Foucault 2004 [1969]: 35–36). Discourse, in this understanding, is constrained to the verbal, textual aspects of formations. However, I acknowledge that the power of images and pictures constitutes as much to the shared understanding of our lifeworldly reality as words do. Whereas Foucault concentrates on what is said or not said, following the postmodern *pictorial turn*, there is a need for a broader understanding of discursive formations beyond the spoken and the textual to include images, performances or objects as equally important elements. All objects and actions within a discourse field are meaningful as long as they are defined within the horizon of socially structured systems of rules and significance (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 2–3). Whether they are placed in the realm of the real or the imaginary "depends on the structuring of the discursive field" (Lacau and Mouffe 2001 [1985]: 108), quoted in Howard et al. (2000: 3). Thus, discourse and imagery can be seen as two parts composing a social formation: images may be powerful, and through sharing they gain a political dimension. As such, they are not separable from political processes. Thereby, agreeing with Förster:

> "To address the multifaceted societal formation of images, I will use the term imagery. Imageries consist of images that occupy a particular place in the social world. Imageries are not closed systems; they are embedded in on-going processes of social, political and cultural articulation." (Förster 2012b: 234)

In many cases, imageries are composed of various parts that create a cluster around a certain issue, or dispersion in Foucault's terms. In scholarly tradition, discourse is located in the realm of the spoken or text whereas the imagery is located in the realm of the visual or mental representations of something. Linking them to a single discursive formation means that imageries must have a strong agentic component, as they are shaped and reshaped by the actors that perceive them, and they may be the cause of reorientation as exemplified in response to contestation.

1.1. State and Society

A range of scholarly literature looks at states following Max Weber's ideal-type of modern state as a single actor monopolizing the legitimate use of violence upon a certain territory and regulating the people within that territory through a centralized government (Weber 1980). The state is often defined through two main domains of institutions: the monopoly of violence, and tax collection, through which it organizes and establishes social order (Hechter and Horne 2009: 82). Viewed from a state-centric vantage point, many African states are considered deficient. Particularly in the context of conflict and war, state institutions do not func-

[24] Discourse and its related theoretical and methodological aspects and implications are very broad categories. I make use of discourse in a twofold way: as an analytical perspective, as defined in the methodology section of this book, and as defined above to situate my understanding of imagery.

tion according to normative expectations and hence lead to state collapse (Zartman 1995: 5). Weak, fragile, or failed states have become synonymous with such deviant states, and after conflict, they may re-emerge from the ashes like "phoenix states" described in Prkic (2005), or from the shadows. States of these kinds have been taken hostage by warlords[25] (Reno 1998, cf. Rotberg 2003, McGovern 2008). The history and the present crisis surrounding a range of states in Africa requires a new approach to analyze what remains left of a national public entity in such situations of perceived decay and lack of order.[26] Recent studies have shown that even in times of war where state functions are hampered, states do not cease to exist. Gerdes construes that the Liberian civil wars did not lead to a breakdown of the state but were central to state formation (Gerdes 2013). How could statehood cease to exist if alternative forms of governance emerge under rebel rule (Förster 2012b, Heitz Tokpa 2013). Even when new state institutions were created (Utas 2012b), it has been noted that the state remained part of the social imaginary (Young 2007: 241). An alternative approach considers the state as consisting of both positive and negative sovereignty (Jackson 1990). Whereas negative sovereignty refers to the external recognition, positive sovereignty denotes how the state is perceived and practiced from within the territorial boundary (Jackson 1990: 21-31). The state is an empirical object, which is not given but rather defined in its specific political, social and cultural setting. This perspective emphasizes the relationship of the state's institutions of governance and the citizens (Call and Wyeth 2008: 7). It represents a more promising approach, as it is actor-centered and follows a bottom-up point of view; questioning the reproduction of the state (Abrams 1988 [1977])[27] within an existing territorial frame, it focuses on its social and cultural processes and constructions, since a number of cases highlight that even in absence of the state, the ideas of 'stateness' persist (Nielsen 2007).

Changing perspectives within the processual aspects of the state and state formation leads from a normative to an analytical take on statehood as a practice in which local, national or transnational actors (re)make the state through encounters and procedures of negotiation, bargaining and contestation (Hagmann and Péclard 2010). Negotiation refers to a situation in which both parties are at comparable terms of power to influence the outcome and come to terms with one another. Bargaining refers to cases in which one party has less power and hence minor or marginal influences on such outcomes. Such weaker parties have to produce and mobilize bargaining power.[28]

In short, statehood refers to practices, whereas state emphasizes the institutional aspect (Förster 2010a: 702). Migdal (2001)'s "state in society" approach provides an analytical perspective on this arrangement of

[25] Reno (1998) defines warlords as arising rulers in case of a breakdown of formal state institutions and authority. According to Reno, warlords maintain strong patrimonial networks, and have access to economic (including foreign companies and relations) and coercive power of which they make use of in pursuing personal interests.
[26] For an extensive literature review on states, see for example Gupta (2006) or Schlichte (2005).
[27] Abrams has written the article "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State" in 1977, eleven years prior to its publication. The major revealing point in this article is that the state is composed of two parts: the state as form and the state as idea.
[28] Personal communication, Till Förster, 17.05.2013.

actors and processes: “The state is a field of power marked by the use and threat of violence and shaped by (1) the image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory, and (2) the actual practices of its multiple parts” (Migdal 2001: 6). The image of the state refers to how social actors see the state in their mind’s eye. Therefore, one must combine Migdal and Schlichte (2005)’s views with the inversion of James Scott’s metaphor (1998), using as a conceptual link the theory on the imaginary according to (Casey 2000a). Images are “amalgamating the numerous institutions of which the performers are members and on behalf of which they exercise authority, into an image of a dominant and single centre of society” (Migdal 2001: 16). The practices of the state, on the other hand, refer to how social actors are “doing the state” in various daily interactions with civil servants (Migdal and Schlichte 2005: 14). Though there exists no coherence between state images and practices - for example a coherent state law, the dimension of power remains central. Power may be used to influence people to believe and act in a certain way. In absence of the obedience of the people, the state has other means at its hands to influence its populace. Power, however, may also work in the opposite way, as people may compete against certain state practices, protest or apply violence in opposition to the stream of power. Image and practices are in a relationship and may construct and shape, or undermine one another. In many spaces and over time, the practices of states vary greatly, but interestingly, the image of the state remains rather constant. In addition, practices may vary locally, whereas the idea of state is embedded in a wider context and beyond the national borders (Migdal and Schlichte 2005: 35). International actors play a central role for states by interacting or providing resources to the state (Call 2008: 7), what Migdal refers to as the “world arena”, in which state actors are interacting with other international actors on political, economic or other dimensions (Migdal 2001: 62). In certain contexts such as post-war Liberia, the “world arena” involving the international community, plays central roles in core institutions and processes related to the state and governance, which evidently become key institutions of the state, such as the security sector and related reforms. Power holders navigate between the world arena and the society they govern.[29] The state and non-state or state and society binary opposition creates an empirical challenge since the two cannot be easily distinguished into clearly differentiated and separable entities. Migdal proposed a “state in society” approach, as these are not clearly dividable monolithic blocks, but rather partially fluid and blurred entities, informed by various societal forces and by the larger world arena involved in shaping the social order. However, more complexity is related to this approach. Firstly, the various actors are interwoven within complex social and political networks with a particular logic and integrated within societal norms (Olivier de Sardan 2008). This holds even stronger in war-affected spaces, where local groups, individuals, transformed fighting factions, members of the diaspora or international organizations are taking over tasks of governance which

[29] This can pose critical dilemmas, for which the debate on homosexuality may serve as an example: a recent legal act criminalized homosexuality, and President Johnson Sirleaf is posited in international critique regarding human rights vis-à-vis local discourse on Liberian norms and values; see debate in the Guardian (Ford and Allen 19.03.2012).

would be formally part of the state. These contexts provide a situation where vertical and horizontal social networks cut across state and society – a phenomenon that has widely been debated as neopatrimonialism (Chabal and Daloz 1999, Erdmann and Engel 2006, or Pitcher, Moran and Johnston 2009)[30] - drawing on the "wealth-in-people" logic (Bledsoe 1980b) in Liberia before, during and after the Civil War (Utas 2012b). Rebel leaders become standard-bearers of political parties, whereas state actors found religious institutions, private security companies and NGOs, changing hats or wearing several at the same time while remaining *big people*.[31] Thus, empirical reality shows that the boundaries between state and non-state institutions are blurred to various degrees (Gupta 1995). A number of state practices take place beyond the state,[32] constituting an "informal logic of the state" (Simone 2004: 36, Utas and Lindell 2012: 3). Olivier de Sardan (2008) calls for an empirical approach to include the plurality of social norms and practical norms in society that underlie the professional norms and the professional *practical* norms. Social actors are often not satisfied with practices that deviate from official norms (Olivier de Sardan 2009a: 66–67), yet, still the "myth of the state" remains (Hansen and Stepputat 2001a: 2) widespread in society.

This approach towards an understanding of state and statehood sets those political spaces at center stage that are created at the intersection with the state and society, and which provide the framework for collective agency. Looking at these processes through the lens of Migdal's approach (2001: 12), states in fact do not differ significantly from other forms of organizations or "social groupings"; their laws and regulations must cope and compete with different types of sanctioned practices. Hence, it is not simply poorly designed policies, incompetent officials or insufficient resources that explain the failures or mixed results of state policies and their implementation: states have to deal with opposing groups that sometimes form into strong opposition, some of which are well connected and have entered into the structures of the state (Simone 2010: 8). At this stage, I merge the two conceptual clusters of state and imaginaries to shape a perspective on associations and their collective political actions in post-war, urban Liberia. Such opposing groups work with shared images and imaginaries on how *they see the state*, and for this purpose I make use of James Scott's metaphor, setting the focus on a reversed vantage point (Scott 1998): as states and urban planners

[30] Pitcher, Moran and Johnston (2009: 126) argue that for Max Weber, "patrimonialism was not a synonym for corruption; 'bad governance,' violence, tribalism, or a weak state. It was instead a specific form of authority and source of legitimacy." State and society, drawing on recent critical writings of Erdmann and Engel (2006), Pitcher, Moran and Johnston (2009) and more especially Utas (2012a), are better understood as complex relations of vertical and horizontal relationships. This view also helps to get away with the state-spaces and non-state spaces (Scott 1998: 186) or absence of the state perspectives, as actors are always part of the social and the political in a continuum of states and alternatives (Bellagamba and Klute 2008: 11).

[31] I use the term *big people* to include *big women* which are essential in the Liberian context. Literature on *big men* is ample; seminal work stems from Marshall Sahlins (1963), Maurice Godelier and Marilyn Strathern (1991) in Melanesia and Polynesia, but it has also been adopted for the African context; see for example Bayart (2009: 60–86), Chabal and Daloz (1999: 37), or for the Liberian and sub-regional context, the introduction and case studies in Utas (2012a).

[32] A bulk of literature exists on such a bottom-up approach of the state, for example on culture, trust and the constitution of public norms in stateless spaces; see Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2006) on everyday corruption and the state, Grätz (2007) on vigilante groups, Neubert (2009) on non-state actors as standard setters, Peters, Koechlin and Zinkernagel (2009).

have “visions” in mind, social actors and groups too have societal plans and attribute state-actors with tasks and duties which are articulated into claims. Visions are basically nothing else than articulated imaginaries and thus should be considered analogous, as *seeing* is metaphorical for perception, and not merely for something concerning the visual sphere. As imaginaries draw on mental images based on other sensory experiences and processes, making use of them constitute a strong tool for articulating political purposes, both for actors related to the state as well as to associations. The state, in Scott’s (1998) sense, has stronger means at its disposal, apart from the aim to make society legible in order to facilitate its controlling and monitoring. Such imaginaries have the potential to become fatal under certain conditions, especially in authoritarian states capable and willing to transform their projects into reality by use of coercive power (Scott 1998: 4–5). On a less severe and more day-to-day level, social practices are ordered, or, in Scott’s words, made legible, such as complex land tenure systems or naming customs that are reduced to a “standard grid” administered by state officials (Scott 1998: 2). As it is easier to reform structures than practices, amendments of law and rules are easily made whereas the social workings are more intricate and hard to order (Scott 1998: 255). But just like states, societies too have and their shape imaginaries of how things ought to ’look’ like. Societies have strong normative expectations, as the demands and claims, demonstrations and oppositions, or, to the extreme, rebellions[33] illustrate. The *national project* – to borrow Dorman, Hammett and Nugent’s (2007) term that inhibits a strong direction towards future plans – involves a range of individuals, groups and institutions in shaping it; the language used to relate to it reveals the qualities of kinship - such as motherland, *Vaterland*, or *patria* - or of belonging - i.e. home, or homeland (Anderson 2006: 143). The state is not only shaped through narratives, it is also defined through an imagery composed of materiality such as flags, statues and monuments, buildings, national dishes, and so on. In either case, the individual is ’naturally’ connected to the nation by kinship to a state that has properties of a protoparent (Jackson 2008: 44). But in as much as the state is partially blind in regards to society (Scott 1998: 2), society is blind towards the state and does not *see* things happen in the right way. There are claims and demands for alternative state practices to achieve the shared imaginaries. As defined above, imagination emphasizes the agentic dimension. Social forces do not only share and shape an imaginary, but also aim at transforming it into lived reality, oppose or demand according actions by the state. Just like the power holders, they too have tools at their disposal in order to shame or place the state in a deadlock situation, as this book will show. However, under what circumstances do imaginaries emerge, how are they shaped and how can they transform into political claims? What are the catalysts of these alternative imaginaries? I argue that associational life creates social spaces in which imaginaries are uttered and hence shared, and therefore inform collective action.

[33] However, not all actors in civil war or rebellion participate due to the same motives; see greed and grievance debate by Collier and Hoeffler (2000) or Berdal and Malone (2000a). There are no simple reasons and not all involved actors share the same imaginaries.

1.2. ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE

It is often empirically challenging to draw a clear cut line between the private and the public, political and non-political or state and society. Even where these sectors are separated in official terms, they are often of little relevance in everyday practices (Olivier de Sardan 2009a: 52). There is a need to clarify the relationship and use of these social spaces and spheres[34] in which public opinions emerge and are shaped, and where political opposition and counter-images are formed and inform collective actions. How can we define the nexus where ordinary people form themselves and interact with state imagery and practices, such as the demonstration described in the preface? The grouping, organizing and formalizing of social actors has been the focus of studies in social anthropology for many decades. Voluntary associations, defined as institutionalized groups composed of intentional membership (Little 1970: 1), often emerge in urban(izing) contexts. The urban context reduces the intersubjective experience of familiarity by distanciation and encounter (Förster 2013b: 9–13). In face-to-face societies, typically in the rural area, a person is often by birth or initiation part of associations such as age groups, kinship or socio-political societies. In Liberia, the emic notion of *secret society* is widespread and refers to societies such as *Poro* and *Sande* or *Bundu* among central and western Mande speaking groups, as well as the societies of the Gio (Himmelheber and Himmelheber 1958) and various groups in the Southeast (Ellis 2010).[35] *Poro* and *Sande*, which received vast scholarly attention, in their core are political associations as they generate subgroups and control their members, and are engaged with the spiritual world, in which ultimate power is believed to be located (Bledsoe 1980a and 1984, Murphy 1980, Ellis 2010: 190). Members of theses societies are involved in regional and national politics; they generate and protect power relations, and control knowledge, norms or values (Bledsoe 1984).[36] A person automatically belongs by birth or gets initiated at a certain age, and remains integrated during the ceremonies of

[34] Jürgen Habermas (1962) coined the concept of public sphere with which he refers to a realm that is open to all actors and in which public opinion is shaped. Prominent examples of his are the cafés in England, in which issues of general interest such as politics were discussed and debated. The public sphere is not related to a specific realm of the professional or private, nor is this related to public authority. It is a sphere in which citizens assemble or associate freely and interact. Political public spheres are those referring to the activity of the state. Public sphere includes news and, today, electronic media to transmit information, but also face-to-face encounters in coffee shops or squares. Habermas' concept was criticized for his assumption that access to the public sphere is guaranteed to all citizens; in reality, however, a number of boundaries are set for example to women and minorities. Besides, his concept was developed further in establishing that there is not *one* public sphere, but many, though, there might exist a dominant sphere (Fraser 1990). For many West African urban spaces, there is not much empiric reality of a public – private dichotomy. For analytical purposes, the dichotomy may be useful, although in my case-study the public sphere is rather diffuse (Förster 2002). However, as the public sphere obviously cannot be a homogeneous block, what then makes out its heterogeneity? The concept of social space **(**Lefebvre 1991) can be adopted among the elements that constitute the public sphere. Leaning on Lachenmann (2009), social space in a non-institutionalized definition goes beyond a merely physical space, but is rather linked to agency and the production of specific meaning. This means, taken a bit further, that social space is both informed by and nourishes imagination.

[35] Whereas the Northeast of Liberia is often referred to as part of the *Poro Complex*, the Southeast was defined as the absence of *Poro* and *Sande* (Moran 2006: 30). Tonkin coins the existence of such societies as a continuum: the Bassa in the center, for example, introduced such societies in the rather recent past, whereas further down Southeast, "secrecy was considered bad" (Tonkin 2010: 116), and "secret societies" are socially condemned.

[36] The notion *secret society*, also widely used by scholars, is somewhat misleading if not defined appropriately. Membership is not concealed as to some extent in the masonic order. For initiation societies, as every individual will partake, participation in general is not secret; however, knowledge of the society is secret, cf. Murphy (1980). Initiation societies exist beyond Liberia, and are often well documented, such as those of the Bamana, see the influential work of McNaughton (and others). Brooks (1993) or McGovern (2012) term *Poro* and *Sande* as "power associations".

his/her life cycle. Thereby, the person acquires knowledge about society, cosmology, family life, work and according norms and values. Expectations towards an individual are relatively clear, and a person can rely on the social network he or she is inserted in for social security. An important aspect of associations is that they do not intend societal change or, to put it differently, having interest in change is not a motivation to join an association (Wallerstein 1970: 318–319, Little 1970). In the 1960s, in the course of colonization and with the increasing need for workers and administrators in urban areas, cities began to grow. This generated a number of new challenges for individuals, above all a need for some kind of alternative association in cities (Bratton 1989: 411). Wallerstein (1970: 319) puts it as a dislocation in the double sense of the notion: not only were people physically out of reach of their kin, but with this novel context emerged a need for reorientation of their agency, as they could not be sure about the rules and norms of this new urban environment, and social security was no longer granted. Conflict-affected contexts have a range of similarities in regards to insecurities and changes imposed on the affected population and call for a need to re-establish orientation and shared understandings. Hence, norms, values, and history have changed and challenged social cohesion and feelings of security. This creates a need for new social and political order and schemes of orientation for the social actors, which have led to the founding of other forms of association. In the past, such an explosion of voluntary associations in urbanizing and de-colonizing contexts in West Africa was termed "societomania" by Wallerstein (1970: 331). A range of associations have their roots in colonial administration (Wallerstein 1970: 323), but local forms of associations should not be neglected, such as the rotating saving clubs which are found in many urban African contexts (for Liberia, see Fraenkel 1970 [1964]: 175 or generally, see Ardener and Burman 1995 or Geertz 1962). In the 1980s, associations gained importance as the targeted local actors in the development context. Since the 1990s, focus shifted to the discourse of good governance and participatory civil society, in a normative concept of change within failing or weak African states (World Bank 1992 or Harbeson, Rothchild and Chazan Naomi 1994).[37] Today, the term NGOization has become fashionable (Choudry and Kapoor 2012 or Fichtner 2012). Though civil society is a contested concept, particularly in the West African context, it is repeatedly used in analyzing state-society relationships. In many cases, it has replaced or is used interchangeably with the notion of association or other notions, and often remains unreflected. In addition, it is often applied in a rather functionalist way in the political context for either alternative forms of governance or in opposition to the state (Förster and Koechlin 2011: 8).[38] Civil society has become an "all-purpose placeholder that stands for a range of yet unnamed and unnamable-popular aspirations, moral concerns, sites and spaces of practice" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999a: 3) or a container-concept into which NGOs and other forms of non-state approaches are included (Lachenmann 2009: 14). A clear division in opposition to the state neglects the societal mechanisms, dynamics, and modes of

[37] In fact, the term "associational life" had been coined by Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, in which he emphasizes the importance of voluntary associations to social and political life Tocqueville (1835).
[38] For debate on civil society, see for example Neubert (2011), Comaroff and Comaroff (1999b) or Makumbe (1998).

(trans)formation, provided that most social actors are embedded in dense and intricate webs of social networks. Viewed from this perspective, a clearly defined civil society is nonexistent. A number of scholars take this into consideration, for example Neubert (2011: 212), who understands civil society as an arena of uncoerced organized collective action centered around shared interests, purposes and values. Theoretically, it is a sphere that is distinguishable from the realms of the state, the family and the market which in practice are often blurred. Civil society can be understood as being composed of a variety of associations, defined by a low degree of organization and formalization, and organizations, characterized by a high degree of organization and formalization. Therefore, civil society includes NGOs, local groups, faith-based organizations, self-help groups or social movements, to name a few. The autonomy of such groups has been questioned for being dependent on external support or being stimulated by international donors or the state (Harbeson 1994: 10, 286 or Makumbe 1998: 311). The stimulus by international sponsors may influence their agency, hence they might adapt their programs to the agenda-setting of donors, which impacts or compromises them in respect to the normative idea of a strong civil society. However, in the past, the power and influence of 'civil society' as a key to addressing social and political challenges was overstated. Receiving (external) funding does not necessarily implicate a one-way relationship from the donor or passivity of the beneficiary; local groups are creative in bridging donor's agendas and their own (Ellis and van Kessel 2009a: 5). Similar critique applies for social movements, a newly recognized concept that only recently became increasingly popular in the context of political action in Africa.[39] Social movements are per definition a form of group action composed of a network of individuals, groups or organizations rooted outside the realms of the state, formed to protest against social and political issues with the intention to change these or prevent ongoing changes. According to Tilly (2004: 53), social movements in a *classical* sense consist of three major elements: campaigns, which are sustained, organized public efforts towards making collective claims towards target authorities; second, they include a repertoire employing different forms of political action such as public meetings, demonstrations or rallies; third, a concerted public representation by participants, since their unity, numbers[40] and commitment leads to a recognition and greater visibility. Social movement theory provides a spectrum of useful concepts to analyze claims made towards the state. Social movement has been explained as that which "packages contestation into a normative frame of reference that lends normative and teleological legitimacy to protest" (Macamo 2011: 54). It regained scholarly interest as a framework to analyze politics of contention in Africa, where social movements are embedded in a context of states that

[39] I have worked with the concept of Social Movements for the Liberian context Kaufmann (2011b), although social movements yet remain to be conceptualized for the post-war context and need greater flexibility to capture the broad dynamics of these collective actions. For an overview of the concept and the historical context of social movements in Europe, see Tilly (2004), Tarrow (1994) or Klandermans and Roggeband (2010). For a more detailed literature review on Social Movement in Africa, see Ellis and van Kessel (2009b) or Engels and Brandes (2011), and for critique, see Macamo (2011).

[40] There is ample literature about the importance of numbers for associations, in particular from feminist debates. Growing numbers of women in associated processes increase voice and work against domination of other minority groups Kanter (1977), Agarwal (2015).

are weaker regarding policing or justice than states in Europe or North America. Social movements in Africa are therefore concerned with broader social and political issues (Habib and Opoku-Mensah 2009: 50). Furthermore, social, political as well as religious attributes are blended and all constitute aspects of movements (Ellis and van Kessel 2009a: 4–16). Social movements in Africa exist in great diversity, targeting or demanding governmental policy. Contrasting European or North American movements, old and new forms of social movements are interwoven (Ellis and van Kessel 2009a: 15, Habib and Opoku-Mensah 2009: 50–55). Though social movements exist and are very visible in both past and the present in many societies, they constitute but one aspect of political agency. There exists a range of collective practices based upon and channeling problems, grievances and anger in the intricate social, economic and political context. However, not all collective agency is about contestation or protest against the state, and not all social phenomena surrounding social movements are demanding or protesting state action. To understand the various associations and their meaning, a broader notion is needed that allows more flexibility to encompass their processual, structural and commonplace participation in everyday life. I make use of the notion of associational life by drawing particularly on Simone (2001) and Tostensen, Tvedten and Vaa (2001a). Associational life serves not only as a wider and broader notion, but it also helps to overcome the dilemma of applying concepts and theories of a politico-historical context of North America and Europe on empirical reality (Macamo 2011). There exists a vast range of associations from the local boxing club to the Freemasons which are all voluntary associations. Some people are members of different associations of diverse interests and for manifold reasons. In the late 1950s, Merran Fraenkel conducted a study on Monrovian societal formations and categorized seven types of voluntary associations: Churches and mosques; "traditional tribal" societies; "urban tribal" societies; masonic-type lodges; football clubs; occupational associations; and others (Fraenkel 1970 [1964]: 67). Fraenkel's analysis of associations laid the groundwork for the comparison to present-day formations, which have changed in structure, form, and practices, and needless to say, the context has also changed. Though she presupposed a society structured in class and tribe, she emphasized the processual and dynamic aspects. On the basis of the changed social and political context, six broad types of associations can be found in post-war Monrovia: a. social (youth,[41] women or other socializing clubs); b. religious (Christian or Muslim communities, prayer groups or choirs); c. professional (transportation or trade unions, marketers or ex-soldiers); d. community welfare (neighborhood watch teams or road construction actions); e. entertainment (football, basketball, karate or music); and f. specific interests (gender issues, regional, ex-combatants or students). In a number of cases, associations cut across and combine elements of various types. Kin- or friendship ties or origin can have an influence on participation. For example, parents will most likely enculturate their children into their church or historically, missionaries were built in the region of certain groups. Utilizing Little's

[41] *Poro*, *Sande*, and other societies do play a role in present-day Liberia, but these did not emerge much from the available data. Accounts were raised that such *secret societies* serve for education and teaching of children, hence *Poro* and *Sande* belong to this category. However, scholars have pointed out other dimensions, in particular the political one (Bledsoe 1980).

terms, a wide variety of associations appreciate sociality in the sense of conviviality within a context of familiarity, and my field work analysis has come to emphasize this as one common, though implicit objective: "not only is the serving of refreshments, including such beverages (…), an integral part of any formal gathering of members, but the latter are expected and encouraged to visit each others' homes, especially in the event of illness or bereavement" (Little 1980: 322). These are essential features of sociality which form part of the everyday life of members in associations. This feeling contributes to the (re)building of a certain degree of intersubjectivity, solidarity, and social cohesion among the members (Fokwang 2008: 17). Members stay in contact directly or indirectly and inform one another over health issues or legal cases, and solidarity may be high especially for associations that are formed around a specific interest or functions, often around grievances or a social problem. Particularly for marginal actors or groups, associations create a space in which and through which identities are shaped (Fuh 2012: 504, Lindell and Utas 2012: 410), from feminist perspectives, see for example (Sweetman 2013). Individuals with similar interests, shared concerns or grievances such as social or political marginalization, form a group and intersubjectively share and forge an imaginary, which figures at the heart of the association. However, solidarity should not be overstated. Some members are at times only temporally or passively part of associations, and often, there is a clear subjective interest in being a member. There is no clear line between the political and non-political; even recreational associations, such as football clubs, entail political elements (Schatzberg 2001: 105, passim). As a result, the typology of associations needs two interlocked dimensions to be completed for analysis, namely the political and the temporal. Associations change over time, and at certain moments: for example, before elections associations may become an instrument or objective of ambitious individuals or groups. Associations, however, are not passive vessels: they are composed of social actors that rearrange themselves within the politicizing framework to compound and articulate interests, for example the registration of the football club in a higher league, or an ambulance for a community clinic. Complex social relations between associations and political leaders exist and are shaped, as all parties make use of such relationships to put forward their claims towards the *big people*.

I am thus interested in the role of associations framed around a certain problem, with a projective element of how their members' situation and futures should be like. Hence, I focus on how they create small spaces and bridge gaps in understandings of order and how that is shared (Benda-Beckmann and Pirie 2007). Empirical case studies, accompanied with individual life stories, help to show the role of the state within these imaginaries, notably how state practices and images are commented, discussed and used to underline their own actions. They demonstrate how associations create a space in which a range of narratives of comparisons, politicized visions, stories or legends are shared and how these relate to the imagery proposed by the state. Past events take an important position in the everyday of the post-conflict setting. Alternative imaginaries of society are constructed and articulated against hegemonic ones. In addition, these shared images

might inform political agency of the associations: problems need solutions, and these might require capacities of more than one actor, often ideally the society or the state. These associations adopt different forms of contestation and claim making as part of their repertoire. They protest against or demand state action. Shared identity, interests or grievance emerge against dominant state practices and images. Here, an important element of associational life comes in, linking up with the conceptualization of imagination that has been previously discussed: in these social spaces, imagination takes a central role.[42]

Associational life as emerging from shared imaginaries creates a space for the (re)production of shared identities, images, and imaginaries, and thereby may inform social or political agency. Very much in Taylor's sense, social imaginaries enable (collective) practices (Taylor 2002). Furthermore, and most importantly, this research aims at laying a focus on aspects of everyday life in these forms of social and political organization, beyond a mere functionalism as welfare or political actors, but linking the social and the political spaces. Thereby, I emphasize the actors' agency beyond tactical or strategic action of fundraising, in welfare or related activities that dominate many organizations. I outline three major characteristics of associational life that merge into political, functional and social aspects of associations. First is its meaning of inclusion of the individual into the group. At the center stands interest, contestation or grievance, formulated into a claim that binds the individual to the group, as seen in the social movement depicted above. Associational life is one aspect of everyday life and the lifeworldly reality, and associations may be more ephemeral than other social categories of belonging (Simone 2001: 102). Secondly, associations provide alternative or additional access to social networks, which are of particular relevance for (post-)war contexts where family relations are affected, alliances of *big people* have shifted or old networks have become marred. This aspect of an association becomes crucial in post-war contexts, where lack of strong family ties, insecurity and uncertainty mark many social actors' life. Such new social relationships are vital for access to resources and social security, but we should not neglect social aspects such as companionship and sociality. Thirdly, other forms of collective political action may emerge from associations. Associations are framed by the making and sharing of individual and social plans against shared imaginaries of the present social reality. As such, these imaginaries are linked to moral expectations towards other social or political actors and their practices. Different from organizations, which are characterized by their structuration, size and formalizations, associations are smaller, they work on the community or specific interest level and gain importance as employers, opportunity providers, fundraisers, and may link to collective action on larger scales. Often, though, such clear cut differentiation is not possible, as the two are in practice often merging and overlapping. Associations may formalize and turn into organizations, they may belong to or collaborate with larger organizations, and members may simultaneously belong to associations, organizations and political parties, manipulating rela-

[42] In a broader sense of the notion, even in recreational associations such as football, players imagine becoming renowned stars, and on a local level, they gain an avenue of proving virtues such as strength, reliability and ambition.

tionships to influential state actors. Like organizations, associations have some degree of structure. But, depending on time and space, the structure might change, and associations may become politicized (Wallerstein 1970), or they may link up with or transform temporally into a social movement. In such a fluid structural and social context, I conceptualize associational life as a non-normative, meaningful combination of voluntary associations and everyday life. It is mutually constituted by a shared imaginary of how the social could be or ought to be. It can create a space for personal aspirations to be fulfilled and a tool for upward social mobility, but that does not exclude other aspects that might be just as important, such as sociality: spending time together, resolving conflicts, exchanging stories and sentiments, especially around shared grievances contrasted against imaginaries, discussing private issues, and recalling past events or discussing future plans.

In short, this research deals with pockets of everyday life in Monrovia. The capital city is marked by urban intricacies and the legacies of the conflict, which pose challenges and uncertainty to ordinary people's life-worldly reality. In this context, I look at the agency of social actors, embedded in both the political history and the present-day depiction of urban Liberia. Against the background of past experiences and new perspectives of international donors and reconstruction programs, new imaginaries and novel forms of collective action emerged. I argue that associational life creates social spaces in which imaginaries are translated into words, and consequently shared into practice. As such, they inform collective action towards enhancing or demanding change explicitly from state actors.

Associations are formed around shared interests and, most prominently, shared imaginaries of how the social ought to be. Partially agreeing with Migdal (2001)'s understanding of "state in society", I demonstrate that the social actors see the state in a very particular way and ascribe specific functions and ideas to its representatives, especially the political leaders and *big people* they relate to. Seeing the state as a metaphor, as suggested by James Scott (1998), serves as a lens to analyze how social actors imagine and relate to the state.

Outline of the Book and the Chapters

This book looks at social imaginaries in pockets of post-war, urban Liberia. The main empirical questions were derived from the working title of the project design, laid out for a comparative, cross-cutting analysis of urban Guinea and urban Liberia: *The work of state imageries: How imageries of governance and the state constitute everyday practice in conflict-affected West Africa*. The overall comparative working theme was subdivided into three questions:

- *What imageries of governance and the state exist? Is there a normative understanding about services, duties or other activities allocated to the realms of the state?*
- *How do imageries of governance and the state emerge? In what arenas are they negotiated and shaped by the local population and who are the main agents therein?*
- *How is the imagery applied in fields of social practice? How do people maneuver in order to gain access to resources, assets and social spaces in a context of post-conflict and economic scarcity?*

In regards to the specific context of my research in Liberia, further particular questions assumed a prominent position, centering on the working title: *Coping with the intricacies of the everyday: Liberia's post-war context*. Particularly after the project in Guinea discontinued, I focused on the following pre-defined leading questions:

- *How do ordinary people in a peri-urban and urban setting try to make a living?*
- *How do they cope with the precarious delivery of common and public goods such as security or access to natural resources or the provision of food and water?*
- *How do new forms of governance emerge in the context of Liberia's post-conflict context?*

Consequently, this research is outlined along the three temporal-structural elements on which the chordal triad of agency builds (Emirbayer and Mische 1998): two chapters are dedicated to the past dimension of longer history and recent war, yet focusing on aspects that inform present-day social imaginaries. The continuum of war and peace, and the legacy of the settlers form a vital part of present-day narratives and imaginaries. The second part looks at the imagery of the post-war state, centered on the presidency of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and the role of the 'world arena' in political and social transformation. Developing upon this basis, I then turn to the social imaginaries of three associations and how these imaginaries emerged, are shared, and are translated into collective practices in demanding changes and aspiring to a better future.

Chapter 2 concerns methodological considerations. The chapter is divided into two parts; the first part gives insights into the process of immersion which took a fairly long time and remained partial. Ethnography in Malinowski's tradition remained but mainly as an ideal type for my research. In part two, I discuss the methods used in doing fieldwork in an urban, post-war setting. I conducted "multiple miniature fieldworks side by side" (Hannerz 1976) and departed with the methodological reflections defined in the EEA (Förster et al. 2011). In this part I also reflect on the central role of working with a research assistant in an intricate and situationally insecure context.

Chapter 3 takes a closer look at those past images and imageries which play a role in present-day imagining the past. The chapter follows a temporal logic. Retrospectively, the time until the outbreak of the war is referred to as the *normal days* and contains central elements to present-day normative and factual under-

standings of how things ought to be. As such, a selectively portrayed and projected historical and political background of Liberia is of considerable importance as it is the basis on which the habitual aspect of agency is built, since past experiences inform the social imaginary. The chapter lays its focus on historicity and is complemented by empirical data stemming from personal memories and imaginaries of the past. Especially in regards to Samuel K. Doe's and Charles Taylor's rule, I suggest to look more closely and reflect on personal alliances and counter-images in order to understand why a range of social actors interpret Doe's rule as *normal days*, and why Charles Taylor was so popular. The importance of the past emerged from informal discussions in the field, and from the emergence of pictures as well as of images from past regimes.

Chapter 4 looks more closely at the continuum of war and peace (Richards 2005, Utas 2005a). It creates a multitude of conflicting images. Some actors are or were temporally and situationally heroes, and state practices and imagery transformed in manifold ways. Rather than giving a detailed account on facts of the violent conflict, I illustrate the continuum of war and peace in the words of an observer and participant, and how he experienced the war. Interestingly, social actors retrospectively depict war and peace as frames bracketed by a start and a beginning, which, however, depends on the time and space of their accounts. I hence use aspects of Goffman's frame analysis in regards to the multiple frames of social reality in war and peace: whereas social life was and remains undisputedly and harshly affected by the war, it is also affected by social actions that are unrelated, or indirectly affected by the war. In this chapter the life history of James, a young man, stands at the center stage. His subjective experience of ups and downs is defined by the war as well as by very ordinary human encounters of social life.

Chapter 5 turns to the present. The period of field research (2009-2012) is marked by a number of images shaped by the state, against which the ordinary people create counter-images. The narrative of peace and reconstruction transforms many social spaces, yet the ordinary people have high expectations, against which it seems as if the present government is inefficient and slow. This chapter attempts a vivid description of post-war, urban Liberia, a context characterized by the multitude of international organizations, actors, processes, and consequences of the continuum of war and peace. These aspects of the post-war condition shape institutions as well as the built environment and the agency of ordinary people. In a selection of images, such as the urban shaped environment, the political leaders, security, gender empowerment, elections, roads and politics of the future, I provide insights into state practices and images. They inform popular discourse and the formation of counter-images, hence, an imagery of the post-war Liberian state.

Chapter 6 builds on the groundwork laid in previous chapters. Against the backdrop of the state imagery, I focus on everyday practices in the intricate setting of the post-war, urban environment. In this chapter, I shift from a macro to a micro perspective, and depict how ordinary people manage their everyday by *trying*, *hustling* and shaping avenues that lead to a better future. An individual way of doing so is by studying at the

University, which increases possibilities of working at an (I)NGO, or within the government. Another way of creating spaces of personal security and somewhat predicable outcomes of practices is by joining voluntary associations. Thereby, social actors find access to new social networks in which shared interests, hence an imaginary of how things ought to be like, are shared.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 show how such associations of marginalized actors gain political importance. I give insight into the formation of three associations and how they gain political significance. In particular, these associations are involved through their collective actions in the context of elections, as well as in the present context in which democratization, civic liberties and development are emphasized. These chapters explore how particular social spaces create an environment of shared imaginaries and how these are translated into collective practices.

Chapter 7 deals with the association of the Unconstitutionally Disbanded Armed Forces of Liberia (UDAFOL). UDAFOL represents the grievances of the former soldiers that have been disbanded in the implementation of the Security Sector Reform. The rather large group of disgruntled ex-servicemen regularly takes to the streets, and address specific state images and practices to turn these into their repertoire of collective action. At the center stands the constitution, which they have defended during the war, and which was used to deactivate them subsequently. Situationally and temporally, their claim gains weight in political processes such as elections.

Chapter 8 looks at the Concerned Mandingo Association of Liberia (COMASL), a group representing the temporally and situationally marginalized and instrumentalized Mandingo, which have a particular history in the Liberian state and society. As traders and late comers, their belonging to the nation-state is contested. They remain in the contested field of formal citizenship according to the constitution on the one hand, while in everyday life their political and social participation is challenged by discursively formed social boundaries on the other hand. Such boundaries are situatively formed by civil servants, and these practices are emphasized by COMASL to underlie their grievances and claims of belonging.

Chapter 9 focuses on The West Point Women for Health and Development Organization (WPHD), in short ‘the West Point Women’, a women’s association in an intricate Monrovian neighborhood which not only presses for political action in regards to especially the delivery of public goods and services such as security, improved justice, and sanitation or health facilities. This association flexibly navigates the donor-sphere as a quite formalized NGO addressing social ills in a standardized language. On the other hand it addresses the problems of an intricate neighborhood and finds solutions in cooperation with state actors, also by demanding specific action.

Chapter 10 compares the three associations in their diversity and similarities. It embeds the findings and their meaning into the past and present of the continuum of war and peace. It shows how social imaginaries take a central position in shaping social practices and political action.

Chapter 11 brings together the particular threads of the research. The chapter closes with an outlook on the political and social avenues in Liberia and offers a contributing perspective upon researching in and on a social environment entangled in urban and post-war problematic issues.

2. Sharing Experience and Long Conversations: On the Setting and Methodology

> "In Ethnography, the distance is often enormous between the brute material of information – as it is presented to the student in his own observations, in native statement, in the kaleidoscope of tribal life – and the final authoritative presentation of the results." (Bronislaw Malinowski 1922)

Data for this fieldwork was collected during twelve months of ethnographic field research between 2009 and 2012 in Monrovia, Liberia's capital, with a few excursions to smaller towns and rural settings. It resulted in what Hannerz described as "several miniature fieldworks side by side" (Hannerz 1976: 76). These specific social and physical sites of fieldwork and the social actors therein will be introduced, described and analyzed throughout this book. In this chapter, I focus on entering the field and developing the research methods applied in a challenging urban, post-war setting. Though I entered the field after extensive desk study and personal communications with Liberians in Switzerland as well as expatriates working in Liberia, my own agency and the research plan required radical readjustment to the actual setting composed of insecurities and other post-war factors. First and foremost, this chapter is about entering the field and reflecting, re-orienting and extending my own approach to overcome personal insecurity, pains and self-doubts that ethnographic field research brings along. The first part, hence, is concerned with immersion into social life and overcoming distance. I reflect on living in common (Förster 2011b: 7) in three distinct sequences of familiarization and becoming knowledgeable of Monrovia; firstly the explorative phase of living in physical and social distance to the field in a gated community in central town; secondly, moving into a rather ordinary Liberian middle-income neighborhood over the longer part of field research, and lastly, living with a family. The last subchapter opens up to other social and physical spaces and social actors in Monrovia. I reflect on researching in and on the city. In the second part, I will elaborate on the methods I used to research the mental images and social imaginaries. However, the two are densely interwoven, as ethnographic research entails much bodily practices and the process of overlapping perspectives.

2.1. Entering the Post-War, Urban Context

How does one get familiar to a precarious and insecure setting that remains fragile in regards to security due to a recent war? Ethnography has been conducted "under fire" (Nordstrom 1995), amongst combatants (Utas 2003), during hunger crisis, in illicit networks and in a range of other precarious or "bad surroundings" (Finnström 2003). A post-war setting is seldom reflected methodologically as such. It is neither considered safe, nor is it dominated by physical violence. Yet, (in)security issues inform everyday life and social practices of the social actors, and obstruct the social anthropologists immersion into the social setting. A range of researchers in such contexts are linked to an NGO, faith-based organization, UN and other international organizations in the peacebuilding industry, and are safeguarded but also constrained by their organization.

Extensive literature review resulted in a mixed view of Liberia: on the one hand it was considered a risky place, marked by high criminality, idle ex-combatants roaming the streets, and scarce infrastructure. On the other hand, security in Liberia was supposed to be granted by UNMIL and improving due to a range of security sector reforms and state-building efforts of a new government under the lead of donor darling Johnson Sirleaf. Between 2009 and 2012, foreigners were not advised to enter the country unless for important reasons (Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft 2012). UN and INGO staff were obliged to follow strict security measures that restricted their personal mobility. In the meetings of the Humanitarian Action Committee (HAC) and related actors I was briefed about high levels of crime rates and sexual violence. However, for the everyday life that I subsequently shared with ordinary Liberians I increasingly relied on recommendations by my growing social network of Liberians. This proved helpful, safe and practical for my work and everyday life, but required time and experience.

Entering the urban, post-war setting absorbed every sensory experience to understand the new context. However, the first weeks in the field were likewise marked by my own perceived insecurity and fear: The accounts on the civil war had shaped my own imagery: I believed to see ex-combatants at every street corner and believed it was a mere risk to step into the streets. For the first ten days I lived with an expatriate friend in a flowery compound in Sinkor. In the beginning, the mere stepping out of the fence was a challenge for me, as there were a range of youth around a small shack near the supermarket and observing me. One day I stopped to change 20 USD into Liberian Dollars at their stand. I greeted and we exchanged a few words. I remarked that one of the young men had a range of tattoos on his underarms, confirming the image I had of ex-combatants. Though I still had difficulties understanding Liberian English, we engaged in a conversation about my background and my country – a very ordinary, unspectacular conversation. Unpretentious positive encounters like these at an early stage of my stay in Liberia facilitated the shaping of my own agency: I gathered experiences and built on my subjective stock of knowledge that enabled me to evaluate events like these and to get habituated engagement with everyday encounters. Likewise, adverse experiences taught me to be attentive, as the following scene shows:

In Sinkor, beach side, lived a range of expats and many of them would jog around the blocks in the evenings. Sometimes I went fast-walking with my host's landlady, or later went jogging on my own. The neighborhood was composed of various gated communities, hosting a range of Lebanese and expats of a range of countries. Jogging was relieving after stressful days, and it gave me a good overview of Sinkor. Normally, I would greet the watchmen at the gates and the youth hanging around, mostly with a brief "hi" in passing. One evening I was returning from jogging and was almost at the gate of our compound when two young men came walking towards me. All of a sudden they stood in front of me, in a way the two had almost encircled me. The taller one was slim and rather of a quiet and diffident type. The shorter man had a kind of reckless

and bold way. I was confused, and before I even understood what was happening, they asked for my telephone number. I replied that my phone was at home because I only went jogging. The short one replied “is it a problem to give us your mobile number?” Out of an emotional mix of fear and aim for harmony, I tried to stay calm and gave them my number. Then, they introduced themselves. The shorter man attends the Methodist University, he said. The taller one just mentioned his name. The situation relaxed a bit and we all went our ways. The security guards at my compound had watched the scene and were upset. They wanted to know what happened, and I told them. It was as clear to me as to them that what happened was strange in a negative way. The securities were unhappy about the fact that they now had my number. They were not concerned in the first place that they could trace me and harm me personally, but rather that they could steal my mobile phone (Field notes, Monrovia, 01.11.2009).

This scene was more demanding at the moment it happened than reflected retrospectively. At the moment it occurred, my fear was certainly not that I could have lost my mobile phone. What made this situation challenging was the fact that I was not experienced to such situations and that in the moment I lacked the knowledge to interpret their intentions, and aimed at typifying ‘bad guys’ and ‘good guys’; that is, I could not evaluate the situation. They could have harmed me or have another plan that I could not know. Retrospectively, this encounter seems very ordinary to me. This experience and many more made me sentient and reflective to the social actors around me. I had to be attentive at all times and adjust and broaden my own agency carefully: paying attention towards the surroundings, the activities and actors around me, but also inwards by drawing attention to all my senses and bodily reactions. It meant to create relationships and greet people, especially those that were always at the same spots, and thereby turning fleeting relationships into more focused ones (Engle Merry 1980, Hannerz 1981). I walked the streets and I felt many people watching me, and I tried to return their watching and observing with a greeting or a smile. The more I got to know the built and social environment, the better I understood the local setting and gathered “street wisdom” (Hannerz 1981: 26). This process was accelerated with the help of my research assistant, Mr. Swaray, through whom I learned much more about the context. Through personal interactions and a range of information I gathered with the help of Mr. Swaray, informants and friends, and with the capacities and knowledge about the realities, I developed routines. By mapping security (Hannerz 1981: 28), I learned about the social actor’s mental maps (Migdal 2004: 7) which guides their activities (Simone 2010: 10) and was able to identify and distinguish safer times, places and actors in Monrovia. The more routines I had, the better I knew the streets and some actors in them, the more my fear reduced. For example, a few weeks later, I met one of the two young men of the above mentioned incident again. I recognized him immediately and I could categorize him as ordinary youth. We exchanged common greetings and got into a conversation. He worked as an apprentice of a gold smith and, as the shop was just a few steps away, he showed me the shop and

introduced me to his 'bossman'. He became one of those persons I greeted while walking down the streets in town. It had turned to an ordinary encounter with an ordinary young Liberian.

Two other episodes are noteworthy that related to fear and insecurity, thereby shaping my consciousness. The first occurred around the Montserrado County By-elections in November 2009. An informant that I judged to be serious and trustworthy was talking to someone on the phone about Alhaji Kromah, a candidate, a university professor, but central to my knowledge, a former rebel leader. Another person next by asked him rather out of curiosity if he would support Kromah. At that moment, I suppressed the feelings I had at that instant: disappointment, and affected trust. How could this person support a former rebel leader? However, I succeeded in concealing my thoughts, and decided to think them through. The next time I saw my informant, it was him who brought up the issue about Alhaji Kromah on his own initiative, possibly he had realized my consternation. He explained to me that Kromah is considered a hero to the Mandingo, an ethnic group that he too belonged to. He said that most of the Mandingo would support Kromah because he had stood up for their cause during the war. A second, similar incident happened soon after but also in the explorative phase of my field research. I was supposed to hold a presentation at the Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation (KAICT), and I was getting some advice from my research assistant about what would be expected from my presentation. He mentioned that Sekou Damante Conneh, the leader of the former rebel group Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), would sit in the audience. I reacted quite shocked, and similar to the above mentioned incident, I was hindered to act by my emotions and pre-defined images of the social. Was I to talk to, and share my knowledge with a former rebel leader? However, I decided to hold the presentation. My personal sentiments obviously diverged from the Liberian reality, and I needed to re-orient my attitudes and agency to deepen my understanding of the social reality of post-war Liberia.

Such incidents at the beginning of my long-term fieldwork taught me quite distressful ways what living in common meant in post-war Liberia. An amalgam of heterogeneous actors interrelate on a daily basis, and mental divisions such as 'good guys' and 'bad guys' become irrelevant in many contexts. As many Liberians explained, everybody was directly or indirectly involved in the war, and there was no need for moral boundaries in regards to the violent past in everyday life. Once I was able to understand and establish a reflected distance to my own personal values, the configuration and interrelation of actors turned from freighting to a valuable perspective of analyzing the post-war, urban environment and social relationships therein. I felt less a stranger as the lived reality became to some degree habitual to me. The perspectives began to overlap (Förster 2011b: 11) to the degree that I could comprehend the constitution of the social realities, without, however, sharing these entirely. The above mentioned challenging situations contributed to a better understanding of the social relations and the setting, an everyday of ordinary people marked by scarcities and

intricacies of many kinds and the harshness of consequences that these intricacies may have. I observed numerous accounts of spontaneous violence, humiliations, desperation, and some incidents also affected me. However, I learnt to situate these in their context and adjust my own agency. I first avoided crowds that seemed loaded with tensions, but later learned to typify violence, for example if spontaneous violence occurred and I was not directly involved, it would not affect me as a bystander. The long term field work allowed many lived experiences and encounters that have sedimented into attitudes (Schütz and Luckmann 1989 [1983]: 20). The following scene of an ordinary Tuesday evening in June 2010 made me aware of this. I was standing in line for the bus that would take me to my later place of residence, near Red Light. As very often these days, the queue was long and waiting time took up to 30 minutes until boarding a bus. Most people were patient, for in such situations, there was nothing else to do than to stand in a perfect line and just wait. There was often not a lot of talking. Depending on the length of the queue, the pressure raised when a minibus arrived: the tranquility turned into excitement and people started to press. On said evening, a young man suddenly appeared and pressed himself into the queue between the person in front of me and myself. Surprised and perplexed, I did not know what to do, and as the other people around me did not react, I just remained in the line as the others. Three men, one of which was an apprentice of the bus driver, addressed the young man and commented angrily about his misbehavior. There followed a verbal dispute during which the young man in a sudden move took a chair of a snack seller along the road and intended to smash it on the bus drivers' helper, who jumped aside just in time. The physical exchange came to an end, however, the argument went on. I had the impression that even though there was physical fighting or at least pressing threat, the others did not take the young man seriously. They talked to the young man and reminded him "to follow the system", and reminded him of the conventions of the new, post-war frame of reference in which such rudeness was not tolerated. He replied that he would not care about any rules. They argued until the bus was loaded. For the ordinary people, there was nothing else to do than standing in line, so I did the same. I heard the young man saying that "street life" was the only option for him, and there were no rules he had to follow. He said street life is good money and that there are "only two things involved: either you die rich or you die poor". The scene was not further commented by the other people in line. It was in fact a quite ordinary scene. I would have reacted with anxiety at such incidents during the exploratory phase of my fieldwork, lacking the contextualization and evaluation of such an incident. I had learned this through participation in the everyday and observation of the other people in such scenes. Reflective discussions with friends, informants or bystanders would help to contextualize such happenings, and they would advise and openly correct my actions or thoughts. I could rely on the practices of the people around me, and draw my attention to the content of the happening. The frustration of the young man in the above scene was not directed towards me, and there were people responsible for such incidents. It was an

ordinary incident and part of post-war Monrovia's social reality and social cohesion in the re-making (field notes, 22.06.2010).

Living in Common: An Ordinary Monrovian Neighborhood

Sharing lived experiences meant to live and organize my everyday life amongst circumstances of post-war insecurities and scarcities. This process took time, and required patience, yet, I experienced it as a process that remained unfinished; close and sensory participation in what Spittler (2001) defined as *Dichte Teilnahme* was only partially possible as my research field was not fixed and lucid due to its size and constant change of the urban context. Rather, it consisted of insights or pockets of Monrovia, what Ulf Hannerz put it figuratively as "several miniature fieldworks side by side" (Hannerz 1976: 76). As Hannerz pointed out, such studies in particular in urban contexts often remain less thick than classic ethnographies in rural settings with of face-to-face contact. Increasing and deepening contacts, however, fostered immersion. After a lively interview with Ruth, a sympathetic manager of a local microfinance bank near Red Light, we continued discussing informally. It was in January 2010, and I told her that I was in fact looking for an apartment in an 'ordinary Liberian neighborhood', that is, not upper class nor poor, and somewhat safe. I had previously moved from my expat friend to the guest house in town, but could not participate in everyday life of Liberians. Intersubjectivity emerges from the simultaneity of sensory and bodily experiences of daily life, I believe (cf. Förster 2011b), and taking part in people's everyday practices would allow me to better understand other people's perspectives. Ruth replied that right behind the bank were a few vacant houses. At first, I was doubtful, because the Red Light market is considered one of the risky spaces in Monrovia, and this market was in 10 minutes' walking distance only. The apartments were nice, and the one with a porch viewing an empty space and a mango tree felt good. Mark, the landlord was a deaf and mute since age six, when he apparently had measles. Even though the apartment of four rooms was far too large for me, I would finally be living in a Liberian 'community'. The apartment had a heavy iron door and iron bars at the window, so the manager and the landlord thought it would be safe for me. Just to be sure, I contacted two Liberian friends who helpingly gave me their advice. The firm confirmation of both of them, one even citing a few names of people that I knew that were living in the surroundings, confirmed that the place was safe. Personal relationships that I would have in physical proximity ought to underline and validate trust and, as a consequence, prove of a good living environment. Their confirmation and my observation of the sociable interaction of the neighbors and the manager made me feel confident. In a complex process, the rent agreement was agreed and signed in the presence of a range of people including Ruth and George, a neighbor who was often referred to as the 'elder' of the community, though he was but in his fifties. Ruth took responsibility over me; like many *big people* (see chapter 6.1) I observed, she organized everything: her son checked the electric wires in the house and recommended a generator. His girlfriend fetched water for me, washed my clothes, cleaned the house and went to the market. Going along with her was enlightening; through her, I got a

deeper insight into the workings of the markets. I gained increasing insights into the patterns of the urban, post-war social and physical spaces. Though many neighborhoods are different from each other by history, structure, location or density of inhabitants, there are a range of similarities, which I could learn through passing time in different parts of town or neighborhoods. For example the local *atay shop*[43] was led by two Guinean classificatory brothers and some 'petits'. It attracted travelers, school children and in the evenings, young men that discussed politics or other issues. This neighborhood was characterized by peri-urban practices of small-scale farming in between the creeks and homes. One neighbor cultivated corn behind the house. Free spaces were used to plant vegetables and crops, such as potato greens, cassava or plantain trees. In the backyard of my apartment was a small construction where a neighbor raised enormous, white pigs.

Picture 1: "Viewpoint", and street scene on Somalia Drive, Paynesville, on a rather calm morning.

Apart from learning about the various activities and social spaces in a Monrovian neighborhood, this experience was telling about post-war urban governance. Defining this community was complicated; regarding the demarcation and administration, there turned out to co-exist different definitions; an emic, an administrative, and a definition in regards to electoral district demarcation. As a consequence of the signed Threshold Bill, the latter had to be drawn anew according to the census, and as of July 2011, the National Election Commission had released a document with all electoral districts. By then, the people had already registered. However, electoral districts are not congruent with the administrative districts, which are still in the process of being defined (as indicated on the map below). The nearest registration center for my neighbors was Kalita School. However, I never heard anyone talk of 'Bassa Town', as it is named in figure 2 below. Rather, they would call it '72nd', or seldom 'Red Light'.

[43] *Atay* is a strong green tea found in many other West African countries and in Liberia particularly related to Mandingo culture. This is contextualized further in Chapter 8.3.

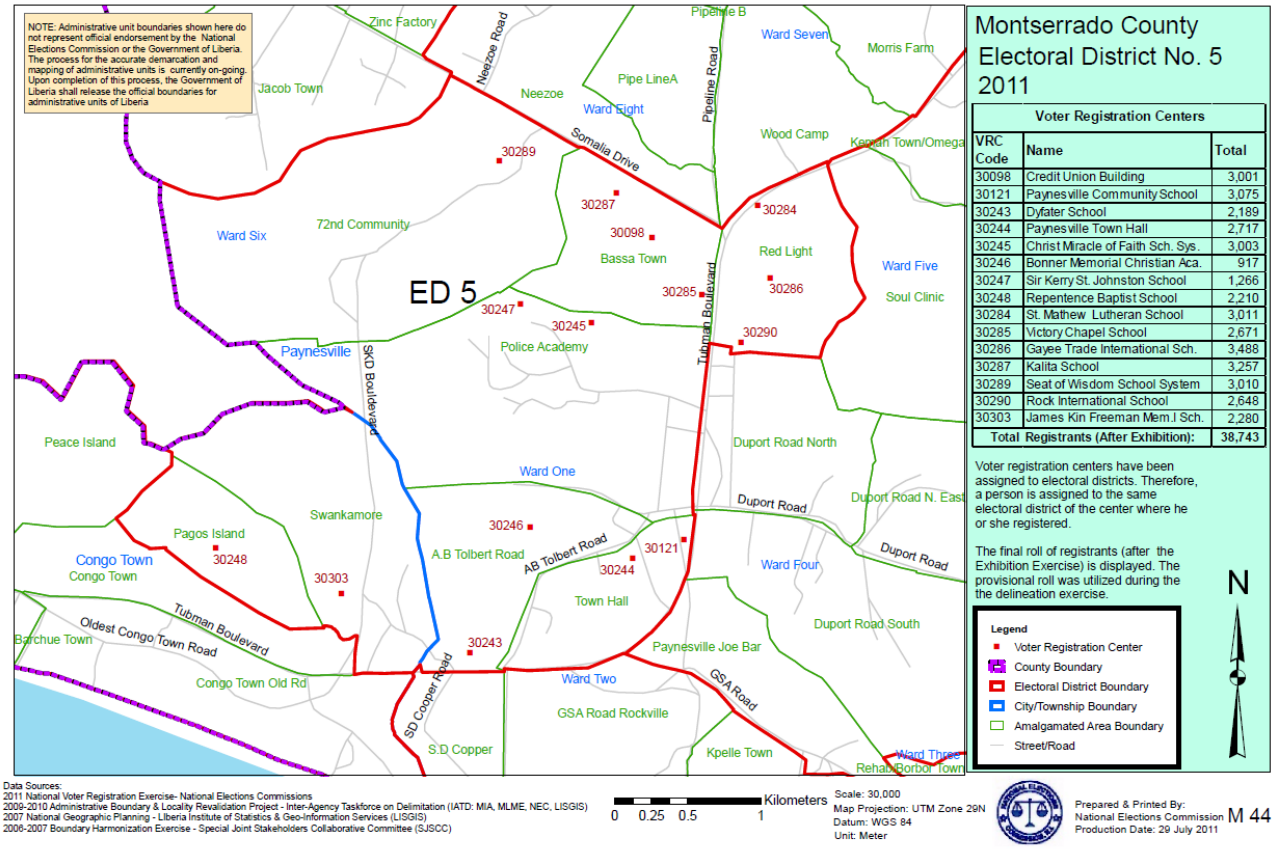


Figure 2: Electoral Demarcations 2011 of District No. 5

It took me a few months to realize that 72nd was administered by the Paynesville City Corporation (PCC). In colloquial terms, Red Light was part of Monrovia, and I make use of this structural organization as emically derived. There was not much information the PCC could provide me on community structures and organization. On the other hand, some neighbors explained that vigilante groups have existed before and still do in some neighborhoods (cf. Kantor and Persson 2010). The neighborhood was overlooked by one man, whom I had to notify for example whenever I would return home late. At some point, a police officer moved to the community. He was one of the few armed police officers. Whereas some of my neighbors said it was good to have a police officer in the community, others that did not live in the community recommended me never to trust any police. Personal trust seemed to be more important than institutional trust.

The neighborhood had no formal organization; there was no council of elders, and the PCC had no local administrative tasks or duties. At the time, there was no active association in the community. A young man had taken initiative before to form a youth association in the community (informal conversation, 28.06.2010). They started with 8-10 young people and became quite a large group, he said. For instance, they had repaired the small road in the community. But in recent times, the organization became dormant. Some neighbors evaluated the house-opening party that Ruth advised me to do as community event. Other events that contributed to community organization were religious institutions, there were a number of churches

and a mosque in the neighborhood. The 'Power Chapel' started in a backyard and in a few years grew to an impressive community in a remarkable new building. Two entertainment centers 'Viewpoint' and 'Up Date' and the above-mentioned *atay shop* 'Love of California' were popular places for a diverse public. Nearby was a mobile phone charging boot, and next to it, a barber shop. Behind the *atay shop* in a large fence was the microfinance office, which had security personnel both day and night. Behind the bars were two hotels in a large fence, which were both used for 'short relaxation', as a woman of the neighborhood once jokingly emphasized, because they were a kind of love hotels. Viewpoint attracted a number of young girls who tried to seek the attention of mid-level government officials and other wealthy men who gathered in the evenings to "bend the elbow" and have fun. Viewpoint imposed itself visually and audibly in particular in the evenings and nights, the sweet Nigerian and Ghanaian pop songs filled the air and cars and people crowded the surroundings. Nearby were the 72nd military barracks, the eroded buildings of former AFL barracks.

After meeting informants or associations in other parts of town, this neighborhood was the place where I lived, reflected and shared many long conversations. By living next door to ordinary Liberians and sharing part of their everyday life, I learned a lot about the context - present-day Liberia with all its scarcities, intricacies and uncertainties. *Lecturing* – a Liberian English expression for discussing serious issues - with my neighbors at the *atay shop* or on a porch in the evenings or on Sundays was very revealing. I had been told that "people mind their own things" in Liberia or that "everybody have their own problems", meaning that you do not just walk into anybody's place. This also meant that I did not have many visitors or invitations. Besides the many problems people had to deal with, it was clear that the war left its scars on many dimensions, and I was faced with high demands that I could not fulfill. Even in better-off households, the lack of money is a prevailing theme, and costs for medicine or transportation are burden. Most Monrovian families have a relative or more abroad who at times send remittances. But the cost of life, as in many cities, is quite high. What made lives more difficult were the gaps in the lives - loss of family ties, education, finances -, due to the war, remain painful. On Decoration Day, a public holiday at which people visit the graves of their loved ones, one of my neighbors explained that his mother was buried in a mass grave and he does not know the exact location. Others had to leave the country after the regime changed, and left out of fear of their lives. Another had been in a refugee camp in Guinea and fell in love with a woman who then left for the USA. Many of these stories were told in side sentences, and often came at unexpected time and circumstances. In an informal conversation, a neighbor explained how he came to Monrovia after the war with bare hands. He made a sign of empty hands with his spread fingers. Ten years after, they are so many people in his small three room apartment that I wondered how they find a place to sleep. I heard many stories of this kind. Some were shared with me as if to explain how "things are", but some were likewise told to others and discussed with other's experiences. Often, I learned about the war *en passant*. One evening at the *atay shop*, I was engaged in a discussion with Dave, a Liberian who had recently returned from a number of years of ref-

uge in Ghana. Suddenly, a motorbike stopped right behind us and blew the loud horn. I jumped up, shocked, and Dave started to laugh as if about a very funny joke. He said I was lucky I had not been here during the war, because I would have fainted of all the explosions “boom, boom, boom, all over!”

The reverse side of life lived in common (Förster 2011b: 7) was that I was part of intrigues, rumors and interpersonal conflicts. For example, someone tried to point out to me who had been part of rebel groups. I sensed his intention of positioning himself in a better light. Rumors were lively part of the everyday, and I became active part therein. The best I could to was to take them with humor and reflect them as part of imaginaries about how the social works or is expected to work. Taken as such, rumors propelled my immersion. I was a person of interest; as a white woman, many doors opened and relationships of empathy and protection were facilitated. Forms of hyper-appreciation resulted into a temporal numbness on my side. These then again were balanced with demands for my ‘help’ to grant access to resources, and these demands towards me were tremendous.

Living in the 72nd community showed me what it means to deal with challenges of the war-affected setting. Poverty was shameful, and some people were open about it, whereas others tried to hold their situation covered. Some had children that did not go to school. I overheard that they were from relatives of rural areas, returnees from refuge or “abandoned” children. It was considered an “open secret” that some parents cannot afford school uniforms. But children were also valuable sources of income and labor force due to their work at home or in the market. Furthermore, it was hard to make out the members of households, as some people travel from and to the country side, or nearby cities or even abroad for petty business. There was a constant shift of members in the various households like Veronika Fuest (1996: 91) observed in the 1980s. High geographic and social mobility of Liberian men and women made demographic categories like households or communities actually difficult to assess. It is common for some Liberians not to inform others about their plans for travelling: Somebody might envy the person and may use ‘African Science’ to influence the journey and render it unsuccessful. Secondly, indicating plans might raise the expectation to take something along or bring something back. So often I did not know when someone traveled. After some time, I shared this frustration with a neighbor, adding that it was hardly possible for me to know the households and names in the community. He was not surprised and told me that was normal; he too did not know all the names of the neighbors. And indeed, when I asked somebody about the name of a third person, sometimes I would not receive an answer.

This neighborhood was just a small pocked of Monrovia, though a slightly better-off one. There were people of various social milieus living next to one another, like in most post-war Monrovian neighborhoods. Some mentioned ‘Americo-Liberian’ background, and there were people of various parts of the country, but mainly from Lofa and Nimba County, and the Southeast. It was difficult for me to identify patterns of who got along

with whom or not; eventually, utterances of distrust and then again friendship could be heard. There was a lot of change over the three years; there was also a lot of movement in and out of the households and apartments; but a core of people and families I interacted with, remained. Over the time of my research, the neighborhood prospered steadily; there were a range of house renovations, new shops, and small success stories in people's lives. There have also been losses; one family had lost both a child and a grandfather. Mark married his girlfriend Annie, and though I was absent, I was appointed as their "sponsor general". The same day of their marriage, the bride lost her father. "This too is Liberia", goes a popular saying. But there were overall little or bigger improvements in their lives during the time of this research: the Liberian Electricity Corporation supplied the neighborhood and a number of people bought their share of electricity through "electricity managers"; Mark and Annie could eventually watch TV, which was an exciting new dimension to his soundless world.

Living in a Family

At my return in 2012, I felt less a stranger than previously. I was warmly welcomed, was invited to eat at the various homes of neighbors or informants, sometimes three or four times a day. Furthermore, I stayed with Ruth and her family, and thereby I got to know a bit more about daily routines of a middle-income Liberian household. I enjoyed the chit-chats with the household members. During my long-term research, I had often spent days and weekends at Ruth's and was always impressed how many people came to her house and stayed for a chat, to discuss a problem, or to help her with a catering assignment. Apart from her son, she adopted children which helped her in the household, and which she in turn sent to school. In many ways, her household was a rather typical Liberian household, composed of a range of members, some temporary, and with family relations to the rural areas as well as the USA. Ruth's house was at a similar distance to the city center as my previous home, but at the other end of town shortly after Duala Market. It had an even stronger peri-urban character than the 72nd neighborhood. There were fewer public infrastructures and it was less densely populated, and there were a number of free plots to be constructed on. On the way to town, cars came from the direction of Cape Mount County and the Sierra Leonean border. Many vehicles were heavily loaded with farm products, and early in the mornings, they unloaded in Duala market, where I could observe market women running in the direction of approaching cars, and throwing a piece of cloth on the car to mark their share of the goods they would acquire for sale at their market stand. There was a row of bars and restaurants between Duala Market and St. Paul Bridge which got crowded in the evenings with fancy dressed youth. Taxis, motorbikes and the host of youth along the road slowed the traffic down. In 2012, street lights reached the Duala market, however, in the middle of July 2012 they extinguished again; some say because of problems at the Liberian Electricity Corporation (LEC), others said that the wires were stolen. The street lights made the nights livelier. Though it was still considered risky around the big markets, more people were travelling after sundown. Still, as previously, all the people I interacted with were very concerned if I had to

travel after dusk; and hence accompanied me to a taxi, or even accompanied me to Ruth's place, where I was picked up at the road by some of the family members. This concern was not only towards me; if somebody left the house late, it was common to briefly confirm the safe arrival at home. Ruth ordered the house door closed at 9pm, after which furniture and empty bottles were placed along the windows and doors as a measure against break-ins. It was generally still considered to be dangerous at night, especially in Ruth's neighborhood. I experienced what it meant to be afraid at night on Friday, 13.07.2012. That night, I suddenly awoke by the nervous barking of dogs, and Ruth calling in a loud and deep voice "who is this?" There was an attempt to break into the house. Luckily, Ruth woke up and scared the thieves away with her shouting. The thieves had already been successful in taking some electronic equipment from below one window in the boy's room. The next day, she showed me all other marks from previous break-ins. They were many. Two weeks later, there were again dogs barking at nights, and the family spent an uneasy night. Ruth said she never slept sound. I wondered why there were no night watch teams. She answered that the community had set some up, bought torches and cutlasses with contributions from the neighborhoods, but in the end, it did not work out. According to Ruth, some communities manage to organize themselves into night watch teams whereas others do not. She rather relies on her own means of securing windows and doors with bottles and furniture. In addition, she said, the thieves are from within the community and must know the interior of her house.

In 2012, Ruth was no longer working for the micro finance bank. Apparently, there had been money misuse by the central management of the bank, causing the entire network of branches to collapse. It was a setback for her, as her branch was one of the most flourishing ones. Though the job had given her a steady income, she was not depending on it. She engaged in a range of activities, doing catering or NGO work thereby very actively forging and forming her life along various avenues. She had established an NGO and successfully registered it in 2011. Together with the chairman of the organization, a Liberian intellectual, she had written a proposal and received a satisfactory amount of money from UNDP in July 2012. At the same time, she was taking lessons in a bible school, and she was planning of opening her own church someday. She was a female leader at a Lutheran church. Despite the workload, she studied her bible or the course notes in the evenings. Hence, when we were not *lecturing*, at about every second evening the generator was on and we sat next to each other, working, while the youth were watching a TV show or sleeping on the couch.

Living with the family provided insights into the micro-workings amidst post-war intricacies: activities were meticulously planned, chances anticipated and risks diversified, always in a delicate social balance of giving and taking. Just as many other households around the world manage their assets, Liberian families have to manage time, income and expenditure, but also risks, security, personal and family relations over time and space, constantly overviewing new options that come along. It does not come as a surprise that persons like

Ruth who are not only heads of households but also important actor in the church and the community, do not sleep well. It is not only the fear of thieves and robbers, but also the many responsibilities and pressures in an environment of present insecurities and future uncertainty that rob her of her sleep. She regularly suffers from Malaria, and tries to balance her weight; however, this gives her abdominal problems. Despite the ups and downs in her life, her social network was dense and she often had visitors. At the time of my stay with her, her son had visitors from Ghana. Together with a school friend who went to Ghana during the war and a young Ghanaian entrepreneur, he wanted to extend an NGO to Liberia. This was exciting, as new perspectives on Liberia were discussed. Her son's friendship with a former schoolmate in Ghana shows how the social is fragmented, but also that people remain in contact over time and space. This young lady started a career as young entrepreneur in Ghana. Despite the many years abroad, she shared common understandings of the social reality with them. In the evenings, they shared stories about past personal or third people's experience, at times war-affected, but interestingly most often about how social life was negatively affected by African Science. One day, the young lady came along with me and Mr. Swaray to meet informants in central Monrovia including West Point. When I introduced her to my informants, I was astonished in what a friendly and welcoming way they addressed her, emphasizing that she should come back home to Liberia, and that she was more than welcome among them and their association. Phone numbers and business cards were exchanged, and Facebook friendships were later established. She, on the other hand, told me later how she was astonished that certain neighborhoods, especially West Point, were not as bad as she had imagined. Like many other Liberians, she shared an image of West Point and other physical or social spaces that are discursively constructed and lack personal experiences. Refugees in Ghana evidently share this rather stable mental image of West Point just like Monrovians that live in walking distance to this neighborhood. Sharing experience and long conversations contributed to grasping certain aspects of urban, post-war social life. It showed me how Liberians engage with the complex problems of their lives.

2.2. Researching in and on The "Concrete Forest"

The capital city Monrovia – like many cities around the world - is a demanding context; it squeezed and imposed itself into all dimensions of my research endeavor. My data builds around a selected number of informants and groups in pockets of the Monrovian everyday. Their range of agency was wide, and their social relationships were densely interwoven, some of which visible and others opaque to the public, and to me. Disentangling the consequences of civil war from the side effects of urbanization or other aspects of change was a challenge. Monrovia situationally turned into a "concrete forest", as an informant said when he talked about the violent conflict in the urban context that hosts a range of mysterious, ominous or dangerous spaces. At the time of this writing, about a third of Liberia's 3.8 Mio inhabitants lived in the capital and its sub- and peri-urban space. The boundaries of the city administration do not equal the imagined fringes, as many people feel marginalized even in the very center of Monrovia. Already before the civil wars the city was

bursting out of its seams. The imagery of the city is composed of the center of power, public administration and knowledge around the “Capitol Hill”, where all the powerful state institutions and the University of Liberia are situated next to each other. From this center, power disperses into other parts of the city and country. Monrovia is host to many international actors’ headquarters and the Freeport; a number of education facilities all serve as imagined catalysts for better futures. Monrovia is a space of interconnectedness, where new technologies and fancy consumer goods would be available. Yet, especially in many residential areas, infrastructures are scarce; the few roads and bridges are often congested. The built diversity within neighborhoods is high: Run-down houses and shacks damaged by bullets stand as remainders of the war next to renovated, modern architectures. Much was destroyed, many families have not returned, or simply cannot afford to renovate their homes. Others use the unoccupied space to squat temporally, but live at risk of being evicted at any time. Neighborhoods such as West Point, vast parts of Vai Town, Clara Town, New Kru Town, but also parts of Sinkor towards the swamp are inhabited by low income earners such as security guards or civil servants, and informal workers of various kinds who need to live in walking distance to their working places in central town. The swamp spills over during the rainy season and breads mosquitos. The notion of slum or informal settlement are not applicable due to the heterogeneity and level of administration of such neighborhoods and the fact that they are not inhabited by deprived and underprivileged people only (see Chapter 9.2.). This urban context, hence, presents a challenge for inhabitants, urban planners, policy makers and practitioners, and, obviously, to my research endeavors. It is the aim of this research to disentangle these thematic and temporal factors, and to identify mental images and subjective and intersubjectively shared imaginaries. Prerequisite to researching such mental practices, like for many social phenomena, is to gather a broad range of knowledge about the social and individual contexts. However, gaining such intimate knowledge was a long process. Doing ethnography in Monrovia ended up in Hannerz’s sense in “several miniature fieldworks side by side” (Hannerz 1976: 76).

The (partial) immersion into several social spaces enabled my “second socialization” in Liberia (Fischer in Spittler 2001: 10). Living and researching was closely interwoven. Through living in spatially different settings, I could compare and contrast the various neighborhoods and their social and physical spaces, and interrelate the discourses and practices therein to the wider context. I had intended to do fieldwork in and not on the city (Hannerz 1980), however, in the sense Lefebvre (1991) the social and physical spaces are closely interlinked and become inseparable. My illustrated learning process was prerequisite to the understanding of who does what and why in the city. From the onset, my research assistant, Mr. Swaray, recommended starting to research at the two major markets that spatially frame the city, Red Light Market in the Southeast, and Duala Market in the Northwest, following Strauss and Corbin’s (1991: 201) theoretical sampling approach. Likewise, we investigated center town with Rally Time and Waterside Markets. As my research assistant was employed half time, I conducted part of the research on my own, which added on experience.

As almost everybody was eager to discuss politics, it was quite easy to gather broad information and opinions, and often, such fleeting relationships turned to key informants. I followed the people, stories and events of interest to my research topics, the social imaginaries and the people's perception of the state in Monrovia. This approach as derived from (Marcus 1995) led to the selection of a number of key informants and social group or pockets of social spaces in the post-war, urban context. Rather than being situated in a "bounded field", I aimed at tracing ideas, movements, and social actors beyond physical and social spaces (Marcus 1995: 101). Some of these social actors have become important key-informants over time, notably Abraham, Emmanuel, James, Mary, Ruth, Sheriff, and a few more from different gender, age, ethnic or professional backgrounds. All of them were part of at least one association, and in the process of the field research, I selected three particular associations due to the relevance, their political engagements with the state and hence, the very particular and explicit ways they discussed social imaginaries. Furthermore, I participated formally and informally in group discussions often held at *atay shops*. Some formalized into "intellectual forums" in which often politically interested youth took part. One of such forums was the "West Point Intellectual Forum", which Mr. Swaray and I used to discuss our findings and in which we received interesting additional information that helped to triangulate the work.

Picture 2: WEPIF group Discussion, amongst all members there was only one woman, however, she raised her voice (picture by F. Swaray, 2012).

Following James Cliffort's (1988) critique on authoritarian writing, my informants engage in this text with their voice in contrasting, illuminating and complementing polyphonically my arguments. Most of them enjoyed above-average formal educational backgrounds or are enrolled into the University of Liberia, and many are in their forties or early fifties. Their age and experience mirrored in their way of reflecting their personal and the country's past. Despite their cultural capital, they lived under rather average conditions, as their monetary income as civil servants, irregular employment or economic activities contributed to a salaries of around 100 USD. This situates them in an equal socio-economic position with a range of other Liberians and forces them to diversify their economic practices and include family members to making a living. All of them are Church or Mosque goers, and are members of at least one association beyond the religious-affiliated associations. Some founded NGOs in order to access funding opportunities, hence broaden their means of making a living. Others founded an association based on shared grievances. Often, these associations emerged during or after the war, and they were based on a particular interest. One was the West Point

Women for Health and Development Organization (see Chapter 9). Mr. Swaray pointed out this group to me while we were zigzagging through the West Point peninsula in order to interview fishermen. The West Point Women, he commented, were considered to be "are a very powerful organization". The seeming contradicting statement against the backdrop of being one of the poorest neighborhoods in which gender-based violence was said to be prevalent raised my interest. How could women in such a socio-spatially stigmatized, precarious environment be so powerful? Subsequently, we met regularly, and over time gained their interest and trust beyond seeing us as potential donors. Mary, the vice president of the group was my main informant, and as she sometimes invited me or took me along to see other friends or West Point Women members. Through her I gained much insight not only in the work of the association, but also of the context through her views and personal challenges. When she visited me in my 72nd community for example, she was eager to leave early enough so that she would not have to enter Red Light in the dark to find a means of transportation – Red Light was considered dangerous in the eyes of this Westpointer. Likewise it became obvious that she could mobilize means for treatment of her glaucoma, but that there was lack of according medicine in Liberia. Through her story, the complexity of the post-war context became visible in rather revered perspectives on personal security and health care.

The second association that I followed over time and space were the disbanded soldiers of the Armed Forces of Liberia. There were several entry points to this association, as former soldiers are numerous and engaged into various economic and political activities in Monrovia. In conducting interviews with money changers, or participates in informal discussions, I became interested in why a solider of rank would sit in the streets and change money. The political issue of the deactivated soldiers and their quite cohesive association was another contradiction on the Liberian post-war landscape, hence, I started to investigate their grievance. In Chapter 7, I will contextualize the association of the Unconstitutionally Disbanded Armed Forces of Liberia (UDAFOL), their claims and members. Working with the leadership of the group was somewhat challenging, as I was investigating into a problematic political and security issue at the heart of the state. I had to distance myself from being taken as their voice to represent their claims. Whereas there are former AFL soldiers in many parts of Liberia, a range of them remained in and around central parts of Monrovia, and this urban, post-war context was central to them.

The last association of core interest was the Concerned Mandingo Association/Society of Liberia (COMASL). It raised my attention after violent eruptions in Lofa County in early 2010. Violence and discursively hardened lines of ethnic and religious constructions mingled with a range of social problems. This led to politicization of ethnicity and revealed social tensions towards the Mandingo ethnic group. Until this event, I had not noticed issues of ethnicity in the everyday, in the contrary, I was told that people tried to "do away with tribalism" and not mention ethnicity. I started to follow this story, and met the leadership of COMASL. In this

story, Mr. Swaray, who was of this group, initially served as gatekeeper, however, he withheld himself from discussions and maintained an analytical perspective towards the issue.

Researching associations of these kinds had the advantage that they were founded on a common cause, and on shared social imaginaries of how things are, and how they are considered to be. They are also engaged in translating these imaginaries through collective actions. These associations cut across some identity or grievance lines, as for example UDAFOL or West Point Women informants were also Mandingo, or the West Point Women were faced with the problem of a neglected, sick old soldier (see Chapter 9.3.). However, other boundaries are rather hard or secondarily relevant, such as gender issues for COMASL or UDAFOL. The post-war and urban context was similarly challenging to a number of these social actors, but as there exist centrifugal forces that lead to social cohesion, there are also centripetal forces that challenge it. Data derived from interacting with informants and associations hence needed to be contrasted or compared to others.

> "Cities, then, became places where new forms of both solidarity and individual action emerged — through various associations, unions, demonstrations, social movements, markets, workplaces, and political and religious meetings. These solidarities and activities were put to work so as to use the city as a means of linking various regional economies, actors, and networks" (Simone 2010: 10–11)

These forms of individual and collective actions are shifting and fluctuating even the more in a post-war context of reconstruction, which is per definition a changing context which creates new possibilities and options for the individual and collective actors. There is much social and physical mobility in this context, which makes it both interesting and challenging for the researcher to keep on track.

Urban spaces are marked by vast heterogeneity that is neither new nor specific for Monrovia. Not the size and urbanization but its long history of inequalities and recent civil wars made Monrovia one of these spaces where great scarcity exists right next door to affluence. Social actors of various social milieus interact with one another on a daily basis, many of which remain fleeting or traffic relationships (Hannerz 1981). But not all is harmonious; there are encounters as well as distanciation practices within the urban (Förster 2013b). Nevertheless, social actors are situated in multiple relational contexts conceptualized as sociality, cf. Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 969), in reference to George Herbert Mead. This requires notably subtle knowledge and observation to notice such spaces and relational processes. At some point, it was one of the biggest challenges for me to switch between these worlds, not only the physical spaces of iced cold acclimatized spaces in cars, hotels, meeting rooms, and the extreme heat of the tropical climate, storms and muddy grounds on the other hand. But certainly it needed knowledge of and experience to adjust to the meaning of conventions, codes and habitus of the respective spaces. For an example, I was told it was considered more important to have the clothes pressed and to look decent for church service than to be on time. In some spaces 'African clothing' is a prerequisite, such as for example entering the parliament building. But some of

these codes and keyings (Goffman 1974: 43) were soon learned, whereas others were more challenging. I experienced social cleavages, inequalities and suffering of many Liberians very demanding to research on, and often found myself quite selfishly in participating in their lives in order to write a good story later on. Yet, exactly this story might be told to a politically influential person that might facilitate change for the people.

Contradictions included international organization paying so low salaries for security guards that hardly allowed them to travel home after 12 hours workdays during six days a week. In a hotel next door, hundred dollar bills were spent on a poker table without the batting of an eye. I recall sick persons reduced to skeletons staring at me with feverish eyes at the local clinic of the Charity Sisters, and found myself drinking cocktails in the same neighborhood in the evening – which was the moment where I had to distanciate myself from contrasting situations that would cause an ethical dilemma and occupy too much mental space. These extreme encounters could happen temporally and regionally close to one another, so that it became difficult to remain objective and not emotional. This meant, however, to take time and reflect and maintain a necessary distance, and to embed extreme encounters into the complex reality of post-war Liberia. The arrangement of diverse social actors is typical for the time and place: there existed a large expatriate community from largely all parts of the world; there were many returning Liberians including deportees; and of course the social strata of Liberians.

I suggest that this social context of a heterogeneous composition of actors including internationals, chances and limitations, hopes and fears, and many more subjective and intersubjective encounters and distanciation processes create spaces of negotiating sociality and shared experience, but also reflects and challenges norms and values in a time of transition in which these norms and values are often all but clear.

2.3. METHODS

The following section reflects on the methods applied during research in a post-war, urban context. Starting point was the development of the Emic Evaluation Approach (EEA) developed at the Seminar of Social Anthropology at the University of Basel. The EEA is composed of three methods that access different dimensions of social life: 1) mapping the actors; 2) social discourse analysis; and 3) practice analysis, which are complemented with the triangulation (Förster 2011b). These three elements were differentiable in data collection, however, they were only hardly separable from each other in for methodological and theoretical reflections. The methods are rooted in classical methodological reflections of social anthropology. Participant observation is often used unreflectedly as the core of social anthropological research, see for example (Spittler 2001). The main argument of the EEA holds that participation and observation provide data on two dimensions of everyday life, hence, discourse and practice analysis generate data on different levels of experience. To plan the sampling, for data collection and organization through coding, I followed the detailed

procedures of Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin 1991). In ethnographic practice, especially during long-term field research, data collection and analysis – comparative analysis being essential part of analysis - are interlocked processes. Research programs such as the Grounded Theory are time consuming and serve rather as heuristic guiding principles (Kruse 2008: 123). In many field situations, I retrospectively see myself in the role of a *bricoleur* (Lévi-Strauss 1965) in flexibly combining suitable methods according to the situation and social setting, with the aim to better access, memorize and understand the complexity of the social environment (Denzin and Lincoln 1995: 349). Basically, I selected mental images clustering around publicly debated issues and problems and I found them in discussions in public spaces or by key informants and members of the three associations. Out of the many issues and problems, I made a selection and followed particular individuals and groups over time and the urban space (Marcus 1995, cf. Hannerz 1976: 76). Comparative methodology developed at the Seminar of Social Anthropology of the University of Basel (Heer 2015) informed this book and collaborations that emerged from it (cf. Ammann and Kaufmann 2013, Ammann and Kaufmann 2014, Heitz Tokpa, Zanker and Kaufmann 2015). Analytical concepts are drawn from Ralph Weber's approach of comparison as a dynamic research process (Weber 2014), however, comparison does not stand at center stage of this work as the three case studies of chapters 7 – 9 were compared in regards to the point of commonality, the social imaginary and how it informs political action of associations.

In the following, I will highlight the central aspects and particularities of the EEA. The EEA triangle provides different dimensions of data that complement each other. However, I do not understand the EEA as three separate and clear cut set of methods, but rather image the EEA triangle as composed of three spheres that mutually constitute one another but also partially overlap.

Mapping the social actors is one of the three corners of the EEA. Its aim is to generate an overview and depiction of actors engaging in social relations in certain physical or social spaces. Essentially this required the investigation of discursive constructions of identities, histories or belonging. This knowledge is essential for the understanding of meanings the actors attributed to one another. Informants, however, were careful to share such information about others, and many statements were rather diffident. A person would state not to know a certain person, but when encountering him or her coincidentally, they joyfully greeted one another. Mapping the actors and knowing who does what and why remained challenging. Other anthropologists noted that people withheld information (Fuest 1996: 23-24) or stage subjective victimcy (Utas 2005). As I was proceeding inductively and applying an actor-oriented approach, I started to follow a number of people through the physical and social spaces relevant to their interaction and interest, thereby borrowing methodologically from Hannerz (2007) and Marcus (1995). This approach required a complement; "following the idea" meant for this research context to follow the mental images, pictures, symbols, practices and imaginaries on government and the state in and between urban spaces. As defined in the proposal, but also rec-

ommended by Liberians, travelling within the country led to complementary perspectives on the city. I collected data by sampling broadly at firstly, to theoretical sampling in the course of the research (Strauss and Corbin 1991: 201). In order to gather specific information, I conducted semi-structured or narrative interviews. The interviews summed up to a total of 166 recorded or written interviews, more than a third conducted in the explorative phase of the first 70 days. Due to time constraints, only a selection was transcribed and open coded. Interviewing, and especially in this quantity, are contested in ethnography, see for example Förster (2011b), Spittler (2001), or Utas (2007); nevertheless, they had a number of advantages for my research, apart from disadvantages. Firstly, access to and participation in everyday life was rather challenging as compared to other West African experiences; in bustling Monrovia, many people did not have time or interest in spending time with me or us, and it happened recurrently that after some time an interview partner asked for example "anything else?" to indicate time pressure or disinterest. We were also denied a number of times. A solution to this challenge was to establish contacts through personal relations, if available. Once agreed on an interview, interestingly, most informants did not mind being recorded, as Mr. Swaray convincingly explained that this way, we did not have to write which would take more time for both parties. If a person agreed, I recorded with the help of a device that I placed marginally into the setting. In the course of a conversation or interview, the informants often focused on the recorder in the beginning and also chose words, expressions or opinions rather carefully. For this reason, my first questions were often about the background of the person. In the course of the interview, the recorder became marginal and the person would focus more on our discussion and the questions I asked. I experienced that the recorder interrupted such a situation less than a pen and booklet to which I would draw my attention. A number of Liberians and most members of associations were habituated to interviews. Initially, the official framing of an interview marked my position, my intent and the company of a research assistant from the University of Liberia underlined the importance of the research. For many individuals and groups, the interview situation created a stage with an imagined audience for their grievances and dissatisfaction with their situation in the post-war context. Indeed, foreigners in Liberia are often linked to NGOs, IOs or powerful actors, hence, funding sources and decision makers. It goes without saying that methods require "off-stage" encounters, informal conversations and go-alongs to triangulate the content and performance of the interview-situation. This was facilitated by having several informants besides a key-informant to a certain topic or association, and through being in contact over a long time. Second advantage of interviews is the generation of lot of data, which I could use for comparisons and the generation of typologies. The Liberian's expressions and formulations complement the text polyphonically. Furthermore, and quite importantly, interviews were helpful in accessing persons with time constraints to provide a short time frame to contribute to this research. Formal interviews often formed the beginning of further interactions. Switching off the microphone often marked the onset of more interesting discussions on the topic. Most often, these were more valuable in contrast to

the formal interview. Off the record, a kind of off-stage situation, strengthened trust and solidarity but at times also indicated that a range of information was not meant for a public, and this aspect required transparency. For some groups such as UDAFOL, the interviews and formal character of meetings established clarity about important and public information and it was central to differentiate "on the record" knowledge on a somewhat delicate issues of national security. Group discussions with the leadership of an association were enriching due to the less artificial character. Often, the participants took their own way, and such discussions revealed a number of topics of concern and in-group dynamics: often, the president of an association spoke, and depending on the constellation of actors there were outspoken members whereas others were more silent. Often, women were more outspoken when in a group, and especially middle-aged women were often rather straightforward, and questioned openly other participant's utterances. The fact that I was recording facilitated observation, and I could follow the discussion without drawing attention to my pen, book or mental protocol. But ethnography by definition cannot be based on interviews only and have to be embedded in a wider methodological context as mentioned above. First and foremost, interviews, the participants and situation require reflection. Informal discussions after the interview were central to gaining knowledge on and experiences in the social context. Especially subjective or shared imaginaries required that the informants had to put into words what stems from the realm of the mind. I evoked these by asking people what they "think about the present government", "which president did best for Liberia", or "how do you imagine the future of Liberia". Questions were complemented by pointing out a political event, a motto, or a national symbol. Often, I triggered a discussion with about a topic I was interested in. I paid attention to words, metaphors or symbols which were often transported in "images, stories and legends" as Taylor put it (2002: 106) and grouped the bits and pieces together in order to assemble these in the empirical part. I presented raw material, preliminary findings or reflections twice at the University of Liberia, or three times at the West Point Intellectual Forum (WEPIF), a local forum of public debate, which lead to interesting debates and opened new problems or questions. Mapping social actors in particular, and constructing a descriptive image of actors, opinions, social and physical spaces in the areas of research was therefore a long process, not least due to the fact that there was a lot of change in dynamics, physical and social mobility, or leadership of groups, of household compositions, or other social aspects. Humans are often not used to talk about certain aspects of their personal past memories or imaginaries. In putting something into words, this experience remains mainly in the dimension of the verbal. This has to be reflected, especially, when people recall a tragic event related to the war. For example, it is an often described phenomenon that people start to laugh when talking about atrocities. It is hard to express these experiences into words, and putting something into words changes the character of the experience (Förster 2011b: 12). All of these elements are aspects of discourse.

The second corner of the empirical research triangle is social discourse analysis. Also therefore, standard procedures in social sciences were applied, such as the retracing of relationships between social actors by examining what they say about each other with regard to the state and governance. What social actors say, hence, is embedded in the context of their life world - their experiences and interests in relation to their claims and socio-cultural setting. Discourse, hence, is inherently political. As for the conceptual aspects (chapter 1), my starting point was Michel Foucault's understanding of discourse or discursive practices as (re)production of knowledge beyond the individual. I took Foucault's understanding of discursive formations with some variations as an analytic lens by listening what the people discussed:

> "Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations)…" (Foucault 2004 [1969]: 42)

As important as the spoken word, it is telling to reflect on what is not said in a discussion. Social actors say differently in familiar groups, in an informal conversation or in a public context. Discourse contains utterances related to one another in a certain context. This context is marked by differences in experience or knowledge and social positions, which inform power relations therein. In difference to Foucault, however, I focus on the social actors and do not isolate their statements from them. The relation between social actors and their expressions is essential and enables the analysis of individual as well as social agency. As indicated, I did not limit the field of enquiry to verbal statements, but apply a broader understanding of language and discourse as it includes statements, performances, or pictures in various media towards other actors. The clothes people wear, the symbols and metaphors they use, the mental maps they apply and shape, and many other elements are expressions relating to the discursive formation of social imaginaries. The differentiation between discourse and practice comes close.

I investigated newspaper articles, but also how these were distributed, discussed, or contested. The particular role of the radio complemented the media analysis, as many people rather follow the news than read newspapers. Media in Liberia have been problematized by many others; "Liberian journalism is often problematic, and article space is more or less openly up for sale to any interested party" (Gerdes 2013: 6, cf. Ellis 2007: 321). What is said in the media, hence, is discourse. Media analysis requires much knowledge on the background of a topic, the actors involved and the generation and distribution of the information. In Liberia, the Public Agenda News newspaper, for example, published a number of articles on the UDAFOL and COMASL issue in a rather factual manner, the Heritage or Chronicle Newspaper likewise give space to the UDAFOL issue. The popular New Democrat stood out with sensational headlines, often underlined with eye-catching, shocking pictures. Hence, I enclosed the media as part of discursive formations which require embedding in the socio-political post-war context, just like statements in radio talk shows, in taxis, busses, *atay*

shops or other public spaces. In this understanding of discourse analysis, intentional as well as unintentional communicative acts - provided the participants understood them as such - contributed to their relationship.

Observation over a significant time span revealed meanings and enabled to embed discourses. I gathered most of the knowledge on state-society relationships in long conversation in public spaces. This required much documentation of spontaneous face-to-face interactions, to listen to the radio or to read newspapers, and to acquire knowledge about how the people listen to the radio, how they read newspapers and how they react to news. In this realm fall statements of government representatives or the president, which I followed by attending respective events, listening on the radio, and analyzing the texts of the speeches, which were often available online or in the newspapers, and investigated predominant metaphors and images in use (Schatzberg 2001: 4–7). Conceptually, the broad definition of discourse analysis included the documentation of performances and pictures; in the visual realm I include buildings, monuments, advertisements, political posters, slogans and mottos on documents, billboards and other visual representations. As theoretically different from mental images (Mitchell 1996, Mitchell 2005), I produced and used pictures and collected visual material for two reasons. Firstly, as part of ethnographic data collection, I make use of photographs from field situations, events and informants which not only revitalize memories and feelings later on, but also add on an analytical dimension to intensify interpretative meanings and visualize aesthetic aspects (Gerold 2012: 117). Like the use of words and quotes of informants, I use pictures not to emphasize a realist representation or evidence (O'Reilly 2009: 221), but rather as an additional dimension in complement to my written text. In this sense, I agree with Pink in that "[v]isual representations bear an important relationship to, but cannot replace, words in theoretical discussion" (Pink 2006: 6). Empirical studies have proposed to integrate the textual as well as the visual (Schatzberg 2001: 4–7), and other senses (Pink 2009). They both formed part and trigger memory and imaginary of the various temporal-structural dimensions of social life. Secondly, I gathered particular pictures of the discursive formation of the state. Though often not referred to in statements or discussions, a range of these pictures belong to the discourse relevant to this dissertation, in particular those pictures that are produced or changed by the state in order to transmit a certain message with the intention to shape mental images. The state makes use of what Mitchell refers to as the magic of pictures (Mitchell 2005: 9). Why some pictures are not powerful requires the embedding of pictures in the discourse they are situated in, and analyze their meaning therein (Mitchell 2005: 19). The powerful pictures merge and form part of the state imagery. Pictures and words hence complemented each other, and added a dimension to discursive formations. Social discourse analysis defined this way enhances gaining insights into one dimension of the everyday, notably on what social actors talk about and what was expressed in various ways. I am aware that the verbally uttered only provides information about themes and attitudes that already surfaced at the consciousness of social actors. However, it does not capture practices that remain unconscious on one or both sides of interaction. For example, it was commonly stated that inse-

curity increases after sundown, and people would barricade themselves in their homes due to high crime and break-in rates after dark. Indeed, I observed that people were eager to get home in the late afternoon, but I observed that spaces along the roads near the central markets were equally crowded at night time and young women sold food, whereas others were still waiting for transportation to return home. Though I embed what people say and do in a wider conceptual framework of agency under harsh conditions of the post-war context, on an empirical level, discourse analysis did not reveal or contextualize such seeming contradictions between what the social actors say and what they actually do. Therefore the third corner of the EEA, practice analysis, helped to understand and reduces this tension.

As one of the core methods of ethnography, practice analysis served to study how actors engage in physical and social spaces, how they try to maintain social relations and how they try to achieve their goals. In following the anthropological shift in perspective from ritual to everyday life, as I was interested in the agency of social actors within a challenging environment. I made use of the primary tools of ethnography, observation and participation. I was much influenced by Gerd Spittlers "Dichte Teilnahme" (Spittler 2001), who in large criticized the unreflected use of participant observation and interviews, and alternatively proposes an approach he terms 'thick participation'. He emphasized the interpretative, empathic, sensory and physically closeness of participation in the social setting. Only through immediate experience of participation in social practice, the researcher gains deep insight thereof. For this reason, I had aimed at living with a family. Only over time and development of relationships of trust and friendship, this became possible, and in 2012, I finally stayed with the family of Ruth. And indeed, this was the most insightful time in the field, in which I learned about everyday routines, chit-chats and gained much tacit knowledge (Spittler 2001: 6). Participation, hence, required a critical and reflective engagement over a long time, which would lead to the immersion of the researcher into the everyday life. In-depth knowledge of the everyday life is the core competence a social anthropologist. However, it requires at the same time a certain distance to enable an analytic perspective. Spittlers' methodology of "Dichte Teilnahme" served as an ideal-type, however, in the urban setting and thematic choice set constraints as explained above. I researched in several miniature fieldworks with the consequence of less thickness as in bounded, face-to-face settings (Hannerz 1976: 76). I aimed at participating as much as possible, such as in demonstrations, in living with a family, or in daily encounters. This led to some degree of overlapping perspectives and embodiment of sensory experiences to understand the complexities of the everyday.

The analysis of social practice remains essential to all ethnographic enquiries, in particular when it comes to questions of the way in which local actors forge their lives in an intricate environment marked by present insecurities and future uncertainties. I cross-checked information, triangulated findings with regards to practices of state- and related actors, with differentiated critiques of a variety social actors and media. Rich and

complementary data was generated and put into context. Still, participation and observation give privilege to the ordinary people and a certain bias persisted as elite remain underexplored (cf. Gupta 1995). However, I investigated social and physical spaces in which members of the elite dwelled, and participated in discussions and gained insights into their take of the social. This complemented the discursive formation of a social imagery of the "state in society" (Migdal 2001). To apprehend the formation of imagination is to trace social relations in spheres where the imageries and practices of state and governance are addressed, I observed public events such as the Armed Forces Day, the International Women's Day, or the elections. In a dense and bustling context, decisions had to be taken swiftly, and unlike Spittlers' daylong waiting with nothing happening, Monrovia was filled with interesting events, associations, neighborhoods, institutions, conflicts, and many more aspects of sprawling urban life. A thorough selection needed to be made, in line with "following the people" within the "miniature fieldwork" sites.

Collaborating with a Research Assistant

Working with a research assistant was of central importance to my field research in an urban and post-war environment. In reading and reflecting on working with a field research assistant, I was surprised by the absence of these important mediators and facilitators in social anthropologists' work. In general, a research assistant is not a key informant, as she or he does not stand for a specific group or topic of interest, nor is he or she a gatekeeper, smoothing access to a particular group (O'Reilly 2009: 132). My field assistant, Mr. Swaray, was both key informant and gatekeeper, and his contributions to the research process and analysis have an even further scope. I could not put it better than Ulf Hannerz:

> "The relationship between an anthropologist and his locally recruited aide, when one is needed, is probably in most cases one of many strands - the latter is a guide, interpreter, translator of texts, interviewer, public relations man, advisor, informant, and perhaps confidante in general." (Hannerz 1976: 78)

Such collaboration requires a considerable degree of trust and mutual understanding, which serves as a groundwork of a professional but also sociable relation. We went together into social and physical spaces that were considered risky, but trustworthiness through the professional, institutional link to the University, as well as the personal, friendly relation to Mr. Swaray's family lay groundwork as I could rely on his judgments of a social or physical space. Mutual understanding was important as he translated questions and answers not only in regards to language, but mediated between plural cultural understandings, meanings and semantic fields. As an "encultured informant" (Spradley 1979), he explained events, sayings or articulations in their politico-historical context, he translated Liberian English in a way that I could follow the discussion and understood not only the words and their semantic fields, but also the cultural contents they transmit. This required, however, that the relationship is continuously reflected, see also Schlehe (2003: 87–88). Reflexivity is prerequisite to embed the context of such a central person into a wider framework; infor-

mation about his social, political, and personal interests and agendas have to be put into context. My research assistant, being a man, a University student and highly educated, being older than me, self-ascribing himself as Muslim and of Mandingo background potentially had an influence on informal conversations, interview situations, and, more basically, on the topics and social actors he would propose to discuss or approach, or filter out. Just like my own characteristics, mainly being a European young woman, these have a strong influence on any individual or group. These have to be reflected and observed in all research situations. This high potential for biasing a situation was reflected and approached by Mr. Swaray and myself in different ways. Firstly, it was important that he was open to all social groups. He had a very sociable way and interacted well with most of our informants. Secondly, that I met my informants also bilaterally or in company of other people. Often, once a contact had been established formally, I followed up on my own.[44] This helped to contrast the relation with our without Mr. Swaray's presence. The interest and focus of the politicization of the Mandingo ethnic group, to which he belonged, for example, was an interest that evolved in a circular process of information in public debates I directly or over the media followed, hence, not through his influence. Obviously, however, he facilitated connections to individual informants of this group. At the same time, I had to be cautious not to expose him, his family members and his interests in a way that it could affect his present occupation and future plans. The same occurred for other key informants; I had to balance my presence despite key informants and meet them in different social configurations or alone. Interestingly, the presence of Mr. Swaray did not affect women's groups negatively. I experienced our encounters with informants as very open, as he engaged with each person in a respectable way. And, very importantly, Mr. Swaray shared the interest in the research topic.

Mr. Swaray's different methodological approach and training as sociologists, on the other hand, did affected encounters. Having often worked with NGOs or short projects of international scientists, he did not really see the need in spending time with our informants, as I had different interest in intersubjectively shared experience than him, who believed to be aware of the local context. After some time, he would propose to move on, and as much socially engaged person he had other duties. These, on the other hand, placed him into the role of a key informant for me, and provided rich insights into social relations and practices. Again, it was a matter of planning, management and communication of interests between us (Hannerz 1976: 79). As trained in sociology and conflict and peace studies, and experienced in working with NGOs and in a refugee camp, he was empathetic and sensitized – at times more than I was - to talk to Liberians of "all walks of life", as he would say. With my growing background knowledge I realized that we gathered a broad range of voices and images within the respective discursive fields. Empathy is a central asset in research, I believe. In regards to the violent past, it was important to me not to intrude social conventions or open up healing wounds. In such context it is helpful to have somebody that is experienced therein.

[44] The better I understood Liberian English, the better I could engage with the informants on my own.

In a city, one needs to increase efficiency of one's endeavor, and also in this regard, my research assistant had a central role as he knew the workings of the city quite well. We started at the most important markets Duala, Rally Time, and Red Light. He introduced us to authorities, and asked for permission to investigate the respective markets, organizations or individuals. We talked to a range of people, to some only for a short time, at times in formal interviews, or in others just informally. We also went to revisit them regularly. He played a vital role in making me understand social relations in a context of the post-war city, and helped to turn Monrovia from a fearful into a familiar city. Not only did he make certain physical spaces familiar to me so that I could go there alone, but there were also a number of topics that we analyzed collaboratively. This way, we gathered a lot of information in a short time, which would, through my studies at home in the evenings, helped to narrow the research field and let specific issues of interest emerge. We moved into diverse socio-economic milieus and neighborhoods. Besides, we followed media and public discussions, for example in taxis, indicated which topics or events were of general importance, and subsequently discussed these jointly.

Working with a research assistant is common in long-term field research, yet only few reflect on their roles, cf. Galizia and Schneider (2005: 8). For all the above mentioned reasons and possible challenges, I consider it is essential to reflect on the role and the impact of a research assistant. It is crucial to spend time with informants without assistant, and to compare different experiences. As Mr. Swaray was part-time employed, it left room to visit informants, institutions, and triangulate information gathered with him in a different context.

2.4. Ethical Concerns and Reflections

Even though I dealt with a post-war context, I experienced challenges that come close to experiences researchers share from war contexts. Mats Utas for example identified a number of ethical concerns and dilemmas, especially in regards to personal and subject's security, access and acceptance, and quality and evaluation of data (Utas 2004: 229-231). The time of this research fell into a period of a certain level of peace and stability, however, there remained certain topics and problems that are delicate to address. Some informants told me quite appalling stories, as for example I have two different stories of sexual abuse, committed by two men who told me the stories bilaterally. Both in fact all happened before the conflict. I have gotten insight into depressing individual and family constellations, cases of corruption, I have seen severe physical violence committed by a friend who seriously beat another young man, and had insight into biographies of abuses, socio-economic downfall and misery. Much was told to me as an outsider and listener to sorrows. Such scenes were not thought to be part of my data and publicly available to the world, such as for example the eviction and jailing of a friend after he had lost his land case in court. Aspects of information gathered with the anthropologists' hat on need to be differentiated from those situations when one is con-

sidered a friend, and private information, not thought to be available to the world is given. These reflections are likewise relevant for the publication. Even though a number of informants have even insisted of adding their names to the stories, it is important to protect informants (Utas 2007: 228), hence, all of my informants have pseudonyms in this dissertation, and at times I have altered the context in order to protect their social or professional position.

Central consideration, in particular to such challenging situations are aspects of my own identity. Though aspects of my identity were very relevant for most encounters, in particular being a women and white, I consider the fact that I was wealthier than most informants – in real or imagined terms – the most important potential factor to bias such relations. Nevertheless, time and repeated encounters helped to relativize these factors and enable interesting conversations that were not primarily linked to me being a possible avenue to a better future. These reflections are similar to those of other researchers in other contexts.

Furthermore, it was crucial, but not always easy to remain at an objective, neutral position with enough distance, in order not to take side with the group or individual one interacts with. Even though my position as a researcher was clear, members of associations repeatedly stated that I should carry their story "out there", to speak on their behalf. Actors of various marginalized settings saw me as a person with a possibility to influence certain debates or enhance their social position. My aim, however, was to depict their story as independently of my personal opinion as possible. This was appreciated by my informants over time, as it became clear that my interest remained on the research topic and the individuals' life stories. There comes a third challenge and dilemma: even though I followed happenings on the political landscape, I aimed at obtaining a broad picture and gathering as many opinions as possible. Critical questions led to counter-questions such as "so you don't believe me?"

My personal opinion and ethical principles repeatedly and constantly needed to be reflected, especially after a number of episodes mentioned in this chapter. It was often difficult because many informants wondered about my opinion on a range of issues, often related to insecurity about changing values and norms. I had to be careful to make clear that these were my opinions based on my own stock of knowledge. This, however, became extremely difficult as I was asked at an informal chitchat if it were true that "women would enjoy rape". This statement shocked me as for me there was only one, clear answer, and rather than reflecting the question I reacted emotionally, as this question clearly overstrained me to a vast degree, and my perspective and this persons' obviously diverged widely.

At the same time I had to continue to learn and understand the consequences that a long period of conflicts can have especially on those that were socialized in this time. Many Liberians have been involved in the conflict in some kind of way. "Every family had a gun. Some used it to defend, others were actively involved in

the conflict" is a literal statement in an informal discussion about the DDRR process in Liberia. Evidently, there were many more than 100'000 combatants, as all participants of the discussion agreed. There were the active participants and the passive ones – those that provided food or supported and defended their family members in combat. My neighbors defended their families – were they now combatants or not? I was repeatedly told that there is no clear line between who participated and who did not. This very issue was at first a major concern for me, as I did not want to be associated with anybody who fought. This soon had to be reflected and accustomed to the local reality: I would not have had any informants but a huge gap of knowledge about social reality in the post-war context. I became conscious about obsolete binary opposition of participators and avoiders, or perpetrators and victims. The lines are blurred and some actors have been on both sides, against the backdrop of the complex rebellions and counter-rebellions probably repeatedly. Lastly and most importantly, (pre)judgments neither helped in accessing nor analyzing the social reality, which led to deep insights into how social actors reflect their past and how they find ways to deal with it in the present. Needless to say that I could only access fragments of the past through their narratives. I did not ask questions about the war as I had been advised to in the initial phase of my research, out of fear to pull a trigger. Nevertheless, I signaled interest and my non-normative position - "I'm neither God nor a judge". I mentioned two episodes concerning rebel leaders above. It proved helpful to discuss these concerns with trustworthy persons, and understood how these actors are vital part of contemporary social networks and how they have transformed in the post-war context. Some receive vast support from their regional kin and affiliates, and are vital part of various spaces, as they support local associations, participate at the university or have opened popular restaurants, bars or hotels. I was aware that I too was part of this social reality, and I got familiar with it.

There were many situations where people would stop talking about something in my presence, or, the other way round, take the possibility of me being an outsider, and a somewhat trustworthy person, to talk about their sorrows, or events that they would never talk to publicly. It is crucial to research ethics to differentiate when certain information is meant for the research data, and when it is something that is not. Anthropologists are researchers and also live in the context as a human being, as some situations or issues, notably war-related issues, affected me as a human being with a normative understanding, even if I was aware that I was in a different context with a particular reality built on past experiences which constituted plural norms and values. The methodology required much time and space to reflect. However, the Liberians too are engaged in multiple dilemmas and were actively engaged with re-adjusting social norms. Living in common helped me to sort out my own – and gain insights into others' understandings of how the social ought to be.

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I elaborated on how I approached the field and how I experienced my "second socialization" in Monrovia. Shared experiences led to a partial understanding which shapes a background for epistemological grasp on the context. In the second part, I dwelled on methodology applied as derived from the Emic Evaluation Approach (EEA). The components of the EEA create a conscious of changing perspectives, listening to various sides of a story, and of contrasting the various standpoints. Through understanding various dimensions of everyday life eventually, some degree of overlapping perspectives could be achieved. My immersion into social life is best described as a continuum of the foreign, insecure, interviewing researcher to a more integrated, participating and sociable social actor, yet it was a slow and partial process. Intersubjective experience was shared with a number of informants and friends as I got to know them and their lifeworldly reality better over a long period of time. Only the longer contact created some degree of proximity, in which I took part in the ups and downs of their lives. However, taking part in people's lives was limited, as for example darkness constrained my participation in evening or nocturne events. Much happens in the evenings and in the nights, and I had only glimpses into this dimension of social life. This applied especially for the West Point Women. The quarter was still stigmatized and considered to be unsafe, although exactly these women take efforts to make the community safer. While living with the family, however, I experienced what it means to block the entrance of the house with furniture, and nevertheless experience a break in.

Secondly, there were a range of practical challenges of living and researching in a bustling city, among busy people and congested roads. This required planning, organizing, scheduling, and evaluating, while maintaining certain flexibility was essential to socially and physically navigate the urban challenges. At the same time, waiting or time shared in public transportation could be revealing. This helped to understand the challenges of many ordinary Liberians who have a paid job "in town": How to be at the office in time, thereby looking decent and not being exhausted. At the same time, public transportation facilitated following news or call-in talk shows on the radio, often launching a discussion among the passengers, or – what was also common - the shared silence. Traffic jams create challenges to the public transport systems, as it signifies a decrease in income, and consume researcher's time, or I would be late for an event or appointment. However, traffic jams also created a space of creativity: in buses, some took the opportunity to preach a sermon on the way, followed by a collection of alms. It therefore required flexibility from my side to include and reflect such data. All of this required planning and above all, time. Nevertheless, combining efficient management tools to overcome urban bottlenecks helped to reduce challenges of researching in the city, and to gain spaces in which social anthropological methods could be flexibly and circularly used to study war-affected social life.

3. STATE FORMATION, THE MAKING OF HISTORY AND *NORMAL DAYS*

The history of Liberia is one of migration, co-existence and conflict of many diversely organized groups, just like in many other West African countries. Different from these, however, Liberia's is characterized by a history of settlers of freeborn and freed slaves that were returned from America in the early 19th century and that shaped the state after 1847. Liberians are proud about "the first black republic" in Africa. This chapter explores imaginaries of Liberia's past. Imagining refers to the dimension of agency situated in the domain of the future of the chordal triad of agency (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). Each dimension may figure all three temporal-structural dimensions; the past, the future, and the present. Given that the past is the place of habits and routines, there is a need to critically look at the facts of the political history and the present to analyze the difference between the factual past and the imagination of the past by the social actors. Construing the Liberian state imaginaries, hence, means to analyze these against the backdrop of the multiple constructions and positionings in the context of the *long durée*.

This chapter will lay the foundation for the inquiry of present-day imaginaries of the state. It is structured along a historical outline of Liberian state formation over the last two centuries. Thereby, it focuses in particular on those aspects that emerged from collective memory and subjective as well as shared imaginary, and how these surface and intersect in present-day Liberian narratives. This chapter does not maintain to give a complete analysis of the manifold social or ethnic groups, the settler history and presidential periods.[45] Rather, it aims at embedding narratives of the past that are said to have contributed to habituation, routines and the imagined characteristics of *normal days*, that is, the central events, practices and mental images related to the becoming of the nation-state. As social cleavages and their discursive constructions play a central role in the present, they will stand in focus in this chapter, in particular the social constructions in a historical and contextual perspective. In particular in times of change, stable images of how things were or are supposed to be are needed, and the past often serves as a legitimate imaginary of the orderly. This can be understood as the flipside of critique towards ongoing political and social transformation, and hence is constitutive for the everyday of post-war Liberia.

3.1. FORMATION OF THE CENTRALIZED STATE AND THE 'AMERICO-LIBERIAN' IMAGERY

The American Colonization Society (ACS) had planned to return freeborn and freed slaves to Liberia (Liebenow 1987: 13). This endeavor was motivated by various reasons: American traders aimed at enhancing trade with Africa, former slave owners feared that the freed slaves would destabilize America, and lastly, missionaries and philanthropically inspired persons intended to 'civilize' Africa and create a home for the freed

[45] Interested readers are referred to the comprehensive works of Liebenow (1969, 1987) on the political history of Liberia until the mid-1980s, see also Ellis (2007). Valuable insights into expeditions and broad information about chiefdoms in the 19th century give insights into pre-settler Liberia (Fairhead *et al.* 2003, see also Dunn and Holsoe 1985 for history of the 19th century). George Brooks' classic work spans over the period of 1000-1630, which he calls the most dynamic in the history of the Mande- and West Atlantic language families (Brooks 1993).

slaves (Guannu 2000: 2). With the signing of the Ducor Contract between 'native' leaders and representatives of the United States on December 15, 1821, the political foundation of the Liberian state was laid. On April 25, 1822, the repatriation of freed slaves was established (Dunn and Tarr 1988: 1), and until 1867, roughly 19'000 immigrants came to Liberia (Liebenow 1987: 19). The mortality rate of these settlers was high; a study by McDaniel and Preston showed that of the 4'472 immigrants from the USA to Liberia between 1820 and 1843, 2'198 had died by 1843 (McDaniel and Preston 1994). Elizabeth Tonkin elucidates:

> "The settlers, the 'repatriated elite', had little control of the coastal economy that they never really developed, let alone do more, often, in the interior than harass recalcitrant indigenes, but they had been effectively dumped, mostly penniless ex-slaves, on a busy but malarial shore, and expected to be colonisers without training or capital. They compensated with myths of superiority to legitimate their exclusionary discrimination, but there were also individual connections and mutual accommodation."(Tonkin 2010: 131)

They started off on a land that was estranged to them. Different from a common assumption about the elite, their reality was rather burdensome and only affluent for a handful of them. Though often summarized under the same categories and as a homogeneous group, there were differences between the settlers. Terminologically, the 'Americo-Liberians' were those freeborn or freed slaves who returned from the United States, whereas the 'Congos' were illegally captured slaves from other African countries that were freed from ships and brought "back to Africa". According to Liebenow (1987: 19), the latter had a lower social status but over the years, the autochthonous Liberians refer to both groups synonymously.

In 1839, a Commonwealth Constitution was adopted, written by the ACS (Dunn and Tarr 1988: 23). On July 26, 1847, Liberia declared its independence, with a constitution that was based on the American Constitution of 1787 (Dunn and Tarr 1988: 25). Liberians are proud that their state is the "oldest republic on the map of Africa", put figuratively by an elder man (Monrovia, 01.12.2009). Many ideas, documents and institutions of the state were adopted from the USA, such as the constitution, the two political parties Republican and Whig, or the appearance of the national flag composed of one star and eleven stripes, symbolizing the eleven signers of the Declaration of Independence (Liebenow 1987: 6, 30).

Picture 3: Symbols of the Liberian State at the Centennial Pavilion in Monrovia

State formation was closely linked to Christian norms and values (Fraenkel 1970 [1964]: 153), and the capital city was initially called Christopolis. The national seal with the motto "the

love of liberty brought us here" suggests the historical settling of the freed slaves in the new land. This imagery of 'Americo-Liberian' governance is still in use today, though contested by those who argue that these symbols have no meaning to them or if there is meaning, these symbols stand for the oppression and domination of the 'Americo-Liberian' rulers. These national symbols including the constitution survived rebellions and wars; but why is this imagery of 'Americo-Liberian' domination so persistent? This is in fact widely debated, but even if contested, these symbols have become part of Liberia's identity beyond the 'Americo-Liberian' minority, says an informant:

> "…this is Liberia, Liberia has a historical foundation. And these are historical documents. Those were the symbols that Liberia declared independence with in 1847. […] Because you cannot destroy historical realities. No matter what you do, it was that seal, it was that flag, that they declared independence for the republic, that I knock my chest for today and say, I'm a Liberian. It was that seal and that flag..." (Intellectual, Monrovia, 11.07.2012)

Hence, these symbols stand for the history and foundation of Liberia, which are entrenched part of the national heritage despite all the dark sides that they represent. Nevertheless, there are ongoing debates about changing some of the symbols and sections of the constitution.

The settler governance was centralized in Monrovia and included parts of the coastal line: the "hinterland" was not represented in the senate, but instead was constituted by what Joseph Guannu calls a colonial relationship with the central government (Guannu 2000: 7). The government was not built on accord grounds. There had been resistance from farming settlers against the Constitution of 1847, mainly against a land clause that guaranteed ownership to the public domain. Settlers of Bassa County and others boycotted it. According to Levitt, this disagreement rendered many 'Americo-Liberians' disillusioned, as Africa's first democratic republic began in disagreement (Levitt 2005: 91). The 'natives' were not entitled to citizenship until 1904. The ambiguous relationship, however, was maintained mutually, as the 'native' rulers did not permit the settlers to become members of ethnic groups and their "village states" (Levitt 2005: 91). Figuratively, the hinterland had become for the settlers in Crapanzano (2004)'s sense a distant and fearful space; anything was possible there, and accounts of witchcraft and magic, the existence of 'heartmen' and powerful *secret societies* are many. These ideas have travelled in time and space and are part of many urban residents' imaginaries today. The hinterland is imagined as a space of little individual freedom, few economic possibilities but many constraints, hence in particular for young men and women the opposite of a desired life's prospect. Images of suppression of the 'natives' by the 'Americo-Liberian' prevail, not so much, however, the accounts of authoritarian 'native' chiefs such as for example King Bessa who was documented to be highly abusive towards his people, in particular the slaves (Fairhead *et al.* 2003: 169). Images of fear are useful to contextually shape other images in positioning oneself or others in a certain light and thereby strengthening in-group cohesion and distinction against the other (Tonkin 2009, drawing on Bourdieu 1983 [1979]).[46]

[46] For the Liberian context, authors often draw on Bourdieu's structuralist formulation of distinction as an aesthetic choice of an individual not on the basis of personal choice, but rather as a class choice in distinction against others (in his case the "working

The relations between the settlers and the 'natives' are often depicted as tense from the date of the settlers' arrival (Liebenow 1987: 47). From the onset of the state's foundation, there were countless local wars against the settlers. Levitt lists ten major wars between 1820 and 1877, most of which took place along the coastal lines, especially in the Southeast between the Kru, Grebo and Bassa, and in the West against the Vai and Dei (Levitt 2005: 31, 93). These wars, which are not very visible in scholarly works, have a number of implications for the Liberian state. First of all, they resulted in indebtedness of the state due vast import of means for defense against the attacks of the 'native' groups (Fuest 1996: 29). Secondly, these wars against the centralized government expose massive resistance against the central state by the indigenous people who opposed to the imposed rules and order. Furthermore, it shows that neither the settlers nor the 'natives' were homogeneous groups, and that regional conflicts and dissonance but also calm spaces existed. Hence, the continuum of war and peace (Richards 2005a) as an analytical perspective to understand the present context in fact includes a much longer history of Liberia (cf. McGovern 2012: 749).

Thought the relationship between the various groups across the 'Americo-Liberian' and 'natives' divide is often referred to as "caste-like" (cf. Liebenow 1987: 3, 47-70), these were and remain social constructions with partially blurred boundaries. Liberians as well as scholars are in fact aware (Moran 2006: 157), nevertheless, the social imaginary persists. Firstly, it was quite common for 'Americo-Liberian' men to have children with 'native' women (Fraenkel 1970 [1964]: 114), and many were given wives in accordance to a common way of establishing and strengthen relationships to *big men* (Fuest 1996: 35). Secondly, the ward or apprentice system was a legally recognized practice that existed until recently: Settler families raised 'native' children but also often used them as an additional labor force in the homes. The children often received the family's name and were educated.[47] Thirdly, a few members of the 'native' population participated in central government long before the coup of 1980. Samuel W. Seton, a Grebo, served as public school commissioner and was a member of the national legislature between 1887 and 1893 (Blamo 1971: 25). Henry Too Wesley, a Grebo from Maryland County served as vice president from 1924-28 (Liebenow 1987: 110). These cases illustrate how boundaries were and are discursively constructed, but in practice, they were transgressed and blurred to the extent that according to a projection by Merran Fraenkel (1970: 364), the 'Americo-Liberian' were almost absorbed.

Today, the social cleavage between the 'Americo-Liberian' and 'native' is vividly re-constructed. It is also projected towards a (new) political, economic or social elite, and claims are made on the grounds of forms of political exclusion. Indeed, a range of state practices did contribute to the construction of such cleavages,

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class"). The means of distinction are expressed in clothing, etiquette, housing, and other means (Bourdieu 1983 [1979]). Though means of distinction existed and remain in the imaginary, authors highlight the "membrane-like" character of these social boundaries and the dynamics and change in time and place (cf. Fuest 1996: 33–41).

[47] I met Liberians who were raised in elite families in the 1970. They experienced these families as discriminatory. One informant was given to such a family by his poor parents. Whereas their children went to school and made their homework, he had to do most of the physical housework. Another person explained that his father was raised by such a family but did not receive the family name, but rather the family head's first name as his second name.

such as the “pacification of the hinterland” (Sawyer 1992: 242). Soon after the founding of the state, the centralized government remarked territorial loss towards the neighboring colonies occurred due to the lack of protection of the borders. Therefore, the Liberian Frontier Force (LFF) was founded in 1908, and the governing elite was forced to administer their territory not only along the coastal line, but also into the hinterland (Guannu 2000). The LFF was initially mainly composed of Sierra Leonean Mende and Loma, led by a British officer (Tonkin 2010: 129). Apart from protecting the borders, the LFF’s main task was tax collection, the enforcement of interior regulations, interventions in conflicts in the hinterland, and the protection of the trade routes (Dunn and Tarr 1988: 56). Today, many Liberians still recall the Hut Tax which was installed in 1910 due to the lack of budget of government. Initially it was 1 USD per indigene domicile, and rose up to 6 USD. The chiefs received part of the revenue as commission. However, the LFF was often un- or underpaid, and consequently plundered and mistreated the rural population (Dunn and Holsoe 1985: 91, Utas 2009) which reminds of the pay-yourself logic applied in the civil wars of the 1990s.

Elder informants explain that people found ways to outsmart tax collection for example by constructing small shacks that they pointed out as their home in order to reduce the tax weight. Even though President William Coleman started an effort to integrate the hinterland into the state in a speech in 1889, it was only during the administration of Arthur Barclay (1904-1912) that the dwellers of the hinterland became acknowledged citizens of the Republic of Liberia (Liebenow 1987: 54). Barclay proposed an administrative reform to change the state structures, according to (Dunn and Tarr 1988: 55). Aim was to make better use of the resources of the hinterland and to control the autochthonous population. Emerging from these interests was a system of indirect rule similar to the colonial states in neighboring countries. The coexisting political systems, the state-structure and the chieftaincies, were unified under a central authority. This meant that in particular the acephalous organized ethnic groups such as the Kru or Grebo were imposed to chieftaincy, and paramount, clan and townships were appointed. Clan chiefs were summarized into Paramount Chiefs. Existing chiefs became incorporated into the centralized government. The Dei, Mende, Gbandi, Kissi, and Belle were allowed to organize themselves under one paramount chief each. All other ethnic groups had to share political authority in the embodiment of paramount chiefs. In addition, the district’s boundaries were drawn without respect of local land ownership and boundaries (Liebenow 1987: 55). The chiefs were basically a prolonged arms of the government in controlling and providing law and order, but also to assist tax collection and provision of labor force (Liebenow 1987: 54). Indirect rule disregarded social or political interests of ethnic units, but most of the local customs and institutions such as *secret societies*, marriage or land tenure continued (Liebenow 1987: 55). The centralized state organized its interior governance through a Department of the Interior, district commissioners and paramount chiefs (Dunn and Tarr 1988: 56). Juridical functions were attached to the Department of the Interior, meaning that district commissioners, the interior secretary and the president were the highest judicial officials for the hinterland. Arthur Barclay’s successors

used the tools set in place in order to impose certain interests: Daniel Edward Howard (1912-1920) replaced disloyal chiefs and manipulated the elections of local chiefs in his interest. Charles D. B. King (1920-1930) strengthened the local governance with additional government officials. An abusive system of recruiting of forced labor came to a peak during his rule. It was common that able-bodied men carried officials in hammocks around the district. Moreover, men and women were recruited to work on public projects such as roads. This was particularly problematic because farming activities require heavy work and the additional duties exhausted the farming population. As a consequence of the signing of contract with the Firestone Plantations Company in 1926, chiefs had to recruit additional laborers. However, the ordered "midnight raids" in villages by the LFF and sending forced laborers to Fernando Po unveiled the scandalous practices in 1927. The lucrative enterprise led to an income of 45 USD per laborer for 3'000 men and a bonus of 5'000 USD for each additional block of 1'500 men. The League of Nations investigated this issue and evaluated these practices as conditions similar to slavery. As a consequence of this scandal, Charles D.B. King had to resign (Liebenow 1987: 58). This is still widely remembered today and fits into people's imaginaries of 'Americo-Liberian' abusive domination.

Succeeding presidents were more inclusive towards the autochthonous population. Edwin Barclay (1930–1944) was in the position to change the authoritarian administration of the hinterland. The relations with the interior became more inclusive. However, the change of presidents was merely a superficial change. Driving force behind the public scene of politics remained the True Whig Party. This party was founded in 1869 and dominated Liberian politics from 1883 until 1980, being factually a political monopoly (Dunn and Holsoe 1985: 174-175). Visually, the True Whig Party skyscraper marked the Monrovian landscape dominantly together with the Masonic Temple. These massive structures on the cityscape represent a central element of perceived 'Americo-Liberian' oligarchy and power. These spaces contained and perpetuated inclusion and exclusion in terms of elections, legal cases, or appointments to positions in government. They served as a means to secure power in the hands of the elite oligarchy. As a consequence, only an individual linked to the machinery of patronage succeed in realms such as economic, or legal, otherwise "he either was crushed by a series of legal or informal obstacles, or he ultimately survived by 'getting into line'" (Liebenow 1987: 71).

There was one group of people that had a special position in this configuration and balanced on a thin line between inclusion and exclusion, and 'Americo-Liberian' and 'native' narrative: the Mandingo. This relationship will be analyzed in the following.

3.2. Politicization of Ethnicity in a Historical Perspective

Despite a long, shared history of migration and settlement comparable to other regions in West Africa (Brooks 1993), Liberia's historiography focuses on the arrival of freeborn and freed slaves after 1822 (Ellis 2007: 37). Apart from this strong focus, range of societal arrangements in Liberia's past play an essential role

in today's debates on the Liberian "state in society" (Migdal 2001). I use ethnicity as a social marker, but consider it as a social construction and means of temporal and situational articulation of difference and social boundaries (Eriksen 2010 or Wimmer 2013).[48]

The Grain Coast, named after the pepper Malaguetta, on which Liberia is situated, was inhabited by various ethnic groups in diverse forms of political organization comprised of stratified and acephalous groups (Dunn and Tarr 1988: 21). Liberia was initially inhabited by pygmies, locally referred to as 'Jinna', which today are rather considered spiritual beings of the forest than first inhabitants. Various streams of migration from the Northwest and Northeast of Africa changed the landscape over time. This aspect of Liberian history shows many gaps, and Liebenow notes in 1987 that there remains a lack of comprehensive studies in anthropology, history, economics and political facets (1987: 33). The classifications of ethnic groups are to some extent misleading, as groups such as for example the Krahn are constituted of two linguistic groups, each composed of a number of different varieties (Lewis 2009), which can hardly understand one other. The label Krahn meant not much more than a vague geographical identity (Ellis 2007: 32, Holsoe and Lauer 1976). In the course of the establishment of the centralized state administration, the local population was categorized into ethnic groups often defined by language to make the territory legible and controllable (Scott 1998): ethnic groups were constructed and fixed in national statistics as to administer them. Indeed, the Liberian Census of Population of 1962 and 1974 listed 16 ethnic groups, detailed in numbers and percentages (Liebenow 1987: 35). However, these ethnic labels are not in all cases constructions by colonial or state administration only, as people migrated throughout the sub-region and beyond and many account for where they came from and how they relate to their new and old homeland. Indeed, many ethnic identities and boundaries or relations were rejected by officials in Monrovia who were in search of identifiable focal points of political authority (Liebenow 1987: 196-198).

Ethnic groups are often dynamic social constructions, hence, I make use of the popular, emic notions, which diverge from linguistic terms. For example, Figure 3 below (Lewis 2009) does not mention Mandingo, and uses the term Dan instead of the popular Gio.

[48] This discourse was further elaborated in a comparative study with Carole Ammann on contextual politicization of ethnicity in urban Guinea and Liberia (Ammann and Kaufmann 2013, 2014).

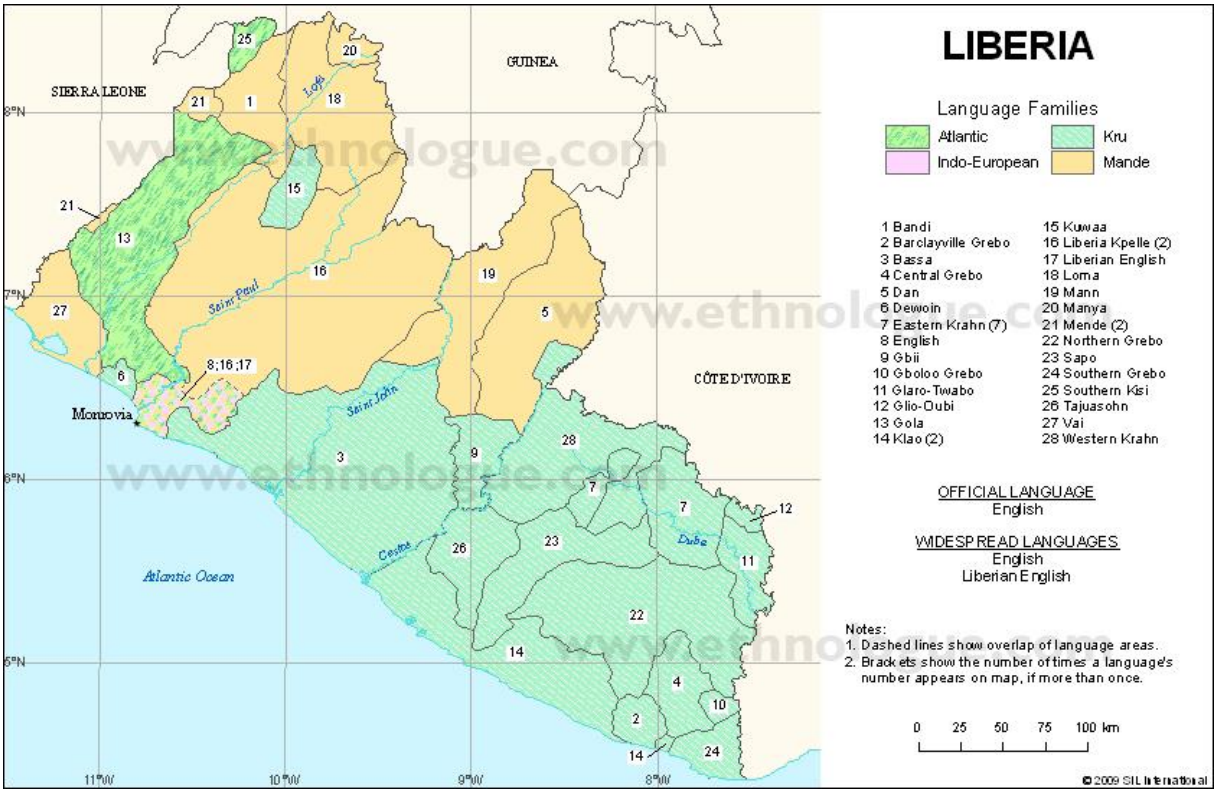


Figure 3: Languages and language families of Liberia

Ethnic groups do not discontinue at national borders, however, colonial administrations of neighboring countries subdivided their population in different ways. In a number of cases, similar groups were named differently across state borders, leading to confusion between groups at either side of the borders. Today, this leads to articulations of differences across borders, in particular in relation to participation in the nation-state as citizens. Discursive formation of ethnicity, however, goes along with ascribed identities such as religious or other cultural customs which are situatively challenged and opposed in political imagination of the state. Though ethnic groups are very heterogeneous, territorial identity is often an important characteristic and claim. Many Liberians relate to a particular village, and each ethnic group relates to homeland, such as the Loma in today's Lofa or the Gio and Mano in Nimba County.

Picture 4: Picture of Matilda Newport at the Centennial Pavilion in Monrovia.

The political history of Liberia is not a peaceful history but rather marked by conflicts and regional wars (Levitt 2005), just like many countries around the world. As all historiography, much of Liberia's history was written with a political cause and purpose. Aspects have been emphasized, left out, or manipulated which is echoed by many informants' comments

such that "the 'Americo-Liberians' did not want the 'native' Liberians to have heroes". On the other hand, heroic figures were invented with specific intentions, such as the myth of Matilda Newport's[49] defense of the settlers by igniting a cannon with her pipe and thereby shooting attacking 'natives' (Holsoe 2007), see picture 5 above. Although there were 'native' authorities who resisted or outwitted the settlers and played important roles in the past, only a few made their way into popular social and political imaginaries of the past. There exist a variety of stories, rumors and myths about these chiefs and kings, shaped by "the science of the times", that is, the interpretation in the respective temporal context (Fairhead *et al.* 2003: 25), be it in regards to their ethnic identity, their achievements or their location. An illustrative example is King Sao Boso or Boatswain.[50] He was the fourth ruler of the trading town Bopulu and quite powerful at the arrival of the settlers in 1822 (Holsoe 1976-1977: 2). He integrated the various ethnic groups into the Condo Confederation. According to Dunn and Holsoe (1985: 29), he was involved in export slave trade. By the same token, Sao Boso assisted the settlers – freeborn and freed slaves - against the hostile Bassa and Dei and gave them land. He sent one of his sons to live with a settler family, and in return, a Methodist missionary stayed in Bopulu (Dunn and Holsoe 1985: 29). Though broadly remembered as a heroic figure and a strong, 'native' leader, Sao Boso got into historiography due to his favors to the settlers.

There had been women in powerful positions (Fairhead *et al.* 2003: 308), such a powerful female ruler was paramount chief Nye Suakoko, born in 1880. She became well-known due to her diplomatic skills through which she mediated in a number of wars between the 'natives' and the settlers. In turn, she was commissioned paramount chief by the state administration (Steady 2011: 108). However, the longer histories of heroes, of malignant rulers and the many brutal wars in Liberia are often only marginally documented. McGovern underlines this observation made in Côte d'Ivoire:

> "Well-documented practices and instances of warfare from the pre-colonial period were largely treated as museum curiosities, when they were not excised from the accounts. Both colonial officials who gave themselves too much credit for introducing a colonial peace and post-colonial researchers who found discussion of pre-colonial warfare embarrassing to their visions of an independent Africa treated past violence as a legacy that would never be repeated. When terrible wars broke out in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s, neither those caught up in them nor academics had adequate tools available for understanding them." (McGovern 2011: xxii)

A closer look at the history of Liberia shows that many heroic figures, ideas and symbols were contextually used to pave the way for state formation and to the advantage of the ruling elite. Historical events and symbols were continuously constructed both by the settlers and the 'native' Liberians; historiography evidently

[49] Although this story is invented, it hints at the fact that women played a central role in 'Americo-Liberian' collective history. Besides the Matilda Newport myth, the Liberian flag, the central national symbol, was created by women (Steady 2011: 126).
[50] The name is found in variations in literature or everyday language; Boatswain ('Americo-Liberian'), or Sau Bosu (Hojbjerg 2010: 281) or Sao Bosso Kamara. He was the King of the Condo Federation and died in 1836/37. Interestingly, when asking about his belonging, people would refer to him as Mandingo, Vai or even Bassa.

prioritized over oral tradition, hence, heroes such as Matilda Newport or Sao Boso are remembered in history books, monuments or street names.

3.3. The Mandingo and Social Constructions of Belonging

The relationship between the ruling elite and the Mandingo was a rather particular one and has implicitly shaped the etic view on this group. The Mandingo, most of their members Muslim and literate, were considered as a kind of allies and "agents of modernization for their active engagement in trade" (Munive Rincon 2010a: 12-13), and as "progressive" and "civilized" compared to other ethnic groups (Konneh 1996: 97). Mandingo traders provided goods to the elite, such as livestock for fresh meat consumption. In turn, the Mandingo were allowed to have their own chiefs and settle disputes by themselves. After the establishment of a central government and the pacification of the hinterland, members of the Mandingo solicited for a territory to establish a chiefdom, which was granted by President King in 1920 and was consequently named Mecca (Holsoe 1976-1977: 8).

Having established a particular relation with the ruling elite and contextually with other ethnic groups, they had established an intricate position within the 'Americo-Liberian' and 'native' divide. Of the various groups that migrated into Liberia, the Mandingo were the latest to appear on the physical landscape and in the oral history, but before the freeborn and freed slaves arrived in the early 1800s. They have a long history of centuries as traders throughout the Savanna region of West Africa and have established long trade routes between Kankan, Kissidougou, Musadougou and other main cities (Konneh 1996b: 12, Brooks 1993: 49–77).[51] By the 18th century, their trade routes are reported to have led through Liberia to the Atlantic coast. And by the 19th century, they had established the Condo Confederation around Bopulu. Though relatively small in number, the Mandingo became politically important through the leadership over the Confederation of these ethnic groups (Holsoe 1971: 336, Konneh 1996b: 121). The aforementioned King Sao Boso is remembered up to today as a powerful Mandingo king, and historic sources of the explorer Benjamin Anderson talk of "two tribes to be feared, the Mandingo and the Grebo people", a quotation that was recited to me at two instances (interviews with a Mandingo elder, 25.03.2010, and Abraham, 25.11.2009, cf. Konneh 1996: 20). It stems from statement of an American Navy Commodore to the American Colonization Society in 1876, quoted in Richardson (1959):

> "These two tribes, the Mandingoes and Greboes, both of them intelligent and aggressive, the one crusaders in the name of Mohammed, and the other warriors in the cause of greed and gain, form the most important elements in the internal economy of the republic. The destiny of Liberia depends on the conquest of these two opposing forces." (Richardson 1959: 182)

[51] This is the main region in which Kola nuts, one of the most important trade goods, were produced (Brooks 1993: 53).

This statement is part of collective Mandingo memory, and this message is used by Mandingo for a range of purposes, in particular to underline their belonging to the nation-state and that they have been well established on the political landscape of Liberia in the past (see Chapter 8.1.).

In the history of the Mandingo, trade and religion were inseparable from each other. Islamic clerics went along with the traders, and through religion they formed a moral community. Mosques were not only religious spaces, but also crucial for social and economic interactions (cf. Bauer 2007, Brooks 1993 or Launay 1982 for other accounts of Manding traders in West Africa). These differences to other ethnic groups allow for social constructions around belonging, as for example many non-Mandingo would say that unlike all other Liberian ethnic groups, the Mandingo do not have a homeland of origin in Liberia where they are considered first settlers.[52] Mandingos often use membership in *secret societies* as a reason to exclude them from belonging to a certain group or region. As traders in the area of the *Poro Complex* in the West African sub region, they are the only ethnic group in northwestern Liberia that are not part of the *Poro* and *Sande societies* (see also Adams 1980, Utas 2009: 274 or Zetterström 1980). Muslim members of the Vai, Gbandi or Lorma, however, belong to these societies. Furthermore, kin relationships are a prerequisite for every trader and members of a certain family were obliged to help in case a trader needed assistance. The trader received information and advice about the location foreign to him. Family members also helped in small-scale production of some goods, and on the other hand helped to sell on the markets. Marrying local women provided them with political and trade alliances as well as protection, on the other hand, they did in general not let their daughters marry local men (Konneh 1996: 18, 109). Having rendered desired services and goods[53] to the local population with their trading activities over a long period of time, Mandingo were accepted to settle. Elderly Liberians today remember that the arrival of Mandingo traders in their towns was a special event; people sang songs and everybody came to buy from the traders (interview with an elder Kru man, Monrovia, 02.03.2011). Due to their wealth and goods they offered, they created competition with the local power holders and marketers (Konneh 1996: 15). A further issue of contestation was the fact that Mandingo men were attractive husbands, as many were quite wealthy, and besides, their wives would not have to do hard work on the farms (interview, Monrovia, 25.03.2010). These asymmetric marriage alliances cause resentment and heated discussions until today.[54] However, Mandingo traders shaped and shifted their identities contextually,[55] but unlike others, they hardly adopted American names (e.g. informal discussion, Kakata,

[52] A number of villages have been founded by Mandingo, in particular in Lofa County (Bøås and Dunn 2013, Hojbjerg 2010), yet most Liberians would not assign the Mandingo to a certain county.

[53] Goods traded included a wide range from kola nuts, country cloth, ivory, hides, slaves, guns and gunpowder. Later on, they granted loans and provided means of transportation (Munive Rincon 2010b: 69).

[54] This argument is contested nowadays. Most Liberians today are Christians, and Muslims are allowed to marry to people of a 'book religion'. Still, it is often heard that parents are very rigid, as for example a young lady in my community said that she wants to go to America because her parents want her to marry a Muslim man.

[55] Konneh explains that exchanging names was a way of integration and a strategy of the Northern Mande to facilitate movements across boundaries (Konneh 1996: 15).

17.02.2011). Many Mandingo learned local languages and cultural habits, but certain qualities in regards to their religious belief were maintained, such as consumption taboos or marriage patterns.

With the increasing establishment of a road system in the 1950s, Mandingo effectively expanded into the interior of Liberia, and the trade route shifted east from Gbarpolu towards Gbarnga. They adapted their trading patterns and invested into the transportation sector. In the 1960s, they dominated the transportation system and owned nearly all means of transportation in Liberia (Konneh 1996: ix). This facilitated access to the markets in the various economic centers and the various counties. They did most of the marketing of staple and commercial goods, later also diamonds. As companies such as the Liberian-American-Swedish Minerals Company LAMCO arrived, the need for goods and transportation increased (Konneh 1996: 113). Even during the economic crisis of the 1970s, the Mandingo maintained their activities and accumulated impressive wealth. They granted loans to 'Americo-Liberians' but also to the autochthonous. During the economic crisis, many 'Americo-Liberians' had to sell their land in the interior, and sold it mostly to Mandingo traders who were wealthy enough to buy (Munive Rincon 2010a: 13). Mandingo acquired valuable land in central spaces for example in Ganta. As a minority group, they sought rights and protection by the government through alliances to the power holders (Munive Rincon 2010a: 13). Whereas indigenous Liberians were granted citizenship in 1904, Mandingo were still considered a minority. The Mandingo became Liberian citizens in the early 1940s (Konneh 1996: 25).

3.4. William V.S. Tubman - Self-proclaimed Father of the Nation

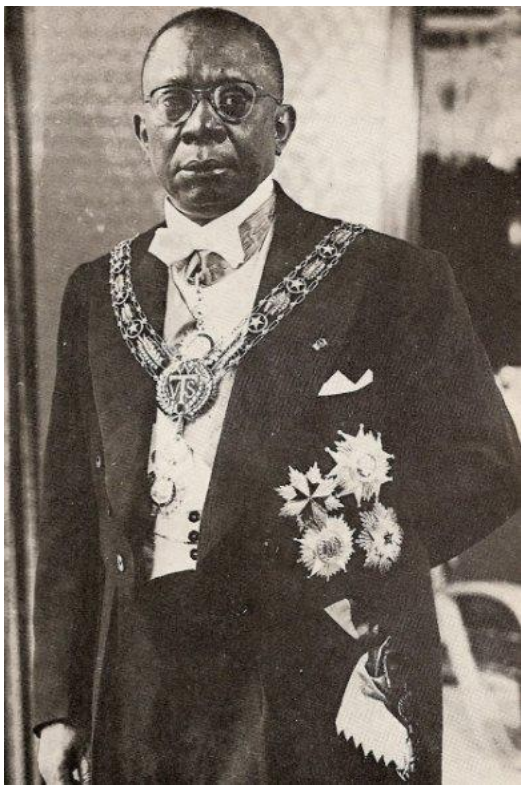
The post-World War II era until 1971 is marked by the longest duration of a Liberian president in office. President William Vacanarat Shadrach Tubman is known for a range of reforms, in particular the Unification- and Open Door Policy. His time in office led to a range of changes and is considered as a period of splendor and glamour, and marks the imagery and imaginary of *normal days*.

Tubman was born on November 29, 1895 in Harper, Maryland County, and his birthday is nationally celebrated until today. Though initially aiming at a career as Methodist priest, he studied law and was appointed associate justice of the Supreme Court in 1937. He had served as a senator for Maryland County for 15 years. Due to these experiences he became well known and had the credentials of the 'Old Guard,[56] the elite mainly centered in Monrovia. Therefore, he was recommended by previous President Edwin Barclay as successor. Tubman had intimate knowledge of Liberian politics through his father, the speaker of the House of Representatives. Besides his political alliances with the elite, Tubman had established relationships with the 'native' population.

> "[T]he Old Guard had assumed that Tubman, like most of his predecessors, would ignore the fiery campaign rhetoric regarding reform of the political system once he had the reins of office firmly in hand. How mistaken they were!" (Liebenow 1987: 59)

[56] As stated previously, the ruling elite was never a homogeneous group, and over the time, they divided into two powerful groups, one centered in Monrovia, and the other in Harper, Maryland County.

Indeed, he realized his plans, one of the best-known programs was the Open Door Policy. Aim of this policy was the fostering of economic development through facilitating foreign investors to use natural resources. A few laws were enacted to "open the doors" to attract foreign investors to intensify and diversify the economic relationships. It led to an increase in revenues mainly through the exploitation of natural resources, and it would "not only enhance the foundations of privilege for the 'Americo-Liberian' elite but also to give them the revenues for maintaining a more modern and efficient system of control over the tribal majority" (Liebenow 1987: 59). According to Liebenow (1987: 60), the isolation of the people of the hinterland would not have been possible any longer due to the decolonization narratives and waves of modernization in the subregion. Eventually, the political elite accepted the reforms of what Tubman formulated as "evolutionary, not revolutionary change" (Liebenow 1987: 59).


Picture 5: President William V.S. Tubman, glamorous father of the nation (Source: concern-liberians.org)

In the course of the Open Door Policy, the Liberian export volume increased from USD 30 million in 1953 to a yearly average of USD 505 million from 1976 until 1980. This vast influx of wealth made it possible to build roads into the counties (Liebenow 1987: 60). According to Ellis (1999: 215), this was the first system of roads connecting the rest of the country with the coast line. Consequently, the population of the hinterland became increasingly involved into the cash and wage economy, and interactions between the various regions increased. There was a growing flow of goods along the main axes. The people in the hinterland increasingly accumulated funds, consumed global goods and sent their children to (mission) schools. A transformation began, thus slowly at first, because 'modernization' appeared to be a double-edged sword: The accessibility of the hinterland also made tax collection easier, and members of the ruling elite began to obtain land and build farms, which was considered one of the most massive period of land-grabbing in nominal purchase and outright theft at the time in Africa (Liebenow 1987: 63).

The second remarkable political program of President Tubman was the Unification Policy. As the name suggests, it was intended to discontinue the construction and reproduction of social boundaries and inequalities between and among the autochthone Liberians and settler decedents (Liebenow 1987: 64). Tubman tried to strengthen "tribal pride" by wearing traditional clothing on specific occasions, by promoting local ceremonies, music and dance, and by establishing cultural centers for research. Ethnic family names re-gained im-

portance in public life. He banned distinguishing terms such as 'Amercio-Liberian' or the use of ethnic groups and thereby "constituted evidence that the self-assuredness of the settler aristocracy had been undermined" (Liebenow 1987: 66).

Tubman's reforms included the extension of voting rights to women in 1945 and to the 'native' Liberians in 1946. This was a *pro forma* inclusion[57] of the broad population into the national project and was a major step of enhancing mass politics in Spencer's sense (Spencer 1997: 9). Tubman fostered 'native' people's participation in the government. The doors of the Executive Mansion were opened for Liberians to personally convey their grievances or recommendations to the president, a practice that was introduced by President King. This way, the Liberian population had access to Tubman as a person. In addition, he regularly went to the chieftaincies in the various counties to listen to their grievances. In turn, Tubman legalized the *secret societies*, integrated these into the Department of the Interior and assigned himself the role of the chief position (Ellis 2010: 196). According to Ellis, Tubman was "very lenient towards such lethal *secret societies* as Neegee – cults of people believed to be in spiritual communication with carnivorous animals living in water – despite the fact that Neegee had been illegal for decades" (Ellis 2010: 196). Such statements feed into widespread imaginaries today of political elites being part of *secret societies* that endow them with mystical powers, societies that include human sacrifices conducted by 'heartmen'.

Tubman maintained proximity to the population who in fact expect exactly this quality from its leaders. "He became the centre of a cult of personality unrivalled before or since, which many Liberians to this day consider the model of what a president should be: a father to his people, powerful, stern, generous" (Ellis 2007: 215). Tubman fostered an extensive system of patronage to all segments of society. Members of his government were interwoven into a dense kinship network, and many relations were further established through marriages (Liebenow 1987: 108). Tubman succeeded to indirectly undercut violent opposition from the ethnic Liberians towards the settler descendants by extending the justice system and sharing some benefits of raising national income, and by dismissing rogue commissioners (Liebenow 1987: 66). These images and practices of the Tubman led government were raised by a range of informants today. They acknowledge some of the positive effects of the reforms, such as infrastructural development.

Political participation increased, and voluntary associations existed, however, they were considered "ineffective, silent, or adorning" (Clower *et al.* 1966: 12). Notable were parades in the streets of Monrovia at the Independence Day celebration or the large demonstration of loyalty to the President by Kru women and men may serve as an illumination of these interrelated practices. In response to the demonstration of loyalty, President Tubman offered the participants gifts through the Kru governor (Fraenkel 1970 [1964]: 182).

Under Tubman's rule, urbanization intensified from the 1950s. Monrovia, being the heart of the centralized government became attractive (Liebenow 1987: 158). The Open Door Policy was a first stimulus of rural to

[57] The True Whig Party still dominated political orientation and decisions, and political opposition had little power.

urban migration, as international companies appeared on the landscape and fostered among other things the development of the Freeport (Lacey and Owusu 1988). The phase of strong economic growth created an increase in well-paid job opportunities. At the same time, unemployment grew strongly due to the increase of uneducated migrants from the countryside. A later stimulus of migration composed the newly constructed roads which improved access to education and employment opportunities for hinterlanders in the capital (Liebenow 1987: 163). Though Tubman led meaningful efforts in integrating the nation, actual power still remained at the True Whig Party and the wealthy elite in Monrovia. Liebenow grades the label of the reforms as superior to the real effect (Liebenow 1987: 67), as they were basically a means of ethnic manipulation: President Tubman maintained personal relationships to many of the local chiefs (Ellis 2007, informal discussion with a Liberian intellectual 16.05.2010). These changes had to come to pass, as more and more educated Liberians demanded participation in the economic and political sector, fuelled by the discourse of independence in the subregion. Claims for inclusion were staged and towards the end of Tubman's rule in the late 1960s – a period of economic slowdown - demands for reform became even louder.

Tubman has a strong position in the collective memory as the father of the nation, a "self-made father of the nation", some would argue, whose glorious appearance and promotion of Liberia around the world remains recognized. Well-remembered events such as Queen Elizabeth's visit to Liberia in 1961 give the past a glamorous twist. Tubman fulfilled certain expectations; the economic boom brought work opportunities and solid infrastructures to the extent that up to today Liberians remember, imagine and expect modernity.[58] Liberia, in particular Monrovia was considered modern during Tubman times. Yet, Tubman is likewise an ambiguous and contested leader who controlled a powerful network of patrimonial relations, a machinery that continued boundaries of inclusions and exclusions. Furthermore, Tubman's policies hampered in implementation, hence social tensions started to grow. Despite great boom, modernization and unification, he was considered as part of the 'Americo-Liberian' elite that manipulated the local population to his interests and generated but growth without sustainable development (Clower 1966).

3.5. William R. Tobert - Socialism and the End of 'Americo-Liberian' Hegemony

William R. Tolbert served as Vice President under Tubman for almost 20 years, and became successor of Tubman after his death in 1971. Tolbert had been in his upcountry farm when he was informed about the death of President Tubman, and rushed to town still in his blue, short-sleeved, flat-collar suit with matching trousers, in which he was sworn in later. Up to present, this suit is known as the "swear-in suit" and has become a common formal attire, as it is more practical, suiting the climate and less expensive. The legacy of 'Americo-Liberian' distinction through tuxedos, tail coat and top hats (Tonkin 2010: 131) was brought to an end. Tolbert had 'Americo-Liberian' roots, as his grandfather originated from North Carolina, USA, and the

[58] From the present point of view, many people expressed their understanding of modernity in infrastructures and wealth related to the Tubman era.

Tolbert family was one of the largest 'Americo-Liberian' families. William Tolbert was a Baptist pastor and president of the Baptist World Alliance. At the same time, he was a supreme *zo* (Ellis and Haar 2004: 79), however, further details on his relation to *secret societies* are not elaborated.[59] Though involved in and controlling various socio-political networks, Tolbert faced difficulties to satisfy the diverse segments of society, respectively their various interests (van der Kraaij, no date).

Tolbert had inherited numerous challenges that were not easily solved or suppressed. First of all, the 1970s were marked by economic crisis. Besides, a growing number of well-educated 'native' Liberians now demanded equal rights, government positions and political participation. But the dominant True Whig Party feared a loss of power and privileges and blocked respective changes. With a rupture and turn of political orientation to the socialist East, Liberia lost its support from the USA in the Cold War era. This shift changed the prior 'Western imitation' including formal lifestyle, which, however was not long lasting.

Because Tolbert was quite young when he became president, he had to build up a basis of power, and one of his strategies to do so was to increase pensions for public and military personnel, and by increasing the salaries of government officials and teachers (Lowenkopf 1976: 180). He publicly recognized that the results of foreign investment had previously been distributed unevenly and initiated renegotiations with foreign companies under the descriptor "humanistic capitalism".

Picture 6: Commissioned by President Tolbert, this monument probably depicts "Higher Heights". Today it stands for the "pull him down syndrome", reinterpreted my informant.

His socialist ideologies announced new directions of policies that aimed to improve the living conditions of the majority of the people. His policies and programs "Market to Farm Roads", "Total Involvement for Higher Heights", "Rally Time", "From Matt to Mattresses", all geared towards creating "A Wholesome Functioning Society" and winning the "War against Ignorance, Disease and

[59] Senior officials of *secret societies*, holders of important positions or knowledge over medicine, history or warfare are referred to as *Zo* or *Zoe* (Fairhead *et al.* 2003: 309).

Poverty". These programs emphasized self-sufficiency, self-reliance and self-help. This made them quite contrary to the personal politics of predecessor Tubman, the personal facilitator of opportunities. Tolbert appointed women, and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was one of eight female ministers in his government in the 1970s (Fuest 2008: 208). As President Tubman before him, he proposed to change the national motto but was prevented by the True Whig Party (Liebenow 1987: 30).

As a consequence of social and political change in Liberia and the decolonizing sub region, the 1970s saw a growth in voluntary associations and political activities thereof. Though the Liberian National Students Union (LINSU) had been founded in the 1950s through an Act of Legislation (LINSU president, 07.03.2011) it became a vital source of opposition towards the state and led to a range of political actions and formation of other associations from the 1970s onwards.

The Progressive Alliance of Liberians (PAL) was founded by Liberian students in the USA. Motivation for the association based on the frustration about slow progress and implementation of reforms in Liberia, the personalized politics of Tubman and Tolbert, and the low recognition of Liberia in Africa. PAL's leader Gabriel Baccus Matthews pushed the advocacy of the association's "Pragmatic African Socialism" forward (Liebenow 1987: 174). PAL, later renamed to the Progressive People's Party (PPP) seriously challenged the Tolbert and True Whig Party government, and several of its members, including Chea Cheapoo were imprisoned for treason.

A second strand of opposition that emerged in the 1970s was the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA). It was founded by professors and students of the University of Liberia, including Amos Sawyer. Major leading figure was Togba-Nah Tipoteh, educated in the USA and part of the Tolbert government before he was dismissed for his 'agitation'. In comparison to PAL, MOJA aimed at rather structural change of the Liberian society and culture. It was based on ideology to combat social inequalities and aimed at promoting solidarity programs such as 'Susukuu', which followed the aims of self-help rooted in local farming customs. MOJA was a Pan Africanist movement that was well connected to other African countries. It was a political pressure group in Liberia. Dr. Tipoteh still promotes these ideas today and still runs Susukuu (interview, Monrovia, 23.07.2012).

MOJA and PAL created an actual challenge to the government, for example in exposing excesses in the security sector and other public institutions (Jaye 2009: 2).

Tolbert conducted a range of critical faults. Erroneous but harmless example was the construction of settlements for deprived people, as for example the West Point community, which was supposed to be relocated to the newly constructed "Stephen Tolbert Estate". This was a classical failure in Scott's sense (1998) because the actual human subjects were not considered. Resettling fishermen and their families to a neighborhood two walking hours from the sea shore was not practical. As Scott showed for a range of schemes of states aiming at simplifying and planning society in order to make it legible, often, the real human subjects

are left out in the plans. If considered hostile to their subjective dignity, plans and tastes, social actors will make such state planning inefficient (Scott 1998: 225). Some of my informants agree that many of Tolbert's ideas were good and that he really had the population – especially the poor – "at heart". Some even say that he had been the best of all presidents, said for example an elder lady in West Point. However, this became clear retrospectively. The Rice Riots of 1979 were basically a state failure of communication, and people did not know what was going on, explained a well-informed elder informant (Monrovia, 23.07.2012). Raising rice prices were not the main reason for social upheaval, but rather the misinformation that subsequently started to circulate. Rice, beyond being the basis of almost every Liberian meal, is loaded with symbolic meaning. Providing rice to the ordinary people at a low price equals "caring for the people", put figuratively as "to cater to the people", or "having the people at heart", which is more powerful than most other state practices. Presidents are expected to distribute to and provide for their people, for example, bags of rice are offered as gifts at events. This cultural understanding surrounding rice helps to understand how the rising price and the rumors and misinformation became fatal, my informant explained. As Schatzberg (2001: 150-160) pointed out, the *father-chief* of the nation has a central role in regards to "nurture and nourishment" of the population in a range of African contexts.

Tolbert's intention of supporting farmers by raising the price of their products turned out to be a complete failure. Tolbert had vast rice farms, and it was suspected that he had personal interests in a rising rice price to increase his personal earnings. Tolbert was in a dilemma; his progressive ideas were blocked by the still dominant True Whig Party, and increasingly, the Tolbert government suppressed freedom of expression or assembly (Liebenow 1987: 174). The execution of the alleged Maryland County 'Ritual Killers' in February 1979 caused anger among the already divided 'Americo-Liberian' families (middle-aged man, Monrovia, 05.03.2010). The death warrant was decided by Tolbert, as he was the last instance.[60] When the Rice Riots broke out on April 12, 1979, Tolbert ordered the police and military to go violently against the demonstrators (Moran 2006: 108). However, as the military disobeyed in sympathy of the cause of the demonstrators, Tolbert called for support from neighboring Guinea (interview, middle-aged man, Monrovia, 09.03.2011). According to the LINSU president, LINSU members actively engaged with the AFL and due to this exchange, they state, the army was on the side of the people (interview, Monrovia, 07.03.2011).

Tolbert no longer had control over the army. In the weeks that followed, opposition became harsh, and in early March 1980, Bacchus Mathews publicly asked Tolbert to step down. Subsequently, his party was banned, and several dissidents were jailed (Dunn and Tarr 1988: 82). On March 12, 1980, Tolbert was killed in a coup d'état by Samuel Kanyon Doe, who broke the hegemony of the 'Americo-Liberian' rule.

3.6. SAMUEL K. DOE: POWER TO THE 'NATIVES'

[60] http://www.liberiapastandpresent.org/MarylandRitualMurders08.htm#top (12.02.2013).

Samuel Kanyon Doe might be one of the most contested Liberian political leader figures. On the one end, there are scholarly accounts of decay, atrocities and authoritarian rule, and on the other, Doe is praised by many Liberians for having ended 'Americo-Liberian' oligarchy. Many ordinary people include 'Doe time' into the narratives of *normal days*, that is, the time before the war came and where daily life was taking its everyday routinized course, and which is often considered even better than today. This chapter shall clarify the two seeming contradictory perceptions of Doe's rule during the 1980s, a period marked by radical changes, initiated violently by a group of soldiers.

Samuel K. Doe stems from Grand Gedeh in southeastern Liberia, a village near the Ivorian border. Most probably due to lack of other opportunities he joined the army, after having accomplished primary education. Together with 17 soldiers he staged a military coup d'état and thereby killed President William Tolbert on April 12, 1980. Doe was the highest ranking of the soldiers, and therefore he became the chairperson of the People's Redemption Council (PRC) and hence, the head of state (van der Kraaij, no date). This event is still surrounded by mysteries, as there exist various rumors about Tolbert's death, suggesting that there must have been other forces behind the plan and that Tolbert was killed "by a white hand" (Kieh 1992, Ellis 2007: 54–55, Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2009: 144). This interpretation has to be understood in the context of past experiences of external involvement into national politics, also seen in other neighboring countries, where such international involvement is not only considered a possibility, but rather a plausible argument (Ellis 2007: 12). However, I was recurrently told that Doe was not intellectual and experienced enough to mastermind the overthrow, hence, there must have been supporters behind him (senior INGO employee, Monrovia, 27.11.2009).

The 1980 coup d'état instigated a radical inversion of power arrangements in Liberia, transferring power from the elite oligarchy to the 'native' Liberians. Samuel K. Doe personified this political reorientation. He remains an ambivalent actor with an imagery containing heroic elements and at the same time, he is held responsibility for a range of atrocities. Many remember people singing in the streets after the coup and praising the "first 'native' President", accompanied with chants such as "native woman born soldiers, soldiers kill Tolbert" (Emanuel, 05.03.2010). This was a symbolic act stands for freedom of 'native Liberians'. The coup d'état was accompanied by a range of promises, which raised expectations. "No monkey work bamboo draw", a slogan which stands for the situation of 'Americo-Liberian' elite exploiting the 'natives' through forced labor and abusive taxation. With the coup d'état, "monkey come down" (personal communication, Abraham, 03.10.2011). In addition, he had used the revolutionary slogan "in the cause of the people, the struggle continues" (Emmanuel, 07.11.2009). Many of these images remain in the societal repertoire and recur in politicized contexts. Doe started off as a hero for many 'native' Liberians.

The US government was at first pleased with Liberia's pro-Western repositioning. Consequently, Liberia received more political and military assistance than ever before (Moran 2012: 56). Doe's regime became in-

creasingly accused of human rights abuses and limiting freedom of assembly or expression (van der Kraaij, no date). Though Doe promised from the beginning to establish a government and return the soldiers back to the barracks, he did not live up to this promise. In fact, he removed but did not replace old political structures such as the True Whig Party. He had trialed and executed all but four ministers of the previous government, one exception was Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Johnson Sirleaf 2009). An informant recalls that whoever was considered 'Americo-Liberian' was thereafter "witch hunted"; many disappeared in mysterious ways (middle-aged man, Monrovia, 05.03.2010). Many fled the country, and the diaspora grew to a large and politically relevant group whereas in Liberia, educated and experienced people were lacking in particular in the government. Doe filled government positions with 'native' Liberians, but increasingly with Krahn speaking members of certain clans (Ellis 2007: 56). Doe did not have access to the patrimonial networks of the former governments, that is, those of the Southeastern elite around Tubman in Maryland County, nor those of the Monrovian 'Americo-Liberian' elite. On the other hand, the 'native' population, having been marginalized for so long, had enormous expectations towards the new government (Ellis 2007: 54). In the course of Doe's rule, internal frictions developed, as is put into quite explicit words by a soldier who joined the army in the 1980s:

> "Charles Taylor, Prince Johnson and bulk of Gio [Man] soldiers […], Quiwonkpa, in 1983, they fled to the Ivory Coast, few months after, they came back into Liberia, went into their County, Nimba County, then you had […] LAMCO, they went there, they killed a lot of people, killed government officials, they ransacked the entire concession that they had, they took away money, etc., etc. Now, the government in return sent the national army up there to arrest the perpetrators, and the thing went to a full scale war, in terms of the Gio against the Krahn. Doe was a Krahn man, and Quiwonkpa was a Gio man. And that created some kind of a rivalry within the army, between the Krahn and the Gio. Those guys fled back into the Ivory Coast, and spring out came new military leaders. (…) There was a guy who was the chief of police at the mining company called Charles Julu. He was a Krahn guy, he went on a rampage, and he killed lots of Gio because lots of his family were killed. He began going to the villages, killing the Gio, dumping them into wells, burning homes, and so on. Within that process, the Mandingo tribe also, the Mandingos are found in Nimba County and in Lofa County. So the President Doe did empower the Mandingo as to get to the Gio." (Monrovia, 28.01.2011).

This rivalry that escalated - which this informant terms as "full scale war" - caused increasing marginalization of the Gio by Doe (Ellis 2007: 58), a "historical predicament" that remains conflictual until today (Utas 2009: 279). This rivalry proved to be fatal, as a range of government officials and citizens were killed in the Nimba Raids. These incidents have led to tensions and harsh ethnic divisions within the AFL which converted into the larger society through family relations. After a failed coup d'état by Thomas Quiwonkpa in 1985, the population was largely divided along pro-Doe and anti-Doe loyalties, which were translated into social constructions and politicization of cleavages between Gio and Mano loyalists on the side of Quiwonkpa, and Krahn and Mandingo who remained loyal to Doe.

Quiwonkpa was executed after the coup. Doe became a more and more authoritarian ruler. He used symbols and rituals to mystify and demonstrate his power, but nevertheless, the monopoly of violence of the state was repeatedly challenged. In 1985, elections took place, which Doe officially won, but in fact it was widely known that opponent Jackson Doe (unrelated with Samuel K. Doe) had the majority of votes. The elections were declared free and fair by the US government (Moran 2006: 9). A major challenge of the Doe led regime was its inexperience and bad preparation. Doe was relatively young, and educated at tenth grade. Later, he received an honorary degree of University of South Korea, and insisted on being addressed as 'Dr. Doe' (Moran 2006: 98). Yet, the government received much financial and military support by the USA as well as from Nigeria, one of the most powerful West African states at the time (Howe 2001: 132–133).

The 1980s were characterized by series of coup attempts, many rooted in the army, and a climate of fear. Various sources including the Truth and Reconciliation Report (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2009: 145–148) published a long list of human rights abuses, especially the detention of journalists and political activists in the 1980s, and threats and prosecutions of professors and students at the University of Liberia, for which the Doe regime is responsible. Amongst others, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf who had run for senate had been sentenced to prison after publicly criticizing

Samuel K. Doe. He became increasingly contested, and in the late 1980s, an attitude of resignation and lack of hope spread across Liberia. Veronika Fuest (1996: 116) observed how development projects were closing down and the experience of poverty and setbacks changed her informant's imagination of the future. Unemployment and delay in payments increased. Towards the end of Doe's regime, the state was close to a bankruptcy and therefore, income decreased due to new taxes and delays of salaries (Fuest 1996: 122).

Despite the decay, politicization of ethnicity and human rights abuses, President Doe is remembered by a range of ordinary people as the President who brought power to the 'native' people. They had been discriminated before, as many people recall. Doe abolished the abusive Hut Tax,[61] and a range of practices that are associated with 'Americo-Liberian' dominance. However, certain facts are not clearly remembered but imagined to fall into Doe's account, such as the abolishment of the celebration of Matilda Newport day, which according to sources is not clear if it was discontinued by Doe (Nyanseor 2003) or Tolbert (TLC Africa, no date).

The period of *normal days*, in emic terms the pre-war experience of everyday life as imagined and remembered to be characterized by daily routine and a 'decent living standard'. This period of time includes the head of state and presidency of Samuel K. Doe. This seeming contradiction might be explained with the tendency that the everyday life of ordinary people during 'Doe Time' is imagined as rather habitual as contrasted to the rupture and unpredictability that was experienced in the subsequent war. Secondly, that not all

[61] He later introduced it again, because the government expenditures were too high. However, the ordinary people opposed to the reintroduction of the tax, which is illustrated by Mary Moran's account of women's collective action in the Southeast (Moran 1989).

social and physical spaces were negatively affected in 'Doe Time' the same way, and thirdly, everyday life in the 1980s is rather meagerly examined.

Vast part of the academic, economic and political elite left the country and lost valuables during Doe's rule; hence, Liberia suffered severe brain drain and loss of political opposition. However, for the majority of ordinary people, life went on in an ordinary pace until the rebellion began to affect their livelihoods. These experiences explain to some degree why many Liberians include "Doe time" in their narratives and imaginaries of *normal days*. For them, life was more or less as before, during Tolbert or Tubman times, only that they were governed by a 'native' Liberian. Besides that, many had experienced state actors and institutions not really as important to them, in the contrary, these were "malignant organisms" to which ordinary people had developed specific responses and practices of resistance in order to protect themselves against predatory state practices (Utas 2009).

Liberians often reflect the processes in which Doe broke the hegemony of the elite's oligarchic rule, such as for example the issue of decentralizing the city by constructing ministry buildings at the outskirts of the city. Unlike his predecessors and successors, Doe wanted to construct public buildings rather than renting offices in buildings of renowned elite families. He also had intended to construct bridges over the swamp in order to create a better flow of public transportation and connect the neighborhoods beyond the swamp. Furthermore, during Doe's time, it became possible for 'native' Liberians to buy land in urban areas. These were issues that worked against the dominance of the ruling elite. An elder informant who originates from Maryland County and who profited under Tubman's regime by having worked for a mining company during *normal days* explains:

Picture 7: Ministry of Defense in Congo Town

> "…for the past, to buy land in Liberia, especially in Monrovia, was difficult. But when Doe came to power, that barrier was removed. Whether you are a Flomo, you're Nyakwe, you can obtain land in Monrovia. So people started building houses. That's how things were. But actually Doe regime showed us that only the aborigines of this country can develop this land. What the pioneers believed in - they built houses and rented them out to government, is frustrating. That's what they've been doing, which is wrong. So, Doe came and tried to erase that, by building ministry of defense, ministry of health - these infrastructures put in place, even the new Euro Bank, the new CBL, the new radio station, on this highway, all those infrastructures are still incomplete. So administration succeeded one another, even, like from Amos Sawyer, the interim, all of them did nothing to complete one." (Elder man, Monrovia, 01.12.2009)

The statement with a clear political undercurrent refers to a popular argument that is often held against priorities by President Johnson Sirleaf: A number of Doe's constructions were destroyed during the war, and have not been renovated by the time of this research. The imagery of Monrovia at almost a decade after the

end of the war was marked by these massive black ruins. These state practices and images contribute to an imagery of the Doe state:

> "Our First Republic - where few group of people lead the country, ruled this country. What did they do […] I'm Garliama, Garliama could not go to the university like I do now, Yarkpawolo could not go to the law school, could not go to CWA, and what have you. It went on for some time. After the coup, those things started to change. Because Doe was in power now. Yarkpawolo could go, quote-unquote, natives, they were in high positions, and so they could afford now to send their children to JJ Roberts, CWA. At that time [i.e. before Doe] we could not go there with Garliama name" (Young man, Monrovia, 20.05.2010)

Interestingly, such statements of empowerment were often heard, and despite much critique and lack of freedom, Doe's coup d'état stands as a moment for this. Today, the name of the ambivalent leader is remembered in constructions such as the Samuel Kanyon Doe Stadium that was built by a Chinese company in 1986 and renovated recently, or the newly repaired 'SKD Boulevard'. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommends constructing a memorial for President Doe (TRC 2009: 380), against the wide reproaches of rigged elections, increasing lack of freedom,[62] ethnical tensions and the brutal raids in Nimba County were no longer tolerated, and Doe's government's legitimacy eroded towards the end of the 1980s.

How do the ordinary people explain the downfall and growing resistance against Doe? To summarize the ambivalent rule of Samuel K. Doe, the statement of Emmanuel is telling:

> "Because if you give a child a chicken egg to hold, the child doesn't have the sense to know that when the chicken egg slip from his hand, it will drop, it will burst. Power was given into the hand of the indigenous for the first time." (Monrovia, 07.11.2009)

My informant, of 'native' Gola background, compares the 'native' ruler to an inexperienced child with lack of knowledge. At the time, most of the 'native' Liberians were not highly educated and consequently not experienced in public administration or political positions.

Many members of former elite who went abroad after 1980 formed resistance from the Diaspora. The Association for Constitutional Democracy in Liberia (ACDL) was supported by two of Doe's strongest adversaries, Amos Sawyer and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2009: 148). In 1989, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), led by Charles Taylor, invaded Liberia from Cote d'Ivoire. What continued was a long period within a continuum of war and peace (Richards 2005a, Utas 2005a).

[62] Liberian economist and government employee under Tolbert and Doe, James Guseh, compared political freedom from 1960 to 1986, in the three regimes of Tubman, Tolbert and Doe. His study showed that political freedom, based on studies of the Freedom House, was never fully granted and was in fact comparable during all three regimes (Guseh 2004). However, he did not include the later years of Doe's rule into his study. Similar reports Guannu (2007: 115) on the lack freedom, and the violation of civil, human, constitutional and political rights of the people.

Every Liberian recalls the time and place where she or he was "when the war came". The rebel incursion of 1989 marked a turning point in many people's lives. The rebellion soon turned in an unpredictable, brutal attack of NPFL rebels towards the Doe regime and groups loyal to Doe, that is, Krahn, Mandingo, and government workers. The first civil war was mainly between soldiers of the AFL and the NPFL, of which the local population was major target: those affiliated with Krahn or Mandingo were considered Doe and AFL loyalists and as such targeted by the NPFL. Gio and a range of ordinary civilians on the other hand were targeted by the AFL who suspected the latter of being close to the rebellion. AFL was considered by many as 'Doe's army', as it was considered loyal to Samuel K. Doe. Figure 4 by the TRC depicts the continuum of war and peace in one dimension, namely that of reported fatalities. However, experiences of insecurity, lack of freedom, deprivation and many other factors cannot be illustrated in a figure. Nevertheless, it can provide a one-dimensional idea of the severities of conflict over 24 years.

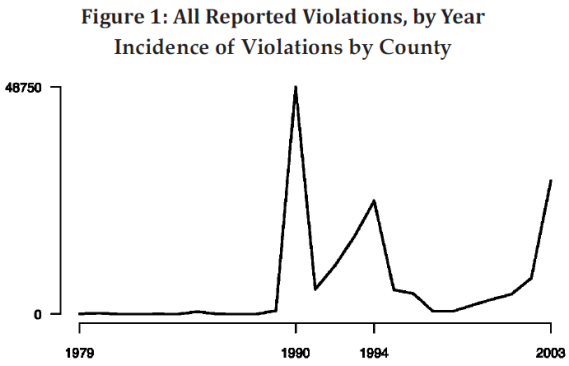


Figure 4: Timeline of fatalities in Liberia (1979-2003), TRC (2009:257)

The AFL reduced in number as many soldiers were killed or deflected. The strength of the AFL is reported contradictory. Before the war, the Armed Forces of Liberia had a strength of 6'000 soldiers (Malan 2008: 27), Gerdes puts the number at 2'000 (Gerdes 2013: 34). Some emphasize that the army as having lacked discipline and expertise, whereas others highlight the military and financial support as well as international training in the US, Israel, Libya, and other countries in various specializations, including the air forces.[63]

At the onset of the war, new soldiers were mobilized and drafted into the army. However, they were not prepared for the rebel warfare, and the army was ambushed in a number of incidents. The deflection of soldiers and the gaining strength of the rebels led to increasing atrocities by the AFL, culminating to the infamous Lutheran Church Massacre of July 29, 1990 in Sinkor, Monrovia, by the AFL under command of Tailey Yonbu, which led to the death of over six hundred refugees in the compound. According to Waugh, Charles Taylor's father Neilson was among the 2'000 refugees that was killed there (Waugh 2011: 144). On September 9, 1990, reported by ex-soldiers who were protecting Doe at that time, Doe left the Mansion towards the Freeport, a territory controlled by the ECOWAS Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). Doe was tortured and killed by Prince Y. Johnson (Ellis 2007: 11). That night he was killed and his mutilated body was displayed to the public in order to prove his death to defeat the many rumors about Doe using African Science that provided supernatural powers (Waugh 2011: 152).

[63] See Chapter 7 on the disbanded AFL soldiers. Many of them have been in foreign countries for training.

There had been plans to evacuate Doe to Nigeria, for example as (Waugh 2011: 143) accounts, however, Doe refused to leave unless in company of the Krahn people "a clearly impossible demand, but one which indicated how firmly in the grip of his supporters he was" (Waugh 2011: 143). He had lost authority and legitimacy, and the fact that he did not tell his closest loyalists about his plans to travel to the Freeport is an indication that he did not trust them anymore. His death, however, did not end the political-military faction (Gerdes 2013: 40) that had divided society.

3.7. Charles G. Taylor: Rebel Leader, *Papay,* President

The time period of the NPFL rebel incursion on December 24, 1989 until 2003 was marked by a series of wars, peace agreements, interim governments and Charles Taylor's presidency. Charles Taylor is the essential figure related to this period, and though he was neither a single player nor sole cause for the violent period, he became strongly linked, and hence, the embodiment of the war (Bøås 2008: 2). The Liberian Civil Wars have been analyzed in detail by a range of scholars, notably Ellis (2007) on the First Civil War, Gerdes (2013) on state formation, the rise and fall of Charles Taylor and the political economy, see also the work of William Reno (1998), or Utas' (2003) ethnographic perspective on the everyday of youth fighters and women in war and post-war (see also Bøås and Utas 2014, Utas 2005a). In the following, I will illuminate aspects of Taylor's person and rule that are shared and discussed in post-war Liberia.[64]

Like a range of other political actors, his political involvement started in the 1970s. Little is written about his personal life, as most of the literature focuses on the war chronicles and records of massive atrocities.[65] To understand Taylor's contextual popularity and unpopularity, a closer investigation of his personality and socio-political background is revealing. Charles Taylor is the son of a rather poor 'Americo-Liberian' father and a Gola mother, a servant in the house. Taylor's parents[66] were urged to get married after the servant became pregnant from him. Though relations between 'Americo-Liberian' men and 'native' women were common, marriage was rather exceptional. At the age of eight months, Charles Taylor was given to another family with 'Americo-Liberian' background where he lived until the age of 18 (Waugh 2011: 37–39). Trained as a school teacher, Taylor later obtained a part-time job at the Ministry of Finance under Tubman, and under the Tolbert administration. Through personal relations, he was able to obtain a scholarship and travelled to Boston, where he graduated from Bentley University (Waugh 2011: 42-43). From the Gola background stems one of his names, Ghankay, which means "strong in the face of adversity". In the course of his life, he obtained the title Dakhpannah, which refers to the highly prestigious title of a *Supreme Zo*. He acquired the title in a meeting of the various societies that Taylor apparently arranged (Waugh 2011: 169, 197). Furthermore, he was part of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows (GUOOF), a fraternal organization common

[64] An outline of the war including facts and figures can be found in the timeline in the appendix.
[65] The biography by Colin Waugh (2011) promises insights into Taylors life but does not reveal much new information.
[66] Sources spell his father's name differently: Nelson (http://www.liberiapastandpresent.org/charles_taylor.htm), whereas Waugh (2011: 38) traces his name as Nielsen as he attended the Lutheran Overseas Mission, a Scandinavian mission.

among former slaves in southern USA (Waugh 2011: 197-198). Taylor also maintained strong relationships with the Baptists, the congregation into which he had been baptized at age 12 (Waugh 2011: 198). These memberships which he nurtured and strengthened created a strong and wide network of social relationships and legitimacy beyond the national borders (Hoffman 2006: 313).

Religious ties were complemented with marital relationships which created bonds beyond societal cleavages – as Schatzberg argues for other contexts, the religious and the political spheres are strongly interrelated (Schatzberg 2001). Taylor's marriage with Victoria Arlington, a Muslim woman in 2002 (Waugh 2011: 280), is considered a strategy to increase loyalties among the Muslim community, many of which are Mandingo. Taylor legitimizes his polygamous practices with the fact that "traditional leaders are entitled to four wives" (Paye-Layleh 21.10.2002).[67] Lastly, Charles Taylor had received an honorary PhD degree of the University of Liberia and the Republic of China. A doctoral degree is highly prestigious in Liberia, not only because it is, in fact, not obtainable in Liberia.

According to Gerdes, the rise as well as fall of Taylor can be understood along these relations and accumulation of power: finally president of the country, he did not succeed in maintaining these political relations and transforming them into a legitimate government (Gerdes 2013: 254). However, already much earlier, he could not maintain image of a popular 'liberator' from the Doe regime because of the atrocities committed by his infamous rebel soldiers (Waugh 2011: 189). At the onset of the rebellion, however, Taylor was popular amongst those with grievances against Doe. He had been able to mobilize resources from a broad range of society due to his family relations to the 'Americo-Liberian' as well as 'native' Liberian.

> "…appealing to the remnants of the old ruling class that where dislodged by Doe and his colleagues in the April 12, 1980 military coup. He promised, among other things, to return them to their positions of privilege. They accepted his offer and provide him with millions of dollars..." (Kieh 1992: 130)

Taylor's access to financial and other resources made him *primus inter pares* and leader of the NPFL rebellion (Kieh 1992: 129). Taylor mobilized support based on the frustration of an economic decline in the Doe era, on politicization along ethnic lines by Doe, and promises of a return to the 'normal'. After the NPFL insurgence on 24.12.1989 with a few hundreds of mostly Gio rebels, the force quickly grew as they approached Monrovia. Operating from his base in Gbarnga, Taylor governed 'Greater Liberia' with support of a host of former state officials. He raised the minimum wage of laborers (Ellis 2007: 92) and established control over Liberia's resources. The economic profits of the NPFL were significant, but Gerdes rates these as overestimated (Gerdes 2013: 80). Nevertheless, Liberia was densely interconnected in a web of national and international relations of various kinds, which are relevant political relations until today (Utas 2012a).[68]

[67] Jewel Howard Taylor, the First Lady, submitted a petition for divorce in 2004, however, she is said to be politically loyal to her former husband. She is now Senator for Bong County (Waugh 2011: 279-280).

[68] Libya had interest in gaining Liberia back from geopolitical US-orientation and therefore offered military training for NPFL forces. Libya and Nigeria had pursued different interests, especially since Nigeria's collaboration with the USA in the context of Libyan dissi-

Even if the struggle legitimated a degree of violent means, the extent of violence that destroyed vast part of the infrastructural, social and economic fabric remains in the minds of those who actively or indirectly were part of the conflict or followed the events from sites of refuge. Taylor and the NPFL combatants are held responsible for the reckless killings, massive sexual violence, torture and many other atrocities. Many of the rebels were youth or children, and influenced by drugs (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2009: 156, passim).[69]

Those who initially supported the NPFL soon started to turn against Taylor: He did not bring the change they had anticipated, but things rather turned out to be much worse (Kieh 1992: 130). Taylor became obsessed with power and elevated himself to a kind of deity. He enjoyed an excessive lifestyle of flamboyance, financed by personalized economy and accumulation of resources. Lastly, he started with the elimination of real and imagined opponents with harsh methods (Kieh 1992: 130).

> "Indeed, several cases of Taylor's tactics are instructive and deserve special mention because of their ramifications. Taylor organized the death of Elmer Johnson, his military commander, because he saw Johnson emerging as a popular figure; and, ironically, Taylor began to commit atrocities against the very Gios and Manos, from Nimba County, whose cause he seemed to be championing. Among the prominent people from Nimba County that Taylor killed were Jackson Doe, winner of the 1985 Presidential election that was rigged by Sergeant Doe." (Kieh 1992: 131)

Due to their disagreement, Prince Johnson broke from the NPFL in July 1990 and formed his own group, the Independent National Patriotic Front (INPFL) (Ellis 2007: 1). A majority of the elite also turned from Taylor and started to support counter-rebellions.

Monrovia was extensively affected by heavy fighting between January and June 1990, seriously affecting the population. Many fled to neighboring countries or refugee camps in Liberia. The urban space of the capital city contained less than half a million inhabitants in 1984, and over 1 million in 2008,[70] creating a challenge for already scarce and destroyed infrastructures and food supply. Indeed, many informants stated that it was

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dents from Chad (Kieh 1992: 132). A further sub regional network is the one with Côte d'Ivoire, which is a major player until today: the Doe regime killed President Tolbert and his son Adolphus, the latter had not only been a personal friend of President Houphouet-Boigny. Adolphus Tolbert had married Daisy, Houphouet-Boigny's daughter. Houphouet-Boigny supported the rebellion against the Doe regime not only by providing his territory as a base for the rebellion. A further sub-regional player is Burkina Faso, who supported Taylor in 1987 when he was passed on in 1987. Burkina Faso passed on weapons from Libya to the NPFL. The network becomes a complete image with the detail that the President of Burkina Faso is a son-in-law of former Ivorian President Houphouet-Boigny (Ellis 2007: 54). These actors shaped their networks in the context of the Liberian rebellion in the eve of 1989. Throughout the political history of Liberia, the United States of America played a major role. This ambivalent and contested relation of the USA is widely debated, especially the question how Taylor could escape from an US prison and leave the country, cf. Pailey (2012), but further issues such as the American financial and military support of President Doe, as well as the support of the INPFL against Taylor (Kieh 1992: 134).

[69] A vast range of scholars devoted to the issue of child soldiers and youth in war, cf. Honwana (2006), Boyden and Berry (2007) or Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot (2003), and for Liberian context in particular, see Hoffman (2011) or Utas (2003). As it has been reported from many other conflict contexts, torture, murder and other atrocities served as a means to dis-link newly recruited fighters from their social context Schäfer (2008: 186).

[70] The number of Monrovian inhabitants depend on the statistics and the demarcation. See for example census 1984 and 2008 (http://www.lisgis.org) 01.06.2011). Monrovians consider Paynesville to be part of the capital in everyday talk. Administratively, however, it is a city by its own.

the war that brought them to Monrovia.[71] The war also stimulated civilian collective action, such as the inter-faith council's appeal to Doe to resign, women's stay home days in 1995 and a range of ordinary people who joined for actions for peace, and providing welfare services (African Women and Peace Support Group 2004). The Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI) was founded in 1994 (Gbowee 2011: 114).

In 1997, elections were held, which were widely recognized as free, fair and transparent. Taylor won the elections with 75% of the votes, whereas his closest opponent, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, gained barely 10%. This landslide victory is often explained by the environment of intimidation in which these elections took place (Jaye 2003: 5, McGovern 2005: 760, Moran 2006: 105). However, other aspects should not be neglected; symbolic acts of *bigmanity* as a strongman, appealing to the youth and deprived (Bledsoe 1980b). "You kill my ma, you kill my pa, I vote for you" was a popular slogan, indicating not only his popularity but more especially the war-weariness. Others said that they preferred the devil they had known, drawing on a popular idiom (middle aged man, Monrovia, 09.03.2011).

In post-war Monrovia, many people believe that the low cost of living is remembered as a positive attribute of Taylor's rule. He distributed certain goods to the ordinary people, and "they loved Taylor for the rice price" (middle-aged woman, Monrovia, 10.02.2011). This woman, along with others, criticizes that the majority of Liberians were ignorant about the reason of these low living costs. Many Liberians were aware of Taylor's deals of Liberian resources against weapons, in which rice imported at low price was but minor part of the deal (Agnes, 10.02.2011 or Brown, 28.02.2011). Rice is loaded with symbolic meaning, and providing rice to the ordinary people stands for evidence that a leader has 'at heart' (Schatzberg 2001). Furthermore, Charles Taylor built up and nurtured a wide net of connections in the sphere of the political, the economic, and the social including the religious. He included women into his government, and the Ministry of Gender and Development was enacted during his presidency in 2001 (Government of Liberia 2013). Especially his personal relations to influential spiritual persons made him to be perceived as extremely powerful. Many informants stated that even though Taylor is a contested figure, everybody would rush to the airport to receive Charles Taylor should he return to Liberia today. A few young people were discussing the ICC court case in The Hague on the University of Liberia campus. They thought that the court would not be able to find enough evidence to prove the case for Taylor, hence, he will return to Liberia. Listening to young men *lecturing* on the University campus, these arguments repeated "if Taylor comes back, we will wear Taylor shirts, Taylor shorts, Taylor watch, we even wear Taylor underwear" (Monrovia, 08.10.2011).

Many still consider Taylor as a Big Man, interlinked with many powerful actors in real and imaginary ways. In 2012, at the day of the verdict, a halo was visible in the sky.[72] The occurrence of this natural phenomenon at

[71] The war and education brought most of them to Monrovia.

[72] In a discussion at the *atay shop* one evening, a friend explained that on the day Taylor got arrested in Nigeria, there was another such miraculous natural phenomenon, namely, a sun eclipse. The narrator had been in Ghana in exile and recalls the two events happening at the same time. He said Taylor had chosen the moment of his escape well.

this moment fitted into a cosmological imaginary surrounding Taylor, as it was visible on the very day of Taylors' verdict which was not considered as a coincidence. It can be understood as a last blazing up of his imagined power.

Yet, even though Taylor departed after a victory of the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), he is remembered today as a powerful leader, and some even say that the Liberian people are stubborn and need to be guided literally by a strongman. However, this is but one element of the discourse.

3.8. Conclusion: The End of *Normal Days*

This chapter showed that the long history of Liberia is a complex figuration of power relations and exclusion in a long continuum of war and peace. This chapter showed that *normal days*, the emic conceptualization of the pre-war period that – depending on belonging of a social actor – includes Doe's rule until the outbreak of the war. The emic concept grasps pre-war experiences and imaginaries of stability and familiarity in contrast to the harsh insecurities of the war, the destruction of homes, infrastructures and deep ruptures within society during the Civil Wars. Against this contrast, the past is romanticized. This chapter showed that the political history of Liberia is one of elite domination, exclusion and "growth without development". Even though Doe's rule is marked by politicization of ethnicity and massive human rights abuses, it was still a period in which certain goods and services are remembered to have been present.

To pre-view into the next chapters, many people emphasize that they enjoy "no more gun sound" in post-war Liberia and appreciate freedom of speech in a new political era of the first elected female president of an African country, which will be central theme in subsequent chapters. Yet what remains to be clarified is how social actors make sense of political changes and how they re-orient their agency.

4. "A LITTLE HOPE WILL GIVE YOU A GREATER HOPE". EMIC IMAGINARIES OF WAR AND PEACE

In this chapter, the focus turns from the past to the present. The civil war came to an official end with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in 2003, the deployment of a vast peacekeeping mission by the UN, and the departure of Charles Taylor into exile.[73] Yet the intricacies and uncertainties continued to challenge the everyday of many Liberians for many years due to the absence of public goods and services. Unresolved or newly emerging conflicts[74] continue with the potential to turn situationally violent, as many examples of disputes over land and property show. Studies by the Small Arms Survey show that forms of violence, including sexual violence, remain a heavy burden for the local population after the end of the war (Small Arms Survey 2011a, 2011b, 2012). This real and feared threat of violence renders the everyday unpredictable and insecure. Nevertheless, social actors characterize the present as fragile peace, but not (yet) 'normality'. How do theoretical concepts of war and peace relate to social practices? In this chapter, I will explore the emic and etic perceptions of war and peace. I argue in line with the conceptualization of the continuum of war and peace (Richards 2005, Utas 2005) that there exist no clear-cut analytical boundaries between these periods. However, from an emic perspective, social actors have and actively share imaginaries of peace and war, framed with clear indicators, beginnings and ends based on personal and shared experiences. This chapter explores the plural tension between emic and etic dimensions and definitions of war and peace within a temporal context. The emic dimensions are shaped by memories and imaginaries of the social actor's subjective and intersubjectively shared experiences drawn from the past and which have sedimented into their stock of knowledge. Beyond the individual dimension, the violent past has left visible marks on the physical landscape, notably as ruins of past leaders' monuments or constructions, and damaged buildings and infrastructures. It has left marks on human bodies; many have disabilities or scars from war-related wounds or stray bullets which they would show situationally, as if evidence to their life stories were needed. In talking about the war, people rarely show signs of emotional turmoil but nevertheless hint at the inscriptions of the war on their personal biographies. Many people lost family members and loved ones, both in tragic deaths but also due to separation in seeking refuge in distant or unknown places.

[73] By the end of the Liberian civil war in 2003, the Liberian state was in fact hardly functioning anymore and remained but as a mental image. The rebellions by LURD and MODEL had brought Taylor's regime into a deadlock, and through diplomatic efforts, ECOWAS brought the warring factions to the peace talks in Accra (Bøås 2009b: 25). Though LURD and MODEL have contributed to the victory over Charles Taylor, the two groups and the affiliated Krahn and Mandingo do not contribute to a positive image in post-war Liberia. However, they refuse to be labeled 'rebels' as they draw their source of legitimacy from having defended the constitution (Gerdes 2013: 34).

[74] I use the term war in relation to the Liberian civil wars between 1989-1996 and 1999-2003. War means violent conflict, but not all conflict means war. I use *conflict* for a range of small scale disputes between a small number of participants, which, however, have the potential to serve as a trigger. For an extensive literature review on war and peace and their scholarly definitions and applications, see for example Höglund and Söderberg Kovacs (2010).

Though the war is over, the memories remain and render the tragic past very present. In the media, themes of the war continue to reappear, such as flashbacks at the time of turmoil in Côte d'Ivoire, where aspects of discourse and imagery show that the war remains a threat to some regions and social actors (Akam 22.03.2011 or 07.04.2011). President Johnson Sirleaf makes use of mental images and memories of the past to evoke the past into the present, for example by starting many of her speeches with a moment of silence (cf. Johnson Sirleaf 16.01.2006, Johnson Sirleaf 26.01.2009).

95 Armed 'Mercenaries' Questioned

Written by ND Staff
Thursday, 07 April 2011 10:25

Flashback: Liberian rebels

Picture 8: Imagery of the Liberian war in reporting on the Ivorian war, Source: New Democrat, 07.04.2011

The urban everyday in Liberia is marked by new problems and sorrows for the majority of the population so that the experiences of the civil wars remain one of many troublesome realms their lives. Yet it is agreed that despite all the remaining precariousness and insecurities, the present can no longer be termed as war. It is referred to as "no more gun sound" (middle-aged man, Monrovia, 12.01.2010), or as "negative peace" cf. Galtung (1964, 1969), a term that is widely known and agreed upon to define the experienced post-war situation. From the present point of view, it is easier for Liberians to recognize, locate and frame the boundaries of the war. Even if war and peace are often interwoven and make it difficult to frame in definite terms, they have a specific subjective meaning which I will illustrate along the life history of a young man whose reflections on past and present experiences draw a parallel and a tension the conceptualization of war and peace (Richards 2005a, Utas 2005a). I will reflect on the emic and etic conceptualizations of the continuum of war and peace along the accounts and reflections of James' life history in war and peace. The effects of the war and its aftermath on a subjective lifeworldly reality become evident, but it becomes equally apparent that a range of seemingly ordinary social events have equally tragic effects on the biography of a person. Subjective experience and social life remains deeply affected by the war and its aftermath, but appalling experiences are made that are unrelated or only indirectly related to the war. The biography also reveals that even in the midst of war, opportunities and new avenues open up.

How do abstract concepts of war and peace relate to concrete social practices? The analytic lens of the continuum of war and peace is complemented with Erving Goffman's frame analysis (1974). His conceptualization of framing and conventions as defining boundaries that shape agency help to understand the complex

changes after which social actors re-orient their agency and seek to understand the discourses and practices within a social setting ("what is going on here?"). Deriving from Bateson, Goffman defines frames as "principles of organization" which serve as orientation for the individual actor. Such principles are not about society as a whole, but concern the organization of experience in social life (Goffman 1974: 10–11). Central to frame analysis are "keyings": like codes for linguists, keyings indicate and facilitate the interpretation of an event, in which a set of conventions govern a given activity and enable social actors to understand and assign meaning to it (Goffman 1974: 43-44).

> "Taken all together, the primary frameworks of a particular social group constitute a central element of its culture, especially insofar as understandings emerge concerning principal classes of schemata, the relations of these classes to one another, and the sum total of forces and agents that these interpretative designs acknowledge to be loose in the world. One must try to form an image of a group's framework of frameworks - its belief system, its 'cosmology.'" (Goffman 1974: 27)

There exist a range of frameworks that work on social actors and groups at the same time, and a range of perspectives within certain frames. The organization of frames varies, as some have clearer rules than others (Goffman 1974: 21). An activity is distinguished from other ongoing activities by what Goffman terms as temporal or spatial "boundary markers or brackets" (Goffman 1974: 251). The analytical perspectives of a range of frames working on social actors and groups help to differentiate the dimensions of emic and etic conceptualizations of war and peace in Liberia. Liberian power holders with backing by the world arena shape a top-down, official frame of peace, formulated along the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and its implementation, including the related programs such as the Security Sector Reform, the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) or the National Action Plan against Violence Against Women along the "peacekeeping-to-statebuilding continuum" (McGovern 2008: 338).[75] This official frame of peace is marked and formed in public speeches in which success is "ticking check boxes" (Gray-Johnson, public presentation at the KAICT, 13.01.2010).

For many ordinary people, however, the CPA and its effects play a rather marginal role, as will become evident below. For their social life, other frames and conventions are more significant. The defeat of Charles Taylor created new spaces for alternative orders which inform and reorient their range of agency in redirecting their practices and imaginaries according to the perceived novel conventions. However, this does not hold for all Liberians the same way. The complexity of frames of war and peace adds to various dimensions and degrees: On an everyday dimension, the practices of ordinary people are governed by a multitude of frames at work (Goffman 1974: 26), many of which are only marginally informed by the official, top-down shaped frame. It will become evident in the story of the former AFL soldiers or the Mandingo ethnic group

[75] Literature on interventions in war and peace are manifold. For a literature review and critical overview of the main concepts of peacebuilding, see for example Chetail (2009), for state-building see Call and Wyeth (2008). From an anthropological point of view, the analysis of p*eaceland* by Severine Autesserre (2014) is seminal in bringing together perspectives from a point of view of external interventions, the local level, as well as the widely debated critique of linking both spheres. Peace operations could reach more potential in taking the local point of view into consideration.

that for certain social and physical spaces, the official frame of peace does not translate into their lived reality – an everyday marked by struggle and precariousness in terms of legal, economic, political and social issues.

4.1. JAMES' LIFE HISTORY IN WAR AND PEACE

James[76] had a painting of Captain Moussa Dadis Camara leaning against the entrance of his small print shop in Voinjama. Against the dusty appearance of Lofa's capital city Voinjama, the replica of the Guinean coup leader in his typical green uniform and red beret attracted my attention. I entered the shop and introduced myself and my interest not in buying but in the meaning of the picture. To this picture belonged a long story, notably James' life story, his past experiences of the war in Liberia and his concerns about the fragility of Liberia's peace. He started to tell his story spontaneously. This became a long conversation and thereafter, an equally long taped interview. It was around Christmas 2009 in Voinjama, a city situated close to the Guinean border. News about the political standstill and instability in neighboring Guinea raised concern,[77] also to James who said that he was actually not interested in politics. But he feared that if war started in Guinea, it could spill over to Liberia. This has happened in the past, he remembered, in fact, most wars "came" from neighboring countries.

James does not know precisely when he was born. He assumed that he was about seven years of age when the NPFL rebels reached Monrovia in 1990. But he still remembered President Samuel K. Doe from his childhood, when he was present at a public event in which President Doe threw candies to the spectators. James can remember this scene very vividly, as it happened during the first months after his arrival in Monrovia. These were some glimpses into his imaginaries and memories of *normal days*, a period that he had only experienced as a child. From his calculations of the pre-war period, therefore, he assumed he was born around 1983. He stems from a village in Bong County, about half way between Monrovia and the Guinean Border. As the son of a Kpelle farmer's daughter and a Guinean Kpelle miner, he was taken from his mother at around age six,[78] when his father left his mother. His mother resurfaces often in his accounts, and he factually romanticizes the time of his early childhood. He was brought to Monrovia, where he subsequently lived and had to work hard for his step mother, a Mandingo woman who treated him very badly, he remembers. He had to sell *kala*, fried dough balls, in the streets, wash dishes, and on top of all she would often beat him in the evenings. Besides that, he was not sent to school. He suffered, he explained, and it was due to the virtues that he emphasizes - his strength, hard work and good character - that he was known and appreciat-

[76] Based on two formal interviews and a number of informal conversations (including phone conversations) with James in Voinjama and Monrovia, go-alongs, participation and observation between 26.12.2009 and 01.03.2011.
[77] I had initially planned a trip across the border to my colleague Michelle Engeler in Guéckédou, but I was advised not to apply for a visa and cross the border due to the tense political situation there.
[78] He though he was about 27 years of age (in our conversation in 2009) and thinks he was a child of 6 when he was taken from the village to Monrovia (and six months later, the war came, in 1990). At a later conversation, he stated that he was 11 years when he was taken from his mother.

ed among many people in the Monrovian neighborhood. Not long after his arrival in Monrovia, the war reached the capital.

> "Because when Doe died, *1990* came. By the time I saw Doe, I was quite new in Monrovia, then I heard that the war was coming. I used to take it to be a very common thing, I didn't really take it serious. Then my father said 'let's go'. We were leaving for refuge, but because of the maltreatment, I didn't consider them as my mother, as my father. I was a child, but I was very smart. I decided to stay in Monrovia. The war came very slowly, so my mother and my father left. Because I was maltreated,[79] it happened that I got missing."

Many changes happened in a short time period: James was taken from his biological mother to the capital where he felt maltreated, and in the same time period, the political turmoil started. He formulated his separation from his father and stepmother as getting lost but at the same time emphasized that he intended to stay, and James found access to another family which he probably knew previously. His "war parents", as he calls them, took care of him. They looked well after him, he recalled, and referred to them as mother and father. He accentuated that he had been very lucky in that period. He still went out to look for food, but within weeks or months of war, food became scarce in the capital city. Many other Liberians remember this period, and "looking for food" remains an often heard expression about the war. Monrovia had turned into a "concrete forest" (middle-aged man, Monrovia, 09.03.2011, see chapter 2).

Eventually, James started to cook for rebels, the "freedom fighters", as Charles Taylor's NPFL fighters were used to be called, with a negative connotation.

> "I used to go in the fence, the rebels, I used to go in the fence, they would ask me 'come and do this, wash clothes' and then do some other work for them, clean up. But I used to really work very hard, so gradually, gradually, those things used to go on. So day by day, I tried to go through that struggle."

Entering the fence meant to trespass a boundary, which is often more than a physical, spatial border. Boundaries are demarcations to spaces in which rules and conventions of other kinds are at work. They serve as physical frames of transformation to a different social reality (Goffman 1974: 251, see also Migdal 2004: 5). James certainly noticed the fence before and got a sense of what was going on within it, nevertheless, *trespassing* this boundary was a turning point which he emphasized. Entering the fence transformed his identity, and the described activities fall into those of child soldiers. Although he does not consider himself a rebel as he only worked for them, he now had access to food and maybe protection. He explains how rebel women within the fence called him their son. In return for his hard work, the rebels paid him two cups of rice[80] which would contribute to the income of his war parent's household of seven. However, he empha-

[79] Such treatment of children is common especially for foster children, see for example Bledsoe (1990), however, there exist boundaries of what is tolerated. Furthermore, with the consciousness of human and child's rights, the discourse has changed, which is also reflected in James' account. Other informants mentioned such excessive maltreatment as "abuse" or even "slavery".

[80] He explained that he received two cups of rice per day. However, it is likely that this "pay" was not regular, as he goes on explaining about starvation. Rice is often mentioned as a measure of hardship. In present-day Liberia, a man considers it his responsibility to provide at least a bag of rice for his family. In his accounts, James explained how he got fruit from the rebels. Nevertheless, it is important to notice how the child has contributed to the support of the family, similar like many women account about having been

sized that he had to work hard for the two cups of rice. Though he explains that he received this amount daily, it must have been less, given his accounts of harsh starvation and the consequences of malnutrition, the "water in the bodies". However the case, James was slightly better off with the food he received from the rebels, as there was serious lack of food in Monrovia and people were starving all around. James emphasized that he had no problems with the rebels, provided "you did not bother them". The situation was ambivalent for James. Though talking of his work with the rebels seemed as something quite normal, he then turned to his personal suffering of the scenes he had witnessed and which are almost impossible to imagine for him from the present, such as the figurative expression of the lack of food. He hardly found the right words to describe this experience: "...then the flowers, that grow around the house, you know, the flowers, you know the flowers that grow in America,[81] that flowers there, we used to go beat it up, put it in the soup,..." Viewed from the present, this lack of food is unimaginable; as it seems unimaginable to the extent that it is almost ridiculous to eat flowers. Apart from the lack of food and his acceptance of having to work hard for the rebels to obtain a bit of rice, he repeated the range of atrocities he witnessed throughout the war:

> "The rebels took some of the ordinary people's children, there were grown girls, and took them as their wives. Forced! You don't like it, you will do it. Every time we accepted the condition, they used to bring the fruit. We were left with it, from place to place, we saw lot of things. We saw lot of things. The war came, they see human body, hundreds upon hundreds. A child, you already used to it. You see people cutting people using hack, you go to the checkpoint, you see human being, the skeleton, the human head, and you see the bones, and the intestines, you see it, hanging on the gate…"

When talking about the atrocities that he saw, he switches from the first person to second or third, as if in Jackson's sense to translate the experience from privacy to the public (Jackson 2002: 62, 94), or to draw a distance between himself and the unimaginable atrocities he saw and that affected him, only to turn to the first person again to confirm that he actually did see all these things. Translating personal experiences of the war into words is hardly possible (cf. Coulter 2009: 17). Despite James' quite reflected and transparent narration, there might be a range of experiences that he cannot put into words, or did not want to do so in my presence.

One day, James was caught on the street by ECOMOG soldiers[82] who considered him a child soldier. He explained to them that he was not a rebel, but he was nevertheless brought to a home of the Children Assis-

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the main bread winners during the war. Men or elder boys often remained hiding in the homes in order not to be recruited to a warring faction or to be killed.

[81] Something of particularly high quality is often complemented with the adjective "American", such as a big, strong dog would be termed as "American dog".

[82] Though in the interview, he referred to them as ECOMIL, it must have been ECOMOG. ECOMOG was the ECOWAS monitoring group that stayed in Liberia until 1998. ECOMIL came shortly before the end of the war in 2003. The United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) was formed in 1993 (Ellis 2007: xiii, xv).

tance Programme (CAP), he remembers. There, he was taken care of just like many other children.[83] "Your mind was disturbed", he remembers, "sometimes you just sit, you tremble. I saw a lot of things." He repeats this last phrase a number of times throughout his accounts of the war. Through his accounts, he puts his experiences as the reverse of imagination: there were real occurrences that are not considered a possibility from the present point of view; illusion-like happenings that can only be explained by the fact that they had been revealed from beyond the horizon in Crapanzano's (2004: 14) terms and had really been "seen". James explains that there were some Americans who talked with the children, provided psycho-social counselling and tried to find their family members. As James' family could not be found, he stayed there until 1994 and was then transferred to a Don Bosco children's home. At Don Bosco, he could participate at a number of activities, and he used to draw. He always wanted to become an artist, and explained how he was able to improve his drawing skills at Don Bosco. James said he always wanted to draw what he saw, so that people would not forget, and he was even able to make a little money by selling some of his paintings. But he remembered having worried about his parents. In fact, when talking of parents he meant his biological mother. He never heard of her and also his relatives lost track of his mother. He assumed she was dead. The remaining relatives did not help him, he said, which indicates that he had information of some kind about his relatives in the village:

> "everyone is crying about their problems, and they have the land there, our family land, and because I don't wanna be too close to them, before they say 'oh, you small boy, you wanna take the home, you wanna take the land', because this is Africa."

Although he would have rights over some land in his village, he said he was afraid to be considered an intruder. Having rights over land is one issue, however, he mentioned not being familiar with the social rules and norms at work within this context. He was afraid that the villagers would even consider *African science*, the Liberian term for harming somebody through magic, witchcraft or poisoning, but it also can include healing. So James feared that his relatives could harm him and preferred to keep away from them.

He remained at Don Bosco until 2000, when he was advised to try a life on his own "outside the fence" of Don Bosco. James used the expression of getting independent or trying on his own as an attempt to change his life. He explained that he started to search for someone to protect and help him. James was promised some money to start a small business, but because of internal problems as a worker ran away with money of Don Bosco, James did not get the reintegration assistance. He entered a phase of life with triple uncertainties: he was no longer protected by Don Bosco, he did not have financial securities, and lastly, the political situation was not considered stable. Nevertheless, he found an alternative beyond the protective fence and

[83] Utas (2005a: 143) accounts that many ex-combatant youth have temporally been in such shelters or part of programs for children during the war. He notes that vocational training did not help to reintegrate former combatants in most cases. I know of children that were taken care of by (I)NGOs despite the fact that they did have relatives, however, parents considered the institution to be providing better and open up possibilities for their children. On the other hand, (I)NGOs are rather successful in fundraising if they cater to children and orphans.

started working for a printer. In turn for his work, James received board and lodging. This gave him working experience. He was protected by someone else now.

James remembered the precariousness of freedom during the time of Charles Taylor's presidency.

> "…because it was a fearful condition, every day, even when Taylor was president. It was a state of fear. Because most of the time you see soldiers. They would do things to people at any time. He was president. But they would do things to people at any time. They used to call them the ATU, the SBU.[84] The problems remained. Even though no one was there in the day, to kill you, but in the night, they will hunt you, especially when you have money. So we were still living in fear, when Taylor was president. So we went through this, when we see people acting, we felt that one day there will be a problem. So when the LURD war came, it did not take us by surprise."

The 'LURD war', the last Civil War, did not last long, he remembered from the present perspective, and then followed the moment when "they told Taylor to leave the country." Everybody was happy, he recalled, but it was a risk to show happiness, as Taylor's loyalists remained a real threat. James defined a clear end of the war which he terms in a side-sentence but three times in a row as the departure of Charles Taylor: "when the American government told Taylor to leave", and, "when Taylor left, we started to make life again". He marks the departure of Charles Taylor as a dislocation, after which ordinary people could reorient their social and economic practices. However, Taylor still had a lot of supporters and a range of youth that were now in an insecure position.

James had a girlfriend with whom he lived together. She was like a wife to him, he explained. She was pregnant, when all of a sudden, she died in 2007. His manner of speaking changed slightly from a rather emotionless and rhythmic style to a faster manner, still without hearable emotions, but with longer pauses between the sentences.[85] James thought that the grandmother of the girl was a witch and that she killed the girl because of property and jealousy: the father had previously turned his property over to the daughter before he died. The grandmother became jealous, James concludes, and she killed the girl in dreams and not by physical force because the hospital could not diagnose any sickness, he explained. He adds that he decided never to have woman again.

In 2008, he decided again to try his life on his own and left the printer who gave him 50 USD from the work he had done all along. A pastor had encouraged James to accompany him to Voinjama because there was a demand for James' skills there. James explained that in fact, he just relied on the help of God who directed him to go to Voinjama. He stayed with the pastor first, worked a bit for his family and started to receive

[84] During the war there were a range of 'special' paramilitary forces, such as the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU) or Small Boys Unit (SBU). The ATU was under control of Taylor's son, Chuckie. After the war, however, the SBU did not exist anymore.

[85] War stories were seldom accompanied with emotions. Though there were sad reactions but these were often only expressed in absence of other people, and often in a low voice. Statements were framed as serious or sad by using phrases like "it was something!", "it was not easy" for emphasis. It meant that the person was really in deep problems or sorrow. I often was astonished by the absence of emotions in bodily or verbal expression when talking about war-related – in my view – exceptionally severe issues, such as going along with somebody and abruptly he points out to me to a place where he and others had to dig a mass grave (go-along, Kakata, 17.02.2011). There were shifting frames, and according to their explanations, there was simply no choice at the moment.

some contracts, so he started to look for his own shop. Right from the beginning, his business did not work badly.

This was the moment in time where I met James. I spent my Christmas in Voinjama with a friend from an international organization. In contrast to bustling Monrovia, Voinjama was cool and airy, and left me much space and time to think and reflect. I met some very interesting people, like James, with whom I had contact all through the research period. I spent time sitting with people, discussing all sorts of things. There seemed to be more time available than in Monrovia. Interestingly, many had been to Monrovia for different reasons, for example education or trade. On the other hand, it was interesting for Monrovian informants from Lofa when I could tell them that I had travelled to their county, especially by public transportation.

I had been interested in the meaning of the painting of Moussa Dadis Camara outside James' shop. He explained to me that when Guinea would go to war, Liberia would be severely affected, and he wanted to draw attention to that with his painting. No words were needed, he thought. Liberians had manifold experiences from the past, where fears of neighboring wars spilling over to Liberia took a space in people's imaginary, an aspect that I came across repeatedly.[86] Many wars and rebel incursions had come from neighboring countries. James wanted to raise attention to this possibility, he said.

James had planned to save money to go to night school but did not earn enough money yet to do so. But his plans were appearing on the horizon, not far to reach: "The day I will have a big contract, my life will be all right". But first, more urgent issues had to be dealt with, so the plan had to be set aside for a moment, as he had to pay rent, food, materials for his shop, and, last but not least "you want to live as man: you need clothes, need church clothes". A decent look, including a set of trousers and leader shoes for church completes a person's dignity. James was one of the few persons I met that did not have a mobile phone, and so I left him my card and number, as I did with all of my informants. Few times he beeped me from a payphone or a friend's phone, and then I would call back. That's how I learned that a month later, he said he had been blessed with a contract to paint the Voinjama hospital and another big contract to print 800 T-shirts for a school. He was happy – his dreams eventually came true, and his business finally started to flourish. He bought a mobile phone.

But all was not good, and he said that in this society, it is difficult to trust one another in the post-war context. He recalls traits about Kpelle norms and values such as honesty, respectfulness, giving up one's rights easily, accepting apologies, be a good host to strangers, offer food, moral concepts that he emphasized and romanticized. The post-war society that he knew and experienced apparently stood in strong contrast to these values. He thinks these values had changed because the society had changed: "today, if you are honest to people, they take you to be stupid", he said (interview, Monrovia, 07.06.2010). He reflected on a dis-

[86] For example the fear of a spill over from Ivory Coast's conflict became topic in media and many people's discussions.

course of the past which he had not lived through personally, hence, he could not know from his own experience how social was like before the war. He *imagined* that it must have been such in contrast to the present and recent past experience, and from everyday speech and shared imaginaries of *normal days*.[87] Just like James, many people were remembering and imagining the past and project positive and romanticized elements of *normalcy* from this idealized past to the intricate present (cf. Casey 2003).

His life story took a new turn on Friday, 26.02.2010, when the Lofa Incident happened: The core of the conflict entailed details about a girl, Korpo Kamara that was found dead[88] in Konia, a town in Lofa County near the border region to Guinea. The news spread quickly to Voinjama, where it caused an outbreak of violence and looting in the streets, mostly by young men. The local issue soon became one of national concern, as parts of the information quickly spread via mobile phone to Monrovia much earlier before radio and newspapers could report about the occurrences. The dead body of the girl was said to have shown signs of ritual killing. She was a Loma woman with a Mandingo name. The alleged perpetrator was found praying in the main mosque, thereafter, there were accounts of clashes between Mandingo and Loma. Though it was often communicated as having ethnic and religious connotations, the consequence of the event was a wide spread looting of shops and injuring of people not along ethnic or religious lines. The inner city of Voinjama including James' workshop was looted. Many people got wounded, and the Catholic Church and the main Mosque burnt. Liberians, especially Mandingo all over Liberia feared revenge and spread of this conflict. It did not. I regularly called James and he explained that many people went to seek refuge in the hospital of Voinjama, and how there dominated a sentiment of fear and insecurity. James had lost his small establishment and was back to square one.

But during his short time in Voinjama, he had built social relations which now helped him to get a temporal economic occupation and income. He began to sell fish for a market woman and explained to me how he realized that there was now a division in the market between the Loma and the Mandingo; Loma would not buy from Mandingo women, and Mandingo women would not buy from Loma women. This went on for some weeks before he did not observe this avoidance anymore, and the articulation of ethnicity drew back from the center stage, and "they forgot about it". I asked what changed and how it changed, and he explained his opinion:

> "it was just God, that's what I believe. Because, the government with their talking, it didn't help nothing. And the president, it did not help straiten the things up. It was God. Because people were praying, the Christians were paying, and also, too, the Muslims were praying for peace. (…) It was

[87] Such debates on norms and values are common, not only in Liberia. One aspect of the discourse is the past is composed of idyll, in which things are thought to have taken a normal course, and were orderly (Förster 2012b: 246). Another aspect of the discourse are the expectations of modernity that result in what Newell so brilliantly depicted as "modernity bluff" of urban, Ivorian youth in distinguishing themselves from rural immigrants referred to as *gaou*, "fool" (Newell 2012).

[88] The name appears in variations such as Korpu, Korpo, or Corpu, and the reported age varied. New Democrat puts her at 21, others simply call her a school girl Mulbah (New Democrat 06.05.2011). The Carter Center published a comprehensive report that shed light on details and perspectives (Flomoku 17.03.2010).

> God. I can remember the Muslims, they carried cows to be given as, (…) apology to the Christians, but they did not accept it. Christians forgave, they forgave individually, let's say, the Muslim in their heart, I mean, they forgave." (Monrovia, 07.06.2010)

Impressively soon, James re-established an entrepreneurship. He started to trade second hand clothes, and for this reason, he started to travel to Monrovia to buy a bale of used clothes. He sold well, and said it made good money: from the first bale he explained that he made profit of 3'500 LD, which is the equivalent to about 50 USD. If we take profit in the understanding that all expenditures (travelling and transporting from Voinjama to Monrovia and back are excluded), what would remain is the equivalent of a monthly income of a night watchman. He started to travel to Monrovia and that is how I met him twice in May and June 2010.

> "Because, I'm doing business now. There is little improvement, bit by bit. I was living at a friends' place, but now I'm renting my own room again. I started with little amount, but now, at least, I'm trying for the bigger one now… Thank God for the little help." (Monrovia, 07.06.2010)

But he had good news and was enthusiastic to tell me in person: there were apparently rumors of a man who traveled to his home town, and he informed James that his mother was alive. "There is a little… great hope is coming in my life. I believe that it's not, it's not good to give up in life. Yeah. It is always good to have a hope, a little hope will give you a greater hope" (Monrovia, 07.06.2010). But hope does not arise out of thin air. Hope is what remains after one has judged something impossible to its fulfillment, in line with what Crapanzano derives from Walter Pater (Crapanzano 2004: 100): Hope thereafter depends on God, chance, or someone else's - a big person, for the Liberian political economy - actions for fulfillment. Hope goes further into the future than expectations (Crapanzano 2004: 104). This is materialized in the common Liberian expression "to hope and pray", also found in James's narrative, God is referred to the imagined supreme power that "works in mysterious ways" and could make "all things possible". However, hope by itself may be paralyzing, creating a state of waiting. Reversing the argument for James' situation, there was no possibility left than wait and hope. Yet, as for many other social actors, past experiences taught them that the future is uncertain.

A month later, when James returned to Monrovia, he told me that he had made contact with his mother. He called her in my presence and let me talk to her. He had promised his mother to visit her as soon as possible. He said he would bring her a *lappa* along and some slippers and hoped that in the future he could help her more. This time, James wore leather shoes and pleated trousers. I went along with him to the Lebanese second hand clothes stores to learn more about his business practices. The only thing he was not satisfied with his own life he was forging now was that he was still not going to school.

The story continued with ups and downs in James' life. He had bad luck with some clothes, and made deficit, and at my return to Liberia in early 2011, he worked again for a printer in Monrovia. The printing shop was prospering though, as it was the year of the elections and a number of T-shirts and stickers had already been ordered, and there was prospect for many more contracts. James liked the work, and also enjoyed board

and lodge with a friendly Kpelle family. In fact, it was only at a conversation under a Mango tree there that James explained that his grandfather had been a popular paramount chief in the village he stems from. The printer, too, was from the same village, and James explained that because of his well-known grandfather he was welcomed everywhere. James also had news that his mother had been involved in a land conflict, and from his explanations I understood that he had given her money and that the conflict continued to raise his concern.

At the time of my last field research in July 2012, he had left the printing shop and had returned to his mother. The owner of the shop repeatedly tried to call him in my presence, but to no avail. James had already left some time ago, and the owner did not think that James would return.

4.2. The Intricacies Along the Continuum of War and Peace

The life history of James is but one example of manifold Liberian life trajectories and their ups and downs, fears and joys, disappointments but also opportunities that open up unexpectedly along the continuum of war and peace. James had reflected much of his life and in comparison to other informants he spoke quite openly about the past.[89] Yet he seldom used words of bitterness or other emotion, but put things in a rather factual way. He talked about his way of navigating the various social spaces in rapidly changing settings of motion in motion, borrowing Vigh's (2006) terms. Often, structures and means of orientation were scarce or lacking, but he indicated how he recognized and understood the conventions within specific frameworks (Goffman 1974), hence has been a good social navigator (Vigh 2006): he worked for rebels, or managed to find new parents during the war who took care of him. He followed the conventions of not "bothering them", the rebels, and "accepting the conditions". Accepting, however, does not mean that he agreed with their actions and that he shared their imaginaries, nor does it mean that he simply reacted to the situations, but, as some examples show, he grasped opportunities by specific actors such as the ECOMOG soldiers, the pastor or the printing shop owner. He not only seized opportunities that came along, but also actively anticipated possibilities for his projects and plans despite the seeming disorder and chaotic settings. His mention of "getting lost" as a child in turmoil can likewise be viewed from an agentic point of few as a subtle act of resisting and escaping his abusive stepmother and careless father.[90] As a red threat through his biography, outlines of a better life appear, disappear, and reappear on the horizon.

As indicated elsewhere, social relations and access to networks and big people are of importance for every dimension of social life in which every person "is for somebody" (Bledsoe 1980b: 54f) or, tries to be for

[89] It is easier to narrate the violent past from a non-fighter's perspective. It applies to all informants that sections of their biography may be emphasized, de-emphasized or left out.

[90] It could also be a possibility that he was dis-linked from his family by the rebels and he constructs his own past to shape a different, in this new frame of peace, socially and subjectively bearable, biography. I have experienced former fighters' construction of victim's biography even though I knew from other people that they had been fighters, but in the case of James I am not convinced that this applies for him and do attribute credibility to the way he constructs his biography.

somebody. Early in our encounter, James emphasized a rather thin social and family networks which rendered his situation intricate, because social relationships are particularly important in a context of increased uncertainty (Fuest 1996: 139), such as during or after conflict from a refugee's point of view (McGovern 2012 or for former combatants Utas 2012a), hence circumstances in which social actors may not find much help based on their stock of knowledge to evaluate and act accordingly in a challenging present setting. For a vast part of his life, James claimed to have had no or little support from family members. But the fact that he got assistance by a printer through the good reputation of his grandfather shows that though distant (temporal and regional) social relationships turned out to be an asset. Nevertheless, he remained in a rather precarious situation.

James managed the ups and downs in his life with the "help of God", as he puts it, and God is the most powerful actor in his life, he thought.[91] Apart from direct kin relationships of which he had little support, he relied on the relationships in the realm of the church, such as the pastor. It highlights the importance of a diversity of relationships, both personal and kin relationships but also institutional ones through the church. James' story also shows how precarious social relations can be, and how they require constant forging, shifting and anticipating opportunities of wider options of networks. Both during and after the war, James story shows what range of possibilities opened up for him along the way, but also how fragile and ephemeral some turned out to be. It shows us furthermore that tragic events in his life are not only caused by war, but also by events and actions that are not directly related to the war. An example with drastic consequences is the witchcraft he suspected the grandmother applied which caused him to lose his wife and unborn child, or that he was separated from his mother by his father before the war. These experiences are unrelated to the war. His past experiences and future plans were hence shaped by the violent conflict but also by events and actions of quite ordinary kind.

For James, the beginning of the war is quite clearly termed by "the war came" or "when *1990* came", the ending is marked as "when Taylor left", thus viewed retrospectively. James's story also shows that the peaceful periods were and are fragile, and that violent conflict can erupt and affect the social life to a high degree.

The ending of the last civil war in Liberia is often framed with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Thereafter, the international interventions initiated transformation. But James did not refer centrally to these events. Nevertheless, crucial moments and turning points in his life were marked by related actors, for example when he was taken to the children's home by ECOMOG soldiers, and the fact that

[91] God and Satan or more generally the spiritual sphere is composed of imaginary powerful actors, and as such they interact with humans and are widely believed to control and interfere in social life not only in Liberia, see for instance Ellis (2007), Ellis and Haar (2004) or Schatzberg (2001: 74, passim).

"the American government told Taylor to leave". War and peace are evaluated by ordinary people as how events and practices have informed their lifeworldly reality.

4.3. Imaginaries of War and Peace

Empirical insights from post-war Liberia reveal that concepts of war and peace are widely used and shared, however, that they discursively shaped in regards to the social actors in respective contexts. The normative concepts shaped by the international arena oppose the emic understandings and perceptions of war and peace. The local understandings differ in accordance with heterogeneous groups and different experiences along the continuum of war and peace. James' – and many others Liberians' - stories show that imaginaries are shaped by emic frames of war and peace, and translate into new perspectives of everyday life after war: despite the pre-war context of structural violence, lack of rule of law and wide-spread mob, sexual and other forms of violence, this period is considered 'normal'. Subjective past experiences vary and lead to different evaluations of the present post-war situation, which in turn inform imaginaries of how the social ought to be.

In post-war Liberia as elsewhere, there are practices that are not directly linked to the war but likewise affect social actors and social coherence, such as for example armed robbery or land conflicts. Land conflicts are related to the war in cases where property was occupied by former fighters or returnees and are now claimed by former proprietors. The history chapter showed that there existed unlawful land transactions in the past.

Many contemporary conflicts in Liberia are contextualized to be recent consequences of the war, however, a range of these were prevalent before the war. Through novel perspectives due to the experience of war, they become re-contextualized and re-interpreted. An example is the increase of violence in the intricate neighborhood of West Point which has a long past of violence, however, dwellers consider increased violence against women and children to be caused by the war (see chapter 9.3.). Precariousness, that is, lack of formal justice had prevailed for the majority of Liberians before the war and therefore embraces the past as well as present. Likewise, uncertainty is not a consequence of the violent past, rather, it is a rather universal characteristic of the future as such, depicted by a range of scholars in a variety of other contexts, such as in young women's becoming (Johnson-Hanks 2005), in urban environments (Simone 2001), or migrants' uncertain future in Europe (Vigh 2009b: 432), just to name a few examples.

The notions post-conflict and post-war are often used by national and international actors as well as a broad populace as containers for a range of social and political challenges after war. They enable according interventions. Such top-down applied concepts may blur the understanding of the subtleties of the local reality or even fuel new conflicts (Autesserre 2010, 2014). The aftermath of a violent crisis is often marked by economic and humanitarian crisis, and social cohesion and order are deeply ruptured. The Liberian context

shows this very clearly. There are likewise elements that lead to new conflicts that are related to social, technological or demographic changes but only marginally informed by the war.

One way of making sense of post-war is by engaging with the emic understanding of the local population who use it consciously to the context of their present-day lifeworldly reality, such as the sensory experience of the past and how it influences today's lifeworld; what they have seen, felt, whom they have lost and which pains they keep covertly to themselves, and how this period and transition is understood and demarcated. There are three temporal expressions that people use to differentiate these frames in Liberia: *normal days* as the time before the war when routines and habits marked an imagined orderly everyday, then the war period, which is often marked by subjective memories of the time and place when "the war came…", "when *April 6* came" or "when the war came, I was…". The third phase that followed after the end of the war is not defined in a single emic term. Liberians agree that it was not peace yet, but rather, as indicated in the introduction, "negative peace", just the silence of the guns. "I would divide it into three distinct periods. First, prewar, post-war, and this transition that we are in" (immigration officer, West Point, 16.02.2011). "That is the obvious aftermath of any civil crisis. Economic crisis. And then unfortunately, the economic crisis has hit the entire world. And so people in post crisis areas like Liberia" (religious leader, Monrovia, 10.11.2009).

Forms of conflict continue after war, such as land conflicts or what is referred to as ethicized conflicts in some regions, such as the Lofa Incident that led to the destruction of James' livelihood in early 2010. Some of these conflicts are said to be related to the "root causes of the war". These prevent the transition to 'normality'. There exist ideas about how such a transition could and should take place: the normal conditions demands a 'change of minds and attitudes', a familiar catchphrase associated to former Minister Laurence Bropleh and his call for a 'Liberian Renaissance'. He called for a reflection on and return to values and norms of non-violence, respect and equal treatment (keynote speech at the International Women's Day, Bensonville, 08.03.2010). This elusive motto, open to (re)interpretation, has become a *leitmotiv* of post-war transition at the time of this research, applied by a myriad of actors in various situations.[92]

The post-war imaginary was also shaped and contrasted by returning refugees. Some were facing challenges of returning and reintegrating. *Not* having been part of a warring faction does not make a person necessarily a morally better one, in the contrary, as some of those who fled are sometimes referred to as betrayers or

[92] Bropleh ran a TV and radio program in which he called for "change of mind and attitude" for a non-violent future of Liberia. Furthermore, I heard his key note speech at the International Women's Day 2010 in Bensonville. Suiting the event, he laid a focus on the importance of the roles of mothers in educating and rising of children. By using his own life as an example, explaining how his mother had taught and raised him, he turned to the need for the nation to be raised by the effort of all citizens. He made a strong point against violence, in particular against women, stating that not even trauma is a legitimate excuse for violence (public speech, Bensonville, 08.03.2010). Bropleh had apparently been involved in a corruption scandal. However, a range of actors were doubtful about the truthfulness of this scandal. The fact that Bropleh's motto and person remains widely heard, could be a point in his favor.

deflectors.[93] They experienced difficulties in reintegration and re-discovered Liberia as estranged. Many talked about their experienced difficulty of understanding what was going on in Liberia. A younger man who worked for the police in the USA for example was noticeably bewildered about the beating of a young man by the LNP because of a mobile phone theft, or another young man returning from Canada was equally shocked by a bloody accident he observed on a Monrovian construction site. Both stated difficulties of re-adjusting to their home. Often, such conversations ended by their wish to return to the foreign places that have temporally become their homes and where they understood what was going on, in Goffman's sense (1974). For them, their actual home, Liberia, had become an alienated place. The frames had changed and so did people's habits and their social reality, and the returnees needed to readjust to the new conventions. They had gained other knowledge and experiences abroad. An informant who worked at the Liberian National Museum explained how occasionally returning Liberians who come to the exhibitions break out in tears. The contrasts to pre-war Liberia are experienced to be severe to the extent that many people hardly recognize the built environment, and they come to realize that their memories of Monrovia are of a past and afar from the new reality.

Expressions such as *normal days*, war or peace are not clearly differentiated or coherent in everyday life usage. There exist a range of understandings based on particular experiences in the past: for those close to the 'Americo-Liberian' elite sphere, things turned bad after 1980, whereas for the Gio and Mano in Nimba County, war-like conditions were experienced from 1984. Certainly, positive memories of the past exist, when everyday life was marked by routines and habits. But Liberians likewise remember that the Liberian history is characterized by social injustice, oligarchic rule and local wars, hence, the past was not peaceful in its normative sense as absence of structural forms of violence.[94] Nevertheless, people remember and imagine that a certain predictability and a life in dignity was possible, which is referred to as 'decent life'. In contrast, the present, though a time of marked by the normative notion of peace and reconstruction or transition, was marked by insecurity, precariousness, but vast hope towards the government. Or, put it in the words of a Mandingo petty trader in investigating how he evaluates the present conditions (interview, Duala Market, 17.11.2009): "Presently, it does not seem fine for me. We are not living now we were living normal condition. We are still living like we are living in fear."

Economists Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler considered the probability of relapse as real, based on statistics showing that in about half of all post-war countries, violent conflict resumed in the first 10 years of peace (Collier, Hoeffler and Söderbom 2001). Analysis of conflict and peace studies draw attention to the implicit and explicit conditions of the term post-conflict. The dichotomous temporal suggestion of conflict and post-

[93] Personal communication, Hélène Simon-Lorière, 07.02.2013.
[94] This becomes visible, for example, in the report of the Truth and Reconciliation commission, which includes the period since 1979 to its investigation. Ordinary people, however, include Doe's regime into their understanding of *normal days*.

conflict translates into the notions of war and peace (Lambach 2007: 9). In this dichotomy, conflict refers to a situation structured by violence carried out by organized actors according to a dominant conflict narrative, while post-conflict or post-war implicitly signals the end of said violence and the return to a peaceful normality. However, conflicts are radically social and essential part of social life, whereas war refers to an armed, often prolonged conflict, often carried on between nations, states, or parties. Clear-cut delimitations and definitions are empirically and analytically obsolete, as many realms are interwoven by social ties and dense networks between the state and society, see Chapter 1, (Utas 2012a). There exist a number of questions about such understanding, because even if violence ends, it is difficult to pinpoint to the exact moment (Baker 2010: 6). According to Berdal and Malone (2000: 9), a formal ending of war often brings the expectations of "lasting peace",[95] but as the case of Liberia shows, often, peace agreements do not hold.[96] The arrival of a peacekeeping force is another element that is considered the demarcation of a peaceful period. However, often, violence continues in the presence of peacekeepers: Where local disputes turned violent, as examples in James' story showed, it becomes evident that latent conflicts and grievances remain. This will become evident in the case studies of subsequent chapters.

The level of human suffering does not necessarily decrease after violent conflict, but can even increase (Small Arms Survey 2011a, 2011b or 2012). There are cases where death rates rose after the signing of the peace agreement, such as for example in the case of Guatemala (Lambach 2007: 10). Brazil did not experience a war, but there is a high level of violence; similar to 'peaceful' South Africa where higher annual rates of murder and other forms of violence are reported than in Sierra Leone's war years (Baker 2010: 53). Violence increases in particular where commitments to a ceasefire or peace agreement are low, where armed groups are dissatisfied with the terms of peace or where "victor's justice" is imposed (The Geneva Declaration 2008: 49). Hence, the level of violence is not by itself an effective indicator of war. Anthropological work, in particular Richards et al. (2005) influential conceptualization of the continuum of war and peace take account of war and peace as social processes, a "state of mind shared among participants" (Richards 2005a: 5), and as such, "war is a social project among other social projects" (Richards 2005a: 5). According to this approach, war and peace cannot be clearly distinct, nor can the related concepts or modes 'refugees', 'combatants' or 'victims', as the boundaries are blurred and belonging of actors to such categories are situational (Lubkemann 2008: 12–13). According to Lubkemann, framing social actors this way is reductionist, top-down and neglects the complexity of war as a „social condition".

The story of James shows that he does differentiate distinct frames of war and peace, which in his imaginary are shaped by the emergence and disappearance of personalities and their respective power-relations. Rele-

[95] Peace is by its nature normative, and often, various political and social actors do not agree on the "form of peace" cf. Höglund and Söderberg Kovacs (2010).
[96] A list of formal agreements (that is, not including mediation efforts of local organizations) are found on http://www.usip.org/publications/peace-agreements-liberia (16.04.2013).

vant for the local actors who experience these social processes, time, space and degree of violence vary. They experience periods of peace followed by periods of war. In addition to temporally varied experiences and remembrance, there exist regional differences. In Liberia, spaces around Monrovia and the Counties Nimba and Lofa towards the borderlands were more affected than other regions (Utas 2005a: 139, Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2009). The historical context of Liberia reveals that for the period prior to incursion of the NPFL rebellion there exist a range of accounts about structural state violence and human right abuses in all past regimes (TRC commissioner, 25.03.2010, Monrovia). Liberia has a history of political exclusion (Sayndee 2007), of state institutions and actors experienced as malignant organisms (Utas 2009), or a range of regional wars during 'Americo-Liberian' rule (Levitt 2005), just to name a few sources and themes. This means for the post-war framework that it is temporally and situationally constructed in relation to belonging, experiences or political interest. These frames are therefore likewise shaped by images and practices of state-related actors, hence both top-down and bottom-up, prone to tensions in the middle ground. Rhetoric of reconciliation, peace messages, as well as the emphasis and visibility of UNMIL and other international actors in government's proxy shape a framework and conventions of peace top-down, aiming at constructing a sense of 'normalcy' and returning to habits and routines of everyday life, yet never restraining from mentioning menacing violence due to the past war.

Translated to everyday practices of social actors, the changing frame from war to peace meant to turn from short-termed securing personal existence and survival from day to day, to more future-oriented agency (Emirbayer and Mische 1998): to return from refuge, to re-appropriate one's property, to reconstruct the damaged infrastructures and livelihoods, or to rebuild social relationships and networks. It meant to turn to more future-oriented projects and practices. For the majority of Liberians in 2010, the war was over, and although most of the informants were quite decisive that the most important reason for the discontinued fighting was their war weariness, expressed by "we are tired of war", this decisive statement stood in tension with the uncertainty of the real fact that too many people were not satisfied with the economic developments and political representation. Furthermore, the "nature of the peace" that is anticipated was not agreed upon (Sayndee 2007: 51). This insecure or even contradicting evaluation in the presence can be explained by the fact that many people experienced instability and unpredictability prior to the war, at least since the 1980s.

It is worth noting that people are aware of the causes that led to the outbreak of war and which have not been resolved yet. Deep social cleavages and tensions persist. Recurring local conflicts, especially in the context of land or belonging disrupt or hinder social cohesion. The narratives vary on whom I talked to and when. Former AFL soldiers (see Chapter 7) or members of the Mandingo (see Chapter 8) for example appeared less confident about peacefulness than members of women's groups or supporters of the incumbent, as the former were marginalized in social and political realms.

The fears and feelings of insecurity, however, are repeatedly confirmed in post-war Monrovia. Although for many it is theoretically clear that the war is over and accordingly shaped agency towards shaping future plans, the lived experience makes them to be careful and attentive. Indeed, repeatedly, this cautiousness becomes visible. For example, shortly before the presidential elections in 2011, rumors about a possible outbreak of post-election violence circulated. Subsequently, the rice price rose, [97] and a number of informants, including Emanuel and Abraham who were documenting the events for me, asked for ahead payment of their salaries in order to buy food stocks for their families and prepare for the worst case. I was explained that some Fulani traders from Guinea closed their shops and left the country. Such statements resonate with past experiences and inform their judgment of the post-war situation, in Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) terms. Based on past experiences, an outbreak of violence was considered as real, possible or hypothetical possibility (Casey 1971: 476), hence something that could be imagined and already was uttered and translated in to practice.[98]

4.4. War Anecdotes and Peace Rhetoric

Though the peace rhetoric of an optimistic but careful international community and UNMILs continued visibility, the practices of many Liberians showed that they did not trust in the security sector and its actors. As shown above, it remains demanding for Liberians to keep informed and to interpret the news and events – their stock of knowledge endowed them with manifold practices of such shifting grounds of mainly rumor-based knowledgescapes (Utas 2013, personal communication). War transcends into the post-war everyday in shared anecdotes based on memories. People would talk about for example how they escaped from violence by fleeing in square-angle and not in opposite direction of gun sound as else one might get into ambush during the war. They have gained particular expertise, shown for example in the neighborhood I lived, near the police academy, in that neighbors could hear when blank and not live bullets were in use for training. I was given explanations of how to interpret the chasing of thieves by the sound: if it is accompanied by people shouting "Rouge! Rouge! Rouge!" it meant that civilians were chasing the robber, and without such sound, it is the police chasing somebody. In such events of chasing robbers, I observed children picking up stones or sticks, just as they had seen others doing it. Rogues have to be defeated, so temporally and situationally, vigilante groups are set up (Persson 2012: 103–104), but also spontaneously, people act and perform *mob justice*. Precariousness of law enforcement was not only a war-related experience, and the majority of the people still mistrust the state institutions and actors, including the police. Such practices, however, trigger war-related experiences, and become related to these.

[97] Interestingly, this fact was rejected by an UNMIL worker. She stated that she had investigated amongst some of her Liberian colleagues (personal communication per e-mail, 06.10.2011).

[98] Though a representative of the idea that "Liberians are tired of war" and that no war could break out again in the context of an earlier discussion on violent land conflicts, at a later time, when discussing about a possible spill-over of the Ivorian war to Liberia, he stated that "the war has already spilled over" and Liberia was affected by the events along the border.

Liberians had gathered knowledge and capabilities during the war that helped them to evaluate present intricate situations and to make according, meaningful decisions. However, this stock of knowledge needed to be updated and modified with regards to the new post-war context to enable proper evaluation in the present. The present situation was still considered to some extent insecure, and past experiences have told people to be attentive. Even though the frame had changed and new conventions emerged in Goffman's sense (1974), the social order was changing and it was at times demanding for social actors to predict happenings to which they were not habituated. Some of the actors had unfitting capabilities and knowledge to adapt to the changing conventions and social environment, which demanded much flexibility. There existed a shared imaginary of peace, articulated on the basis of the pre- and post-war experiences and in contrast to war. Subjective imaginaries of how the social ought to be were very strong, and were shared and translate into collective action. This included personal and intersubjectively shared experiences, as not all Liberians went through the war. This leads to quite exactly framed events such as arrival and departure of certain actors and institutions.

I thus propose combining reflections on peace, war and changing frames with the social imaginaries (Förster 2012a, Taylor 2002), and formulate a social imaginary of war and peace. This particular social imaginary stems from an emic evaluation of the past, i.e. *normal days*, and the present situation in war-affected social spaces. The experience of the various different social actors has led to a myriad of mental images. Some people were able to flee and experienced the war differently than others who remained in the environment of combat, some over a longer period of time. Heterogeneous imaginaries are derived from ex-combatants (Utas 2003), of women in war (Coulter, Persson and Utas 2012 or Utas 2005b), or of refugees (Omata 2012). Their experiences and encounters differ and have informed and shaped the social actor's capacities and knowledge in different ways. Being in refuge might have enabled education, but it does not mean that one had been spared from (sexualized) violence or other forms of humiliation (Government of Liberia, UN Joint Programme on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Swedish International Development Cooperation (SIDA) 2011: 15, 31). On another dimension, life during the conflict period also had times and spaces close to 'normal' in a sense that routines were possible, positive experiences, chances and opportunities are accounted for.

The war was officially brought to an end at the agreement in 2003, and the decisions made and adhered, have effected structural change, and these changes have informed local imaginaries. In addition to the continuum of war and peace as social practices and projects, Goffman's frame analysis enhances the understanding how for some actors peace is more or less convincing, and why there exist various standpoints and ranges of agency.

4.5. Discursive Formation of a War Frame in a Post-war Context

James' life history showed how present the war remained in his everyday life and how this is reflected at certain occasions. For example, he related the happenings of the neighboring country with the conflict that he experienced in Liberia: he painted a portrait of Captain Moussa Dadis Camara and put it visibly outside his shop. My question about the painting pulled a trigger where after he began to talk about his personal experience along the continuum of war and peace. In James' narrative, the war "came" with a powerful person, and ended when "they told Taylor to go", hence other political leaders took over. James' narrative and similar ones of other social actors gave insights into the discursive formations of war and how fragile the present situation is considered. Situationally, increased insecurity and uncertainty such as the coup led by Captain Camara, activated a mental image that James related to past subjective and intersubjective experiences, which he translated into a picture. In his narrative, however, concerns about the neighboring country and threat of instability there do not figure prominently, but he rather talked about his personal view on the past in Liberia.

In casual debates, the war takes a particular space. Grievances of the past are very present, however, they are but one dimension of intricacies against the many problems that preoccupy most people, that is health, transportation, school fees or their own personal advancement. Like James did, war stories were often narrated without perceptible emotions, especially in the presence of others. When in a group, talk about serious events including severe atrocities that occurred during the war was often accompanied by laughter. This baffled many other external observers which noted that laughter accompanied stories comprising severe atrocities. Such laughter has been assessed as "all out of reason" or indication of trauma (Gberie 2008: 459). Suppressing emotions is a way of the mind to try to adapt, accept or justify what has happened and laughter does not mean one ignores them, but helps a person to endure these by creating a distance. Laughter is universal, but its content is subtle and follows specific social rulings (Carty and Musharbash 2008: 213, Goffman 1974: 38–39). A friend explained that if you have been through the experience of having legs as thin as your forearms, and you cannot imagine how you survived, what can you do about it? You just find it so odd or weird to the extent that you can only laugh about it (informal conversation, Monrovia, 23.07.2012, see also Gbowee 2011: 213). Laughter is social, and contextual immediacy (Carty and Musharbash 2008: 215) is a prerequisite to comprehend laughter and to be able to laugh along. It marks a boundary between those that know "what is going on here" and those who do not. It marks social boundaries in which intersubjectivity has its confines: if I would have laughed along after such accounts, it would have been considered inappropriate, left alone that I did not find them humorous.

Liberians made reference to the war as a frame which was used to contextualize the past that would make me understand or leave the inexplicable, and unimaginable, (un)explained, just like James did by trying to explain that he had to eat flowers in hunger. There was no convincing explanation for many atrocities, as in fact what has happened is unimaginable to them, and has disappeared behind the imaginative horizon

(Crapanzano 2004). They remain witnesses of an unimaginable past. Even if new themes or grievances became prominent in the everyday, the experiences of the past are at times reflected and remain and constitute a mostly silent part of the life-worldly sediment. The past remains as embodied, remembered and imagined in experiences and inscribed.

The agentic dimension of the past becomes clearer as the past is constantly shaped as memories are retrieved and simultaneously restored in a changed, updated version within an act of remembering.[99] Memories of the past change as the social world does; routines and practices that were required in the past need to be adjusted due to new experiences of a changing social world (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 998). But the frame has changed, and social actors turn to projects of improving their lives, they reactivate old ideas or formulate new future projects. James formulated this reorientation as "when Taylor left, we started to make life again". But how does the past, as described in James' story inform the present and how has the war influenced social cohesion? "Liberians seem to be in general agreement on the need for sustainable peace, but what peace and whose peace are the fundamental questions to be addressed" (Sayndee 2007: 51). The responses of ordinary people are diverging: "But people reconciled ever since!" said a middle-aged woman of an intricate environment. These statements are explained by a range of past experiences and the evaluation of the present, as the woman went on saying that many Liberians are afraid of retaliation by followers of the rebel leaders such as Charles Taylor, just as James said how he had been afraid of showing relief about Charles Taylor's departure. According to the lady and her conversation partner, taking Charles Taylor to jail will make his loyalists angry. Revenge had been the source of so many wars in Liberia, they recall. Rather than rolling up the past and taking perpetrators to justice, the two women suggest to "leave them with their conscience" (informal group discussion, Monrovia, 21.07.2012). The departure of Taylor is one aspect of the end of the war, but faith would lead a person to repentance. This is believed to contribute to social cohesion and reconciliation, often referred to as *togetherness*. However, others diverge on the need for reconciliation. Obviously, some of these perpetrators do not have such a conscience, other Liberians think, and I was given the example of Myrtle Gibson, a close supporter of Charles Taylor, who 'ate' millions of US dollars from a fundraising event with opera singer Pavarotti to help children in need (informal conversation, Monrovia, 23.07.2012).

After the trial of Charles Taylor, Liberians' critiques diverged about the place of the trial, Europe, and its result, Taylor's detention. This aspect debate was situated in a "neocolonialist framing" that mainly Africans are brought before the ICC (cf. Pailey 2012). However contested the trial was, others doubted that the Liberian justice system would have the capacities for trials of this kind, as the justice system is corrupt and favoring certain people. "Leaving them with their conscious" was a statement that fits into an often heard belief

[99] There exists a range of literature on remembering, for example Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), Schwartz (1991), Halbwachs (1992), Olick and Levy (1997), cf. Mead (1932: 12): "the past (or the meaningful structure of the past) is as hypothetical as the future".

that “with God, all things are possible” and that people change. The widow of Thomas Quiwonkpa[100] became a prophetess, “Mother Favor”, and apparently reconciled with the killers of her husband through God. On a Gospel talk show on the radio, she urged in a hoarse but decisive voice for people to forgive one another*;* “if you don’t forgive, you keep the blessing from you” (radio talk show, Monrovia, 27.07.2012). In such discussions, interlocutors explain how they found “peace” subjectively through the spiritual, and I did not hear of any of them that had been through formal acts of reconciliation. Also James’ story revealed a number of happenings that he explains with the spiritual, for example the reconciling of Loma and Mandingo women after the violent eruption in Lofa.

This chapter put subjective experiences of war and peace at center stage, and how lifeworldly reality therein is experienced as openings and closures throughout challenging periods. The frame changed from war to peace after the peace agreement in Accra in 2003 was signed. Subsequently, the arrangements of power were transformed: Charles Taylor was in exile, rebel leaders participated in the NTGL, economic sanctions aimed at controlling the former illicit exchange of weapons and goods, the guns collected and rebels transformed to ex-combatants in the course of the DDRR programs. In their accounts, interestingly, the state, strengthened by the “world arena” with programs defined at the peace talks, play a marginal role. For a majority of Liberians, spiritual forces were considered to be the main contributor to the shaping of peace.

In many people’s everyday life, new problems emerged after “the guns are silent”. Furthermore, they continued to struggle with violence, lack of water, health services, transportation and a range of other public goods and services. Their evaluation of the transformation process was a rather negative one, which was overlooked by the many praises for the new government and high spirits within the international community. The Ebola outbreak in 2014, however, brought an end to the glory of the post-war government. The next chapter examines the imagery of the post-war state prior to the Ebola pandemic.

[100] Thomas Quiwonkpa was a close friend of Samuel K. Doe, commanding general of the AFL and founding member of the NPFL. In the 1980ies, Doe and Quiwonkpa became rivals. Quiwonkpa staged a coup and was thereby killed in 1985.

5. SHAPING AN IMAGERY OF THE POST-WAR LIBERIAN STATE

Image of states often have a powerful position in ordinary people's imagination. Very much in the sense of Migdal and Schlichte, the practices of a state strengthen or weaken its image (2005: 18), and a range of symbols, rites, ceremonies, or speeches reinforce a particular imagery of the state: "In rites, references to the past are combined with new procedures. State leaders try to enhance the state's legitimacy by appropriating old, sacred references and put them to use in new context for their own ends" 2005: 18: 23). For Castoriadis (1998 [1978]), institutions draw on the social imaginary for legitimacy, which is closely interwoven with the symbolic. This chapter will outline aspects of the discursive formation of a post-war Liberian state imagery against the backdrop of the previous chapter, in which the processes of transition into a new, post-war phase was highlighted. Post-war Liberia is strongly related to the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf led government which fostered state-building through professionalization of the state administration, and at the same time political integration, all with strong support of international actors and institutions in physical reconstruction, and foreign investment.

I will illuminate a selection recurrently discussed state images, how they are used by state actors, and how they are reinforced or rejected with counter-images of the ordinary people. Some are rather specific, such as those about roads, where others are crosscutting a range of themes in spheres of public and social life. In this empirical chapter, the *imagery* of the state stand at center stage, whereas subsequent chapters will illuminate people's agency in reflecting this imagery. As an analytical lens on the ethnographic data served James Scott's perspective of "seeing like a state" (1998), reveres and re-applied to explore how social actors see the state. How do they position themselves in their relationships to the state and what do they understand to be roles and duties of which actors in the "state in society" (Migdal 2001) arrangement? The temporal-structural dimensions of agency come into play where social actors refer to memories or imaginaries of the past. As the ordinary people, the state actors make use of symbols, ceremonies and practices that are situationally referring to the past or actively dissociating with it. Past experiences, present struggles and future projects are shared but contextually clash against each other, as the post-war society is fragmented and relations within social groups cut across the state-non-state boundary (Gupta 1995, Utas 2012a). Therefore, a clear-cut boundary delineating the state apparatus and its practices and images from society can hardly be drawn; pictures, performances, texts and other representations form part of a discursive formation and the imagery of the state.

5.1. URBAN IMAGINARIES, MODERNITIES AND EXPECATIONS

Passing the border from Sierra Leone to Liberia, travelers encounter a bustling scene of state officials and offices, travelers and their luggage, and a host of means of transportation. "Car loaders" help the passengers to find taxis for their onward journey. They shout "in town, in town, in town!" as they are drawing attention

to the destination of the taxis they were assisting to fill. The 'car loaders' in Duala Market or Red Light Market would use the same words in the same way to load taxis in direction of central Monrovia. So whether from the margins of the state or in peri-urban Monrovia, there seems to be one relevant direction: 'in town'. Monrovia is the epicenter of power, knowledge, and modernity from an emic point of view,[101] and considered the hub of upward social mobility, in strong relation to the state and political will to facilitate opportunities for its citizens. Indeed, Liberia has been a strongly centralized state in which public goods and services were mainly available in the capital, and public servants had to travel to the capital to receive their salaries or pensions (Zanker 2014).

Though Monrovian urban imaginaries of possibilities and opportunities are often framed as modern in a dialectic against the rural, situated at the core of the traditionalist discourse about the 'backward' but also unknown, hence feared in Crapanzano's sense (Crapanzano 2004). Imaginaries of a 'modern life' are very prominent and are often expressed in relation to materiality, knowledge or orientation, and expectations (Ferguson 1999): a lifestyle including particular consumer goods, "Western" education, norms and values such as freedom that often have a link to the West,[102] especially USA or Europe. In contrast, the 'traditional' is of rural origin, sources in the countryside and was locally produced and controlled by elders or other local authorities (Utas 2003: 44). These expectations of modernity are widespread discourse in many parts of the world (see Geschiere 2008, Newell 2012). What makes it specific in Liberia is the historically-based social construction of two polarized divisions of society, one being a 'civilized', 'educated' Monrovia-centered 'elite' in distinction to the 'uncivilized', 'uneducated' 'country people'(Fuest 1996: 38, passim). Though many similarities are found in particular among youth in other regions (Newell 2012), we have to differentiate the various groups that compose society, and that norms and values are in debate, and the aims that are strived for. This emic dialectic of 'modernity' and 'tradition' as sketched out is to be situated in a broader context of social and political change and the discourse of 'modernity' and 'tradition'. Since the end of the Great Divide, scholars relate tradition as process and products that are constantly constructed and reconstructed, and interpreted regarding representation or instrumentalization (Linnekin 1992). Tradition is informed by other sources than the local, customary, and may be amalgamated with the so called modern (Utas 2003: 40). Hence, the constructions of what is said to be modern or traditional cannot be seen as two binary oppositions, but the two blur into one another and create novel forms.

[101] There exists a bulk of literature about modernity, see Ferguson (1999) or Giddens (1997 [1990]), and for a literature review and debate on African perspectives, see Geschiere, Meyer and Pels (2008). Debates on modernity are at risk of being misleadingly opposed to the binary counterpart, tradition. It often neglects that many features of the traditional are invented Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), and modernity is projected, and there are manifold expectations that lead to a plurality of modernities (Ferguson 1999). Though I do not share a teleological understanding of modernity situated in the urban or global as compared to the rural, traditional, an emic understanding of modernity often contains such elements and understanding.

[102] The "West" is metaphorical and includes a range of other spaces such as Australia, Japan, India, South Africa, or other imagined spaces of modernity.

Monrovia can be understood as a temporal location within the emic continuum of the imagined modern and traditional, as many Monrovians have migrated from the rural areas during the war,[103] to seek education or a job in Monrovia, and aim at traveling abroad someday, preferably the US or Europe, but also India, China, or another country to build capacity and a better life.[104] Some do not want to leave Liberia, as living abroad could reduce possibilities of becoming a political leader.[105]

Monrovia, however, is considered to be a place of many options leading to a better future. But understanding modernity as a one-way flow from the local to Monrovia and then to the West is only one aspect of modernity. Educated people return from the USA to work for the government. Goods and money are sent to Liberia. From the urban context, disobedient young girls are sent "back to the villages" for disciplinary measures, possibly to the Sande bush. There circulate rumors of politically ambitious people who visit *African Scientists* in the rural spaces for occult practices. The village bears mysterious powers. It does not mean that Monrovia does not host 'traditional' beliefs or practices; there are *Sande* groves in the capital or 'traditional healers'. Though the discourse of modernity privileges the urban to the rural, situationally, the rural gains central importance: it means to be a 'true Liberian' if one can pinpoint to a "village of origin", where he/she comes from. Origin, however, remains an ambiguous issue, and I was advised not to ask people where they come from, due to politicized ethnicity in the past, and today. Social relations are nevertheless crucial, even if the person has not visited the village for a range of years.[106] The village has its central imagined space and time in the discursive formation of modernities. Solidarities bind two social actors if they coincidentally find out that they are from the same village, even if many have not been there for decades, or have not been there at all.

Though Monrovia has been a magnet in particular since Tubman's Open Door Policy, it had temporally turned into a deadlock during the war, though the imaginary of a safe haven remained, as it had already been told along James' experiences: "…there was starvation, no food, we were living in that concrete forest, Monrovia" (middle-aged man, Monrovia, 09.03.2011). In a temporal continuum, Monrovia has become like a palimpsest of power shaping the built constructions. Old constructions and ruins remain next to new ones, whereas some are renovated or removed. Some changes take place rapidly while icons of the past remain, such as the ruins of the True Whig Party which stands – in a double sense - as both real and imaginary representation of 'Americo-Liberian' oligarchy in the past. The massive, black ruins of what remains of President

[103] Many, especially youth, have been dislocated from their rural communities. For some, the anonymity of the urban opens up a range of possibilities to forge and shape their futures.
[104] It includes a range of regions, in fact also a range of other African countries (Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana or Morocco).
[105] Indeed, a range of people have political ambitions, and criteria of eligibility of becoming president, for example is the residential clause: a political aspirant must have been residents of Liberia for 10 years prior to the poll. The voters have rejected an amendment of the clause from 10 to 5 years at a referendum in 2011. Besides that, it should not be neglected that a range of political leaders are still under the UN travel ban, hence, do not have a choice.
[106] As compared to other African customs, a Liberian does not necessarily have to be buried in his or her homeland. Besides, associations based on ethnicity and belonging did exist, however, did not play a central role as they did in the past Fraenkel (1970 [1964]: 70, passim).

Samuel K. Doe's buildings are reflected in the discursive formation of the state by a fragmented society. For many, they represent the violent past and root causes of the war. They are images of the past, in Mitchell's sense, "they both stand for and act as symptoms of what they signify" (Mitchell 2005: 15). In go-alongs with informants or friends, I was pointed at such buildings, accompanied by the mantra of 'Americo-Liberian' domination, marginalization of the powerless, and the "first native president", Samuel K. Doe, and depending on whether the person has some remains of loyalty for Doe, she or he would point out this aspect. Buildings are renovated or removed, not randomly, at least not from the local people's points of view. Some ascribe such shaping as intentional acts by the government, the acts of removing, taking down or leaving untouched are often understood as state practices containing symbolic value. An example is the monument of the Unknown Soldier, which had been constructed in the traffic island on the Capitol Hill. It had been built by President Doe, and a number of conflicting narratives surround it; some say that the monument was built over the grave of the soldier that killed President Tolbert. Another says that it was built over a person buried alive by President Doe as a source of power for him (personal communication, Abraham, 05.12.2012). Waugh (2011: 243) adds a rumor that the remains of President Tolbert were buried there. In all versions, it resonates that the statue embodied power of Doe, which made it necessary to be removed by President Taylor, in the pretext of beautification of Monrovia. During his presidency,[107] Taylor did not construct monuments or structures that would remind of his rule, except for the overpass from the University of Liberia to the Parliament. An informant commented that this was the only construction of Taylor's time, and at the time of my research, it was not used, as protest, some of the explanation goes. This overpass was removed in recent times. Though the intentionality of not using the overpass can be questioned, as it is simply faster and less strenuous to cross the road than to mount stairs, but this argument once again points to how this social actor sees a particular Liberian state.

State authorities are not the only powerful actors shaping the urban spaces according to imaginaries of modernity. Presently, the city is co-produced and de-ruined by a range of international and national actors; Lebanese merchants build fancy commercial stores, hotels, bars and shopping centers, Libya had been contracted to renovate famous Ducor Hotel,[108] Chinese are involved in the construction of roads and public buildings in central Monrovia. The glitter and glass of Nigerian and Liberian banks and insurance companies give the central streets a fancy flair. The central markets are dominated by Liberians trading cloth from Guinea, Ivory Coast, or other West African Countries, and a host of foods from the Liberian rural areas. The USA and China had realized new embassies, both occupying vast spaces of Monrovia and suggest powerful physical and social spaces, likewise the UNMIL headquarter in a fenced skyscraper adjunct to the Capitol Hill. Religious spaces take new dimensions in shaping and forming the city. There are more mosques and more

[107] However, as many rebel movements, he contributed to the ruination of the city and the state, as most infrastructures were severely damaged in the war.
[108] Libya had also been involved in road construction. Due to the political situation in Libya, these constructions came to a halt.

churches than in *normal days*. Spaces have a temporal dimension, as for example on Sundays, the road-side Winners' Chapel in Congo Town is marked with a host of black government and business SUVs as well as a number of UN vehicles. In recent times, gigantic parabolic antennas visibly displayed outside this church building suggest promises of technological progress and international connectedness. It is said that President Johnson Sirleaf visits the Winners' Chapel at times; a rumor that fits into the imaginary of an interlocked, well-connected and influential sphere of religious and political (Schatzberg 2001: 73, 98).

At the same time, there seemed to be a disconnection to those urban spaces used by the ordinary people that are considered to be neglected by the powerful actors. This is articulated into claims, in which especially associations link to perceived responsible state actors. The capital had received street lights along the main axes of town. Due to lack of control, regulation and maintenance, electricity and wires got stolen, and infra-structures were damaged by wind, rain and accidents. Though this holds for a range of other cities in Africa, "Monrovia is the darkest[109] capital in the whole world" a young man exclaimed a day after Independence Day 2012 in a taxi while approaching pitch-dark Duala Market. Darkness perpetuated insecurity, and many complained about theft and robberies increasing due to lack of street lights. A similar argument was raised about roads. Many pointed out that whereas the central streets of Monrovia were tarred, those spaces that are crucial to ordinary Liberians – especially the markets - were the last to be renovated. Waterside Market was the last area in central Monrovia to be tarred, similarly so for Red Light market.[110] In early 2011, the sewage system had leaked in Waterside, leaving the marketers, businesspeople and shoppers to deal with polluted water spilling the streets. A group of businesspeople organized themselves and formed the Con-cerned Waterside Citizens (CWC), initiated by a Waterside businessman and university student. The group structured themselves to raise complaint at the Ministry of Public works (informal discussion, 01.03.2011). According to their statements, CWC was heard, and soon after, the leakage was repaired and the street de-ruined. This event shows in what way Monrovia is also the center of contestation (Simone 2010: 8), in par-ticular about perpetuated inequalities. These processes shape out imaginaries of post-war Liberia, which go in line with or counter the expectations of a modern, good life. These imaginaries are shared and inform collective grievance and give way to new avenues and horizons of agency. The reality for many social actors in this contextual imagined space of modernity, however, is *hustling* for a few Liberian Dollars a day, and living in crowded residential areas around West Point, Mamba point, Sinkor, Red Light, Vai Town, Clara Town or New Kru Town. Their everyday is marked by struggles; often, many family members including children go around town to sell snacks, cold water or other products to contribute to the family income and serve the

[109] In this context he meant the lack of electricity. The LEC had suffered theft of electricity cables and so Red Light and vast parts of Duala Markets were without street lights. 'Darkness' has a second connotation in Liberia: the 'uncivilizedness' and 'backwardness' of the countryside is often referred to as 'dark'. The lack of electricity at the University of Liberia was commented as "they want to keep us in darkness" meaning, that they (the ruling elite, government) do not want the ordinary people to develop and emancipate. Many people believe in the existence of a cleavage between the *big people* and the ordinary people, which reminds us of the former 'Americo-Liberian' and 'native'-divide.

[110] Red light market is under the auspices of the Paynesville City Corporation.

need of a bustling urban environment. What seems chaotic has its specific rule (Förster 2013b), governed by demand and supply.

At the same time, the national government sees a need to structure and order these dense interactions that are considered chaotic. In its aim to create a clean and green city, city mayor Mary Broh and the Monrovia City Corporation (MCC), informal street sellers are removed, certain monuments or structures are re-built or ruined. These practices of governing and shaping the city aim at making it legible and controllable, in Scott's sense (Scott 1998).[111] The nicknames 'Iron lady' or 'General Broh' are literal connotations that exhibit certain characteristics of power and also masculinity. She was both praised by some and contested by a number of people; her actions were considered efficient in a sense that Monrovia became cleaner, many would agree. However, she was criticized severely by ordinary people for the demolishing actions enforced by the MCC. I observed a number of spaces and heard of even more that were demolished by the MCC, some actors claim that they were not noticed about the illegality of their shacks. The MCC became one of the state's institutions that created both order and uncertainty, as Simone described: "Through the state's arbitrary actions, in terms of how decisions are made, resources applied and formalities distributed (licenses, permits, authorizations etc.), the uncertainty which already characterizes much of everyday urban life is intensified" (Simone 2001: 107). Similarly so in Tostensen (2001) regarding the 'urban crisis', "governments have not been able to devise new regulatory frameworks which would serve urban residents better in their pursuit of livelihoods, shelter and services. Various policy measures launched by central governments have in many cases exacerbated the situation" (Tostensen, Tvedten and Vaa 2001b: 11).

The debate exhibits two clashing imaginaries in the heart of the city: One shared by those who welcome the MCCs practices to remove what are diminutively referred to as peddlers, beggars and petty criminals; statements which are found in blogs and on the website of the MCC and which remind of what Foucault meant about who is right or wrong in a certain context (Foucault 2004 [1969]). The other side of the imaginary is shared by a vast majority of Liberians that are appropriating the city to various needs and who experience the "order and cleanliness" as imposed on their survival strategies. Many of them consider Mary Broh to be closely linked to the president, hence a powerful person legitimate to the use of means including violence.[112] These actors, 'yanaboys', female food sellers, motorbike riders, and many more who *hustle* the streets for little income, are appropriating the streets and sidewalks flexibly in order to avoid consequences of the MCC,

[111] In the sense of Jacobs (Scott 1998: 142), Monrovia as a city is the outcome of historical practices and the contributions of many people without an intended outcome.

[112] However, Broh became increasingly contested: A friend commented that she was worriedly because she looked a bit like Mary Broh and hence feared being confused with her. Her statement showed that the practices of the MCC were about to approach the borders of legitimacy, and she did not exclude violent acts towards her due to her physical similarities to Broh. My friend told me this in July 2012, and shortly after, Broh was repeatedly in critique due to her physical assault of an employee of the senate, and in her intervening in the detention of a superintendent by the Legislature. Late February 2013, she apparently became challenged by an angry mob, interestingly for not respecting the law makers and positioning herself above the law (Boley 26.02.2013), and resigned in March 2013 (Executive Mansion 03.03.2013).

for example by increased mobile in carrying a few goods in a backpack rather than displaying them on the sidewalk. They are essential to keeping the city going, and hence continue to respond to the needs of the mass of consumers in Monrovia that require water, soft drinks, snacks, or items to revive their looks in the evenings. Most of them would prefer to have a store to sell, hence, they share the imaginary of a "clean and green Monrovia" with the MCC and related planners. However, stores are far too expensive to rent. The reality shows that the incomes of the lowest salary earners, for example security guards or civil servants[113] do not even suffice for public transportation.[114]

Hence, Monrovia remains to be shifted and shaped by a range of social actors allocated broadly to two contrasting social factions. In Scott's sense, urban planners backed by the state who the aim at simplifying and controlling the urban aesthetic and make the population legible and controllable compose one faction. On the other side of the spectrum is the "social organism" with crowds that define a setting where people want to be (Scott 1998: 116–142), and, I would add, have to be. They strive for work, cash and in-kind income to forge a better future. Monrovia continues to figure as the epicenter of state power, but also of imagined possibilities where a university degree can be achieved, where there are possibilities for a desk-job at an NGO, or even if one is temporally "hustling", one can live a city life. Monrovia is the symbolic center of imaginaries of a better future, but also of ways and means of accessing big people. These are not considered utopic dreams, as once in a while, a person gets a chance, be it but the vague one of winning the DV lottery,[115] or obtaining a job at an INGO where after a person and his or her family begins to bloom. The following subchapter zooms into the imaginary of state power, embodied in the personality of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

5.2. Having the People "At Heart": Johnson Sirleaf and the Arrangements of Power

"…ça venait de mon ventre dissent les Africains, de mon cœur disent les Français de France…"
Birahima, Ahmadou Kourouma

Any social imaginary has to be understood in the context of the real and the symbolic (Castoriadis 1998 [1975]). In regards to the post-war context of Liberia, the person and presidency of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf figures central in the discursive formation of the post-war state, interlinked with national and international imaginaries on how post-war states could and should be. The frame of post-war Liberia is ornamented by her election and presidency since 2006, and the media distributed an enthusiastic imagery of the first democratically elected woman of Africa, who was now at the lead of the war-torn nation-state. She "powerfully fuses two separate discourses of political authority: the 'powerful mother' (Van Allen 2006) of pre-war kin-

[113] Some ministries or government institutions have staff busses, however, no paid transportation is available for low-level civil servants such as teachers.
[114] A seat in a taxi from central Monrovia to Red Light costs 50 LD. In a stuffed minibus, one pays 30LD one way, which would sum up to close to one USA per day only for transportation. Considering these amounts, it becomes clear that a security guard with a monthly salary of 60 USD does not have the means to travel back and forth every day of the normally six working days a week.
[115] Diversity Visa or Green Card Lottery https://www.dvlottery.state.gov/ (07.03.2015).

ship-based political relations, and the 'Iron Lady' or essentially sexless 'modern' technocrat" (Moran 2012: 52). On one hand, she embodies motherly - or even more powerful - grandmotherly attributes comprising elder status and vital source of care, wisdom and guidance. On the other hand, she is the professional Harvard-trained politician with long term experiences in the political and economic sphere, avowing the post-development postulate of neoliberalism. This powerful combination raised internal and external expectations towards her government in anticipation of a swift move out of the "shadows"[116] along "the peacekeeping-to-statebuilding continuum" (McGovern 2008: 338), and transform the "weak", or "failed" state to an inclusive, democratic government. However, her election was not a novel appearance on the political horizon. Rather, her election has to be understood as embedded in a politico-historical context of Liberia, in which women had been politically active on local but also national level before and during the war (Fuest 2008, Moran 2012). Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has been an active part on the political landscape of Liberia since the 1970s, when she became the first female Minister of Finance (Moran 2012: 59). After the military coup of 1980, she served briefly as President of the Liberian Bank for Development and Investment (LBDI), but soon had to leave the country due to the tense political climate. She returned and contested the parliamentary elections in 1985. Her critique towards the Doe-led government rendered her in custody, however, she was subsequently freed and left to the USA. From there, she contributed to building resistance against Doe's government, and contributed financially and ideologically to the NPFL (Ellis 2007: 67). Likewise, there is evidence - which, however, is publicly downplayed and concealed - that she contributed likewise to the MODEL and LURD movements (Bøås and Utas 2014: 51, Munive Rincon 2010b). This does not necessarily delegitimize her leadership, as Johnson Sirleaf is the *biggest woman* in a dense political network of power relations (Utas 2008, Utas 2012a).

Johnson Sirleaf competed as standard bearer of the Unity Party in the 1997 elections, in which she gained less than 10% of the votes, whereas Charles Taylor won with 73% of the votes. She returned to Liberia and served as chairperson of the Governance Reform Commission of the National Transitional Government after the end of the war (Executive Mansion of the Government of Liberia no date). In the 2005 elections, she won with a slight lead against George Manneh Oppong Weah, standard bearer of the largest opposition party, the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC). George Weah constitutes a counter-image to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Often, scholars and Western media oppose Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and George Weah in a binary opposition of the female, Harvard-trained experienced, respectable political and economic technocrat versus the footballer, inexperienced and low-educated hero of the mass of youth. This juxtaposition is often valued normatively, rating Weah's supporters as irrational. However, it is not simply his football career that makes him popular in Liberia. Rather, this dichotomy neglects the past experiences and lived reality, in which ordi-

[116] The Liberian State has been coined as a "Shadow State", a state theory emphasizing the relation between corruption and politics (Reno 1995, 2008).

nary people experienced education and power as having been in the hands of a minor group and misused over decades, to the disadvantage of the ordinary people. George Weah can be considered as a role model due to the achieved successful life many dream of, literally the "American Dream", in particular against the backdrop of growing up in a poor Monrovian slum (Armstrong 2007: 234) - a Liberian "Cinderella Story" (Bauer 2009: 196). Weah is part of a social imaginary deeply embedded in a social context: Considered to know the ordinary people's plight because he was raised in such context, he would be expected to address their issues as naturally having the people "at heart" (Yoder 2005), despite the fact that he lives affluently in the USA. Due to his biography, he was often seen as a source of pride and patriotism for Liberians in the midst of war. He became one of the best footballers in the world and brought the Liberian flag into limelight when the country lay in ashes. Lastly, he started to study business administration at Devry University in Florida to challenge the educational gap (Paye-Layleh 08.11.2010).

Weah continues to mobilize a range of supporters and thereby creates a challenge to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in elections and dominant opinion-making. Having political experience can turn out to be a disadvantage[117] and not having been part of the political landscape before, during and after the war can be a valuable resource to political positioning. Johnson Sirleaf, however, mobilized voters with support from international and national women's networks and movements, whose links to the diaspora also equipped her campaign with according funding.[118] Initiatives such as the "50 50 movement" encouraged women to vote (Sawyer 2008: 187–188). Ellen Johnson Sirleaf faces mainly the challenge of being dissociate with the ordinary people, especially girls and women, as she is often related to the socially reconstructed 'Americo-Liberian' elite, even though she emphasizes being the daughter of a Gola man, and granddaughter of a Gola chief. Her mother was the daughter of a Kru marketer and a German businessman (Sawyer 2008: 187). Though she is in reality not descendant of 'Americo-Liberian' ancestors, she is branded as such due to her affiliations to the USA and American accent; some emphasize that she does not speak proper Liberian English nor an indigenous language. As depicted in the history chapter, social constructions such as 'Americo-Liberian' are to a certain degree dynamic and have fluid boundaries beyond belonging. This does not mean, however, that elite constructions are not contested as they were in the past.[119] The image of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is composed of

[117] This is especially the case if a political aspirant has been close to a person or group who turned unpopular. Johnson Sirleaf's participation in Association for Constitutional Democracy in Liberia (ACDL) and supporting the NPFL rebellion at the beginning continues to be used as argument against her.

[118] Many people believe that the "international community wanted Ellen" and that the elections were influenced by interests beyond those of the voters. There had been similar rumors in other elections in Africa where candidate had been supported by "the international community", notably in Côte d'Ivoire. In Liberia, such statements are often framed as *open secrets*. As they are widely believed, they form part of people's reality and hence, inform their agency to some extent. Elections have not enjoyed much trust in the past, despite their declaration of processes and institutions that labeled them free and fair. Though the presence of international observers renders these processes more credible, before and after there is room for irregularities and illicit practices. Ordinary people have seen Samuel K. Doe rig victory over Jackson Doe van der Kraaij (no date), or international observers declaring Taylor's elections as having been free and fair.

[119] Gerdes finds that the elite remain organized in social clubs such as the Freemasons or the United Brothers' Friendship, and members therein continue to shield one another (Gerdes 2013: 221).

contested and opposed counter-images in a temporal and relational context. While her image is rather positive on the "world arena", at the time of this research it was broadly contested in many local spaces. This is best highlighted by a Liberian female activist and NGO worker who had the opportunity to travel abroad to a women's congress and was baffled about the positive image of the Liberian president amongst the international participants:

> "When Ellen took power, the work that they are doing here, I can tell any Liberian, if you travel, you will hear more good than bad about this government. Yes, internationally. They even tell you some things that if you are working here, I don't even know!" (Interview, Monrovia, 18.11.2009)

This statement reflects the binary image of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on the local and international level. The local debate differs from the international one on various levels and themes. Many Liberians consider development as too slow, contrasted to propagated changes and promises. Neoliberal reforms, in particular "right sizing" of the government, has led to a reduction of government position, and pushed a range of actors into the informal sector in the shadows of the state (Gerdes 2013: 3). Many see the president as the decisive authority holding ultimate responsibility of what happens or does not happen in Liberia. According to the Constitution, the president is head of state, head of government and commander-in-chief of the AFL (Art. 50), she appoints in consent with the senate a range of state officials including the county superintendents (Art. 54), the latter "shall hold their offices at the pleasure of the President" (Art. 65 a). The power of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is reflected in an exemplary statement by Mr. Kollie, an NGO worker in his 50s:

> "I would not support Ellen anymore. People believed in change. But she is not committed to her promises. Liberia has no depts now, it is credible now. The international community is helping now, but no one knows how the money is used! No efforts are made, nothing changes. No one would elect Ellen now." (Interview, Monrovia, 28.10.2009)

Mr. Kollie's statement is a central aspect of the discursive formation of the Liberian state that is shared by many ordinary people: change seems to appear on the horizon, but due to lack of political will, it does not materialize. People demand action by the Ellen-led government, and harsh complaints over the government predominate many discussions in call-in radio talk shows and other public forums which provide opportunities to express the expectations towards the government. Much of critique concerns the use of international funds. Ordinary people repeatedly learn from the news or presidential speeches about vast cash flows into the country.[120] As an example serves the 2009 publicly broadcasted address to the parliament, in which President Johnson Sirleaf comments on economic growth, foreign investments and concession agreements or cancellations of depts:

> "The Concession Agreement Signed between the Government of Liberia and Buchanan Renewable (Monrovia) Power Incorporated. (…) The first power from these plants will be available by the end of 2010. The estimated capital cost of the project is US$149 million. (…) The Mineral Development Agreement (MDA) between China Union Mining Co. (Hong Kong), Ltd. and China Union Investment (Liberia) Bong Mines Co., Ltd and the Government of Liberia. This Agreement, the largest single in-

[120] Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Liberia amounts from 260 Mio USD in 2006 to 488 USD Mio in 2010, however, these figures do not include the 5 USD Billion dept relief (Gerdes 2013: 236-237).

> vestment package in the history of Liberia, is intended to resume iron ore mining and processing operations at Bong Mines. It will facilitate the investment of US$2.68 billion to rehabilitate infrastructures and operational facilities at Bong Mines, the Port, the railroad. (…) Reflecting confidence in the management of the economy in 2008, net inflows of remittances were US$42 million and new foreign direct investments were estimated at US$200 million. (…) The National Investment Commission (NIC) also reports that during last year, a total of eighteen investment contracts were signed for an aggregate value of US$132.5 million and creation of 2,287 jobs. In the area of commerce, total trade continue to expand with exports at a value of US$181.05 million and imports US$856.81 million." (Johnson Sirleaf 26.01.2009)

These sums are beyond imagination of ordinary Liberians,[121] whose everyday life is a struggle over gaining tens of Liberian Dollars. Money flows are diffuse yet omnipresent in political discourse as they regularly appear in newspapers alongside reports about misallocation or private use of funding "eating the money".[122] They give way to rumors, filigreed with perceivable hence real enrichments such as houses, cars and physical appearance of mid or high-level administrators. This fits philosopher Taylor's definition of social imaginary as "the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings […] carried in images, stories, and legends […], it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society" (Taylor 2002: 106). Rebuilding and restructuring public infrastructures and institutions are linked to monetary flows from the international realms into the national coffers, but they are closely linked to moral expectations of distributing some to the people. Paradoxically, this is not only considered possible, but furthermore, it is expected, which becomes clear by Emanuel's statement about best jobs with prospects of good payment:

> "You have good jobs in the NGO circle, the non-governmental institutions. These are the people that really pay high salaries. But for the public area, to have a good job, then, you have to be at the Ministry of Finance, if you are assigned to custom, or LPRC [Liberia Petroleum Refining Company], the refinery company. Once you work there, you can expect to get something good. Like the maritime [Liberian Maritime Authority], where the major cash flow is, the US dollar, and at certain institutions that are attached to the government. There, the benefit at the end of the day is satisfactory. So it's also a very good job from the government side." (Interview, Monrovia, 08.12.2009)

In his view, working at the government will result in a good salary – though less paid than an NGO, provided one works in an institution of large money flows. My informant condemns misuse of public funds for private purposes, but by the same token explains that refraining to such acts would render a person to be considered 'stupid', as the practicality – wanting to build one's life – is more important than the "official norms" that are considered to be evaded in practice (Olivier de Sardan 2008). The social consequences of being considered 'stupid' are harsher, as many people are interwoven into dense social relations not only to politically but also economically influential persons.[123] The expectations therein build on the redistributive logic of the "wealth in people" context (Bledsoe 1980b). Besides, they exhibit in what way the various dimensions of

[121] Besides, much information is taken as promise, and also puts foreign investors under pressure: Sime Darby is to provide 35'000 jobs, a piece of information which created a rush of people seeking employment to Grand Cape Mount and hence a range of challenges and problems on site.

[122] For detailed discussion on corruption, see for example Koechlin (2010), or classical work of Chabal and Daloz (1999: 95–109)

[123] Telling was the argument of a Liberian middle-aged man explaining in an informal group discussion that having women in leading positions would not benefit the broad populace, because women would not have many lovers, and hence, the money would not be distributed like from men to their many female lovers.

public and social reality are interwoven. Institutions and related actors have lost efficiency, legitimacy, and trustworthiness due to misappropriation over decades in which people experienced state institutions mostly serving personal purposes of the ruling elite. In this context fits the complaint of many Liberians who lament the practice of Johnson Sirleaf appointing people from the diaspora to government positions. Many may accept the fact that Liberia needs educated and experienced professionals, and the Johnson Sirleaf government is the most qualified Liberia has ever had (cf. Gerdes 2013: 218), most criticize the practice of offering US-standard salaries to those returning to join the government, and it is harshly condemned that they send vast amounts of money back to their family members they left behind (cf. informal discussion, Monrovia, 04.07.2012). Emanuel explains:

> "…the President must set an example, so that everybody can follow. Mainly the corruption.(…) Liberians from the diaspora have positions in the government. Ministry of Finance, what have you. With the intention that these people will try to work out things so that corruption will be limited. Because she never trusted those that were here. But the thing went in the contrary. Those that came from the United States, so as they are getting the money, send it, a high income, to their families in the United States. Money is leaving the country…" (Emanuel, Monrovia, 08.12.2009)

The imagined affluence of Liberians in and from the diaspora[124] is contrasted by the precariousness of the ordinary people's everyday in Liberia. Low-level government employees and civil servants earning about 80-100 USD a month.[125] If the state does not pay "decent" salaries, goes a popular argument, these actors are left with a post-war version of the "pay yourself-logic" (Utas 2009: 277): their request for "cold water", that is, petty corruption, is socially accepted to some degree, a cost that is considered to be transferred to the ordinary people. This practice of small scale bribery is considered embarrassing and immoral, but many agree that the police, soldiers or other civil servants such as teachers simply earn too little. They can hardly sustain themselves, "anybody understands that people need money to live" (middle-aged man, 04.07.2012), hence, the government is held responsible. As intolerable large-scale missuses of public funds by bureaucrats are, in following the above argument, redistributive practices are socially and culturally embedded (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 99). Money flowing abroad is considered an immoral practice similar to corruption, and fits an according social imaginary that these actors "do not have Liberia at heart". In line with Chabal and Daloz, it becomes a socially condemned practice if such public funds are appropriated on the basis of greed (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 100). Hence, public debates give insights into social imaginaries of how low-level bribery practices are practically tolerated, but not considered normal. Taxi drivers lament that it is the

[124] Though many Liberians in the USA present themselves prosperously on social media or in Liberia with fancy clothing at social events, the everyday in the US is very harsh and I assumed that many live under precarious conditions.

[125] I was given different numbers by my informants, however, lower civil servants earned between 75 and 100 USD. Salaries were raised significantly increased during Johnson Sirleaf's presidency, for example from 17 to 92 USD for the police (Gerdes 2013: 224). Whereas some civil servants can make use free transportation, teachers, for example, cannot. The minimal wage of 15 LD per hour does not suffice for a living (Bureau of Democracy 2011). The Labor and Trade Union pushes a work bill, however, it was delayed by the Legislature (Secretary of the Labor and Trade union, Monrovia, 22.02.2011).

government that ought to raise police officer's salaries so that they would not "steal" money from them anymore.[126]

The international ties build expectations on money flows in projects of rebuilding institutions and infrastructures. Mr. Kollie went on explaining that "the international community is helping now, but no one knows how the money is used!" Often mentioned examples are lacking roads and the bad quality of built roads. It is considered an "open secret" that the failure lays within the Ministry of Public Works who is believed to have mismanaged the funds.

The following scene illustrates subjective imagination in regards to monetary capacities. In the afternoon of January 24, 2011, the annual speech of the President to the legislature was broadcasted. A range of Liberians follow these speeches with interest. I listened to it on the radio in the company of two Liberians, one being a former soldier, the other an unemployed man seeking for NGO employment. The motto of the speech was "our nation is heading in the right direction", and was composed of mainly a retrospect of achievements of the government, a common theme of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's speeches. At times she was applauded, though not enthusiastically. At the moment when the President explained that the reserves of the Central Bank mounted from 5 Mio USD in 2006 to 293 Mio USD in 2011, the former soldier hammered his fists on the table and stood up, exclaiming "they have 200 Mio in the reserves, and they can't pay us?" The attention to the speech had vanished after this incident, and we were discussing the meaning of reserves in the bank. The mechanisms of macroeconomics and the importance of reserves to stabilize the economy seemed insignificant to him; he does not see the necessity in saving money whereas people like him and his fellows in misery could hardly survive from day to day, as they put it (see Chapter 7). The other person did not say much and was rather thoughtful. The former soldiers on the other hand have followed the process and the rhetoric of the government closely which will be topic in the according case study. They are aware of the enormous costs of such large operations as the Security Sector Reform (SSR) and others, and of the figure for the rebuilding of the army which mounts at 210 Mio USD per year, or UNMIL's annual budgets of well over 500 Mio USD per year between 2003-2010 (UNMIL 2013). Groups like the disbanded soldiers hold the belief that the state would have at their disposal 17 Mio USD for arrear pension payments. I was repeatedly told in a convinced manner, persuaded that the state has that much money at their disposal, however, the government is not *willing* to allocate it to them. To summarize this aspect, a statement of a video club owner is quite striking. He said that in fact, the problems could be resolved if only the government would be willing, literally, "it all depends on a good governance" (interview, 18.05.2010) and having the interest of the people at heart. Such grievances are unsurprising against the backdrop of decades of economic mismanagement and extortion of the countries' resources which were privatized and dispensed through presidential ties of

[126] There are debates whether civil servants would be less corrupt if they would earn more money, but following the argument of above mentioned actors, the current status makes social actors blame the government for immoral practices.

an elite few. This is considered confirmed with President Johnson Sirleaf appointing range of family members in strategic position of the government, and for Liberians, this is understood as personal enrichment.[127] Ordinary people can hardly establish personal relations to these actors, and consequently turn to existing schemes of discursive formed social cleavages.

In the midst of harsh critique and high expectations, many ordinary people emphasized positive changes in regards to democratic liberties in recent years. Most informants agreed that they enjoy increasing personal freedom today. More than ever before was it possible to utter a personal opinion or critique towards the President as it was done now even in the public sphere such as a radio program or an *atay shop*. Some of the voices, especially from the deprived majority and marginalized opposition supporters have become harsh to the degree that others even start to reverse critique and demand politeness. Motherly attributes, nicknames or kin terminology ('Ma Ellen') are selectively and situationally used. A business lady explained that she was tired of the complaints against Ellen Johnson Sirleaf: Liberia was never before as free as in these days; never before was it possible to do politics so freely, to demonstrate, or insult the President even publicly on air as many did (informal discussion, Monrovia, 10.02.2011). My informant had been close to some of the students demonstrating against Doe in the 1980s, hence, is linked to the academic elite of today. She remembered the riots on the university campus, the death of colleagues and professors. A taxi driver told a similar story one night after the other passengers had left the taxi following a heated debate about President Johnson Sirleaf. He continued to explain to me how much Johnson Sirleaf had done for the country, and that he was satisfied what her government did and continued to do. Later, he revealed that his wife had been campaigning for Johnson Sirleaf and in campaigning apparently earned some money. Satisfied with personal welfares from the incumbent, he hailed the present government.

However, apart from economic benefits, a range of actors do emphasize political freedom and participation. Both brief scenes provide insights into imaginaries of ordinary people about their participation in social networks, but also their expectations beyond the material dimension. For many social actors it is important to experience that a political leader – especially the President - has them figuratively "at heart". As such, ordinary people expect direct benefit from the government in jobs and cash or in-kind contributions, and indirectly through the provision of public goods and services. This will become clearer in the three case studies of perceived deprived social actors. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is expected to show up in the respective social and physical spaces and provide to the various groups, in return, they will support her and vote for her. International organizations may have stepped in, but the people expect the government, the legitimate head of the state, to provide to them. Having Liberia at heart is a central moral quality of a political leader. A *big person*

[127] These charges have become denser in recent times with the chairmanship of EJS's son Robert Sirleaf National Oil Company of Liberia (NOCAL) (http://www.nocal.com.lr/). Besides, in early 2012 there were rumors of Robert Sirleaf joining the CDC, the biggest opposition party, which were later rejected by standard bearer George Weah (Daygbor 12.06.2012).

is supposed to maintain her or his relationship to the people, and due to the Presidents frequent travels,[128] this creates a further moment of critique towards the President: "She is not even in the country for 30 unbroken days", said Kollie (interview, 04.12.2009). *Seeing* the president and political leaders is key to evidence of commitment; their physical "coming into" a certain community or her presence at an event, offering some bags of rice or other gifts is taken as an indication that she cares and caters to "her people" (cf. Schatzberg 2001). Moral expectations are framed and evaluated as having the people 'at heart'. These moral expectations turn out to be tricky regarding specific performances of the government, one central aspect of which, security, will be presented in the following. It constitutes a central image of the post-war Liberian state.

5.3. (IN)SECURITY

A prominent cluster of mental images in post-war Liberia figures around issues of security, respectively the fragility of security.[129] Discourse s center prominently on the Security Sector Reform (SSR), a provision of the CPA and implemented by the National Transitional Government with the support of the American government and UNMIL as international actors, presently under the auspices of the Johnson Sirleaf led government. The understanding of security shared in Liberia strongly resembled the normative, state-centered Weberian concept of national security as one of the state's main functions, coupled with a clear belief that the state ought to hold the monopoly on violence (cf. Weber 1980). This understanding becomes evident in debates about the lack of the state's monopoly on security, or its misuse experienced in the past and present (cf. Utas 2009). Main facets of the discourse are the international actors intervening in this core state function; the effectiveness of the Liberian army and police; and the continued occurrence of forms of violence (Small Arms Survey 2011a, 2011b, 2012). Hardly any topic is as much researched in Liberia as the security sector and related discourse about actors, institutions and processes. The Security Hubs are considered an innovative effort in decentralizing security to the counties (Caparini 2014, Zanker 2014).

Yet these top-down approaches often fail to take the local populations' point of view into considerations; evaluations based on past and present experiences and needs in regards to real and imagined insecurities beyond "hard security". There existed a tension between the local considerations that the state and its actors are not in the position to provide national security, hence, international actors and standards met the Liberian "state in society" (Migdal 2001) context and lived reality of mistrust and insecurities. The state, on the other hand, tries to oppose this sentiment through elaborate symbol-laden pictures and performances of

[128] The international community is crucial for political and macroeconomic processes, hence, the Liberian President maintains institutions such as the UN or World Bank. Not only does she visit neighboring countries and re-establishes ties, but also to the US and Europe. Thereby, she was successful in raising attention to the needs of the nation, and, for example, convinced the Bretton Woods institutions to cancel the national depts. However, in her own country, her travelling is harshly criticized by some actors who emphasize the many tasks and duties in her own country.

[129] Security is a topic that gained much scholarly attention. A shift in perspective from national security to human security took place in the 1990s, yet in practice the concept remains normative and state-centered (Baker 2010: 1-3, see also Krause 2009: 147 or Smith-Höhn 2010: 16). Interested readers are referred to Baker (2010) for definitions and cases on security in post-war Africa, or Hills (2009) on security in African cities.

increased stability and order in its use of posters along the roads, public performances and in speeches. Trust does not emerge out of the blue, but is based on trustworthiness (Hardin 2002, Heitz Tokpa 2013). Against the backdrop of past and present personal and structural insecurities, security is an issue that ordinary people are concerned with in their daily life both practically and theoretically. Security discourse, hence, has two main dimensions, the imagery that the state authority with international support aim to shape, and secondly, (in)security on a societal level as experienced in everyday life.

The role of the international actors was decided at the CPA and included proficiencies regarding humanitarian issues and the Liberian Security Sector in general. International actors and organizations were assigned central roles post-conflict, and remain central in particular in the processes of the Security Sector Reform, as it is one of the core areas of reconstruction after war (Hänggi 2009). The SSR included the restructuring of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) with a new command structure, drawing from the ranks of GOL, LURD or MODEL, and civilians with an appropriate background. Furthermore, the CPA comprised provisions for the restructuring of the Liberian National Police (LNP) and other security forces. It was further agreed that ECOWAS, the UN, AU and the ICGL[130] support the Security Sector Reform (SSR)[131] implementation. In addition, the signing parties requested the USA to play a leading role in the restructuring process (CPA 2003, Art VII). The UN Security Council Resolution 1509 (UNSC Resolution 1509 (2003)) defined the key parameters and aims of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation program (DDRR), and the National Transitional Government established an according national commission, the NCDDRR. Target groups of DDRR were defined to be the combatants of the AFL/GOL, LURD, MODEL and other paramilitary forces and militias. 103'019 ex-combatants were registered in the process.[132] Demobilization after a conflict basically would fall in the realms of the state, but due to lack of state capacities, this approach was hardly feasible in Liberia. The problems of the aftermath - social, logistical, environmental, economic or political - are many and complex, and created a number of difficulties to the local, national and international actors (Jaye 2003). As a consequence of the state not being in the condition to take a lead role, the implementation of the CPA was characterized by an "overwhelming lack of local ownership" (Governance Reform Commission of Liberia 2006: 13, Mehler 2004: 19). The DDRR process was marked by a massive deficiency in regards to resources and knowledge to deal with ex-combatants. The lack of resources clashed with high expectations of the ex-combatants that were created with the rhetoric of opportunities that seemed to open up new avenues for future projects after the war: Reintegration assistance programs, scholarships, new opportunities in the restructured security sector, or economic possibilities through donors and the neoliberal promise of job crea-

[130] International Contact Group on Liberia, a group composed of international experts to implement the CPA.
[131] Extensive literature exists on the Security Sector Reform, for a conceptual overview see Hänggi (2009: 337) and for further readings and cases see Griffiths (2011), Jaye (2008), Malan (2008) or Nilsson and Kovacs (2013). Yet, most fall short on ordinary people's perspective and response to these (institutional) reforms.
[132] Pugel (2007: 18) estimates the number of ex-combatants even higher, at 105'699 - or more. A large number of interviewed ex-combatants had not participated in the DDRR program because they did not want to be identified as ex-combatants (Pugel 2007: 45). After the First Civil War in 1996, Outram accounts for 59'370 combatants (Outram 1997: 356).

tion through foreign investors (Alusala 2008, Bøås and Hatloy 2006, or Jennings 2008). Women's organizations intervened and played a central role in calming the situation (African Women and Peace Support Group 2004, Reticker 2008). A number of ex-combatants claim not to have profited adequately from the components of DDRR programs, and even if they did, many still find it difficult to reintegrate into society and economy. Besides, the economic condition created a challenge to a successful and sustainable social and economic reintegration. Others believe they have not gained from the peace process, such as the disbanded soldiers (see Chapter 7) who believe that they have been left out. The rhetoric of opportunities activated imaginaries and informed future plans in this phase of transition.

A new military force was constituted of thoroughly vetted young soldiers, trained by the private military company DynCorp, whereas the Pacific Architects and Engineers Inc. (PAE) mentored officers and military leaders, amongst others tasks, commissioned by the USA (Nilsson and Kovacs 2013: 6). The new army was composed of about 2'000 new soldiers. The government claimed not to afford higher salary costs, which is a reason for the size of the new AFL (informal conversation, employee of the Ministry of Defense, 18.06.2010). Updates on restructuring and reforms were regularly given in public speeches, such as the yearly address to the parliament, at the Armed Forces Day or the Independence Day celebrations, thereby highlighting positive developments and achievements.

In the eyes of the local population, institutions such as the AFL or LNP still lack efficiency and are scrutinized by the public. In their everyday life, personal insecurity still affects many negatively to a vast degree. A number of people say that they were not sure what would happen in absence of UNMIL. However, the Lofa Incident in early 2010 raised debates about the potential of UNMIL to intervene in such events. It was rumored that peacekeepers even took side, whereas others said they did not respond at all. Even though UNMIL gradually reduced its strength, they remained visible throughout the country at strategic points and public events. UNMIL and security issues continued to be central issues of debate, and many worried that the Liberian police and army could not deal with national and sub-regional security issues.[133] Many Liberians scrutinized the news and events in the neighboring countries and have acquired knowledge on security-related issues due to the war. In *normal days*, the police had been an attractive employer, some say; they had been equipped with modern technologies and gadgets. An informant had intended to join the police (middle aged man, Monrovia, 12.01.2010): "When I graduated, by then, the love I had for the police force started going, because of the police behavior had changed. There was corruption all over the place, the police were still picking at the drivers - there was no respect for the police [anymore]. So I felt deterred to enter the police". In the post-war context, many claimed to make rather negative experiences which led them to evaluate this institution as rather ambiguous, even though statistics of crime rates showed decrease (Sengbeh

[133] Even though some of my informants played an active role in the war, many have not, but nevertheless follow the developments and comment on state and international activities in the realm of security.

08.07.2010). As one elderly informant (Monrovia, 18.02.2011) puts it "bulk of the police that are there, they were criminals. Some of them, they have put them down [in the deactivation process], some of them are still in the system. Some of them joined the armed robbers, because they are used to it." Deviant practices of taking bribes or collaborating with criminals, for example getting back one's stolen mobile phone from a police officer in return for a bribe, are believed to be a practice that has its cause in the war.

Yet police are the most visible state-actors in daily interactions. In public discussions by ordinary people, the LNP is held responsible for not providing security, not regulating the motorbike riders or solving traffic jams. In fact, due to their controls along the road, the police even hindered the flow of traffic. In order to keep secure, most people are left on their own, they believe, and state institutions responsible of security provision, law enforcement or justice system at large continue to lack credibility and capacity. The practices and discourse on the police lead to the assumption that the police do not meet the expectation of the populace. "They live on past glory", one informant explained. As a result, vigilante groups or private security companies stepped in the place of state policing (Baker 2010 or Persson 2012), and mob violence was framed as properly taking care of rogues, thieves and troublemakers. In absence of efficient policing, local actors consider it necessary to take action. At night, households such as Ruth's are locked in, furniture and glass bottles are moved in front of windows. Especially in the sub- or peri-urban space, no one would call the police in case something happens, as they would not respond or even turn against those they should provide security, I was told. I learned the reasons behind such explanations. For example, I had intended to introduce myself at the local police station at my moving into the community, for security reasons in case I had a problem. But "I would strongly advice you not to do so" was the answer of a neighbor, explaining that they could break into my house once they knew where I was living. The image of the police, however, varied depending on issue at debate, and social actors participating. And it depended on the neighborhood. Informants in West Point, for example, considered the police as underequipped and lacking legitimacy to intervene in the community. But at the same time, the police were expected to resolve interpersonal disputes that did not figure as central competence of law enforcement. This shows the importance of looking at the police in the respective context and as social actors in relation to the local population. The image of the police might vary from one particular neighborhood to another; the police are not only state-actors, but also social actors. Hence, agreeing with Persson and others, institutions and practices beyond the formal security sector are as vital for policing (Kantor and Persson 2010: 11).

In order to change the negative image of the security forces, the government fostered the integration women as an attempt to increase trustworthiness, yet overlooking the complexity of femininities in Liberia and the fact that not only "adding women and stir" will tame the security forces (Baaz and Utas 2012a). Nevertheless the recruitment of women into security forces was made visible in every corner of the city, it seemed; DINA 4 posters decorated various offices and doors of private homes. The number of women in the

security sector increased, for example the Liberian National Police was composed of 15% women (Griffiths 2011: 9), and 3.6% in the AFL (Griffiths 2011: 12). The women in the AFL were highlighted at the Armed Forces Day, in which they performed drills and paraded to the delight of the audience. President Johnson Sirleaf took the occasion of her annual message to the legislature to highlight the first post-war female Captain in the restructured AFL. "The new AFL is the most ethnically and gender balanced military force in our nation's history. I am very proud that our new army will look like Captain Geraldine Janet George, the first post-war female Captain in the restructured AFL" (Johnson Sirleaf 24.01.2011).

Security forces are no "democracy organizations" (old soldier, Monrovia, 09.03.2011); but rather the muscles of the state functioning through the logic of the chain of command. To effectively enhance change, structures need to be changed as much as the practices (cf. Scott 1998: 255). The government, with the use of symbolic statements,

Picture 9: Recruitment poster for the new AFL, displayed at the entrance door of the West Point Women.

pictures and performances intended to enhance an image of a new government: trustworthy, inclusive, effective. Such a powerful image of women and security was the illustrious Indian female contingent of UNMIL guarding at the entrance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where President Johnson Sirleaf had her office. However, women in the security forces are not a novelty in Liberia. There were a number of women in the 'old' AFL, and Cecil Griffiths, President of the Liberian Law Enforcement Association states that already in 1994, an association was created for LNP women in order to foster women's participation (Griffiths 2011: 9). Such images of women in arms are contrasted by practices or statements such as the taxi driver neglecting a young female police officer's instructions. At a passengers comment he simply muttered "that' baby police" and continued (observation, Monrovia, 03.09.2011). The government follows widely agreed upon standards of gender-balance[134] of its security sector (cf. Baaz and Utas 2012a), however, this aspect requires some reflections. The scene of the taxi driver was one of many that showed in what way young women have difficulty gaining respect by men - and also elder women. Authority is less related to gender than to age and social position, as in Liberia, women have been in security forces and male-dominated domains and institutions in the past, both in state and local institutions (Moran 2006, Moran 2012).

[134] Gender, as in many other interventions, often concerns women Baaz and Utas (2012b: 6), and rather than taking local women's perspectives into consideration, "pre-packed toolkits" are applied (Baaz and Utas 2012b: 9).

5.4. Fostering Gender Equality - Empowering Women?

In many political and popular debates on the Liberian war, war and peace are complemented by a dimension of gender and age, resulting in a binary opposition of young male fighters as opposed to mature female peace activists. This juxtaposition is incomplete as it overlooks the roles of women in Liberia in the past and their participation in the political sphere, as scholars emphasize (cf. Fuest 2008: 218, Moran 2012, Moran and Pitcher 2004, Steady 2011: 109, Utas 2005b: 405). The roles of women in war and peace are more complex just like in many other contexts around the world (Cockburn 2013), as are the roles of men and masculinities (Kirby and Henry 2012). This becomes visible by analyzing the gender dimensions of political actors in war and peace. Charles Taylor's rebels are accused of using rape as a weapon of war (The Hague Justice Portal 2012). During his presidency in 2001, the Ministry of Gender and Development was created by an Act of the National Legislature.[135] By the same token, though internationally praised, the image of President Johnson Sirleaf is overshadowed by the fact that she contributed to the formation of the NPFL as well as LURD (Utas 2008: 8). The post-war imaginary shaped by the government, is strongly co-constructed by the international community, in line with the "gender empowerment discourse" which is partially blind to gendered aspects beyond women peace builders and male combatants, which, however but mostly pragmatic in regards to fundraising and political legitimization.

It is well-known that a range of atrocities were committed towards women and girls during and after the war. Even in times and spaces of less fighting, problems persisted or emerged, such as health care or provision of food for the families, and women suffered disproportionately due to their care responsibilities and multiple burdens. Many women recall how they used to "go and look for food" during the war, whereas the men and boys had to hide at home so that they would not be recruited or killed by warring factions. Women left the houses as early as four o'clock in the morning to walk for hours for example from Monrovia out of town towards Bomi Hill, which amounted to several hours one way (interviews with middle-aged women, 26.05.2010 or 31.03.2010). Many accounted of very difficult encounters with rebels, some included humiliation or torture. To me, not one woman spoke openly about personal experiences of rape during war, however, there were indications, such as a lady who got pregnant at young age and during the war. The facts and accounts of third people however, are countless. Interestingly, many women talked about various situations during the war in which they had been very lucky, for example, where rebels warned and protected women that were unknown to them. Though women were especially negatively affected by the war, it is likewise a fact that the entire society suffered; children, elderly, youth, women and men, husbands, brothers and so on. It was a common statement in Liberia that men said that they were most afraid of child and female soldiers, as they were most unpredictable. Such statements show that gender roles, power relations and other

[135] http://mogdliberia.com/index.php/about-the-ministry (25.04.2015).

societal dimensions and schemes of social orientation were deeply affected by war in their core. Yet, the complexity of women's roles in Liberia's past and present are often overlooked.

In regards to female political participation, Liberia is quite particular in comparison to other African countries, as Liberia has a rather high rate of female involvement in the political and public sphere. Women have played central roles well before the war (Fraenkel 1970 [1964], Fuest 1996 or Moran 1989, cf. Moran 2006). Women have been political leaders of Sande and other initiation societies, councils of elders or chiefs in local governance and leaders of state institutions or activists of religious groups and associations (African Women and Peace Support Group 2004). Liberia had the first female president of an African University, and for the African context a high percentage of female students and lecturers (Fuest 2008: 208). Ruth Perry became Africa's first female head of state in 1996 (Moran and Pitcher 2004: 507). During Charles Taylor led rebellion and later presidency, a range of women were in central positions. Dr. Dorothy Musuleng Cooper, for example, was not only the first Minister of Gender and Development. She had previously been the principal of Cuttington University, the first female Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1994, as well as the vice-chairperson of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) (Christensen 2010). Another famous woman that was close to Taylor was Myrtle Gibson who is often described as Taylors' right hand or advisor (United Nations Security Council Committee SC/10510 2011). The list of women in key positions in national or local government or the security forces goes on.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was internationally praised as the first elected president of an African country. She has a long history of political involvement and activism, having run for senator under President Doe in 1985 and having served as Minister of Finance, one of eight female ministers, under President Tolbert (Fuest 2008: 208). Though the war brought the remarkable women's peace activities onto center stage through media, international actors and organizations, and it continues in people's consciousness today, women's political agency in the past was the prerequisite for these collective actions and achievements. The first institutions to start to promote peace during the war were religious institutions, specifically the Liberian Interfaith Council or the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission in 1990 (Sawyer 2005: 71, 82). Women started to articulate their claims in churches and mosques (Reticker 2008). A number of women's networks and programs were founded in the course of the war: the Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI) was founded in 1994, women organized "stay home days" in 1995 and 1996, and demonstrations.[136] During and after the war, many international and national organizations supported women's organizations and women's claims.

Women's collective action peaked with the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, enabled by post-war transformations through new opportunity structures after the war as well as past iteration of pre-war political participation and action (Moran 2012: 52). The present-day gender discourse is predominated by governments'

[136] Women in Peacebuilding Program, WIPNET, was founded in 2001. The Mano River Women's Peace Network was also founded in 2000, see also African Women and Peace Support Group (2004).

and international actors' aim to build on these opportunity structures. Fuest emphasizes that international agencies have been pushing national policies and activities by introducing a "rights-based model of governance", running mass media and by having informed a "rhetoric of human rights" (Fuest 2010: 9).

The government successfully implemented and changed a range of policies in regards to gender issues. With the strong petitioning of the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL), a 'Rape Law' was enacted in 2005, changing rape into a non-bailable criminal act. Besides, the 'Inheritance Law' was reformed to foster protection of women's rights in customary as well as statutory marriages (Government of Liberia 2008a: 89). Furthermore, a special court for cases of sexual violence was set up (*IRIN News* 21.03.2008). Furthermore, the present government has installed a Gender-based Violence Office at the Ministry of Gender and Development, and the Liberian National Police has set up a Women and Child Protection Division with according personnel at police depots, supported by UNICEF (Government of Liberia 2008a: 54, 89). Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has appointed a number of women into key positions in the government, including ministries and the judiciary (Fuest 2008: 203).

The challenge remained to implement the new gender policies into practice. Those in charge of implementing, as well as a broad range of Liberians often do not share the same understanding of women's problems, roles and rights. On a national-level political discourse, historical dimensions, cultural, social and political norms and roles and participation of women are often left out, and women are framed as victims: women as victims of domestic violence and 'chattel of their husbands'. Conservative forces emphasize the role of women as mother and wife articulated on the basis of Christian or Muslim norms and values, which pose quite high pressure on women and girls. Critique towards women's misbehavior leads feeds into evaluation of the *loose society*, articulated and illustrated in women's "indecent dressing", whereas men's and boy's actions play a rather marginal role. Yet another strand of discourse makes use of the veiled Muslim women, often drawing on international, normative discursive formations of lacking women's rights. These different positions are not contradictions, but rather reflect the heterogeneous society with a broad range of experiences from the past and expectations towards a better future. Within these debates, the woman's victim's position proves useful and powerful for women's organizations in forming claims for policy change and implementation of transformed structures and gender relations on the appearing new horizons ("windows of opportunity"). Furthermore, an NGO with a strong gender – focusing on women – is more likely to receive in-kind or cash contributions from international organizations.

The image of women remains incomplete, and through the above mentioned discourse it will remain incomplete: Forms of contestation by women, including demonstrations, awareness marches and other visible actions on the political landscape have to be considered as historically embedded. This holds also for other African contexts. There exists a body of literature about women's protest movements in the colonial and

post-colonial struggles and respective women's roles in local and national politics.[137] For the Liberian case, Mary Moran accounts of women protesting in Southeastern Liberia in 1983 against the reintroduction of the head-tax, and she gathered stories about women resisting chief's decisions (Moran 1989). These cases show how Southeastern women have played an active role in local politics, where in the indigenous politics there was based on a dual-sex system. Women had their council of elders, amongst other institutions (Moran 1989: 453). Women did not accept being politically represented by men; rather, they would take action on spheres of their own responsibility, so Moran's argument. War could not be declared without consulting the women leaders (Moran 2012: 56). What changed in post-war Liberia is the visibility of women not only as high-level government officials but in a novel consciousness.[138] Women and girls are persistently encouraged to pursue education and attend university. Whereas higher education was often limited to the urban, elite population in the past, there exist free evening and night schools, and university scholarships for women. This imaginary of education as a key to political participation is co-produced and shaped by the state actors. Education is seen more as a means to reach an end than an end in itself. Educated women are expected to know their rights and duties and will be eligible to participate in a public or political sphere. Furthermore, they increase their knowledge and capacities in regards to economic activities. This has an impact on gender relations, and some men criticize that more is done for women and girls, whereas boys and men are left out. Some organizations, such as the West Point Women, however, acknowledge that the fight against violence against women requires active participation of men in the quest of their aims, but most programs continue the simplistic view of women as victims only.

In society, women become more independent, which is criticized by conservative force of both men and women, thereby referring to normative expectations of women's roles "as the bible says": mothers are supposed to remain in the domain of the household, maybe market. The reality however does not leave much choice, even though a range of women would share this normative image. Many households are female-headed;[139] some have become *big women*, and being both, Ruth told me that in Liberia, it is often the women who upkeep the family. She meant that in lack of formal employment and in the presence of a range of consequences of the war, women sustain the family economically with manifold activities, but also morally. The children participate, and if girls do not help, they experience sanctions as harsh as being "sent to the village".

Despite these realities, many women find resources for education and political participation, and many foster their qualifications and capacities. Ruth was thinking of applying for a scholarship for Cuttington University. Tina and Kebbeh, two ladies of my neighborhood went to the University of Liberia, so did the West Point

[137] See for example part three of the edited volume by Jean Hay and Stichter Jean Hay and Stichter (1984) on women's agency in Africa during and after colonialism.
[138] Besides, the "world arena" was now debating gender issues, and many debates and reforms were added a gendered dimension.
[139] According to studies of the World Bank, 30% of the households surveyed in 2009 were female-headed The World Bank (2009).

women's president, whereas others of the leadership participated in evening schools and computer training programs. International and national programs foster women in political participation. UNIFEM organized workshops for female politicians on rights, public speech or campaigning (interview with a female politician, 26.05.2010). President Johnson Sirleaf invests strongly on symbolic practices as if to routinize imaginaries of a novel reality. Her presence and speeches at the university graduation programs are quite exemplary. She repeatedly emphasized the need for women and girl children to be educated.

Since the beginning of the war and until today, Liberia has experienced a strong growth in women's organizations and influence through their joint effort to tackle complex problems. The women's engagement in war and peace has led to an influx of donor funding and programs, some forms of which have become criticized, like the practice of paying "sitting fees" (Fuest 2009, Schäfer 2008). Some scholars talk of the "aid business" and "workshop culture" (Fuest 2007: 12) or yet another "talkshop" (Baaz and Utas 2012b: 8), indicating that though foreign help is needed, but implementation is often questionable and ineffective. The hundreds of NGO signboards in the capital and beyond suggest that much is being done, yet, ordinary people do not confirm such development, as they still lack the most basic goods and services – roads, clean water, or health services. A range of local NGOs, especially women, were benefitting from funding and even though it is often criticized that donor aid will lead to a one-way flow of interests, I have observed a range of local organizations that do have their own agenda and find ways of both living up to the donor's as well as their own interests and agendas.

In a nutshell, women have been politically active in the past, during the war, and after the war. Many women lead households due to the absence of their husbands or partners, and others are breadwinners due to the joblessness of their men. Nevertheless, women actively forge their lives as well as their social roles. In the aftermath of the war, the government has adjusted a number of policies, however, implementing these novel standards remain one of the biggest challenges on an institutional level to the present government, due to conflicting imaginaries and a range of personal or diverging interests of respective actors. Most often, they simply lack capacities. Nevertheless, the government uses symbols, metaphors and monuments to pass its message. Such has been depicted in the previous chapter, and in the following, another aspect in relation to elections will be presented.

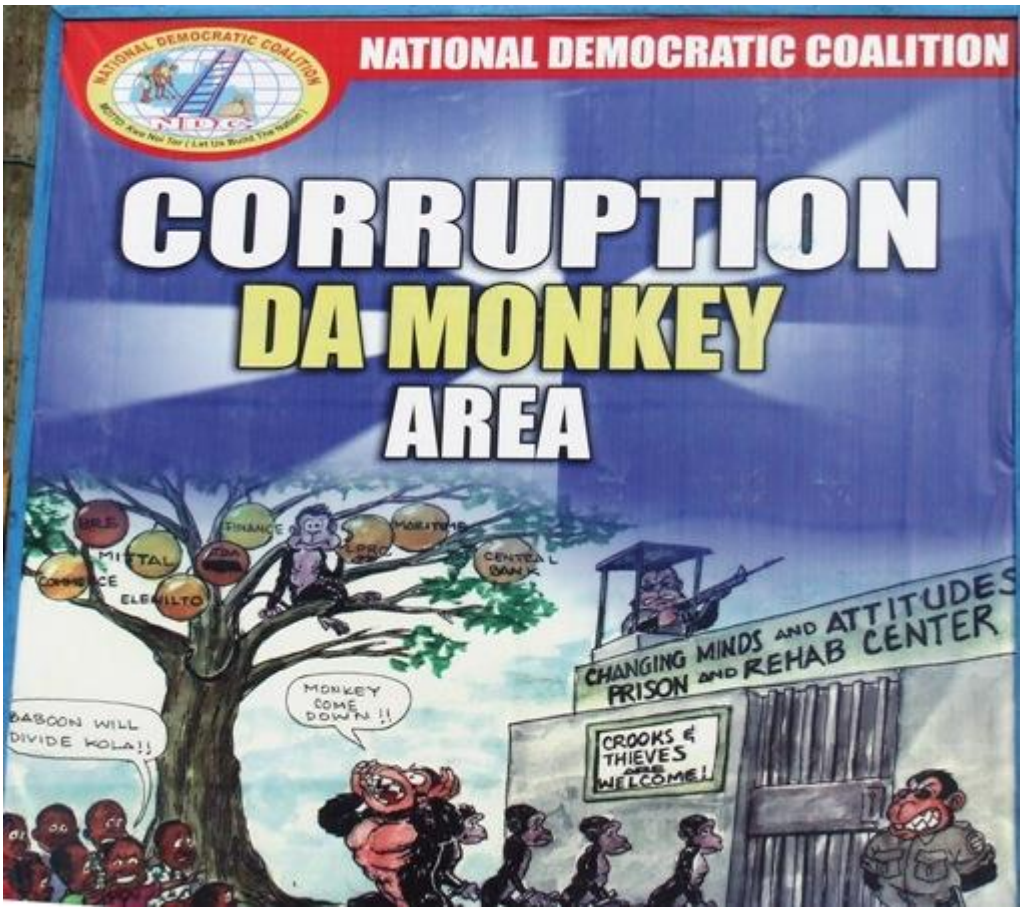
5.5. Elections Between Democratization and Economic Opportunities

The golden statue in front of the new National Elections Commission (NEC) building was meant to be an image and symbol for practices of a 'new woman'. It is placed at the entry of the new NEC building along the Tubman Boulevard, the main road through Sinkor. It depicts a woman dressed in Liberian style, a *lappa suit,* and with a baby on her back. She is about to cast a ballot. An NEC official (interview, Monrovia, 07.04.2010) stated that the statue is loaded with meaning. He referred to the dominant discourse of women having been

discouraged of voting, or who have been harassed for political statements, just like Ellen Johnson Sirleaf had been while in opposition with Samuel K. Doe. The statue represents an image of change - of the now empowered woman - and is first and foremost supposed to be a symbol for women and encourage them to vote. It also stands for members of other social categories that have been deprived in the past, such as the elderly, the 'native Liberians', the disabled; in sum, people who are considered to have been marginalized in the past. These people have a central position in this democracy, the informant of the NEC said, quite in line with the present government's rhetoric of political inclusion. It is an effort of the government to encourage Liberian citizens from all walks of life to participate and vote. This state image is worth a closer look, especially where the image meets practices such as the registration and 2011 presidential and parliamentary elections. The parliamentary and presidential elections were scheduled for October 11, 2011. 16 presidential candidates were registered (African Elections Project 2011b). The NEC had registered 1'798'930 voters (National Elections Commission 2011c). Voter turnout was at 71.6% (1'288'716), which was slightly less than in 2005 (74.9%) (Harris and Lewis 2013: 84). The NEC was criticized by many for being closely linked to and working in favor of the incumbent. In the view of many Liberians and based on past experiences, presidents had been the center of patrimonial relations, and ordinary people experienced presidents as upmost power holders with access over all state's resources. Elections were restricted to an elite few during the time of 'Americo-Liberian' rule, rigged in the 1985 by Samuel K. Doe, affected by war and violence in 1996 or believed to have been influenced by 'the international community' in 2005. To what extent past events surrounding elections are factual is one aspect, but the belief of the people – hence a social construction - is what counts as reality and what informs people's practices. What people learned from the past was that their affiliation to the biggest person would assure personal advantage: Big people from the past normally remain connected on the highest level, and by "pledging support", goods and services were distributed and promised. However, as one might be loyal to several big people, one has to be careful about the display of support, and has a spectrum of negotiation, as will become evident in the case studies of COMASL, UDAFOL and the West Point Women. Bayart derived the understanding of *faire de la politique* in Senegal as the translation from Wolof as well as Pulaar meaning "to be devotee of a leader or of a faction, and work actively in their interest" (Bayart 2009: 212). He extends this to all activity of institutions and associations in society, not only the governmental sphere. In Liberia's post-war context, Utas et al. (2012a) show how elections are vital part of *big man politics* and patrimonial relations (see also Bøås and Utas 2014). Christensen (2012) demonstrated how war loyalties persist in post-war contexts and build on the workings of alliances of powerful *big men*, which becomes particularly visible around elections.

Although most Liberian were critical and aware of what elsewhere has been called "watermelon politics" or *politricks* (Christensen and Utas 2008), often, election is considered to be but about promises. Nevertheless, most associations were much engaged in the process, and the election period did materialize in several

ways. The groups' activities culminated in the pre-election period, in which they met regularly and debated issues of alliances and claims towards political leaders. Political leaders, on the other hand, were seeking supporters, and in urban contexts, it is often easier to link up with the deprived people to gather support (Lindell 2010: 4). Central concern was the mass of (unemployed) youth. In early 2011, indeed, local football associations received financial and in-kind contributions. The West Point football field had been renovated and painted by the son of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.[140]



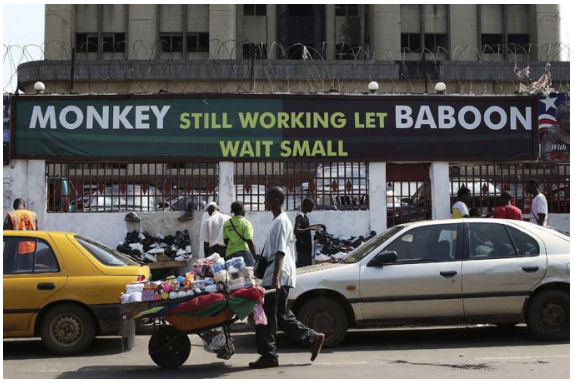
Picture 10: An election poster of a coalition of opposition parties (Source: The Informer, 29.09.2011).

Election posters exhibited a range of images in relation to the state. In picture 10, the strongest opposition party draws on a political metaphor that has a long history in Liberia. As shown in chapter 3.6., Samuel K. Doe referred to the 'Americo-Liberian' ruling oligarchy as the monkeys that abused the natives, the baboons. Whereas the monkey are sent to the "Changing minds and attitudes prison", the Liberian population anticipates the baboon's dividing of the spoils, rather than the monkey in the trees not sharing with the people. It also had an audible dimension of the popular song "Monkey come down". The UP party, the party of the incumbent, made use the same metaphor and imagery. The UP party used the slogan "Monkey still working,

[140] Robert Sirleaf, billionaire and founder of the Robert Sirleaf Foundation, son and advisor of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, was praised for the welfare projects, which were, however, also criticized for being campaign projects, cf. Executive Mansion (2010).

let Baboon wait small", and emphasizing in a number of posters what they Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Vice President Joseph Boakai had been doing (Picture 11 and 12). "Da their area" is a popular slogan and had a song by the group "African Soldier" to praise the realms of the incumbent. Picture 11 refers to "their area", their professional realm as fighting corruption, one of the central problems allocated to past and present governments.

Picture 11: UP party election poster (Source: movedtomonoriva.blogspot.ch, no date)



Picture 11: The incumbent's UP party metaphor (Source: Aljazeera/Reuters, 06.10.2011)

Another topic is education, accountability, international respect, women's rights or oil exploration. The election campaigning started in July 2011. At the time of my research in early 2011, the big "keeping the promise" posters were already considered as campaigning and contested in some news articles, however, people were certain that much that was done within the communities was due to the upcoming elections. "Election roads" were built, in the people's mind's eyes. The West Point football field had been renovated and painted by the son of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.[141] In my community of residence, the footballers received cold water from their sponsor. However, alliances are not only made vertically with the ordinary people, but also horizontally among and between parties and leaders; shifts, alliances and splits take place at all times, and programs or ideologies rather get lost in the shuffle (Harris and Lewis 2013: 82). Alliances are made, hardened or change, and goods are distributed or promised to the constituency. The elections revealed central aspects of post-war power arrangements. In 2011, the UP headquarter moved from a rather unnoticed compound on Broad Street towards Congo Town, where the fleet of white pick-ups was very visible along the road. The display of power of the UP attracted everyone's attention. A range of political actors from the opposition changed side, most prominently former NPP then CDC party member Eugene Nagbe, who became UP's campaign manager (African Elections Project 2011a), and as a result became Minister of Transport (Gerdes 2013: 234).

[141] Robert Sirleaf, billionaire and founder of the Robert Sirleaf Foundation, son and advisor of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, was praised for the welfare projects, which were, however, also criticized for being campaign projects, cf. Executive Mansion (2010).

Others continued to feel excluded, and observe social markers being instrumentalized both by the constituency as well as the political aspirants. In the election process, a common issue was the questioning of Mandingo as considered foreigners and hence, not eligible to vote.[142] This is an old topic in social sciences, as in each societies, cleavages exist. Some societal markers are more powerful in creating a sentiment of "we" and belonging, and are used to differentiate against the other (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Even though social actors are part of various groups and have multiple identities, a specific dimension may contextually bring about a stronger sense of identity than others. From shared experiences in Liberia, access to state's resources are facilitated through members of one's own group, or if state actor share ones' grievances. Consequently, social actors seek the most promising political leader (Posner 2005). However, there has to be a real chance for someone to become a leader, and contributions of some kind in advance are necessary to prove commitment. Institutions in such an interlinked "state in society" (Migdal 2001) are challenged regarding trustworthiness. For members of the opposition and/or critiques of the government, the NEC is considered to be biased and in favor of the incumbent (Bøås and Utas 2014). Well before the elections, members of the Mandingo ethnic group, whose belonging to the Liberian nation-state is contested by some, made public statements indicating partiality and ill-preparedness of the NEC personnel. This was confirmed by the former president of the Liberian National Students Union (LINSU), though not a representing the Mandingo, but further differentiating the critique towards the NEC:

> "talking about electoral law, the none independence of the election commission, the chairman of the elections commission [is contested]. The religious leader of the Muslim council also complained about it. These are signals and blinkers that tell that trouble is around if we are not careful. These are signals and blinkers in the Far East and coming closer - government needs to listen! To what they are saying. Government needs to listen to what they are saying! Government is not listening." (Interview, 07.03.2011)

Though the elections were accompanied by national and international observers added on legitimacy over the institution and processes, there occurred a range of complications already in the registration process. An informant doubted the number of people registered, namely 1'798'930 voters (National Elections Commission 2011c), was correct: Almost half of the population[143] is simply too high, he found, considering that more than 50% of the population under the age of voter eligibility. Many of my informants in 2010, and especially at my second term in the field in early 2011 debated irregularities, uttered a general disinterest towards elections, and observed the "election business": Aspiring parliamentarians were funding trucks to transport voters to the respective electoral districts to register. The registration process generated a range of temporal job opportunities at the polling centers, and many NGO workers applied at NEC for funding for civic education projects and observing the registration and election process.[144] Whereas many profited economically

[142] The topic of politicization of ethnicity is elaborated in two papers (Ammann and Kaufmann 2013 and 2014).
[143] According to the 2008 census, Liberia had a population of 3'489'072 (Government of Liberia 2009: 3).
[144] A range of informants had received funding by the NEC. The West Point Women were rejected, however, they received a task by WONGOSOL to do so. So evidently, there were other sources of funding opportunities surrounding the elections.

from the elections, others debated about democracy being reduced to registering and voting - why should they "waste their time and stand in line"?[145] These were some of the arguments that key informants and friends were debating. Though they had different political opinions, many agreed that "too many promises were made", and not held. Political leaders were criticized that they rather competed for a piece of the national cake than serving their people. Ruth said that 14 of her friends were politically ambitious, and she did not know whom to give her vote to. The competition over votes became tense, and her statement also shows that for the social actors, expectations of loyalty can cause dilemmas, but also situations in which they all of a sudden have assets in their hands to make claims in return to their vote. Elections exhibit power relations and social alliances.[146]

In the course of the election process, tensions intensified. A Liberian intellectual for example explained how votes had been calculated the wrong way. The ballot had a mistake on it, but though the text was still understandable, it was not changed. However this was yet again an argument against the competencies of the NEC (Bayjay 23.08.2011). Subsequent to the first round of presidential elections, an erroneous letter led to an éclat: The letter declaring the election winner was sent to both the winning party and the strongest opposition party. Even though the NEC chairman subsequently stepped down, the major opposition party CDC boycotted the second round (Harris and Lewis 2013: 89). CDC supporters subsequently took to the streets, and the violent protest rendered several people dead and the police was severely criticized over the abundant use of violence. Though this incident ended lenient and with the victory of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a vast number of unsatisfied people remains, and regularly threat to demonstrate.

Taking part in the pre-election period and registration revealed a range of mental images on the political landscape post-war Liberia. As the statue of the golden woman remains as a symbol for the marginalized citizens in the past, she stands for the ordinary people who continue to feel manipulated and used for certain interests. They are not devoid of agency and likewise continue to actively shape social relationships to political leaders. They carry on holding strong arguments at hand which they formulate to claims: responding to promises of provision of public goods and services.

5.6. More than Roads: Arteries of Social Life

Roads are a very particular but central image of post-war Liberia: Roads seem to be at the core where state images and practices - or in this example non-practices – meet the expectations of the ordinary people. Almost all conversations about the state at some point turn to roads. Unlike most other issues, interestingly, the problem of roads existed already in *normal days*, they recall.

[145] "Don't waste my time" is a frequent expression, as the precarious everyday is time consuming, hence, time is precious.
[146] Similarly so in many European countries (Basedau 2007: 8).

Roads are not only expensive, but essential physical infrastructures. They link people, and their absence separate them from one another. They are the infrastructural counterparts of social networks; they are the means for access to resources of various kinds, such as goods, services, communication, education, or kin relations. Roads link the capital city to the other parts of the country, and are "roads to power" (Herbst 2000: 170) in a double sense of the term. Despite their importance in all realm of political, social or economic, roads have a more ambivalent history in Liberia than other public goods and services: In the past and today, roads have always been in precarious provision, as both the informants confirm and the historical sources and collective memory tell us. Tubman was the first president to construct roads into the hinterland, and public roads increased from 0 miles in 1945 to 129 miles of paved roads in 1961 (Clower *et al.* 1966: 32). In the 1980s, the density of roads remained far lower than in the surrounding countries, and were concentrated to the west of the country (Fuest 1996: 53). Roads are linked to economic and social transition: Wherever a road was built, there was more mobility of goods and people. This is evaluated in a similar way today, put to the point by Emmanuel: "Where there is no road, there is no life" (Monrovia, 07.11.2009). Apart from being expensive in construction and maintenance, bad roads and lacking bridges can be part of political strategies in controlling and hindering flows of goods and people, and controlling this liveliness. This also means that providing such infrastructures and access to the hinterland could create a bigger threat to power than benefit for the people; "roads allow the capital to reach outward but also allow those in the hinterland to march more quickly to the center of power" (Herbst 2000: 170, cf. Scott 1998).

For many ordinary people, roads are also symbolic for modernity. Robust and fancy infrastructures link up the imagery with a social imaginary, just like the bridges and broad roads in Abidjan are mentioned as examples of how Monrovia could and should look like. There was not a single informant not criticizing the government for the bad and non-maintained road system; for them, roads are the key of linking workplace to home, of linking family members, and, citizens to their state. A passport could only be produced in Monrovia, and until recently, a birth certificate could only be obtained in the capital (Plan International: no date). Prerequisite to registering a political party is a party headquarters in Monrovia. The absence of roads – bad infrastructures and consequently scarce and expensive transportation possibilities - continues to disintegrate the social actors in the Liberian interior and keeps up pejorative notions such as "country people" as opposed to the "city girl" (young woman, Monrovia, 19.11.2009). A young girl of fourteen years of age explained that her father was from Grand Kru County. She had never been there and also had no interest to do so. Asking her what she knows about her County, she said:

> "Grand Kru is backward. In the future, maybe there will be roads. Like you see most of the groups, like business people, usually go to Maryland, but going to Grand Kru, it's kind of hard. Due to the roads. So they are not able to carry their goods to Grand Kru. So if they can fix the roads, then I think, Grand Kru will be better." (Interview, Monrovia, 11.03.2010)

This girl expresses what many people think but would not say in the presence of my recording devise. Many argue that vast parts of the country are cut off due to the bad roads, and especially so during the rainy season. This poses the rural areas in an ambiguous space between highly valued roots in villages, which serves as evidence of belonging, and enables social connections on one hand, but at the same token, one laments lack of infrastructures and prefers the possibilities and freedoms of an urban life. It is an ambivalent approach that has its roots in history. Situationally a person was urged to take back his or her identity in order to gain access to 'Americo-Liberian' dominated social spaces. Yet emphasizing one's identity served as proof of citizenship by pinpointing at a homeland. As such, we can understand present-day practices against the various subjective and shared experiences in the past including the war, where identities were constructed situationally and temporally in regards to personal and social advantages or bare survival. The young schoolgirl, full of ambition to upward social mobility, does not want to be associated with her Kru kin on-stage of our interview.

The 'hinterland' is vastly still cut off, even though President Johnson Sirleaf has resumed the unification paradigm of President Tubman. It aims at closing the cleavages of society that were and still are reality in many minds. In regards to the roads as a good to be provided by the public administration, there has not been a significant difference to the *normal days*. Roads and means of transportation had lacked in the past and some people recall that their parents had to walk for days from the interior, all the way through the dense forest area to reach Monrovia. Authorities were carried in hammocks by unpaid or forced porters. When President Tubman had built some of the roads in the interior, there was soon more exchange as trade increased, at least along these transport routes. Mandingo traders brought goods from the neighboring countries and traded local goods (Konneh 1996b: 13). The elite went into the interior to build farms. Likewise the "catchment area of foreign aid" (Fuest 2010: 5) was limited to areas which are accessible by roads.

In 2012, the majority of the most common roads in Montserrado County were rebuilt or under construction. One of the central traffic axis towards Voinjama was supposed to be constructed by Libya, but due to the Libyan conflict, the project came to a standstill. Needs for goods and exchange with their home counties remain unfulfilled, and whereas in the interior farm products are said to rot, the densely populated capital city lacks fresh farm products. Within Monrovia, even West Point had received two paved roads. Better roads led to more traffic, and there were new intricacies in regards to transportation, as heavy traffic jams emerged. Due to loss of time and income, taxi drivers avoided the most congested roads – where there was highest need for transportation. Policy-makers aimed at seeking solutions, yet the decisions taken, such as the banning of motorbikes or a high tax on taxis, increased the burden of the ordinary people that were left to walk the streets.[147]

[147] A critical contribution examining the consequences of these policies was published as a think piece (Kaufmann 2014).

5.7. Normal Days and the Politics of Making the Future

The past is often *imagined*, whereas something remembered is presented as blurred but factually based (Casey 2000b). Against the background of the history chapter that illuminated the mental images and factual past of Liberia, and the present state images that are used by social actors and associations to articulate their claims, this section introduce a central emic concept, *normal days*. The imagined pre-war social context of Liberia is often expressed with a nostalgic connotation as the *normal days*, also by social actors that are in fact too young to remember this time. This imagined past is composed of selected elements or fragments of the 'good old days'.

At the time of this research, Liberians found themselves at a crossroads. In many informant's narratives, a certain pattern reveals the three temporal-contextual periods in their life: a challenging present just coming from war, nostalgic sentiments about the pre-war remembered and imagined *normal days*, and emerging perspectives of a better future which seems but a stone throw away due to the many possibilities of the aid industry and private companies. As highlighted in this chapter, Liberians regularly hear and read in the news about vast donor funds flowing into the country. A time of transition creates new opportunities and room for imagination about how the future could be like. However, it also brings uncertainties for some, as for example the "new" human rights were considered as a useful resource for underlining some actor's claims, whereas others were confused by the changing norms and unsure about possible consequences. Many social actors had become accustomed to the harsh conditions that survival along the continuum of war and peace required, and now had difficulties to adjust to new social conventions and sanctions in the framework of 'peace'.

References to the past were very frequent, even if many did not have subjective experiences of *normal days*. The notion *normal days* was very common in everyday discussions during a vast part of my research period in urban Liberia. Often, people evaluated a certain condition or in particular public event in contrast to how it had been those days, many have heard of ostentatious parades and cheerful crowds, and today they lack such splendor. *Normal days* are imagined and remembered to be a standard of what potential there actually could be, and as such, are collectively shared and become intersubjective. *Normal days* encompass an everyday structured by established routines, and, most importantly, a certain standard of living people had been habituated to. The following statement by an intellectual who has experienced *normal days* illustrates this:

> "[M]any people rightly refer to what they call normal days in comparison to what has become so abnormal in our lives, occasioned by the conflict. So if you aim for the comparison between those two - the war, when people were running helter-skelter and so forth, before the war, it was not like that. It was normal. People were like at home, people were doing what they call their regular everyday scope of life. So life moved at a normal pace. It was normal, people lived where they wanted to live, they moved when they wanted to move, they farmed when they wanted to farm, they did things that they thought was beneficent for them." (Monrovia, 11.07.2012)

These notions are about sensations of an imagined, romanticized home against the confusing mobility and homelessness associated with war times. In the history chapter, I highlight arguments of people remembering new and positive possibilities in the 1980s, such as access to education and government positions in Monrovia. This period before the war was situationally and temporally very violent, and freedom was often constrained. Yet, for ordinary people, the normal is about routines, familiarity, and the orderliness of the everyday. *Normal days* is not only about familiarity, the neighborly, face-to-face realms and interactions, but also the state's actors and their provision of goods and services. The perception of (in)security is different from the experienced (in)security – people imagine what is a real or hypothetical possibility (Casey 2010), and whereas crime rates are decreasing according to statistics (Sengbeh 08.07.2010) and law enforcement officer's statements, it will take time and positive experiences to change the mental images many people have, for example, of the police. Similar so for other public goods and services that are imagined to have been better before, e.g. often mentioned is the medical system:

> "Hospitals were there, good hospitals, plenty. Now, hospitals are there, but money [you have to pay] is too much. It's like there was no hospital! Before, there was 'Doctor Turnaround' in Sinkor. You go, you get treatment, you turn around and go home. It was very good, he was a very good doctor."(Middle-aged woman, New Kru Town, 12.01.2010)

Especially women expressed concern about today's health system; indeed, clinics are crowded and the health workers are said to take bribes. For *normal days*, Fraenkel (1970 [1964]: 63) accounts of only two hospitals in Monrovia. Most clinics were operated in the city center, and many private clinics were flourishing and had foreign health practitioners. The elite preferred to use the private clinics, or went abroad for treatment. Dunn and Holsoe (1985: 89) state that there had been a strong increase in availability of medical services from the 1970s onwards. There was a decrease in hospital beds per person from 1.6 in 1975 to 0.7 in 2009. The number of physicians per 1'000 people reached a maximum of 0.1 in 1983, and reached its lowest ratio in 2008 with 0.014 physicians per 1'000 people (Index Mundi 2008). In this light, it did not surprise that the Ebola outbreak in 2014 led to an epidemic and high mortality rates in Liberia (Heitz Tokpa, Zanker and Kaufmann 2015). Personal observations and informal conversations with physicians confirmed the scarcity of health professionals. At the visit to the 'Small Catholic', a hospital in New Kru Town, we counted about 40 people, mostly mothers, sitting in the waiting room. It was 4pm and the Sierra Leonean doctor looked exhausted. Nevertheless, he took a few minutes to explain, for example that he observed improving health conditions of the people (Monrovia, 12.01.2010).

Though things were not like *normal days*, yet, they seemed to be improving, and though impatient, people saw little changes happening (Kaufmann 2011a). In 2012, the popular notion and discussion of *normal days* had temporally been replaced by the 'Vision 2030'. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf had started her second term, and the elections campaigns were over. The imaginary of the future received a political program: The newly launched Vision 2030, a national program initially aiming at exploring how the citizens imagine 2030. I took

note of the debates it provoked as they came close to the research questions I pursued: how do you imagine the future to be like, and what do you expect from the state for your life? The national visioning was the successor of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) that had run out by the end of 2011 – far from being completed.[148] UNDP integrated Vision 2030 into phase one and two of the PRS (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2011), however, in popular understanding, it was considered the successor of the PRS. The national visioning project was established in 2011, when the institutional frameworks, structures and capacities were built. A National Visioning Secretariat had been established and a brochure with the title "transforming the future of Liberia" had been printed. The Vision 2030 program was launched on February 10, 2011 by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. The Vision 2030 declares its aims on a website and a flyer; in addition, it has already been widely debated in the media and the public (Government of Liberia 2012). Emphasized several times on the website, the Vision 2030 should be a vision of the people and by the people, hence a participatory endeavor. Thereby, it aimed to elaborate how the people view the future of their country through various workshops in the various counties, districts, and the diaspora. Interesting was the organizations' evaluation of the future as follows:

> "The Visioning Exercise is essentially to explore the future. The future is filled with possibilities but unpredictable or uncertain. However, it would be shaped by internal and external forces. Being uncertain does not necessarily mean that our future is bound by fate; whether pleasant or feared. What is certain is that we have the freedom to take the necessary steps to claim the future for ourselves. In other words, the future is partially in our hands." (Government of Liberia 2012)

Previous efforts to development are criticized as having been short-termed approaches without involvement of the people. I gathered information from the media, websites and informal discussions, and met with the chairperson of the Vision 2030, Mr. Tipoteh (personal communication, Monrovia, 23.07.2012). He had been approached and appointed as chairperson when the program was already launched and apparently was informed through media communication that he was supposed to chair the program. Having been part of the opposition and a presidential candidate, he is a vital critique of the government and its practices. Mr. Tipoteh was critical about the program, the motto - "how can the future be transformed?", and many assumptions about the future that have already been made. For over a month he had been trying to obtain an independent license plate for the "National Vision vehicle", instead of the government license plate. He assumed that the government intended to make him appear as working for the government, which he rejected. The national vision ought to be the people's vision, and not the government's, he emphasized, and making a strong point in the sense of Scott's (1998) critique of powerful planners' ignorance of practical knowledge of the people, and in favor of the top-down view. Planning the future means to include the people's view and knowledge, hence, the wide range of opinions into the common project.

[148] An interview with a representative of the Peacebuilding Fund explained that quantitatively, much was done, however, quality of goods and services were beyond expectations (interview, Monrovia, 31.05.2010).

With other informants and in a meeting with the West Point Intellectual Forum (WEPIF), I discussed the notions of *normal days* and Vision 2030. To some, it was clear that the President is trying to collaborate with all opposition, and including the national visioning chairman which they know to be a long term opposition candidate, "one of the brains of the nation", as for example Emanuel denoted. It is part of a political strategy, many thought, and were not surprised. One person said that the President integrated members of the opposition, which means that she does not trust them. Others agreed, and stated that therefore, the government manipulated these actors by using strategies to collaborate with them. Mr. Tipoteh, the chairman of the Vision 2030, however, evaluated his involvement and the challenging tasks with a decisive smile "where there are challenges, there are also opportunities." He had accepted the chairmanship of this program because it provided the opportunity to make people talk, "and if people talk, they will not fight".

The discursive formation of the future project raised and fueled debates and critiques about the promises the government has made and not implemented; according to chairman Tipoteh, for example, 92% of the county development funds had been misallocated and the projects failed. He adds that there has never been a government evaluation report. This goes in line with discussions with ordinary people who think that the vision 2030 is just another of these *en vogue* programs now and will be "out" quite soon. A young many summarized: "we are good at making policy. That's one part - we are good at making those policy. But to put it into practicality, that's the problem we have" (group discussion, West Point, 21.07.2012). Many people doubted that these well-sounding state-related programs would change anything in the future, just like others were not implemented.

> "[I]f you look at historic standpoint, from 1950, when we had President Tubman, he had the Open Door Policy. What the Open Door Policy did for us? Eh? We cannot have anything from that Open Door Policy. When Tolbert came, Tolbert came with Self-Relying, Mats to Mattresses, nothing, it died down. Other government came. With Green Revolution. Nothing. And Taylor government came. Vision 2024, what was the Vision 2024? We cannot see nothing, the vision died down. Madam Sirleaf came, again, with the Poverty Reduction Strategy. No good implementation. Nothing. None of the people have benefitted a lot from the Poverty Reduction Strategy. It passed away. Now the government is coming with Vision 2030." (Young man, West Point, 21.07.2012)

This argument summarizes a commonly shared imaginary of government and the state. It includes experiences of past regimes, which are remembered as having been ambivalent. On the one hand, some people remember the economic growth during Tubman's rule. These programs promised so much, but in the end, they were always replaced by a new ruler with a new program. From this point of view, they see minor changes, which they grade as "nothing" in comparison to their expectations of what could be possible with the "hundreds of millions" that flow into the country. Government employees are seen with a new fleet of cars. Corruption and nepotism were always criticized by the very rulers themselves, legitimizing revolutions and coups. This is reflected in everyday discussions, popular culture and critique of the very government employees. The young Westpointer goes on hinting at the social differences in the country, and as long as

these are not overcome, there will be not change:

> "I want for the steering committee of the Vision 2030 to come down to slum communities, New Kru Town, West Point, ghetto area, where we can discuss this Vision 2030, because this Vision 2030 is for all of us, not only for few group of people, elite up there, no. Because we would be discussing what we want to see in this vision."

West Point constitutes a kind of antithesis of 'modern' Monrovia – hence, modern Liberia - as it is considered poor, overcrowded, and stigmatized as being dangerous. Yet, the mostly young men of the West Point Intellectual Forum are well informed and aware of the social cleavages. The critical discussion about the Vision 2030 gave a new impetus to the social imaginary of a better future:

> "Yes, 18 years from now I want for West Point to be like - like New York City. 18 years from now we want for our country to be on the right track in terms of democratic principle, economic empowerment, peace and security, those are things we want to be in the, in the Vision 2030." (Group discussion, West Point, 21.07.2012)

The young man refers to infrastructures as well as very normative standards. New York is not just a city, but rather, as imagined by a range of social actors around the globe as symbol of urban modernity, freedom, and the good old 'American Dream' - the locus of real and hypothetical possibilities. Interestingly, he is imaging Monrovia like New York, and such imagination of a better future uses utopic elements to elucidate subjective expectations. Another person uses Paris to express his imagination of the future, and specifies a timeline:

> "For me, I see Liberia to become what we used to call before in fact, a Paris. To be a Paris. That's my vision. Maybe I might not be there to see it, but my children." (West Point, group discussion, 21.07.2012)

These comparisons were not heard the two previous years of this research. In the past, some informants mentioned Abidjan to elucidate the imagined future. Abidjan seemed to be a city of modernity, with fashionable and functioning infrastructures, and situated in a neighboring country, it seemed a realistic goal. However, in the course of this research, the neighboring country was seriously affected by war, which could have influenced Liberians' imagination of the future and may have turned the compass of imagination to a new direction of orientation. As it enhanced social imaginaries of the future, still, most of my informants doubted that the Vision 2030 will include their perspective, not to mention the implementation and transformation of this vision into reality. They questioned the commission as well as the "sincerity of Liberians": they felt that this program again brings chances for a few, whereas the broad populace will be left with their imaginaries.

Normal days and the Vision 2030 mark a temporal-imaginary intersection in 2012's post-war Liberia. It is where the past meets with the future in the present. It links experiences, and an imagined orderly past with expectations of the future, facilitated by the state. Against the backdrop of preceding chapters, the ordinary people demand the government to take lead and enhance change with the support of international actors and funding.

6. CRAFTING A PRESENT AND A FUTURE

Previous chapters of this book dealt with the becoming of the Liberian nation-state. At center stage stood the particularities of Liberia's past, the ruptures of the late 1980s and the subsequent war, and lastly the transformations that took place since "they told Taylor to leave". The previous chapter reflected on the imaginary of government and the state and what Liberians expect from it in regards to a better future for themselves and society. The chapter remained at a discursive level of how people take up topics in popular discussions in myriad urban social spaces. This chapter turns to social practices in the context of a war-affected, urban context. These practices, drawing on the definition of agency by Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 969) hold that the "construction of temporal perspectives is fundamentally an intersubjective process, constituted by the ability to hold simultaneously to one's own and to another's viewpoint". It analyses how these subjective and intersubjective imaginaries of the social translate into practices in the post-war everyday. What social trajectories exist in fixing and forging ones' life in a demanding social and physical setting? I had spent the first weeks and months in Monrovia documenting the ample avenues for economic practices ranging from second-hand shoe-vendors to motorbike riders, deep-sea fishermen, market men, businesswomen, NGO leaders and workers, and many others. I attempted to compute financial incomes and expenditures of these broad and multifold economic practices in order to grasp monetary flows. However, the complexity and multifaceted non-monetary contributions such as interpersonal favors and patterns of mutual help were of higher importance to their lives and made real monetary profits appear as subordinate. Comparable to many other inhabitants of African cities, social security is not provided through the state,[149] but rather by support from family members, lovers, friends and acquaintances. It is a methodological challenge to grasp these manifold strategies, as they are often concealed. Many present themselves to *big people* as poor and in need of support (Fuest 1996: 23–24).

In this chapter, I will first show how social becoming is related to *big people*, but often means subjective struggle, uttered in emic terms of *trying* and *hustling*. Both emic concepts are defined in the two subsequent subchapters. These practices emphasize individual efforts, but take place in a social environment. Education appears centrally in all my informants' narratives. Education is the believed to be the link between the intricate present and a desired future. The last chapter turns from individual to collective strives for a better future. It deals with associational life as a way of creating novel and alternative horizontal as well as vertical social relations, extends the means of social security and integrates hustling activities, and is both entertaining and inspiring. Associations tie groups together in a heterogeneous and changing urban context and contain grievances. They provide a social space for sharing social imaginaries.

[149] There do exist insurance companies, but are in general not relied, people say. Whereas market women told me there was no insurance companies, the LMA (interview, Monrovia, 18.11.2009) or at the government (interview, Monrovia, 25.11.2009) account of such. Whereas the first interview partner was part of such an insurance scheme, the second was not.

6.1. *BIG PEOPLE* AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

> "… tha' government worker there, tha' so so crook; we see them riding big big cars, they say the government broke. My man, you lie too much, you' talking spider story"
> HIPCO Star Ru Moni

In many Liberian folk tales, the spider[150] is found as one of the most intelligent and cunning of all animals. Spider often figures in company of his spouse and children, which endows him with manlike characteristics. In times of food scarcity, for example, he is the master of trickery and finds ways to sustain himself. In his selfish ways, spider manages to outsmart even his wife and offspring, and thereby manages to nourish himself even in times of hunger (Westermann 1921: 364). Spider is the embodiment of vice and immorality, and Himmelheber accounts for the Gio that people were enthusiastic about stories in which spider is defeated or outwitted (Himmelheber and Himmelheber 1958: 153).

In contemporary popular parlance, the expression *spider story* relates to intentionally distributed false information, excuses, or lies in an emic context. The notion of lie often comes into use in arguments in which a person accuses another of dispensing false information. Such lies do not affect social relationships in a way that they would raise mistrust or decrease in trustworthiness. Rather, they are to be understood as an essential element of social relations in action. The context is a complex social reality composed of interwoven relationships in which everybody is a client of someone, and a patron to someone else, which Caroline Bledsoe coined as "wealth in people" (Bledsoe 1980b: 55). These social relations are essential for protection, knowledge or access to resources such as land, working forces or marriage partners. They follow the rulings of affinity, consanguinity, and dependence (Johnson-Hanks 2006: 30), in Olivier de Sardan's terms "parent, ami ou connaissance" (Olivier de Sardan 2009a: 48) and the implicit rules of loving business (Fuest 1996).

The concept of *big men* has a long tradition in political anthropology, going back to Marshall Sahlin's study of attributes of political leadership and legitimacy in Melanesia (Sahlins 1963). The concept was adopted amongst others by Bayart (2009: 60–86) or Chabal and Daloz (1999: 15) to understand comparable practices in African societies. Utas et al. (2012) have conceptualized the notion to the analysis of transformation of vertical and horizontal social relations along the continuum of war and peace. *Bigmanity* was coined for this specific context and its dynamic interrelations of state and society (Utas 2012a). Drawing on emic notions of *big men* and networks, the authors show how social relations span spatio-temporally between nodal points throughout the entire society, hence include a wide span from elders in communities to the ministers and president. It also includes old networks of alliances and dependency that have been re-created in the post-war context, as Persson depicts in much detail for the ex-combatant's informal security provision in the

[150] Spiders as trickster figures are found in elder ethnographies of Gola, Kpelle (Westermann 1921) or Gio (Himmelheber 1958). However, spiders are found in other parts of the world, especially the Caribbean and the USA, most probably, the stories and folk tales travelled along with the slaves. The comic Spider Man is even related to this figure (http://www.anansistories.com/Anansi_Spider_Man.html, 06.03.2013).

Guthrie Rubber plantation (Persson 2012: 115). I make use of the emic notion *big people*[151] for this complex, diverse and shifting, temporal-situational category. The biggest of all is the president, followed by few other powerful political leaders which enjoy rational-legal legitimacy in Weber's (1980) terms due to having been elected into office by the votes of ordinary people. Bledsoe terms these as contract relations based on services (1980: 187). In the everyday, *big people* include influential social actors of neighborhoods, leaders of NGOs, businessmen and women, family heads or elders, hence, those who directly play a role in ordinary people's lives, and who stand in moral relationships to the others (cf. Bledsoe 1980: 187). Age and gender are no major constraints to becoming a *big person*. Hence, this emic notion entails dynamic in regards to temporality and degree. This is shown by Bledsoe in regards to the moral relations in the domain of the family; in contrast to contract relations, moral relations are subject to "informal maneuvering" and "emotional appeals" (1980: 187).

In many everyday situations in contemporary Monrovia, *big people* withhold certain commitments towards their clients. But there is a limitation of acceptance, and if big people do not deliver, clients will eventually seek another big person, or threat to do so. Hence, social relations are subject to dynamics and shifts (Utas 2012b: 13). As an example, the district representative's lack of engagement in the realms of health and sexualized violence in West Point was countered by the West Point Women's threat to turn to another political leader (see Chapter 9.4). The re-election of a non-delivering and not redistributing big person is at stake. Distributive practices therefore have to be carefully scrutinized by political leaders in order to maintain their positions, and manipulating relationships are at the core of the interaction within these social arrangements. In such contexts, lies indicate that one has detected the hidden agenda of the other and that promises are yet expected to be held; lies are reminders of moral expectations and formulated into a claim of what one believes to deserve. In practices such as self-staging as victims, clients present themselves in a poor condition and refer to the big person's will and generosity to take action on behalf of the client. A big person on the other hand contextually downplays or displays personal wealth. These are delicate and complex practices of giving, taking, and of being in someone's dept, and still remain central part of the moral economy. As the spiders in the folk tales, politicians make use of promises, and if not held or neglected, this will be added to the repertoire of claims people make towards them. The complexity of such relations becomes obvious in Bledsoe's example of an American Peace Corps teacher who observed a Liberian teacher being rather cruel to his students. Astonishingly, the students preferred the unpleasant teacher to others, because in specific circumstances he protected his students in disputes with other teachers, or situationally gave them good grades. He was a respected patron (Bledsoe 1980b: 54). Once again to use the spider trickster as a metaphor, big persons contextually appear to be vicious and cunning, and let people down. Though the *big peo-*

[151] A variety of notions are used for persons of higher status: *big person*, *big man*, *big woman*, *bossman*, *bosslady*, *the big big people*. A different notion signifying this relation is the frequently used notion *sponsor*.

ple minimally uphold the relationships, the clients have own means to influence relationships if they are unsatisfied, as often, they maintain connections to several big people and make use of these against another. Positions of *bigmanity* are not static as there are limitations of what is acceptable, and if a patron does not fulfill certain obligations, clients will mount pressure or seek to establish a relation to another big person.

Apart from control over social relations due to wealth and access to social relations, a second aspect may constitute to the becoming of a big person: the understanding of big people is often related to *book people*, a notion that is derived from *kwi*, which in a range of Liberian languages refers to the educated and/or elite (cf. Fuest 1996: 39).[152] Though these relational terms commonly used in the past are not as essential anymore in the present, they still have a contextual meaning in the imaginaries of the people and may be drawn upon for political advantages by opposition politicians, as for instance former INPFL commander and presidential candidate Prince Johnson had done in a critical newspaper article: in his government, there would be "no jobs for book people" (New Democrat 03.02.2010). The government of Johnson Sirleaf seeks educated people, and hence, *book people* are often found in public institutions, equipped with regular salary pay and additional benefits. Knowledge entails power that raises the social status of a person into the position of a *big person*, connected to further social and political obligations. In addition or in contrast to practical knowledge of the ordinary people, *metis* in Scott's (Scott 1998) conceptualization, a big person is furnished with *techne* which is connoted to higher prestige, and in particular historically related to power (Fuest 1996: 79). In the past, *techne* was related to the Liberian elite endowed with political power, education, and control over the economy. Being part of the category 'Americo-Liberian', however, was no guarantee for such economic or political power; there are a range of accounts of poor 'Americo-Liberians', and in fact, most started off in Liberia as power- and penniless (Tonkin 2010: 131). In the past, the oligarchic rule was maintained by the hegemony of the elite through the True Whig Party, their exclusive participation in religious societies or the Freemasons (Cohen 1981), which controlled the government, the army and other domains of power and might. The contemporary use of the term *big people*[153] fits to politically influential, economically established, and often also physically big persons, yet, in fact independent from ancestry and belonging. Their social position becomes visible at events where they are seated in a special way. They are offered a chair or seat immediately upon their arrival, depending on the event often apart from the other participants on an elevated platform facing the audience. Analyzing big people's involvement reveals that they are engaged in a range of societal obligations and activities. They often serve as sponsors to others, pay medical bills of family members, offer school fees, contribute to a graduation or religious event, provide gifts to the

[152] The exist a variety of translation of the notion *kvi* or *kui*, some more or less pejorative, and often used synonymous for 'civilized', 'educated', 'Americo-Liberian', etc. The origin is not clear (Ellis 2007: 305).

[153] "…the big people that are in the government, when they want position" (informal conversation, West Point women, 02.02.2010), but also the (formerly) young girl that conducts international trade now is "a big woman now" (informal conversation, Monrovia, July 2012).

local church or football club or fund a motorbike for a boy to run. As sponsors, they receive honors in return, such as being the namesake of a beneficiary's child, or receiving special seating at a celebration or in a taxi. They let others participate in their wealth and grant access to other resources, and distribute among their clients along complex rules of affinity, consanguinity, and dependence (Johnson-Hanks 2006: 30). The big people are expected to have, but also to give. They are often not freed from this obligation even if they are abroad, hence, networks expand over national boundaries and continents. Indeed, many people receive money or goods from the USA in containers that are shipped to Monrovia. Having a relative in the USA is both of symbolic and mere economic valuable, as they regularly send money or goods back home, sometimes entire containers with goods.[154]

To be a big person brings along further responsibilities beyond the material dimension. A big person is contacted to give advice and contribute to social cohesion, for example in resolving interpersonal disputes, most often within the family or the neighborhood. All informants that I apportion to the social position of a big person, most especially Ruth, Abraham or the vice-president of the West Point Women were often asked to resolve family conflicts or find a solution to social problems. Ruth and Abraham spent a vast part of their time in meticulous processes of dispute settlement, which, due to their work load, had to be conducted in the early mornings, evenings or over the weekends. Though these social actors were neither politically ambitious, particularly wealthy, nor were they the eldest among the family, they did enjoy much respect and authority, and through the social position they gained, they were called upon for dispute resolution. Responsibility, norms and values are expected to be overviewed by big people, and in particular political leaders are not devoid of critique despite their respectable position. This also leads to the imaginaries of the government and the president. Political leaders are expected to watch over society and initiate change, said for example a young Liberian man who participated in a group discussion in West Point:

> "[I]t depends on our leaders to change their minds and attitudes, if they change their minds and attitudes, like for example, you have a father in the house. If the father mind and attitude is not changed, the children mind and attitude will not be changed. (…) There's a common saying in our terrain that the fish starts to get rotten from the head. Similarly with our national leaders. Why do you expect the little man to change their minds? So, it has to start from the head, and gonna permeate, it has to come down to the common people." (Young man, Monrovia, 20.05.2010)

Social imaginaries link the big person to what anthropologist Jackson termed as protoparent (Jackson 2008). Parents are ambiguous in as they are caring but also restraining care, when necessary punishing, and most of all, parents are upholding and transmitting norms and put into effect according sanctions (see also Schatzberg 2001). Parental terms and nicknames are temporally and situationally applied to indicate intimate relations, and if so, they are of higher estimation than the notions of respect, for example 'old Ma',

[154] Prestigious material goods can serve manifold purposes. Firstly, they can be used by those who own them. Secondly, these goods get into the system of reciprocity: you can give it to somebody that you are indebted to. Thirdly, it can be sold to one of the kind of pawn shops in town, where you can "buy your own thing" should you later on have more money again. It is risky to have many valuables in an apartment for the risk to get stolen in case of a break-in: in many living rooms, valuables are not displayed.

'Ma', 'old Man' or 'Papay'.[155] These expressions do not necessarily refer to old age or biological parenthood but serve as an emphasis of respectfulness and personal relation to the speaker's lower position. In the earlier period of her presidency, Johnson Sirleaf is often referred to as 'Ma Ellen' (Moran 2009: 21, Moran 2012: 61), yet in the time of my research, I have rarely heard President Johnson Sirleaf being referred to by the prefix 'Ma' or similar notions indicating a close relationship.[156] Imaginaries about the social or political are often linked to the performance of the big people with whom they stand in relation. The high expectations towards such leading figures, in particular biggest person Johnson Sirleaf are explained with historical roles of chiefs and kings, to which parallels are made.

> "To understand it [the Liberian state], you have to go back to the time before the settlers came. For example, there was the Kissi Kingdom. It had one ruler, over a large space in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. They had their own identity and did a lot of trade with Sierra Leone, but not with the settlers. (…). To the Kissi, the community stood over the individual person. The chief would organize everything for the people. In case of war, he goes to the front line." (Interview, Monrovia, 15.06.2010)

My informant, being an academic, a religious leader and also upholding social responsibilities of conflict settlement, went on explaining that people imagine a president to be like such a chief endowed by ownership, control and leadership capacities. In this ideal relation to the people, chiefs do not pursue their own interest, but rather the interest of the people over whom they rule. As such, they ensure justice, health, and other aspects to permit orderly life. Though there existed an influential council, the chief was to take the last decision. A chief's power was never questioned by the people. But the chief took the advice of the council very seriously. Social groups would hold together in case of injustice, and chiefs would initiate reconciliation. Such idealized understandings of how political leaders ought to be are translated into the new conventions of government framed as democracy. Prevailing, however, are imaginaries of strong and just leaders that have the people at heart; "they are supposed to rescue us. To help us" said a market woman in Duala (interview, 14.11.2009), and literally and figuratively, "get us out of darkness."[157]

The imaginary of the government and the president builds on the imagination of rule and leadership, and deviating practices are criticized, as becomes evident in the text of the HIPCO star Ru Moni at the beginning of this chapter. The government workers drive fancy new cars but tell the people that the government is broke. People read in the newspapers about money disappearing and being mismanaged; they see pictures of government representatives posing with international politicians and investors, and hear about new concession agreements but also land grabbing. The ordinary people claim their share of promises by the *big*

[155] Establishing family relationship by using kinship terms is a common way of constructing a relationship of honor and belonging, which would involve me, a visible a stranger. I observed that whereby a person would expect money from me, as an example, I was temporally addressed with the prefix 'Ma', although the person was not only older could even be a respected person. After some time, I had turned back to 'sis' Andrea'.

[156] It does not mean that such notions are not situationally used to emphasize a relation.

[157] During mid-2010, the University of Liberia only had few hours of electricity per day, and students were complaining that no improvements can be made if even the university is kept, literally, in darkness.

persons on the political landscape, who, from their perspective are well furnished with foreign donor money and tax income. There was hope that the government would reestablish the conditions of normal days by creating jobs, for example, but then one of the first things the new government did was to lay off government employees in huge numbers, lament many people. Being a big person means that a range of expectations are projected towards the person; and a range of people aim at crafting a link to them. The higher and closer a person is to the government, the more the people expect from her or him. Many big people like Ruth or Abraham are vital social sources of advice, dispute settlement and knowledge, and social protection in the absence of the state providing such security.

6.2. *TRYING*

In a post-war and urban poor environment of myriad intricacies and an uncertain future, social actors are constantly evaluating possible trajectories, as the social environment and the social forces relevant therein are continuously shifting. It requires all components of agency at all times, which are conceptualized by a number of scholars as "social navigation" (Vigh 2006), or "fixing" (Fuh 2012), emphasizing the present actions in relation to the intricate social and structural context. It means a constant evaluation of the present situation and anticipation of possible future projects. Whereas scholars contextualize "life on hold" for African youth, cf. Diouf (2003: 6), I argue that in post-war, urban Liberia, life is "on hold" for a broad range of social actors.[158]

An expression I often heard in Liberian English highlights this particular temporal aspect of agency, namely the expression of *trying* which is frequently used in greetings. As part of an everyday greeting, one would ask the other how he or she was doing. As forms of interactions are quick to get habituated to, I only at a later stage began to reflect on the response to the question, "I'm trying". It is often put in the plural tense, "we are trying". It indicates not only that the present situation is not too unbearable, or else the person would indicate accordingly. *Trying* is strongly embedded in the present, in which it is directly related to existent struggles, and the future, which is uncertain but composed of projected hopes and expectations: It entails a projection towards the future, and as such indicates the efforts of an actor towards such aims. Its shapes may or may not appear on the horizon (yet), and they remain trying to make their future more predictable. Deriving from the concept of agency (Emirbayer and Mische 1998), a person projects from past experiences which have been somewhat rewarding, and, in addition to one's own, personal experiences from the past, practices of others might inform a person's agency. Social actors are constantly evaluating possible avenues and horizons. In a social and physical environment marked by intricacies and scarcities, it is of importance to establish, sustain and shape social relationships. Being "parent, ami ou connaissance" (Olivier de Sardan

[158] Life was most probably on hold for many in pre-war days too. Here again, the past is selectively remembered. Despite the economic decline in the 1980s, many remember the well-paid jobs at foreign companies in the period of "growth without development" (Clower *et al.* 1966).

2009a: 48) of an influential *big person* and his or her dense social network will increase chances and possibilities for protection and support. For many informants, accessing big people is rather challenging. James' story gave some insights of how he successfully managed, for example by offering his work in return for support. It required luck, say many who had a similar experience themselves, such as Ruth who was given a chance by an aunt after her mother died when she was a child. From the explanations of chances that people told me, it concerns not only rational decisions of adults over young clients, but, as in other parts of the world when it comes to opportunities: being offered and taking a chance. In the case of another informant, the situation was different. As the youngest of an influential family, most relatives left to the USA at the onset of the war, but he remained with some relatives, as he was a child. At the same time, for example Ruth integrated orphans[159] and children of poor people and looked after them in her home, sent them to school, and they in turn provided labor and also security.

Trying to achieve access to such actors can be exhausting. Often, a big person is asked for support, and despite the rejection, a person has to remain emotionless and continue trying. What else remains to do? But imaginaries of a better life are so strong as to lead a person take extra risks and efforts towards it. However, it is simply a radical necessity and as such there is not much alternative to it in this intricate context. Shaming is an alternative to put pressure on somebody. "We are tired" can be opposed by as an expression of *trying*: "we are tired" was displayed on posters of the Threshold Bill demonstration in January 2010, and was often used by the women's movements during civil war: "we are tired, we want peace" (African Women and Peace Support Group 2004).

It requires closer observations to understand at what moment social actors do not tolerate a certain condition anymore, what indicators pinpoint to a turning point. "Being tired" is serious and indicates, for example, giving up trying; when there does not seem to be any getting closer to a better situation, the imaginary is considered not a possibility anymore, so there grows a need for reorientation of one's agency to other options. For Henrik Vigh's youth of Bissau, such a possibility as an escape from "social death" is migration (Vigh 2009b: 94, passim).

For the present-day context of Monrovia, the future was uncertain, however, there appeared new possibilities: once in a while, social actors saw others being employed, or having temporal opportunities at an institution such as the National Elections Commission. Many tried to extend their knowledge and social relationships through education or NGO work, and increasingly, there seems to be spare money for a growing entertainment sector. Still, the present remained linked to an uncertain future, though the future is uncertain by definition. Also, for some, *trying* was more exhausting and less rewarding than for others. There were a

[159] Often, children characterized as orphans, or children that live in orphanages do have relatives, however, they do not have the resources to look after them. Often, especially rural children are given to urban relatives so that the children will eventually go to school (Bledsoe 1990).

number of ways to tackle such problems and improve one's situation, one of which was to join an association. For the time waiting for a chance, a range of social actors were engaged in *hustling* activities, which are the economic practices of *trying*, however, this emic notion needs some contextualization before turning to associational life.

6.3. *HUSTLING*

Much like the state, the economy in Liberia is entrenched in society and is not institutionally distinct from the rest of society (Polanyi 1977).

> "'Form' is the rule, an idea of what ought to be universal in social life; and for most of the twentieth century the dominant forms where those of bureaucracy, particularly national bureaucracy, since society was identified to a large extent with nation-states. The formal and informal aspects of society were also linked; so the idea of an 'informal economy's entailed in the institutional effort to organize society along formal lines." (Hart 2010: 142–143)

The economy, as any other dimension of the social, is deeply embedded and interwoven into social processes and institutions, hence, I prefer to use of the notion of the economy in society, and economic practices instead of a frequently normatively understood formal/informal divide.[160] Much like Jairo Munive Rincon's findings on *hustling* activities by youth in a Liberian small town also applied for a wide range of Liberians of all ages in the densely populated capital city Monrovia. Various dimensions and forms of economic activities are interlinked, for example, a civil servant might spend much of her working time organizing her NGO, political or former rebel leaders run churches, big people may sponsor entrepreneurships of youth such as a motorbike or wheelbarrow, and or a young marketer may be financially aided by a senior civil servant, and so on. The formal sector relies on the informal, as for example the state can only afford paying low salaries to its servants because these are securing incomes by other means. Informal activities supplied many rural areas with petroleum and contributed centrally to maintaining many social and economic processes (Munive Rincon 2010b: 215).

The Liberian economy is organized by two main processes. Firstly, many economic activities are regulated through associations such as the Liberian Marketing Association, Labor and Transport Union and many more which not only conduct lobbying activities in the interest of the workers, but also organize, regulate and control the economic activities. Secondly, and against the ideal type of formal, state-regulated institutions visible to the "bureaucratic gaze" (Hart 2010: 148), much of Liberia's economy runs through systems of patron-client relationships and according redistributive practices. Big people are vital for these activities, and they in turn benefit from broadened networks of clients. Contrasting to ideal types of the formal economy

[160] The formal-informal debate was initiated by Keith Hart (1973), and reflected in Hart (2010). He coined the term in the context of urban Ghana, where a range of economic activities took place beyond state regulation and, in contrast to Western everyday life, characterized as unpredictable, unorderly and irrational. Informality needs to be reconsidered, as is neither a phenomenon of the global south nor the urban poor only (Hart 2010: 150), "the 'informal economy' allows academics and bureaucrats to incorporate the teeming street life of exotic cities into their abstract models without having to know what people are really doing" (Hart 2010: 151-152).

simply make the social reality look deficient, which is in particular the case for the war-affected economic environment of present-day Liberia. Harsh conditions such as bad roads, low agricultural production and insufficient public infrastructures, however, hinder the development of the formal sector, and much relies on personal efforts by youth, big men and marketers. Nevertheless, having a steady, well-paid office job at an international or national organization or the government is the ideal and hope of a wide range of Liberians. By the same token, generating employment is an expectation these actors have towards the government. This has repercussions on the people's way they *try* to form their life, but also the imaginaries this produces. For most, in particular youth, ordinary economic practices are considered temporal forms of *hustling*. I situate economic practices, notably the emic concept of hustling, as central to many people's economic agency. It encompasses temporal and situational practices to personal and relational subsistence, and as such is strongly situated in the presence. The future projects are mostly of a different kind, often more steady and formal.

After the end of the war, high hopes arose that the government would bring back the idealized and imagined conditions of "normal days", by bringing international companies back and thereby creating employment. This was also communicated by the new government already at the inauguration of President Johnson Sirleaf, with words that were received as promises:

> „We know that your vote was a vote for change; a vote for peace, security and stability; a vote for individual and national prosperity; a vote for healing and leadership. We have heard you loudly, and we humbly accept your vote of confidence and your mandate. (…) Yet, we are humbled and awed by the enormity of the challenges that lie ahead – to heal our nation's wounds, redefine and strengthen its purpose, make democracy a living and effective experiment, promote economic growth, create jobs, revitalize our health and educational facilities and services, and quicken the pace of social progress and individual prosperity in this country.(…) We will formulate a multi-year economic reconstruction plan tied to a Poverty Reduction Strategy Program that relieves our country from a staggering US$3.5 billion external debt and paves the way for acceleration in our national effort to make more progress in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals."(Johnson Sirleaf 16.01.2006)

But to the discontent of many, rather than creating jobs, one of the first decisions the new government did was to lay off government employees in huge numbers, one key informant tells me in consternation (middle-aged man, Monrovia, 03.02.2011). In line with neoliberal "right sizing" governmental reforms, this practice is widely criticized by ordinary people (Gerdes 2013: 223). Such statements are common, but nevertheless, many people continue hoping to work for the government someday and thereby earn a lucrative salary. This is also reflected by the immense number of university graduates in disciplines such as public administration, which will be discussed in the next subchapter.

Liberia has a particular history of economic growth, "growth without development" (Clower *et al.* 1966), due to past reforms such as the Open Door Policy under President Tubman. Many elder people in Monrovia have in the past experienced this economic prosperity and were employed at foreign companies or state institu-

tions. In the course of the civil wars and until present, most of these companies have left the country and have not returned.

As many urban contexts in Africa, Monrovia has a high number of youth that are eager to shape their social and economic becoming (Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006). Hence, vast part of the labor force is composed of young people. Young as well as members of other age groups lack skills and experience due to the fact that educational institutions were severely affected during the war. Many people have gaps in their educational career, and most of the university students are adults. The present precarious economic situation affects poorly educated people the most, in particular if they have combatant or criminal backgrounds (Utas 2003). Especially in regards to youth, this composes a political issue as the frustrated youth composes a challenge that is hard to deal with. Besides, demographic shifts render the youth category larger. Many are dependent on elders who control land and other resources, and for which they have to work. Hence, youth is a growing yet marginalized group (Gbla 2003). This is a peril to the country, for frustrated youths are easily mobilized in case of new breaking out of violent conflicts (Vigh 2006, Utas 2003).[161] For youth in such precarious environment with occasional chances, Vigh (2006: 104-107) shows that they mostly rely on networks of affection (Hyden 1983: 8).[162] In absence of family support, a person will seek support by a big person. The limited range of economic agency and ties of dependency render some youths to be frustrated, some engage in illicit activities. Unemployed youth and their socio-economic marginalization is a huge challenge for post-war societies (Gbla 2003). However, scholars working on youth have shown evidence of youth crisis in a range of West African settings which have not lead to conflict (Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot 2003: 9). In Liberia, youth are likewise active in creating associations and are involved in efforts to enhance social cohesion. Youth associations such as the Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY) or the Liberian National Students Union (LINSU) are exemplary for such efforts. Yet, exactly these associations demand state action in regards to job creation, youth training and empowerment. They urge the government to act, not least by using exactly that mental image many people share of youth as a ticking bomb and easily mobilized for violent acts. In the words of the LINSU president:

> "We have always told the government that job creation should be a priority. Thousands of young people go to college - no jobs. And, unemployment is a receipt for instability by itself (…) the young people will be used as instruments of violence - of anything, once they have nothing to do." (Interview, Monrovia, 07.03.2011)

[161] In the context of so called "new wars" (Kaldor 1999), a strong argument was made that youths were recruited and engaged on a voluntary basis from different rebels in different countries. This argument was criticized by a range of scholars, questioning the newness of the perspective and the simplification of wars (Kalyvas 2001). Richards argues that a strong motivation was centered on a mixture of greed, power and the resurgence of age-old cultural and ethnic hatred, the generational tensions (Richards 1996).
[162] Economies of affection are a concept elaborated by Hyden (1983: 8) describing the support of a person by its family. Family provides food and can provide a link to a patron.

His argument goes in line with a popular understanding that idle youth are a threat to stability and as such, ironically, to the economic development in the country. Creating job is of course not easily implemented, but there are ideas of how this tricky issue could be addressed, for example by making farming attractive for young men, says one informant. Training and educating young people is not the only way – jobs need to be

Picture 12: Water Road in Monrovia; young men transporting clean water into West Point.

created, and the LINSU president who later was appointed at the government – had another idea:

> "I don't need to go to the store to buy a cushion. You gotta have money for it. If the locals can weave, fix bamboo chairs - I can buy the bamboo chair and put it in my living room, and government will be generating resources from that! Government can restrain some imported materials and make sure the locals can produce it for the market - that would provide jobs. But that is not happening. It's not happening." (Interview, Monrovia, 07.03.2011)

A lot of products that could be produced locally are yet imported.[163] The LINSU president is not alone with this idea. A range of organizations such as the ones that for example opposition leader Togba Nah Tipoteh has founded, produce local products made by youth, a number of which are former combatants. His living room was decorated with a beautiful large wooden conference table and more than a dozen of massive wooden chairs. He emphasized that this was a product made by ex-combatants of one of his programs. Though the government used a rhetoric based on neoliberal principles of attracting foreign companies to create job opportunities, this was not convincing for most Liberians who believed that the government did

[163] The same holds for many international organizations. With the intention not to influence the local economy, UNMIL for example imports everything from food stuffs to working materials from abroad.

not enough to create job opportunities. Too many still depended on the support of family members and their petty businesses.

Where the urban economy builds crucially on traders, landlords, day-laborers, transporters or marketers, the formal-informal divide does not help as an analytical perspective. The formal sector as that part of the national economy is often defined by the three elements, namely the taxation system, monitoring by the government, and contribution to the Gross National Product (cf. Hart 2010: 142, passim). In many African contexts, the situation of the economy is only informal in a sense that it cannot be taxed (Chabal 2009: 108–109). The Liberian Employment Policy of the Republic of Liberia and Ministry of Labour (2009: 14) defines the informal sector in relation with "low quality jobs with little or almost no security for job holders". However, economic activities of a range of self-employed petty traders are organized through the Liberian Marketer Association (LMA), to which they pay fees, and from which they get protection and the infrastructure for selling in return. 'Yana boys' pay a contribution so that they can stand with their goods at a certain place. Such actors do contribute to taxation and the Liberian economy. Similarly so for the young man who obtained a loan from the microfinance bank LEAP and sold plastic bags along the road. They make the city and the economy work, and contribute to efficiency and flows of processes. Yet many of these actors, 'petty traders' or 'yana boys', by their own definition would state not to be satisfied with their present condition, and would even explain that they were working informally or not working at all. Many ordinary people, from young petty traders to market women or motorbike riders would answer my question how the business is going with "it's not easy", followed by a detailed account of their temporal and situational struggles and problems.[164] The economic reality of a range of Liberians was composed of narratives of risks, dangers, and an uncertain future, which were the central characteristics of the informality of their work. However, they would also talk about past chances and opportunities they had experienced, as many had someone behind them that helped with funding for the economic activity. To absorb these aspects to some degree, a range of them were members of an associations. These associations were typically headed by a leadership that bargained relations, such as to the Liberian Marketer Association LMA in the above mentioned example, often with officials or with the police. This way, the individual's agency was expanded, and their protection enhanced. The larger associations, mainly in the domains of markets and transportation, administered and monitored the economic activities, surveyed standards, resolved disputes and enforced systems of taxation. Looking at the range of economic activities of a 'yana boy', for example, who would consider himself as "unemployed" or "not doing nothing", one might be astonished to find him saving a little in order to attend a school or even university in his free time. Looking back into their life histories, a number of informants state that they had been *hustling* in the past.

[164] This situation is not specific for Liberians; even in Switzerland, where financial crisis since 2008 had little effect on employment or economic productivity, self-employed people would give a similar answer of concern and insecurity.

I make use of the emic notion of *hustling* to refer to unsteady or insecure income activities (see also Munive Rincon 2010b: 208-210). It is a temporal activity, often containing a strong prospect of a better situation in the future. This future is anticipated by a range of activities, such as saving, or obtaining education. Making a living does not build on financial income only. The hustling activities exhibit values, especially the willingness of hard work that will impress others and construct a good reputation. The notion of hustling is common in present-day Liberia, and the following statements give insight into the broad spectrum of the use of it.

> "After the war calmed down small, I took all my group, I brought them here to Duala. I took a room for them there, I sent my children to school, hustling hard, doing everything for them, me and my husband." (Market Superintendent, Monrovia, 18.11.2009)

This elderly lady held a rather prestigious position as a Market Superintendent. She explained how she was hustling hard during times of insecurity. Similarly so for a West Point inhabitant who explained an ordinary day and living conditions of many young men in the community:

> "…but at least you can have a cheap room to live in and have easy access to town on a daily basis where you meet colleagues and have a little means of hustling and getting little thing at least and come back down (…) and have the next day going." (Middle-aged man, West Point, 13.07.2012).

Both explanations indicate that through hustling activities, social actors forge their living and existence, though an unsteady one with no guarantees. *Hustling*, unlike in US American slang, does not refer to illegal or immoral activities (Valentine 1978), but it could include such activities. As the examples above showed, ordinary Liberians hustle or were hustling at a certain moment in the past of their lives. A range of people around them have been hustling. More often than not, these economic activities were rewarding, as for example a motorbike boy explains that he had been a 'yana boy' beforehand, and now he has ascended to be a motorbike rider. Interesting is the way that many ordinary people use the term 'yana boy' to those young men that sell on the streets, push wheelbarrows or carry goods on the head. Mr. Swaray explained "it means street seller. We try to modify it. We say yana boy" (informal conversation, 02.03.2010). The label apparently stems from their vendor's cry "Here! Now!" in drawing attention to their goods on sale (Singler 1981: 131). Most Liberians did not term these practices pejoratively, as many families depended on these practices to increase the household incomes. As such, hustling became an important part of economic activities. As depicted, it has a strong link to future prospects, however, this present activity by itself will most probably not lead to the upward social mobility, rather, it is a practice one does in absence of a better project. Furthermore, *hustling* may be composed of a range of activities. It is a conventional activity that is closely linked to "struggle", but *hustling* has a larger agentic dimension. It refers to agency in an uncertain environment. A hustler might have support from a family member or big person who granted a credit. It also includes making and shaping a relationship to a *bossman* or *bosslady*, and to improve one's position towards such a person. In the absence of the ideal which is a secured and well-paid employment in a company or the government, this is what a range of social actors do to contribute to their and their families' living. And if a person achieved a paid employment, it might at first be one with low payment. Teachers, police officers,

actually the majority of civil servants earned around 80-100 USD per month at the time of this research, which was not sufficient to sustain a family.[165] Agnes was a middle-aged woman who was lucky to be a civil servant with a fixed contract. Despite her office job, she was involved in a range of other activities such as catering for weddings, and baking cookies that her sons would sell. One of her sons was sick, and the others in education, so she was in fact urged to obtain additional income to the meager civil servant's salary. She often got up at 4am in the morning to prepare her bakeries. Against the backdrop of such circumstances, the greeting "how's the up and down?" does not surprise, even though one meets the person more or less seated in the office during long working days. Similar to many Liberians in her situation, in the absence of her boss - or even in his presence - she was almost constantly on the phone, organizing the various parallel activities she coordinated or was involved in. Despite her formal employment and regular salary, she had to engage in a range of other activities to maintain her family.

Picture 13 A child, probably contributing to the family household (picture by K. Heitz)

I agree with Munive Rincon (2010b: 209) in that hustling "reproduces a self-efficacious, meaningful existence", however, I would extend hustling as an activity of the post-war challenges of "life on hold" with an emphasis on temporality: Hustling composes a range of activities in the present, but with a strong projective towards an imagined better future in the making. In such context, the response "I'm trying" to a greeting reflects the agentic dimension of the present situation. Hustling is conceptualized by social actors as a temporary range of activities; being a petty trader is just a (shorter or longer) transitional period in one's life. A person is left to do something along the way – but having aspirations and an imagined better future arise on the horizon. Imagination, as a dimension of agency, marks the horizon of economic activities against the present, short-termed hustling.

6.4. STUDYING

[165] A bag of rice costs already around 20 USD, and depending on the size of the family, a bread winner would have to provide one bag per month. In addition to rent (5-10 USD for one room), and transportation (10-20 USD per month, depending on location of work and home), urban living costs do not leave much savings. High prevalence of Malaria, infections and other sicknesses raise health expenditures.

Since the end of the war, many people seek education to close the gaps of their war-affected biographies in prospect of well-paid jobs in the government, at international organizations or the private sector. Education is key to upward social mobility not only by building knowledge, symbolic capital and access to novel social networks (Fuest 1996), but it also serves as a process in which a social actor is de-and re-labelled (cf. Munive Rincon and Jakobsen 2012). For example, a *hustler* may refer to him- or herself as a student in accounting.

In the past, education was a scarce good, hardly accessible to the majority of Liberians. Knowledge and power were in the hands of an elite few, interlinked at the heart of the centralized government. In the course of Tubman's rule after World War II and influenced by processes in neighboring countries with the growing significance of Western-oriented education schemes, some schools were established in the interior of Liberia. Still, education beyond primary level was almost only available in Monrovia. In the 1980s, half of the Liberian schools were situated in the capital, and in West African comparison, the Liberian system was one of the worst (Fuest 1996: 69). However, in West African comparison, there were more highly educated women, as the 'Americo-Liberian' elite fostered the education of their girl children (Fuest 1996: 71). This effect materialized in the present: There were a range of quite well-educated women habituated to work in the public domains. Furthermore, young women from various social and regional backgrounds enrolled at the university. It remains in collective memory that education was hardly accessible for the inhabitants of the rural areas and to those with ethnic names. There existed possibilities to adopt a Western sounding name, like Johnson or Cooper, to enroll into university. This is part of an imaginary that has its roots in the past but is still very active in the conscious of the present.

The University of Liberia[166] is situated on the Capitol Hill in Monrovia which is composed of the Temple of Justice, the Parliament, the Executive Mansion and a number of ministries. Power and knowledge are linked through physical proxy, and a number of high-level government officials change from one building to the next during the day, and education seems not only visibly to be related to the physical node of power, but is also experienced as such by many Liberians. Education continues to serve as a promoter of social relations which facilitates access to prestigious and well-paid positions or even a foreign scholarship. Many informants think that spending at least some time in America to foster education through a scholarship may lead to a prestigious position in Liberia. Indeed, the government lacks well-educated personnel and even calls back some qualified Liberians from the USA. During the conflict, educational institutions were often closed, or people had to flee or hide, hence, their educational biographies show ruptures and gaps. In post-war Liberia, many school students and especially at the University are around the age of forty or above. Due to the brain drain during the war, state administration lacks educated and experience personnel. Likewise, IOs and NGOs

[166] The only other university in which an MA degree can be obtained is Cuttington University in Bong County. However, it is out of reach for the majority of Liberians, as it is quite expensive.

attract a lot of people due to their working conditions and high salaries. Hence, education is not only a possible, but rather a real key to upward social mobility.

Education composes a central aspect of many people's agency. To some it is a future possibility, to others a contemporary lifestyle, and a means to mold the future. Education figures as an important aspect of many Liberian's lifeworld and a pattern in the imaginaries of most of my informants. For the 60 years old chemist who was working as a security guard, it had become part of an abstract dream to go back to university. Even though he was old, he considered it as a possibility. He asked me one day if I could do him a favor and buy a chemistry book, one of those second-hand books of the 1980s that are piled up for sale in the shelter of the Ministry of Education. A motorbike boy I often rode with told me that he was reading public administration at the university. The market superintendent in Duala promoted evening schools for the marketers, and she was one of the attendees, she said. Such accounts go on and on; most of my informants mentioned their educational level as one of the first statements about themselves, often followed by a few words about personal intentions related to studying. In their narratives, education was clearly interlinked with a better future of a range of possibilities. It is a way to upward social mobility. The aspiring persons were often equipped with an according school or university ID card that was visibly displayed. Carrying a memory stick around the neck was a further identification of university students. Educational practices were mentioned in conversations, as a person would mention university courses, often by the number of the course, "I'm studying history 203". The ascribed and experienced meaning of education was striking, and the numbers speak for themselves: 1'550 students graduated in December 2009, almost a third of these were female.[167] Most had studied public administration, accounting, business administration, management, and sociology - all indicating an anticipated dreamful future in the government, a business or an NGO (field notes, 16.12.2009). Today, studying is affordable to a broader range of people in urban Monrovia, as one can pay per credit point, and not studying fulltime is cheaper and leaves time for economic activities. This way, many work to maintain themselves and save money for their studies.[168]

Apart from its symbolic and prestigious aspect, there was also a real practical need of educated and experienced people after the many years of turmoil that led to brain drain. Education is central part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (2008: 111, 122) and is much promoted by President Johnson Sirleaf. The government introduced programs for free and compulsory education. In her speeches, she encourages people to proceed their education. She personally took part at the University graduation and held a keynote speech. In her December 2009 speech, she not only encouraged students, but also created awareness about much needed expertise in certain disciplines:

[167] Most of these are undergraduates. However, graduation is celebrated bi-annually.
[168] For registration and fees, see University of Liberia (http://www.tlcafrica.com/lu/lu.htm, accessed 03.06.2015), and recurring debates and rumors over rising tuition fees, for example The News (19.02.2013).

> "For those receiving a first degree, you can opt to further your education and do graduate studies. The country desperately needs engineers – civil, electrical, and mechanical – scientists (e.g., geologists), doctors, nurses, and teachers to push forward the development agenda. Yet the numbers of graduates in these disciplines fall far short of what Liberia requires. Liberia also needs entrepreneurs, managers, organizers, and inventors – not only job seekers and employees. In that context, we also need highly trained lab technologists, masons, electricians, carpenters, welders, and other craftsmen. Government does not have the resources to hire everyone, at least not in type of job where you will behind a desk. The opportunities that exist are those where you go back to the land – in agriculture, forestry, mining, construction, or community development – where you will work hard, and get your hands dirty. Or you can choose to work for yourself by starting your own small or medium enterprise." (Johnson Sirleaf 16.12.2009)

Picture 14: A billboard at a central Monrovian Junction shows in what visual and symbolic ways the Government promotes education through role model Johnson Sirleaf.

The choice of the ordinary people, on the other hand, reflects the precariousness of the everyday which is projected against an uncertain future:[169] rather than risking an unpopular discipline, many chose the way that proved successful to others. They compared to what those friends and acquaintances had chosen who got prestigious and well-paid jobs. And indeed, international organizations and NGOs employed a lot of social scientists, accountants or business administrators, hence, many present students rationally chose according disciplines. Yet others had applied for scholarships, or had a patron who funded them, and hence, aspiring students had to warrant their choices and intentions in convincing manners, as they were obligated towards their patrons.

Education still continued to create social differences as the vast part of the Liberian population will not pursue an academic education. However, the plurality of educational systems and their meanings to the respective social actors should not be neglected. Even though pejorative expressions such as 'uneducated' are no longer applied in public, education, as described above as 'Western' is creating competition to other forms of knowledge and knowledge attainment. Though 'Western' education creates more prestige and chances of higher future income, other forms associated to the *secret societies* are referred to as cultural values that become increasingly neglected. However, considering the titles that William Tolbert, Ruth Perry, Charles Taylor and many other political leaders had, it shows that the titles related to the *secret societies* were considered comparable to the honorary doctor degrees. Though contested by some, others agree that they are

[169] The same refers to choices of studies in Switzerland: many choices are not made due to its projected future need but rather what has been tried and tested.

important for the persistence of culturally embedded norms and values and hence defend *secret societies* against the dominance of the 'Western' education. In turn, the 'bush schools' of the *secret societies* have proven flexible and adapted the time frame to the summer holidays and make the two systems compatible, so that children can participate in both educational systems.

Education is also distinct for Muslim whose children attend Koran schools from early ages on. Especially members of the Mandingo ethnic group have in the past sent their children to Koran schools only to experience exclusion due to their disadvantage in regards to English reading and writing. They often attend both Koran schools and later the public school.

Presently, many children and youth are gathering knowledge through various educational institutions across the plurality of educational systems. However, many parents invest in a good education of at least some of their children. For example, the entire West Point peninsula with a population of 50'000-70'000 inhabitants has only one public school. But there are 17 private schools, and many parents even send their children to schools in central Monrovia, provided they can afford it. Despite the harsh living conditions, money is spent for an imagined better future of their children (cf. Fuest 1996: 75). To sum up, a few words to illustrate the imaginaries associated with education, in the words of a middle-aged man of my neighborhood:

> "… as I sleep, that's my favorite prayer. I do everything that I want to learn. I do everything to be an academician. I want to go to learn. I want a master degree, I want a doctorate degree, I want a PhD, I really want to be... every night I pray, and I work against it. If I see anybody who tells me, are you ready to go today, I will go today. I feel that if I learn a lot, I feel I can help my country, I can help my family, I can improve my life." (informal conversation, Monrovia, 12.01.2010)

Both in the past and today, education is of central importance in a person's social and professional becoming. Education is a rewarding way of shaping one's biography and get access to a social space that catalyzes ties to a big people and enhances ones position society, government, business or in a company. This explains the large number of graduates in the fields of public and business administration, management or sociology. Having a high school or university degree was and is a door-opener to good jobs and hence, an improved social and economic status. Having a university degree comes close to a proof of quality of a person: That person has achieved something special, he or she can surely do a good job, is contacted for his or her knowledge, can be trusted, hence, he/she enjoys social legitimacy. A person can firstly define him- or herself by what she or he is studying, which gives the biography in the making a revaluing twist against the often harsh everyday hustling, and maybe an unsatisfying subjective life history.

6.5. Associational Life

"Where there is union, success is assured", said Abraham in an interview about neighborhood structures and organization in Monrovia (04.03.2011). He cited a quote from the National Anthem, which is repeatedly

used, for example as the final statement of Johnson Sirleaf's 2006 inauguration speech.[170] Abraham did not consider union in the political sense of national unity, but rather in the context of spaces of social cohesion in the city and the lack of face-to-face encounters and familiarity in Little's (1970) or Wallerstein's sense (Wallerstein 1970). We were sitting in Abraham's sprawling sandy yard under a colorful sunshade umbrella. People were passing now and then, and I was recording him in explaining the rather complex political and administrative process of district demarcation, which was required after the Threshold Bill had finally been passed, and which was supposed to take place before the elections. This interview-turned-conversation went on about neighborhood organization. When he came to live in the new neighborhood three years ago, there used to be night watch teams, he said. Each household would contribute with 25 LD per week,[171] and in turn, young men would go around at night, thereby making the neighborhood repellent to criminals. Presently, there was no need for night watch teams, he explained, even though this neighborhood was right next to the Red Light market, an area still stigmatized as home of roaming criminals. The night watch had been temporally institutionalized, but now seized to exist. Yet, Abraham lamented about the lack of social cohesion in the neighborhood he lived in, and in other neighborhoods in general. This had changed with the war, he said, and it has subsequently become dangerous to walk around at night. Now, in precarious present of early 2011, the need for coordinated interactions in the neighborhoods increased:

> "Some efforts of communities I'm seeing now is that communities have started blowing whistle, that 'hey, there's a problem', you see publications now in the various newspapers that this isn't good. Measures have to be taken, and these are the roles of the communities. Like myself, I try to do a publication and put it in the paper. Liberians will read it, and they will get to know that these things are not ok. They can take heed but nothing is done about it. That's it. So then, if something happens, somebody will say, yes, being forewarned is being forearmed. Somebody warned of these things. And now that they are happening nothing was done about it" (Abraham, Monrovia, 04.03.2011)

Abraham regretted the lack of structures in the neighborhood. He had a clear image about how things should be: People should take responsibility, create awareness, organize themselves and in case of lack of security in certain neighborhoods, take action collectively. This had been done in the recent past. He planned to draw awareness by writing a newspaper article, like he had done before. The newspapers are considered a means to voice his opinion. This way, he anticipated that other individuals would share his imaginary about society. He had previously read articles of people who shared his view. Abraham's action was most probably not to lead to the founding of an association, but sharing his views with neighbors could lead to a reintroduction of community watch efforts.

This example of Abraham's intentionality showed how specific concerns or problems are shared in an urban context affected by war, where daily life may be subject to disruption by armed robbers. Abraham was member of several associations; he was founding member of a socio-religious NGO which had received fund-

[170] "In union strong, success is sure, we cannot fail!" (Johnson Sirleaf 16.01.2006).
[171] 70 LD equaled roughly one US Dollar at the time of the research.

ing by the NEC for civil education and observing the elections. As such, this NGO contained elements of several types of associations, namely religious, social, and temporally a political dimension, in particular in the context of the 2011 elections. Besides that, he was member of a religious association, and lastly, as head of the family he held responsibility for social cohesion of his big and regionally dispersed family members. This personal information contextualizes his reflections on community ills in a new light: Associational life composes a central aspect to ordinary people's everyday, and they are to some degree routinized to collective socio-political practices. Scholars have studied collective action and initiatives around the global South. According to Lindell (2010), initiatives such as the Indian Self-Employed Women's association (SEWA) as pioneers inspired the discursive formation of groups and claims of the marginalized around the globe. Lindell argues that strong advocacy created visibility of such groups in the media and in public spaces by protests or by making use of litigation and courts to demand state action, such efforts of sub-Saharan African associations of the informal sector are often described as "inwards looking", are reduced to "welfare- or business-oriented" interests and often bounded to kinship, ethnicity or religion (Lindell 2010: 8).

In Liberia, a vast range of international organizations and state institutions fund manifold local initiatives. Push and pull factors have encouraged collective efforts. The government encourages democratization and political participation, and activists' rhetoric reflects the international discourse about strengthening civil society in fragile or conflict-affected states. A Liberian activist engaged in human rights explains:

> "A couple of years ago, there was nothing called civil society. People were all by themselves. (…) civil society has got a big stake in that government, you know that? A very big stake. A big one. Because civil society is engaging government into processes, all processes, the PRS, even government related matters. Even corruption, civil society is speaking out now. It's worldwide, civil society is in the street telling the people stop eating government money. You know. So if like speaking into where the root of the bad thinking is, saying, let not the root of the bad thinking take its course!" (Interview, civil society activist, Monrovia, 04.02.2010)

Although the history chapter illuminated the diverse political activities of associations in the past, they have received vast open space in the post-war context. They are perceived to have a strong impact.

Associations have to be registered in a formal procedure defined by the (Government of Liberia 2008b)[172] and which includes prerequisites such as an e-mail address, an office space, personnel or an according sign-

[172] "Eligibility Requirements for NGO Status in Liberia: 3.1 An organization wishing to operate as an NGO in Liberia must fulfill the following basic requirements: 3.1.1 Must fall within the definition of an NGO as contained in Section 2.1 above. 3.1.2 Must have a mission statement containing clearly defined objectives, target beneficiaries, sector(s) of operation, constitution and by-laws. 3.1.3 Must obtain accreditation from the MPEA, following formal registration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as required by law (Article of Incorporation). 3.1.4 Must submit annual NGO reporting requirement as stated in Annex 3." Furthermore: " 4.1 An organization wishing to obtain accreditation as an NGO in Liberia must submit a letter of request for accreditation to the MPEA and additionally fulfill the following requirements: 4.1.1 Obtain Articles of Incorporation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an entity confined in the definition in 2.1 4.1.2 Have office space with a visible signboard exhibited and, where feasible provide postal address and email addresses and telephone numbers 4.1.3 Have a bank account in the organization's name in Liberia that concurs with the rules and regulations of the Central Bank Authority and Financial Institution Act of Liberia. 4.1.4 Have not less than 3 full-time staff. The staff should be employed within 60 days of the first accreditation. 4.1.5 Must have a board of directors or its equivalent policy making body whose composition is not dominated by a family group. The NGO should make available the contact information of this body upon request." (Government of Liberia 2008b: 8–9)

board. The “area of intervention and area of operation” are pre-defined categories which are checked on the registration form’s spreadsheet (Government of Liberia 2008b: 14). This led to a mushrooming of NGOs with standardized programs and language of development, and a plastering of Monrovia with NGO signboards. Project applications are written by Liberians who are experienced therein and who have begun to professionalize proposal-writing for aspiring groups (interview, Monrovia, 11.11.2009). Finally receiving external funding, NGOs thrive. But the supply of external funding does not automatically lead to a welfare-and business orientation of pleasing the donors’ or resulting in passivity towards the beneficiary. Rather, local groups are often creative in combining donor’s agendas and their own (Ellis and van Kessel 2009a: 5). Furthermore, a range of associations of the six broad types of associations defined in Chapter 1.3. have emerged bottom-up and have partaken and influenced social and political processes without abundant resources.

The subsequent three chapters will give insight into the workings of such associations. Urban intricacies, precariousness and uncertain future do challenge ordinary people’s lifeworldly reality and future plans. This does not mean that social actors are devoid of agency. Besides, these challenges are not only of negative kind: the changing frame and conventions therein, in Goffman’s sense (Goffman 1974), creates also new options and opportunities as working for or funding an own NGO. Social actors expand their agency according to the new avenues for future projects. Abraham’s claim on social cohesion does not address political leaders directly, although the vaguely defined “they” includes responsible persons but rather, he expects that sharing his imaginary will link up with others of ordinary people. This example shows in what way a social imaginary can become shared, and how social actors use the media as a means to draw attention to a certain condition. He addressed his imagined open letter to society at large, which included a range of responsible actors, influential big people in communities and the government.

Abraham’s is one of multiple ways in which social actors aim at shifting and shaping social reality. Against the background of past experiences and new perspectives with international donors and reconstruction programs, new imaginaries and novel forms of collective action emerge. As depicted earlier, each social actor has his or her subjective experiences which inform present agency, and individual plans for the future. Each social actor is part of a wider setting, and is closely linked to the social environment; if the person is hustling today, she or he is establishing or maintaining relationships to a big person who provides financial capital for an economic endeavor, social and physical protection, and access to other social relations.

In many conversations with informants occupied in any thinkable economic activity practice, a person would mention his or her participation in a professional association as a member. Beyond that, a wide range of associations exist which are not primarily related to their profession, but rather to social, religious or other interests, and, many are related to shared grievances. Many also have temporal and situational particularities. The most popular are religious associations and ROSCAs, and these have a long history and significance

beyond Liberia. There are many associations, and the realms are cross-cutting: A religious women's organization may pray for the members' economic practices, as much as members of an ethnically-based group might articulate in the interest of their economic practices.[173] Liberian associations often are quite strongly structured into a leadership decorated with standardized titles, composed of the president, vice president, the treasury, and so on. As many NGOs are formalized and registered through the above mentioned complex processes in order to participate and obtain international donor funding, many voluntary associations adapt to these practices. For example, even at the meeting of the executives of a community football team, minutes are written. Much importance is attributed to protocol, however, the "official norms" guiding these leaderships are often challenged by "practical norms" (Olivier de Sardan 2009a: 53). The character of the precarious setting, the influence of local big people and/or foreign donors challenge their direction. Nevertheless, individuals as well as groups have means of influencing these various challenges.

Associations meet regularly, and often, members contribute to a treasury from which they fund common projects, or assist members in case something happens to them. They also control their members, communicate amongst one another, and bargain with other organizations or institutions. But not only the economic activities are organized with the help of associations; other groups who share an interest or grievance have formed into associations. Sharing of imaginaries also contributes to shaping a shared identity of the concerned. It is a shaping of "we-identity" against the abstract state or a 'social ills'; of the social actors who have means of comparing the forms of knowledge embedded in local experiences, *metis*, as compared to the imagined *techne* of the state-actors (Scott 1998: 311). To recall, there prevails a normative image of official and normative practices of the state, however, in the everyday, state actors follow practical rules which often differ from the normative (Olivier de Sardan 2009a: 49). As such, the state is perceived as differentiated from society, and deriving from the "official norms". The following chapters will explore shared grievances of post-war Liberia and how - in line with Taylor - social imaginaries enable (collective) practices (Taylor 2002). Beyond the functionist approach, aspects of everyday life in social and political organization beyond mere welfare provision will be highlighted, expanding and linking the social and the political spaces. Thereby, I emphasize the social actors' agency in three major characteristics of associational life that merge into political, functional and social aspects of associations. In the Liberian post-war context, there still exist a range of grievances and the vast majority of the population is deprived and poor. However, forms of contestation follow particular rules, and again, Abraham illustrated:

> "Where there is union, success is assured. When there is union. But where there is no union, success is very limited. At times. So coming together and presenting your concern honorably and peacefully, to the national government, I think that's the best way forward. But protesting, violently, and resulting to arm, is not the right approach. But again, government should take heed when people present

[173] For example, marketers are mostly women. However, there are also men, and in case of the couple of potato sellers, the two took changes in selling at their market stand. There 'greens' cutters and sellers are mostly women, but those with a machine, are men. Generally, those activities that involve machines (transportation, technical workers, IT, etc.) are almost always men.

> their plight. People present their concern. People present their problem. Government should be in the position to do something about it." (Abraham, Monrovia, 04.03.2011)

Abraham would receive wide agreement with his assessment, even from within the government. Indeed, social actors gather and share their state of mind and knowledge about a certain problem, and formulate these into claims and demand state action. The backgrounds on which these claims grow are often voluntary associations built on shared identities and grievances, often from a societal or professional background. In the absence of authorities and due to the precariousness of social order, temporary or new forms of social order emerged during the conflict and after it, Abraham explained. Community watch teams were such novel forms that emerged due to post-war continuation of criminality (Kantor and Persson 2010: 23). Voluntary associations have a longer history, especially political ones such as LINSU or MOJA which have temporally formed into resistance towards state practices.

Associational life creates social spaces of familiarity in which imaginaries are shared translated into words and practices. As such, they inform collective action to enhance or demand change in order to make their professional or social environment more predictable. The conclusion of my informant posits a central role on associations. Associations, if formed around shared interests and, most prominently, shared imaginaries of how the social ought to be, have two basic purposes, namely, establishing and strengthening subjective and shared identity and building on its role in society, and secondly, forming horizontal and vertical social relationships and solidarities (Lindell and Utas 2012: 410). They contribute to social security, some degree of solidarity, and integrate marginalized actors and create awareness to political leaders especially in their large numbers.

This is especially the case for the three associations portrayed in the next section, COMASL, UDAFOL and the West Point Women. They all stem mainly from marginal social and/or physical spaces of urban Liberia. All of them represent rather large groups of concerned members with social problems. As such, they establish a certain order in an urban context of scarce resources, influenced by intricacies stemming from the conflict. However, participation in the association, especially as a member of the leadership is to some extent prestigious and can be materialized for political ambitions. A range of social actors are involved in associations not only as a means to an aim regarding profession, like the welfare as marketers, motorbike riders, or secondhand shoe sellers, but also for their personal aim. A young man who is active in the leadership of one of the two Monrovian motorbike unions[174] and who studies in his free time, clearly formulated his personal ambitions, as the following statement highlights:

[174] Most of these actors today create, shape and re-shape a new identity in a shifting and changing environment. According to Munive Rincon (2010b: 217), returning refugees from Guinea brought motorbikes along. Munive Rincon argues that motorbikes are a "spin-off or by-product of the war". Furthermore, he explains that motorbike riding was an attractive opportunity for ex-combatants, as it did not require much training or capital, and was very profitable (Munive Rincon 2010b: 217). In present-day Monrovia, motorbikes dominate the roads and many street corners; despite the higher costs of transportation, they are much faster on the congested roads, and in addition, almost anything can be transported on a motorbike.

> "AK: …how about your personal future:
> I: I expect to have better life in the future. A better life.
> AK: 'Better life', what does that mean for you?
> I: By, maybe, today, you are speaking to me as [name] of the Liberian motorcyclist transport union. Maybe tomorrow, you will be speaking to me as director or department head for another ministry or another organization or another department, where I will be living - my needs will be met.
> AK: So presently your needs are not met?
> I: Not exactly so. I'm just from school. A real life, I'm living better life at this time. I think I should be going over my lesson now. But instead, I'm here, working, I will be here up to 6 to 6:30, before I get home, take bath, 7 o'clock. Probably, I'll be looking over my lesson up to 9, 10 o'clock. Sleep, early morning I wake up, get ready for class. Immediately, I come from class… - I have no rest! Indeed, I have no rest." (Young man, Monrovia, 02.03.2010)

This young man's statement gives not only insight into quite a diversified range of present actions and future plans. He is building on his stock of knowledge by gaining experiences and a reputation in the leadership, his practices of motorbike riding and by going to school. These are valuable tools for upward social mobility. This particular association bargained with police, or got involved in workshops to train motorbike riders, supported by the Liberian YMCA. Similar to James as portrayed in Chapter 4, my informant is aspiring for a better future to come, against the harshness of present *hustling* and *trying*. The leadership position in this association has not situated him into that of a big man, however, he does have new visibility and responsibilities.

6.6. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of the political history of Liberia and the manifold challenges the present adds to subjective lives, this chapter gave insight into the avenues of ordinary people. Life is "on hold" not only for young people, and social actors are tirelessly attempting to gain and manipulate support from family members or big people of the social environment. Nevertheless, there are a range of avenues, in which they presently engage in economic activities termed as *hustling*; 'street business' of selling, facilitating transportation or other situational services such as carrying loads. However, once in respected position of a *big person*, responsibilities mount. A range of middle-aged informants state to have passed the stage form *hustling* and are now in more steady positions as civil servants or NGO workers, and face manifold familial or social responsibilities: they are approached to resolve disputes, or to raise children of others. In their life histories and future plans, however, most actors emphasize education or the lack of it. Despite the precarious situation, vast majority of my informants either in *hustling* or in more steady socio-economic positions save time and money to foster their education.

A further means to shape and forge one's social becoming is to participate in voluntary associations. I have defined six broad types of associations with a temporal and political dimension in Chapter 1.3. However, in practice, these realms are strongly interwoven. Nevertheless, being part of an association strengthens social ties to other members with similar interests, backgrounds or grievances. In professional associations, mem-

bers gain advice or protection by the associations. In a range of others, ideas, images and concerns are shared, and formed into social imaginaries. Therein, they form practices to translate these imaginaries into practices.

The continuum of war and peace required new forms of social security, cohesion and political participation. Because of this reason, many social actors form associations to address their members' problems in this new context. This particular aspect will be subject to the next three chapters, which present three particular voluntary associations from the margins of the state.

7. DISBANDED SOLDIERS IN THE SHADOWS OF THE STATE

Since the end of the war, media recurrently report about 'ex-soldiers' demonstrating in the streets of Monrovia. With these reports resonates a certain degree of unease, if not insecurity. According to the stories, former soldiers continue to request benefits despite the end of the DDRR process. This chapter aims at providing insight into the claims of soldiers of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) who have been disbanded in the course of the Security Sector Reform, introduced subsequently to the Accra Peace Agreement (2003).[175] Drawing on the concepts of agency and imagination (Emirbayer and Mische 1998), I show why many of these soldiers find it difficult to reintegrate into post-war social reality, and will provide answers to the question what their social imaginaries are and how they are translated into practices – why do they continue to protest? Their claims are shaped out very clearly against a legal(ized) construction, and despite the fact that they have been active part in the becoming and making of the war, social imaginaries are formulated that contextually inform social cohesion or lead into opposition. This case study illuminates the urban and post-war intricacies and how social actors therein shape their relationship with the state and its actors.

In conducting semi-structured interviews with Liberians of diverse backgrounds and engaged in various economic practices, I came across a number of men who had been part of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) in the past. Unlike members of other former warring factions such as LURD or NPFL, they did not hold their combatant background disclosed. One such informant was a money changer, another was actively engaged in NGO networks, and both were sympathetic and open-minded personalities that I kept more or less in contact with over the entire research period. The NGO worker took me along to some of the activities in town or to the monthly thematic meetings of NGOs. Finally, he introduced me to members of the leadership of the Unconstitutionally Disbanded Armed Forces of Liberia (UDAFOL). Thereafter, I followed up with UDAFOL members in informal and formal meetings. I analyzed selected President's speeches, radio and news articles, and reports or texts for example of the Ministry of Defense to embed the issue into a wider context of public opinions.[176]

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[175] It is rather challenging to deal with a group that feels disadvantaged by the government and that is seen as a threat to the government and national security. It requires cautiousness to remain at a neutral, researcher's point of view, in order not to be perceived as biased, not with the government nor with the soldiers - and not so much about the researcher's actual point of view or personal opinion, but in regards to what the actors *perceive* the researcher's position to be. Observations of events such as the Armed Forces Day, documenting of radio reports or newspaper articles completed the data. The issue of the disbanded soldiers is strongly contested in the Liberian context. In discussions with Liberians my interest in this claim was at times looked at with suspicion. It has to be clarified that this case study does not intend to take a political standpoint nor opinion. Judgments and recommendations are left with policy makers. Rather, this chapter aims at giving insight into a pressure group and its quite efficient range of agency that has so far not received much attention in scholarly debate.

[176] Security in Liberia - but not only Liberia - is surrounded by a range of issues that are considered secret. I tried to be as open and transparent as possible, and repeatedly stated to my informants that I was a researcher and that they should only tell me what I am allowed to write into my book, which will be publicly available. This had the disadvantage that I was taken to be a representative of their claim, but had the advantage that they were aware of my role, interest and that I was not interest in 'secret' information.

I got more insight into the complex grievances of the group, and analyzed these through the lens of veteran studies. Though they are not veterans, because they consider the deactivation unconstitutional hence invalid, they share similarities with veterans as they have transformed from a military to a civilian life. UDAFOL's claim is quite complex. The AFL had been disarmed and demobilized after the war, but was not included in the rehabilitation and reintegration parts of Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Rehabilitation (DDRR) in the framework of the SSR. Thereafter, some found their ways into new economic activities, however, many find it difficult to reintegrate into civil life after having been part of the army for a long period of their life. They made a commitment to be soldiers, and if the government rejects them, it should reward them according to their service, goes their claim in a nutshell. They reject the label 'ex-soldiers' or 'veterans', as they remain soldiers by training and by the oath they took, they emphasize. Hence, the notion 'ex-soldier' is an etic category which, however, is widely used by the media and international actors. On the grounds of these claims, they formed an association. In the course of time, they structured themselves, found a name - the Unconstitutionally Disbanded Armed Forces of Liberia (UDAFOL)[177] and formed a leadership. As the name indicates, they consider the process of their disbandment as unconstitutional, as several articles of the Liberian Constitution were violated in the process. Since their disbandment, they regularly organize street filling demonstrations, request dialogues with government, mark presence in the news and media, and have launched a petition to unseat the president in 2008. Their issue has created some disagreement along the social and political sphere. Whereas some welcomed the act of disbandment because of the atrocities the AFL has committed during the war and before, and hence consider it legitimate; yet others argue that these atrocities are symptoms of a malfunctioning institution and individual failures. In the pre-election period, the disbanded soldiers became objective as constituency, as they positioned themselves as a large group of around 17'000[178] with the potential of mobilizing voters as a block, bound by their collective interest and loyalty of kin relationships.

The present case study focuses on the questions how the soldiers assess the turning point in their life trajectories, how they frame their claims and how they translate these into practice. What are their imaginaries of the social world and how do they position themselves in it?

7.1. No Longer Soldiers, Not Truly Civilians

This chapter lays a focus on agency of AFL soldiers in post-war Liberia, a group that considers itself as having been left out in the peace talks, especially of the process Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and

[177] Other labels, i.e. etic notions used for this group are ex-soldiers, ex-AFL, or ex-servicemen. The notion ex-combatants is not used for them. Emically, they just consider themselves to be soldiers or disbanded soldiers.

[178] The number has to be understood in the context of politics of numbers: at the time of the first interview in 2010, I was given the number of 17'000, however, it was later reduced to 15'000 including the dead (group discussion, Monrovia, 14.02.2014). In public and scholarly works, the numbers are not coherently used either; 18'000 is the number used in this article, as given by the disbanded soldiers. Jaye puts the number of ex-servicemen including the police or fire service as high as 20'000 (Governance Reform Commission of Liberia 2006: 14).

Rehabilitation (DDRR).[179] Recent research on ex-combatants[180] provides rich insights particularly on youth, children or women, and the interface or blurring of boundaries between combatants and civilians. The literature shows in what way ex-combatants remain organized and in mutual dependence to intermediaries and the economic and political elite (Bøås and Utas 2014, Christensen and Utas 2008, or Utas 2012a). Yet literature on (former) armies after so called new wars is scanty (Schafer 2007: 8).[181] This chapter does not look into the peace process and related policies, but rather at the social actors in this period of transformation, in particular the everyday of UDAFOL and their association's claims making. The soldiers have acquired specific specialized and habituated capacities and knowledge during their training, in the period of service, and during the war. The dichotomous image of the Liberian army is composed of historical accounts of vast (financial) support and training by external actors including the USA in the past on the one hand, and accounts of the army's incompetence, lack of discipline and a range of failures on the other hand (see chapter 3.5). It is therefore important to critically reflect the prewar setting, the war experiences, and post-war socio-political environment in order to contextualize veterans subjectivities and imaginaries, as well as the social setting at large (cf. Schafer 2007: 14). Their training in a military environment would theoretically facilitate soldiers a life in a civil environment – as engineers, educators, or in private security companies. However, in many African contexts soldiers are often disadvantaged, and in case of demobilization after a war, their integration into civilian life constitutes a challenge:

> "The typical veteran is semiliterate at best, is unskilled, has few personal possessions, often has no housing or land, and frequently has many dependents. Some veterans are also physically and psychologically handicapped by wartime experience. Many find it difficult to take independent initiatives and to cope with the ordinary demands of civilian life." (Ball 1997: 86)

Though this holds for a range of Liberian veterans, there is a need to differentiate their agency further in order to understand their specific grievances. Soldiers have been habituated to a very specific context, notably that of military, which they experience as a gulf between them and the civilian population (Schafer 2007: 12–13, see also Muggah 2009: 123). Some of the Liberian soldiers enjoyed extensive education and formation in Liberia and in the USA before the war; for example in legal studies, the air force or logistics man-

[179] In-dept discussion of the concepts of peacemaking, peace building and peacekeeping would be beyond the scope of this book. Interested readers are referred to Berdal and Ucko (2009b) that discuss case studies of reintegration of ex-combatants in other countries; Bøås and Bjorkhaug (2010) or Bøås and Hatloy (2008), Jensen and Stepputat (2001)), Muggah (2009) or Nussio (2011) on critical debates of reintegration challenges; on Liberia, including successes and critiques of the DDRR see Alusala (2008), the Governance Reform Commission of Liberia (2006), Jennings (2008) or Munive Rincon (2010b).

[180] See previous footnote. For further details on the reintegration of combatants, ex-combatants in the post-war context and political participation, see Söderström (2011: 16–20) or Utas (2003, 2005a, 2005b).

[181] There exist a range of deactivated armies, comparable may be the Haitian army which had been deactivated with support of the US in 1995 (Fatton 2005). They remain organized into paramilitary groups in the shadows of the state, yet training personnel of security companies (Fox 21.03.2011). Schafer concludes from observations of veterans in the 20th century that the most successful solution for veterans was the post-World War II 'G.I. Bill' containing benefits or educational programs for veterans. However, such programs are considered costly and require long-term financial commitment (Schafer 2007: 171). How states deal with former soldiers depends vastly on the type of peace agreement, present resources, and the interpretation of the war (Wiegink 2013: 46, see also Metsola 2010: 590). Further comparisons with deactivation and restructuration processes would be rewarding, yet, this goes beyond the scope of this research.

agement at military academies in the USA.[182] Nevertheless, this was not the case for many others. According to the director of the Bureau of Veteran Affairs (interview, Monrovia, 02.03.2011), many have basic or incomplete school education. However, amongst those Liberian soldiers that found it difficult to integrate into society were a number with high educational and training background. Hence, there must be other factors than education that hinder their re-integration, for example their habituation in the military environment, fragmented social relations, stigma or lack of economic opportunities. The director of the Veteran's Bureau agrees that many find it difficult to integrate into civilian life, emphasizing that the army-life is a strongly structured professional life, in which most aspects of everyday life are regulated, predefined and arranged in rigid hierarchies. Evidence from works on European or American war veterans show that many have "hard-boiled habits", a "dependency syndrome" or "feeling socially dislocated and unable to fit into former societal roles" (Schafer 2007: 13). Hence, the everyday life of soldiers leaves a perceived and also unconscious rather narrow space of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and often does not request reflecting on past actions, or making plans and projects for the near or distant future, as they are supplied with a rather clear career path and all there is needed for their professional life. Furthermore, many of their daily interactions are marked by instructions and obedience:

> "[A] military man is trained to take instruction. From superiors, and carry those orders out without question. So you give unquestionable obedience to your superior. (…) But obedience is the first thing, in any army in the world. So the differences in the army and outside, they are many. If you are a former military person, and you go back, you got to be reoriented. To enter the civilian life, because you were out of the civilian life for many years." (Director of the Veterans Bureau, Monrovia, 02.03.2011)

In transition to civilian life, veterans therefore often need assistance and training, in particular to reorient their agency towards the future, to make plans and translate these into action and new practices. It does not mean that the soldiers' agency was and remains reduced to passive reaction to instructions and commands: a number of my informants have uttered aspirations they had and still have, such as to become a general for example, to acquire a specific skill, whereas others joined the army for ideological reasons, or simply to have a job. In civilian life, however, they need new perspectives, which is a challenge to many. Even though many other ordinary Liberians face similar challenges in (re)integrating into the post-war, urban context, many soldiers have acquired knowledge and capacities during their lifetime, have sedimented knowledge, skills and have been making plans all along. They are ahead of the elder soldiers, who have a less broad scope of agency.

However, the soldiers I encountered do not just stagnate on past routines. They share nostalgic imaginaries of the past, and project their situation to into the future. Many wish to return to the army in some way or the other. Many others have found new avenues in the post-war everyday life. These aspects will be shown

[182] During the time of Samuel K. Doe's rule, the Liberian military had received vast training and resources from the USA (Howe 2001, Moran 2012: 56).

from the data collected from a number of soldiers that struggle to make a living, but many have adapted to a new context and changes – just as many other ordinary Liberians; new projections are interactively shared and formed (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 984), and the everyday becomes reconstituted with new meaning.

In difference to elder soldiers, non-military and younger ex-combatants have lived a 'normal life' before the war, or have fought for a certain period of time, according to Ellis (2007: 133) or Bøås and Hatloy (2006: 44), and have more or less found their way into society and *hustling* activities (Munive Rincon 2010b). Berdal and Ucko (2009a: 3) highlight the diversity of characters in armed groups, which applies also for the Liberian case, where ex-combatants joined groups for various motives, and actors also switched between factions. Though Bøås and Hatloy (2006: 44) found in their survey that this practice was not as common as presumed, I have a number of statements of informants about AFL soldiers who deserted and joined or founded rebellion movements before and during the conflict. The most common is the INPFL founder Prince Y. Johnson, another would be George Dweh, a founding member of LURD (Gerdes 2013: 201, Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2009: 155), or Ruth Milton, commander of the Liberia Peace Council (LPC) (Prkic 2005: 122).

In the post-war context of transition, a number of key actors of the war are in a process of redefining themselves and readjusting their agency in range with the discourse of reconstruction and democratization. Though not a former AFL soldier, former LURD leader Sekou Damante Conneh, for example, is enrolled in peace and conflict studies at the University of Liberia. Evaluated by ordinary people, these are rather unspectacular, or at least not publicly debated life trajectories. Prince Y. Johnson has vast support from his Nimbadian constituency, and resulted in third position after the 2011 presidential elections. In this new context, old alliances are rearranged, and new alliances are bargained, as social and political arrangements of the past are transformed into new socio-political configurations. The new context opens up spaces of legitimate authority on the national political landscape, or charismatic authority in the religious sphere (Weber 1978), and the social actors bargain their relations with old and new *big people*. Mariam Persson has brilliantly shown how networks of former combatants are now rearranged into interlinked informal security provision of the Guthrie Rubber Plantation (Persson 2012: 110–117), under the gaze of the state.

Ordinary veterans, on the other hand, find it difficult to reintegrate into post-war, urban civil life. To address this issue and facilitate the integration of old soldiers, the government has opened a National Bureau for Veteran Affairs, in short the Veteran's Bureau. The bureau was installed in an Act of National Legislature in July 2008 in response to the problem of state-made veterans and the identified need to integrate these into civil life. There has not existed such an institution before. The bureau was to be chaired by the Minister of Defense and a director general nominated by the President (Executive Mansion 21.08.2008). The National Bureau of Veteran Affairs has been installed with the following mandate "to advocate for the veterans […] to seek the welfare, to economically empower them, and, to, make sure that their widows, their children are

taken care of, while they are living" (interview, director, 02.03.2011). The bureau, however, suffered the consequences of budget shortage. There exist a number of plans aimed at the empowerment of the old soldiers. One of them is an agricultural project, another is a fish pond project. The director explains that the most pragmatic way of integrating them into civilian life was by agriculture, as most of them lack high school education. But the disbanded soldiers are only partially considered as eligible to support by the veterans the bureau, explains the director.

> "Partly, the deactivated people are the people that came in [recruited into the army] when they were needed. The war is going on in the country, and the armed forces did not have enough strength, to combat against the forces that came against it. So they brought these people in. They were activated into the army. And then, after that, the retirement business came, because they wanted a new army. They didn't want any of the old people there and so they retired people, they had to be deactivated. But they are not a full part of the veterans. That's why we don't call them veterans. We call them deactivated." (Interview, 02.03.2011)

The etic and emic terminology, hence, differs. Whereas the director elaborates on deactivation and retirement, the soldiers themselves distinguish disbandment, deactivation and retirement. The disbanded soldiers do not recognize the National Bureau of Veteran Affairs as legitimate institution for their claims. First and foremost, they do not consider themselves as veterans. In their narratives, they emphasize that a number of them have not reached the age of retirement and that some of them had not been willing to resign, so the argument goes. "We were dismissed unconstitutionally, we can't go there, because we would accept the deactivation" (group discussion, UDAFOL, 24.07.2012). In other words, if they would collaborate with the Veteran's Bureau, they would accept their status as retired, deactivated or disbanded, which, however, they do not. They had received an honorable discharge certificate which transferred them into civilians. According to their statement, they are honorably discharged and not honorably retired, hence, they factually do not fall under the Veterans Act and are therefore not eligible as military veterans. Lastly, they do not recognize the director of the Bureau. According to the disbanded soldiers, the director of the Veteran's Bureau had been discharged by Samuel K. Doe. He has not been honorably discharged from the army, and hence, is not considered a veteran (interview, 20.07.2012). According to the UDAFOL leadership, the director was installed due to misinformation; the President had been poorly informed. In the end, the Veteran's Bureau is a politicized issue, they say. This irregularity on terminology and multiple perspectives shows how politicized the issue is. This strengthens the claim of UDAFOL that their claim is instrumentalized for political reasons and to their disadvantage. It also shows that rather than the law, power relations and access to other resources define the political terms.

In all of the formal and informal conversations with UDAFOL members, the Veteran's Bureau was criticized as soon as it was mentioned. In addition to the aforementioned critique, it is not considered to be efficient and apparently all the funding goes mostly into office rental, which is a rather prestigious house in Congo Town, a richer environment. In 2011, UDAFOL were investigating a concept to integrate their group into the National

Bureau of Veteran Affairs. In 2012, these Veteran Act Amendments were said to be debated with members of the senate.

The Veterans' Bureau is one of the institutions that create and inform images and counter-images of the state, despite the ambivalent relationship between the state institutions and the disbanded soldiers. The disbanded soldiers do not consider it a legitimate institution and actors, and use this to underline their claim towards the State authorities.

7.2. Lifeworldly Realities and Everyday Life of Disbanded Soldiers

Sheriff sits behind his boot of foreign exchange at Waterside Market. He counts some bundles of money in front of him. The small wooden stand with wire protects the many packages of Liberian Dollars. The money is visibly displayed, as well as the 'scratch cards', prepaid mobile phone cards that he is selling as well. People are passing, and once in a while somebody stops to change a few US Dollars to Liberian Dollars. Traders need US Dollars to travel to other regions within Liberia and other countries. What he earns from this business helps him to survive, he says and talks about his three children that all go to school. One of the boys is old enough to take over the business from time to time.

> "Foreign exchange is, in Liberian terms, a hustling business. You come, you sit down with your money, you go, come, you buy from them, you sell. When you're lucky, you get 100LD, sometimes 50LD, you compile. You get good capital, you get good money. But if you don't get good capital, it's hard for you to make good money. But if you have little, ah, good money with you, you can get something good." (Interview, 22.02.2010)

According to his statement, he roughly gains between one and two US Dollars of profit per day. However, like for many other Liberians, this is only one part of his economic activities. As stated above, his son takes over sometimes, especially when he travels to his home county. Though he asserts being a money changer, a soldier and a hustler just as many Liberians are, he helps others with the currency he changes, and diversifies his business by having sons helping while he travels. As so many other Liberians, he takes the chances that come along occasionally, as his biography illuminates. Sheriff originates from the rural area. The son of a rather poor Muslim farmer went to school and graduated from a Christian mission high school. In the 1980s, he came to Monrovia and lived with an older brother for a while. Before the presidential elections in 1985, Sheriff was recommended as a personal bodyguard to a renowned Liberian politician, Edward Beyan Kessely, who was also one of the founders of the Unity Party. Subsequently to the campaign, Sheriff returned to his home county and became chief security of an international NGO. After the outbreak of the war in 1990, a lot of soldiers were drafted into the army. Sheriff also applied and was recruited. As many of the former AFL soldiers, Sheriff makes no secret of his service for the Armed Forces of Liberia, and he mentions a certain degree of pride to this service of the country. But despite the fact that he enlisted after the beginning of the war, interestingly he states that this was not his intention, a thought that he might have added retrospectively:

> "Well, I would say, it was not bad, because I was doing it in the defense of my country […], but it was not in my intention to get into the war." (interview, 22.02.2010)

This is a statement that many other former soldiers share: though proud to have served their country as soldiers, in particular some of the elder soldiers that have been part of peace keeping missions in the Congo in the 1960s. However, this is easier to say retrospectively, against the backdrop of the well-known facts of the brutal civil war. Sheriff was recruited after the outbreak of the conflict, and hence is not a long trained soldier of the Armed Forces of Liberia. However, he obtained the rank of a master sergeant of the Armed Forces of Liberia until he was deactivated after the war.

A similar life history tells Sumo. He is a tall and slim man, and looks much older than he actually is. The fancy looking sunglasses contrast his haggard appearance. Sumo lives in West Point but originates from a rather poor, rural Loma family and came to West Point in 1971. In the 1980s he had a few job opportunities, first unsteady ones such as pushing wheelbarrows, and later he was employed by a "white man" who paid a good salary. With the money he saved, Sumo was able to build three houses in West Point. In 1987, he got married and soon had his first child, a daughter. Before the war, life went well for him; he had other children and they all went to school. He has seven children. But then the war came and his wife fled to Guinea with the children. Later on, she left for the USA with two of the children.

> "There was no way to survive. (…). So they gone try, they left, they were gone. But before time, I heard about repatriation of the American government in Guinea. They carried my woman and two children to the States. Thank God, they are there. We don't receive nothing here, but the American government supports them." (interview, 18.02.2010)

While his family went to refuge, he joined the Armed Forces of Liberia, and was drafted into the army like Sheriff. He explained that he was forced to join by the circumstances, that is, by the hardship at that time: "I joined by force, because the hard struggle what was coming, the war, I begun join with the government. I fought for government." He dwelled superficially on the direness of the war, and explains that he got wounded. He showed the long scar on his leg as if he had to provide evidence for his past experience. Yet, like many of the disbanded soldiers, he spends much more time complaining about what happened after the disbandment than on the harshness of the many years of violent conflict. He too had been a master sergeant in the army.

> "They gave me 540 dollars, US, put me down. Say I should wait, I will get benefit. But I'm not getting nothing [claps his hands]. But still, we don't depend on them, we force for ourselves we can get one, one cup to eat. With the hard struggle to passing, it was so difficult. Up to now, I pray to God, we can make it. God is there."

Since he was 'put down', as he calls the deactivation process, he expects receiving benefits from the government. Meanwhile, he lives from the income he gets as a proprietor from renting out his rooms. This gives him a low, but steady financial income. In fact, this puts him in a far better position than many other Westpointers or inhabitants of Monrovia. He has something for himself and the two sons that live with him. At

times, when there was a lot of armed robbery in the community, he joined night patrols, he explains. According to his own statement, people respect him and ask him for advice as he is a former soldier. In fact, a number of former soldiers work in private security companies. Sumo says that there are several former soldiers in the neighborhood, and if necessary, they go around protecting and watching the neighborhood. Rather disappointedly he adds that he receives no support from his wife and children in the USA.

The short insights into the life histories of Sumo and Sheriff show that some of the soldiers have re-built an existence and are *hustling* as so many other Liberians do. The two are disappointed by the fact that they were 'put down' with meager benefits, however, they have alternative horizons. Already before the war, they were engaged in diverse other activities and gained experiences, so the past has contributed to a broader range of capabilities and knowledge they can draw on today.

However, there are other, less fortunate soldiers that find it more difficult to integrate into society and to rebuild their social and economic existence. The majority of these were older than Sheriff and Sumo, others have bodily injuries or mental traumata for which stammering, onychophagie, cringing at sudden sounds, or mentioning forms of insomnia could be an indicator of trauma.[183] I could only assume from what I observed in spending time or going along with somebody, as for example noticing intense reactions to the noise of a mango falling on a corrugated iron roof. Remarkable often, the notions of trust and mistrust were uttered.

However, I do not want to paint a one-sided picture. When some of the members met, they could share good times and laugh so hard they would bend. The first meetings with members of the leadership were telling. It had taken a long time and many informal meetings until finally the formal group discussion could take place. This process, however, gave me the opportunity to get to know the various members of the group, and get familiar to the context. I had been surprised by the leadership's appearance: the first time I met them, they were sitting in a bright and nice backyard of a restaurant in central Monrovia. Some wore colorful Hawaii-like shirts, drank beer and laughed loudly and cheerfully. However, the mood changed rapidly when the discussion changed to their grievance. In informal discussions, some would get up to talk confidentially somewhere, then again, I was supposed to leave from the table due to sensitive topics. Some of them were heavy drinkers, and consequently proposed to hold meetings early in the day so that they would have a clear head, unaffected by alcohol. Drinking alcohol had a convivial aspect. But against the fact that most of these old soldiers lack financial income and the rather high beer price, this habit was problematic. It is a commonplace that drinking is considered to help to dwell into a different world for some time, one of illusions and forgetting the harshness of the presence and maybe the past for a while. However, to them it is a social and health

[183] I did not raise issues that I thought could pull a trigger. Nevertheless, I am aware of the multiple factors that influence a person and his or her mental health. For example, sleeping habits are different from what we consider 'normal' in Europe; a student explained that he always studies in the night when it is quiet and cool but complained about his fatigue (informal conversation, Monrovia, 06.01.2010). Ruth never slept sound, she said, due to roaming armed robbers. On the other hand, it is very common to "rest on Sundays".

risk (on this issue, see also Metsola 2010: 608).

I also met disbanded soldiers that did not want to talk about their past as a soldier. Such a person was Kollie, a man in his mid-fifties and actually one of my first informants. He was full of ideas; he had projects in mind from raising snails which would reproduce extremely fast and are a valuable source of protein. Or introducing new herbs from China which are said to relief chronic diseases, or to trade pepper which is valuable and scarce in town. The pretext of his plans, he emphasized, is to empower the people. He had enjoyed a broad educational background, and he enrolled into the military in the 1970ies. He was in the military elite and enjoyed military training in the USA in the 1970ies. In the 1980ies, he had been working for the government, and did so when the war started.

> "…and we that had worked in the military before, they asked us not to go to school any longer. They said we should help the government, to fight the rebels. So I was given another assignment to work with the commanding general. God carried me there for a purpose. Because a lot of people were arrested at the front, and they were accused of being rebels." (Interview, 19.11.2009)

Kollie had to investigate if captives were rebels, and this is how he could identify a lot of them as not affiliated to rebels, he said. He did not go into the details how his relationship to the AFL during the war, and it was one of his first remarks about my research questions: "you can ask me anything except for the war". He later had received training in Human Rights, he wrote proposals and was working as a microfinance manager. His background with two BAs earned before the war, and other specializations provided him with capacities and capabilities that give him options beyond the army. This is how, after the civil war, he chose to find his own way by linking up with donors and founding his own NGO. He founded an NGO, and had his own office space, but due to legal conflicts with the landlord of the office, he later rented another workplace. Kollie had not been to his village of origin for a long time, he could not even recall, even though it was only one hour's drive from Monrovia. I went along with him to this town on December 04, 2009. He introduced me to a range of people, however, we did not visit his mother,[184] though she was still alive. Though he had saved some money in his former state employments and had invested in building apartments, evidently, his basis of existence was crumbling. His aim was to have his own NGO, and he said that with that NGO funding he would be able to tour the country and get people to know him. His political ambitions shimmered through. To register the NGO, he needed a computer and access to the internet, as through a website he could link up with donors more easily. He had asked me to investigate a laptop he thought to buy from a friend. Soon after, I received a call from said friend, and he asked me about the whereabouts of Kollie, because he still had his computer. I

[184] He did not seem to have priority to visit her, and he did not give an answer that I could make sense of. Due to the many lively encounters, there was simply no time in the end. On the other hand, he also did not have any gifts to offer, which is a gesture of courtesy that many mention in relation to visits of their mothers, as for example was mentioned in James' story (Chapter 4.1.).

realized too that Kollie would not answer his phone.[185] I hence lost track of him for a while. Though Kollie was linked to other NGOs that had been well established and had received international funding, he was struggling. Sickness gave him another setback. It did not work well with the NGO funding, and up to date, there is no website of Kollie's NGO. Weeks later, Kollie returned the computer to his friend.

Those disbanded soldiers who find it hard to integrate are mainly old soldiers, some of whom have served the army already in the 1960ies. An example is Mr. Hineh, who joined the army in the 1970ies under President Tolbert. Presently, he is not doing anything, he says. In presence of other soldiers, he often did not talk much. On a cloudy afternoon we meet and have a drink, and also in my company, he did not speak more, I asked him about his children. Some of his six children are still in school, the youngest is 12 years of age, and the oldest is 33. He also was deactivated, and having served the army for over twenty years including the war period, he finds it difficult to reintegrate into society, he says. However, like many, he often makes use of the plural form, "we", to create some distance instead of talking about himself specifically. He owns some land in the Southeast, where he originates from, beautiful land near the coast, he adds. But presently, he lacks finances to even travel there, he says[186] and he would prefer to sell the land. Besides, he thinks that a foreigner will manage better, he says by hinting at the unease many Liberians have about the Southeast and its stigma for being a hub of *African science*. The pension he gets as a deactivated soldier is less than 20 USD a month, and sometimes, the payments are delayed for a couple of months, such as at the time of our meeting in July 2012. He thinks he is stuck in his situation. What would he like to do, I want to know. As a trained soldier, he now depends on the goodwill of his family members, he says. A daughter is married to an engineer, but he feels ashamed to ask them for support. Actually, he would have preferred to go back to the army, he says, but the system is such that he would have to start way below his actual status. "It's like you have a BA, or a master's degree. Then you have to go back to high school." He laughed a laughter that was not meant to be humorous. I asked him about agricultural projects such as the fish ponds of the veterans' bureau. He paused, then mumbled "Fishpond? Stupid man." He had asked me for money before. Sometimes, he had an alcohol scent, and often smoked menthol cigarettes. It was getting towards 3pm and I proposed to find something to eat, and he said that he had not eaten that day.[187] Mr. Hineh was one of the older soldiers that has spent a larger part of his life serving the army, and did not have any other economic activities outside the army, hence, the army constituted his lifeworldly reality until his deactivation. He often hangs around UDAFOL or fellow disbanded soldiers. He does not think that their advocacy will result in anything. "It's just a

[185] Not answering the phone in Liberia was always a bad sign. A phone was normally picked even at the most inappropriate moments. Not picking a phone happened when a person could not meet a deadline, or for an example a lawyer that took money for a case but did not work on it.
[186] Only a strong SUV can make the way to Maryland, and the price to travel may be around 50 USD.
[187] Not having eaten is quite bad for Liberians. It was often explained to me that a poor person was considered a person that cannot afford three meals a day.

waste of time", he said resignedly. However, actually all that he is able to plan and think of is linked to a future in the army.

As with most of my informants, I tried to spend as much time as possible, without recording, taking notes or asking many questions. I was interested in what topics of discussions they would bring up by themselves, and which ones not. In regards to the leadership, I had limited formal and informal meetings, which nevertheless provided insights into their understanding of post-war Liberia, and their struggles and imaginaries. The many flexibly assembled data I combined like a *bricoleur* to compose a coherent image, complemented to expert interviews with the organization. Further challenge was that I was considered to carrying their plight to the wider public. The puzzle pieces of information provided insight into their everyday struggles which helped me to contextualize utterances and in particular "emotional appeals" in Bledsoe's (1980) sense, being treated unfairly by the present government and "left on the streets". It also showed me that not all former soldiers experience the same challenges and not all emphasize them the same way. What they do share in common is a mental image of the state in a perpetrator-like position that continues to ignore their plight or even work against them, and an imaginary of a state and society in which they consider themselves to play a purposeful role.

The former soldiers' everyday agency is linked to physical and social space and the use of the city for their collective actions. Many of the soldiers live the city at its social margins, even though they dwell or linger around its physical heart of power. Their use of the city deserves a closer look. Our encounters often took place at the margins of their former professional spaces, such in quarters around the 2nd district of Monrovia, more precisely between the Capitol Hill and the 'barracks', i.e. the Barclay Training Center, a space that includes the slum called "Buzzi Quarter[188]", and the area of Camp Johnson road,[189] where group later had an office. Besides this area, many dwell in West Point, or around the '72nd barracks', a peri-urban residential area that is named after the former barracks, or in an area in Congo Town on 'Peace Island' that is called *540* after the benefit the *1990 soldiers* received at their demobilization. Some of these are spaces related to their former position or related to their group. 'Peace Island', as an example, is where President Doe had planned the Ministry of Defense, which today remains a massive, imposing, black ruin. The second district is the space between the Executive Mansion and the barracks, an area well known to them from war and pre-war times. I used to meet the group or members of them in a tea shop, a restaurant or small bars around the latter area. In 2012, I realized that one of these tea shops had been demolished. It used to be located in the yard of some houses, and run by a young man who made strong green or ginger tea. Mr. Hineh told me that the *atay shop* had been destroyed. He said the government had demolished it, because they had found out

[188] 'Buzzi' is an ethnonym for Loma or Lorma, and actually indicates the name of a former king.
[189] Camp Johnson Road was the main territory of ULIMO-J (personal communication, Mats Utas, 13.12.2012). Whereas relations might exist, UDAFOL strongly emphasize their identity as having been "regular soldiers".

that the disbanded soldiers met there (informal discussion, 20.07.2012). I wanted to know if the *atay shop* owner had a license, well knowing that Mary Broh and her Monrovia City Corporation were cleaning up the city and removing 'informal' shacks and squatters under the pretext of beautification. Mr. Hineh was silent for a short while, and then said "this could be a reason too". His first statement and assumption, however, reflects an aspect of the imaginary that many disbanded soldiers have and share: that the government does everything to 'put them' and 'keep them down', and they are left 'duck sitting'. Indeed, even though Liberia enjoys freedoms of many kinds, including the freedom of assembly, newspaper articles once in a while write about "ex-soldiers holding secret meetings" (see below). This, however, fits into their shared imagination that the state disempowers the disbanded soldiers because it does not trust them. It also fits into their strategy of victimizing as such acts add to their repertoire of shared grievance. Likewise their deprived living condition, as many disbanded soldiers I met live in run-down communities and circumstances.[190] The majority of disbanded soldiers live at the margin of society; integration into a sustainable social and economic life has remained a challenge for many of them. A further challenge to the deactivated soldiers is that some are disintegrated from their kin- and family networks.[191]

Female soldiers are evidently better socially absorbed, as I have met one lady who minders her grandchildren and does not take part in the advocacy. Many men ascribe themselves and their kin or spouses lack of supportive relationships, which is often framed in terms of nurturing, catering or simply "feeding the children". So for example this soldier who said he is not trusted by the present government as due to his military expertise he had been close to Charles Taylor. We were sitting around a table, drinking beer with two other soldiers, when he explained that "…the women don't respect us. If a man doesn't bring money, they have no respect for you" (informal conversation, 06.03.2011).[192] He recently had his birthday and aired out that he did not even have the money for a bottle of beer. His concern reflected a common understanding especially men share about expectations towards their role as men in the family. It composes an aspect of a social imaginary that is shared by a number of male informants, and not only disbanded soldiers. The reality often opposes to this ideal of the husband-breadwinner, as many depend on their wives and family members; the women and children are the breadwinners of many a family in Liberia, and not only the soldiers.[193] The norms and values around masculinities (and femininities) challenge gender relationships in this precarious

[190] Those of higher ranks, however, are found in public office such as the Ministry of Defense, at the Bureau of Veteran Affairs, or as an Aide de Camp (Hicks 2009), and some have established companies; some have influential connections. Formerly high ranked officers are said to have received higher benefits after their deactivation, and hence do not share the plight of UDAFOL, and in our discussions and interviews, these personalities were not point out to play a role in the lobbying activities of the ex-soldiers.

[191] See example of the West Point Women who were confronted with sick former soldier without kin to take care of him (Chapter 9.3.).

[192] There exist a number of factors complicating relationships, and I witnessed many men accusing women or women accusing men for various reasons. Abandonment of women and children are a topic that many women's organizations deal with. Although the quote refers to an often heard statement of men, it has to be taken with a pinch of salt.

[193] This is a common problem in many urban contexts and creates tensions in marital relationships Obrist (2006), on masculinities and expectations, see in particular Connell (2005).

setting of un- and underemployment, as only a small minority can in fact live up to these expectations. Just like in most ordinary Liberian families, wives and children of disbanded soldiers are providing for the families due to the manifold economic practices in markets, selling of snacks or drinks. Women and children also contribute to a flow of information to other disbanded soldiers and their families, and contribute to the maintenance of vertical social networks. Formal employment with a regular income is most desirable for many actors, however, such opportunities are rare, even the more so for those soldiers who cannot present skills of non-military kinds. Many of them find a way by engaging into *hustling* activities, irregular or minor businesses, trading or services, just as many other ordinary Liberians do. In fact, the vast majority of ordinary men undergo struggles comparable to Sumo and Sheriff. Other disbanded soldiers, especially the elder ones who had served the army for a long time and whose everyday is defined by soldierness find it more difficult to reintegrate into society, which becomes visible in the biography of Mr. Hineh. An additional burden to the families constitutes the consumption of cheap alcohol or drugs, as well as the health and psychological problems of some disbanded soldiers.

What caused this change in their life trajectories? How do the disbanded soldiers evaluate these turning points such as from a master sergeant to a money changer? Briefly pointing at the role of the Liberian army before and during the war will help to contextualize the discourse on the AFL in present-day Liberia.

7.3. Contested Actors of a Contested Past

The relationship between the army and the civilians had been contested in Liberia's history. To recall, the Liberian Frontier Force (LFF) was created in 1908 out of a militia (Sawyer 1992: 79) and was mainly used to collect taxes. Their brutal manners are part of the collective memory (Utas 2009: 277). Under President Tubman, the mandate and structure of the LFF changed and was transformed into a military, the Armed Forces of Liberia, as part of the Defense Act in 1956 (Jaye 2008: 52). The higher ranks of the AFL were dominated by members of the elite, which were linked to a personal network at the disposal of the respective presidents, hence, the army was embedded in the system of personal networks (Ellis 2007: 46). In the same manner, Samuel K. Doe personalized the army and increasingly appointed members of his kin into higher positions, while starting to marginalize in particular the Gio and Mano. President Taylor kept the AFL but did not trust the army; rather, he relied on forces such the ATU, a network of personal relations over which he had control. He decorated his personalized militia and supporters with high ranks, said a former AFL soldier: "Taylor took NPFL rebels, and made them soldiers. And he made most of them commanding officers. We, who stayed throughout the war years, we could not increase in rank" (disbanded soldier, Monrovia, 09.03.2011, cf. Malan 2008: 8). Yet, the institution of the AFL and many of its coercive and terrorizing actions of the 1980s and during the war is harshly criticized, as depicted in the history chapter (see also Utas 2009: 278). After Samuel K. Doe was executed by Prince Y. Johnson, the AFL still considered

themselves as the defenders of the constitution, from today's perspective emphasizing the oath they had taken, legitimizing their sticky position during the war. "[The AFL's] self-legitimation was largely built on representing the state. Given its lack of legitimacy and weak domestic power base, its goal of maintaining power was most likely to be achieved by international recognition of the AFL as an institution representing the sovereign state" (Gerdes 2013: 40). An interim government was established, and was in fact recognized by the AFL, but in practice, the AFL controlled the Executive Mansion to the extent that the interim President, Amos Sawyer, was forced to govern from a hotel (Gerdes 2013: 41). The AFL has been accused of various forms of human rights violations and atrocities, such as the UN compound massacre, the JFK hospital massacre or the widely known Lutheran Church Massacre in July 1990. These massacres had cost the lives of hundreds and thousands of civilians and increased the mistrust in the Armed Forces of Liberia. The TRC included hearings of AFL officers, and some were contested by members of UDAFOL (Wiagbe 21.08.2008): members of the UDAFOL leadership explain that they had called upon some AFL leaders for taking responsibility of actions such as the Lutheran Church Massacre or the 1984 violence on the campus of the University of Liberia. This does not change the fact that the AFL is highly contested, in particular for their actions in the 1980s and during the period of the first civil war. It is widely known that AFL soldiers burnt and looted Monrovia in September 1990 after the murder of Samuel K. Doe, and their statement "No Doe no Liberia" is still remembered (Noble 18.09.1990).

Calculating the oppression, coercion and atrocities in numbers and statistics can hardly be representative to the subjective experiences of a long continuum of war and peace. Some AFL soldiers had changed to rebel groups and then back into the army. A number of rebel forces had been established in order to remove oppressive regimes, which subsequently led to splinter groups and counter rebellions. The NPFL was supported by members of the ACDL to remove the increasingly abusive government under the lead of Samuel K. Doe, the LPC was supported by ECOMOG which included AFL soldiers and aimed at removing the NPFL (Gerdes 2013: 129). LURD was supported by members of the diaspora to remove Taylor (Utas 2008: 8). "Taking side", hence, is a political statement and a strong asset in discursively constructing 'bad guys'. This informs the state imagery shaped by the post-war governments, legitimizing the intention to build credible institutions and a new order. These intentions and practices go in line with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) negotiated in Accra in 2003, which was comprised a number of decisions about restructuring and rebuilding state institutions and reconciling the population. As discussed in chapter 5, the security sector was reformed, which included the restructuring of the Armed Forces of Liberia. The UN Security Council Resolution 1509 (2003) defined the key parameters and aims of the DDRR program, and the Transitional Government established a National Commission, the NCDDRR. Objective groups of DDRR were defined to be the combatants of the AFL, GOL, LURD, MODEL and other paramilitary forces and militias. The UN had prepared to disarm 38'000 ex-combatants, however, the number was much higher; 103'019

combatants were registered in the DDRR program of 2003,[194] including a number of 12'254 AFL soldiers. After the First Civil War in 1996, Outram counts a number of 59'370 combatants, including 8'734 AFL soldiers (Outram 1997: 356). The state lacked capacities for demobilization, hence, the process was mainly lead by international actors. The DDRR program was criticized for a massive lack of resources due to an underestimation of the number ex-combatants, which caused a range of problems. Firstly, this lack of resources clashed with diverse and high expectations towards the many opportunities that seemed to open up new avenues for future projects after the war: reintegration assistance programs, scholarships, new opportunities in a new security sector, or seemingly new economic opportunities with the incoming of companies and donors (Alusala 2008, Jennings 2008). A number of ex-combatants claim not to have profited adequately from the DDRR; what they have received does not restitute the losses of the war. Besides, the economic condition created a challenge to a successful and sustainable social and economic reintegration. Others believed they have not gained from the peace process, such as the disbanded soldiers' who feel that they have been left out. In order to understand the complexity of the claim of the disbanded soldiers, there is a need to differentiate the composition of this group. The category or label[195] (ex-)combatant needs to be distinguished. In emic categories, ex-combatants can be divided into two groups, namely the irregular and the regular combatants. The regular combatants are soldiers of the Armed Forces of Liberia, the regular army of the state which draws its legitimacy as a state institution defined in the Constitution and the Military Law, functioning through a chain of command with the Commander-in-Chief being the President. Irregular combatants are those that follow non-state associated, often charismatic leaders of rebellion,[196] such as the NPFL, LURD, and many more. The boundaries, however, are not clear-cut. The AFL soldiers are further divided into those who were recruited into the army at the onset of the war, and they are referred to as the *1990s* or *540s*. They have been deactivated after the war and received an amount of 540 USD. The others who have been part of the army for a longer time are often simply called *old soldiers*, and they have received a benefit depending on rank and years of service. Some received up to 2'000 USD, explained an old soldier (interview, Monrovia, 09.03.2011). It is important to note that categories are often blurred and situationally shaped constructions. For example, rebel factions formed out of the AFL or mixed and matched in the course of the violent conflict. This also explains the challenge of calculating the number of soldiers, especially when it comes to the eligibility of benefits. Roughly, the number of former AFL soldiers (*1990s* as well as *old soldiers*) fluctuates between 12'254, which were the registered AFL soldiers in the DDRR, and 20'000, which

[194] Pugel (2007: 18) estimates the number of ex-combatants even higher, at 105'699 - or more. A large number of interviewed ex-combatants, in particular women, had not participated in the DDRR program because they did not want to be identified and labelled as ex-combatants (Pugel 2007: 45).

[195] Jairo Munive Rincon (2010b) observed the making and unmaking of 'ex-combatant' in Ganta, in particular through ID carding and labelling someone as such (Munive Rincon and Jakobsen 2012).

[196] I am hesitant to use the term "warlord" as defined Chapter 1. Not all rebel leaders were self-centered profit maximizes, and many dispute being termed as rebels. Warring factions and their leaders are social constructions and depending on perspective, some are 'good guys' whereas others are the 'bad guys', which is argued throughout this research.

includes other regular deactivated security forces, such as the Liberian National Police (LNP), the Special Security Service (SSS) and others, which are subsumed under the term ex-servicemen (Governance Reform Commission of Liberia 2006: 14). According to the findings of the DDRR Trust fund in 2004, 16% of the AFL soldiers were women (United Nations Development Programme Administered Trust Fund 2004: 52), including widely known personalities such as Ruth Milton (Gerdes 2013: 129).

In the process of the DDRR, the AFL soldiers were disarmed, demobilized and thus appear in the statistics of the DDRR program. However, they say that they did not receive money for their weapons and were excluded from other parts of the DDRR program such as trauma healing or skills training. They were neither integrated into the new army nor into society. Instead of the packages that were given to irregular combatants, the entire AFL was given notice to evict the barracks within 72 hours. This moment of 72 hours is an often remembered and narrated turning point in their life trajectories: It is the moment of dislocation in their careers. According to their evaluation of the process, irregular forces received tools and assistance to reintegration into a new, civilian life, but for these soldiers it was the moment of disintegration. This created many problems for the soldiers, and the first, spontaneous decision had been to respond with violence. However, the opinion leaders of the former army sat together to form a plan. The group decided to inform the soldiers to remain calm and await the result of the presidential elections of 2005. This was considered a convincing solution, for they stated that they were exhausted of war. But the problem remained that in a short period of time, they were "thrown out of the barracks", which was formed into a claim as considered unconstitutional. A soldier explains in his own words:

> "…. the army resolution also states that, if a man is to be retired and taken away from the barracks, he must be there for a 90 days period. At which time you are able, to, you know, to resettle himself, plan where to go, how you gonna earn a living, and the rest of it. Nothing like that! As soon as we had heard that we are out of the system, the following week, we should evict, we should leave the barracks." (Group discussion, Monrovia, 18.03.2010)

The soldiers hence left the barracks and awaited the response of the new government, they narrate. In her inauguration address, to their disappointment, President Johnson Sirleaf addressed the disbanded soldiers as having voluntarily retired.[197]

> "I thank and applaud our gallant men and women of the Armed Forces of Liberia who have rendered sacrificial service to our nation and are now being willingly retired to facilitate the training and restructuring of the new Armed Forces of Liberia." (Johnson Sirleaf 16.01.2006)

Knowing the law quite well, the soldiers did not accept this formulation, as none of them had written a letter of resignation, nor had they received a certificate of retirement; they did not retire willingly, and the process and actors were not considered legitimate by them. The discursive formation of their claim is embedded in and framed around a construction of legality, as they believe to have been unconstitutionally disbanded.

[197] http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/inaugural_add_1.pdf (25.04.2015).

Subsequently to the inauguration speech, a certificate of retirement was provided to them. I was shown some of these certificates, followed by comments about a range of procedural mistakes.

The Liberian SSR did not lead to an integration of the old army into the new army. The new army was re-composed, vetted and trained by the American military company DynCorp International. The former soldiers could apply to join the new army as other Liberians. According to Alusula (2008: 20), they were not considered for the new army for reasons of impartiality. The old AFL was considered to be composed of actors who committed atrocities, and the government was critical to have such elements amongst the new army, as it is hesitant to trust these actors. This confirmed a young man who is part of the new army. He said that the government would not trust the *540s* due to the reason that they had "changed side" during the war (informal conversation, 29.01.2011). He went on explaining that the new army would be much more trustworthy due to its complete reconstruction. The new army had a good morale, he said.

Picture 15: Display of the new security forces, "seen like the state" (Scott 1998) – at a central junction in Monrovia.

The results of the peace process are evaluated as a loss by UDAFOL: They narrate repeatedly how they have lost their profession, they were accused for atrocities, their files were destroyed: Certificates of honor and as well as crimes are listed in each soldier's file, the '201 file', 'military jacket' that they claim were destroyed at their disbandment.[198] According to soldiers, the government had failed to take a roster of the actors and beneficiaries, which composes challenges due to various demands up to today. With that, the records of honors were lost. They are left with the charges of range of atrocities, which are comprehensively documented in the TRC report which is publicly available. With the receipt of the "honorably retirement certificate", which in their eyes is illegitimate, the disbanded soldiers were deleted from the government payroll; the amount of the deactivation was considered an insult, as they did not contain the arrear payments[199] or insurances covered. The soldiers believe they have rendered services and sacrifices in defense of the state. In return, they consider what happened to them as unconstitutional: only the approval of the legislature or a referendum can disband an entire army. The basis of their claim is framed around their evaluation that the

[198] According to the National Defense Law (cf. Chapter 9), Courts Martial (Jaye 2008: 86f).
[199] This in fact is not a problem solely in Liberia; in other countries salaries are often delayed or not paid at all.

disbandment violated Article 34 b, c and k of the Liberian Constitution,[200] which basically state that the legislature is the accurate body to take such decisions, and not the executive. The secretary general of UDAFOL explained:

> "According to our Constitution, Article 34, the Liberian Constitution, it states that only the legislature has the statutory mandate to form an army of this nation. Anything that has to do with this nation, with the security, entirely, it is that branch of government that is responsible for it. But to our upmost surprise, the president bridged that provision of the constitution." (Monrovia, 18.03.2010)

This plight then was translated into a repertoire to articulate their interests. Whereas the government generates images of them as perpetrators, the soldiers shape their self-image as victims of the process and of the past and present governments. In Migdal and Schlichte's sense, "[a]s the rule-giver and the rule-enforcer, the state stood out as the ultimate force in people's lives, shaping their daily behavior and even how they thought of themselves and the meaning they attached to their actions and lives" (2005: 7). The state comes first and would be defended with one's life. The state, as the narratives of the soldiers shows, was reduced its mere imagery (Nielsen 2007). There had been times where in fact the state institutions were hardly functioning. As the 'muscle' of it, the AFL remained as the last real institution of an almost non-existent state.

7.4. Seeing the State Like Soldiers: Formation of UDAFOL

The soldiers have opposed to the process of disbandment from the moment the decisions of the CPA were implemented by the National Transitional Government. In their narratives in which they construct and reconstruct the events since 2003, they link their formation of the group closely to the decisions taken at the peace negotiations in Accra and the subsequent implementations by actors of the state and world arena. In the first sentence of an extensive group discussion, the grievance chairman summarized UDAFOL's claim: "to start with, we are a group of senior officers of the disbanded AFL. We grouped ourselves to register our regret of the way and manner of which the AFL was treated after the 14 years of conflict" (Monrovia, 18.03.2010). They named the organization the Unconstitutionally Disbanded Armed Forces of Liberia, UDAFL, later changed the abbreviation to UDAFOL. They explained that after the army was disbanded, they decided to organize themselves in order to tackle their problem in a non-violent way, and in their narrative, they repeatedly emphasize the peacefulness of their actions and intentions. The formation into a group of collective action took more and more shape; they held elections and voted in a chairman who began to lead their advocacy with the newly installed government. At first, they decided to await the elections of the new, legitimate Liberian president. After Ellen Johnson Sirleaf had been installed into office, it became clear that she continued the policy implemented by the NTGL. This became publicly clear for example in her inaugural speech in which she described the disbanded soldiers as "being willingly retired to facilitate the training and

[200] In the newspaper articles of 2008, the articles mentioned are Article 62 and 76a (5).

restructuring of the new Armed Forces of Liberia"(Johnson Sirleaf 16.01.2006: 3). My informants of the UDAFOL frame this as a plot against them, which is translated into an essential element of their claim. Between early 2006 and 2008, there are a number of media accounts and reports that document the protests of the disbanded soldiers, for example surrounding the recruitment of new soldiers (Blunt 26.01.2006), repeated protests in April 2006 (IRIN News 25.04.2006) and visualized in scenes of the film about the first 100 days in office of Johnson Sirleaf (Junge and Scott Johnson 2007), and the demonstrations surrounding the petition submitted in 2008 (Azango 27.05.2008). Such a scene is reported in the film about Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's first 100 days in office. The film gives an impression on the size of the group and the frustration. At one instance of the demonstration, some of the protesters get into a fist fight but are separated by others. The film portrays the president in a transparent way, for example as not having been informed about the arrear payments (Junge and Scott Johnson 2007).

The Inquirer (Monrovia)
Liberia: Ex-AFL Soldiers Storm Capitol Building
Morrison O.G. Sayon 27 May 2008
Empfehlen Empfehle dies deinen Freunden.
A group of former Ex-AFL soldiers under the banner of
LIBERIA: Stone throwing ex-soldiers paralyse capital
MONROVIA, 25 April 2006 (IRIN) - Shops pulled down shutters and residents emptied the streets of the seafront Liberian capital Monrovia on Tuesday after more than 100 former soldiers burned tyres and set up road blocks to angrily protest the non-payment of their demobilisation pay. UN peacekeepers fired in the air to disperse the stone-throwing men who hurled stones and metal objects at the Ministry of Defence, smashing office windows. "We want to assure the public to remain calm," said Minister of Defence Brownie Samukai. "The government will take appropriate measures to ensure that such acts are not repeated," he told
Photo: Claire Soares/IRIN
UN peacekeepers in Monrovia last year
BBC NEWS
Liberia recruits a new army
By Elizabeth Blunt
BBC News, Monrovia
Every morning at the moment there are two small near-riots in the centre of
One is outside the barracks, where a heaving, jostling queue of young men and wor
AFL demo soldiers to get pension benefits
Written by Sorbor George
Saturday, 28 April 2007
The Liberian Government says it would provide pension benefits to demobilized the Armed Forces of Liberia.
Information Minister Lawrence Bropleh said the former soldiers deserve the pens
benefits
Ex- AFL Solders Demonstrate in Demand of Arrears
Written by Our Staff Writer
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'No Compromise': Ex-AFL Soldiers Demand Face-to-face Meet With Prez Sirleaf

Picture 16: Media imagery on the disbanded soldier's demonstrations

UDAFOL's claim created a space for bargaining, as they got summoned to meetings with the president where they explained their concern and brought forward their requests for their benefits. A documentary portraying Johnson Sirleaf's first 100 days in office showed quite transparently in what way disgruntled soldiers were invited to the negotiation table (Junge and Scott Johnson 2007). It also makes visible that the president admits lack of knowledge on the issue. The soldiers consider that, retrospectively viewed, their first chairman was not sufficiently experienced nor was he persistent and successful in representing the plight of the group. Discontented with the result of the bargain with the government, they recall, the disbanded soldiers resumed their protest and took to the streets. The large group continued to gain attention of the government, as they created a situation of unease in the country through their street-filling collective actions, and the dialogue was resumed. The discourse requires some analysis, as it is inconsistent. Media reports and informal discussions with international and national experts reveal conflicting opinions and mental images of disbanded soldiers being old and not professionally trained or equipped, hence harmless. On the other, in particular from media reports of demonstrations, they

are ascribed as violent and a real threat. In fact, the group is heterogeneous and hence difficult to grasp, as UDAFOL members indeed admit that there are a range of disbanded soldiers that are and were not law-abiding. In their own accounts of the demonstrations, however, the soldiers emphasize today that they are tired of war and seek non-violent means to make their claims.

Since their founding in 2003, the group began to build its capacity, added knowledge and experience, and intensified their activities. There was a change in the leadership after the first chairman passed away. As his death was considered unnatural by some, this argument was taken as an aspect to strengthen the idea of a plot against them. However, the chairman's death also created room for a reorganization of their leadership, and the chairmanship and responsibilities reshuffled into a new leadership and delegated to several members. Thought formally defined, in practice, there are a number of members that compose the core and which shift in function and over time. The leadership of UDAFOL was composed of a legal advisor, a grievances chairman, a chairman for strategy and operations, a secretary general and a chairman. The organization did not receive any external funding. All of the members of the leadership were disbanded senior officers of the Armed Forces of Liberia. Furthermore, the leadership was composed of members of several social categories such as regional and ethnic groups including Gio, Mandingo, Grebo and Kru; different age groups and religious backgrounds. The leadership contained no women, despite the number of women in the old army including the higher ranks.

The main claim of UDAFOL centers on having honorably dedicated their lives to serve their state loyally over many years including a brutal war, and now they believe not being treated fairly in the peace process. Therefore, the aim of the group is to advocate for the rights and interests of these soldiers, as a member of UDAFOL says:

> "…the Comprehensive Peace Accord that was signed in Accra in 2003, one of the provisions under the Security Sector Reform mentions in that accord: all irregular forces, let me underscore: all irregular forces shall be disarmed and disbanded. They will cease to exist. But the Armed Forces of Liberia shall be disarmed and restructured with a new command structure. So, that paragraph, when the people returned to Liberia, they deviated from that particular sector. Instead of restructuring, they disbanded the military. We told this present government that you will have to revisit the CPA thus placing this matter of the AFL in the rightful direction. But they said no, they cannot undo what has been done. Then we said no, we will not accept that until we are treated fairly." (Group discussion, Monrovia, 18.03.2010)

As a consequence, the soldiers requested a monthly pension, which subsequently was provided. However, the pension payment of 15 USD monthly was considered too low; "15 Dollars doesn't even buy a bag of rice!", hence is not sufficient for a living. Much of their grievance concerns the bad living condition due to the low pension, the loss of their files, honors, and records of social and life insurances. Their claim at first appears somewhat contradictory, as they seem both interested in joining the new army and at the same time request a retirement payment, hence not joining the army. But the interest diverges between the two

groups: the *1990s* are unsatisfied with the benefit of 540 USD they received at their demobilization, and for the majority of the soldiers who are above the age of 50, the main interest lies in a decent pension pay. Furthermore, the younger members and those that were determined for a military career expressed interest in joining the new army and continue their ambitions. All in all, UDAFOL claims to represent the general interest of the roughly 17'000 members of the disbanded army for having been left out in the peace process. Further arguments in their repertoire is that they are experiencing collective punishment, that the government has uttered promises which were not fulfilled, and lastly, on a higher level, that international actors have intervened too strongly in the process. This is clearly summarized and put to the point by Sheriff, a former soldier but not member of the leadership:

> "…they told us that they were gonna take care of us, we'd have some program, that they gonna have some program, gonna go for program, like they have PAE in America, and other country. (…). Since they brought the Ellen-led government, they downplayed us. Best known to her. But rumors are circulating that, prior to ah, the late Samuel Kanyon Doe, when he took over Liberian government, when overthrown Tolbert, Ellen then was one of the political figures. So after they give Doe hard time, they arrested her and put her in jail. And according to the rumors, said, the army, they are the ones that put her in jail. So, when she took over, she don't care for the army. The old AFL. So she's paying back. What they have done for her. But we are saying: not everybody put her in jail. It was Doe who put her in jail. And not all of us. Not the entire army. And Doe don't have army. Army is left with a government, other government come and go. So you just pay back on us." (Interview, Monrovia, 18.02.2011)

This leads to an explanations concerning the reasons for the 'downplaying'. According to widely shared belief, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was not only jailed under Doe's rule, but like other political opponents was subject to maltreatment. Some say that this is a reason that Ellen Johnson Sirleaf does not trust 'Samuel K. Doe' army', and present actions are considered as revengeful practices. Another old soldier summarizes similarly, but more dramatically: "We risked our lives, died, bled, fought and lost our honor. They feel that we stood in their way too long, so therefor they think our fate is a well-deserved fate" (personal communication, 26.02.2012). This melodramatic statement concludes in condensed terms what many of them think and share. They share experiences of their own group as having made sacrifices for the state, for the constitution, at the cost of being repeatedly targeted by rebel forces. Some of the political leaders today have contributed to forming of rebellions, or have led such themselves, and whereas they are in important positions today, the disbanded soldiers remain in the streets with a bad name. Behind much of their grievance and forms of contestation is in fact the lack of recognition - the lost honor: they feel they have offered themselves to the defense of the nation, in their view, and their narratives are marked by losses of comrades, sacrifices of their own selves. They hold up to commanders such as General Hezekiah Bowen who led the army and participated in peace talks after the death of Samuel K. Doe. By many, Bowen is imagined with hero-like attributes –in particular around his death on April 6, 2010, as he had emphasized the motto 'Liberia First!' throughout the war. They construct counter-images of norms and an order obtained that opposes a dominant image of Doe-time and the past as unruly, a popular state image that the present government upholds and uses to shape

its legitimacy. Against the popular mental image of victors and losers, of victims and perpetrators after war, a soldier emphasizes:

> "Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, on record I speak, supported the NPFL, they invaded Liberia. Billions and millions worth of property and lives have been damaged. Based upon their greed for power. They were never tried for these atrocities and damages. We lost our youth, our strength and time in defense of this state. We were a conventional army, we weren't a rag tag army, to gratify themselves, because to the victor comes the spoils, this one in terms not by war, but they fall against the government that we protected, and they became elected, and became president, neutralized the army, disbanded the army. Now should we be like them? Go to the forest and come back and get them from power? God forbid. And now what happens? (3) What happens? What happens if a bullet should fire? Who am I to defend?" (Interview, Monrovia, 09.03.2011)

These experiences form into a shared social imaginary in which the very state actors that postulate a new order through a regionally and gender balanced security sector today have contributed to disorder in the past (cf. Benda-Beckmann and Pirie 2007). In various forms of activities, the soldiers articulate their claims publicly, they demonstrate and seek meetings with government actors as well as the international community including embassies or international veteran associations. The international actors, however, refer them back to their government, as it constitutes a matter of internal concern. In 2008, the deactivated soldiers had crafted and submitted a petition to dismiss President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf for the unconstitutional disbandment of the army, arguing that according to the constitution only the legislative could have approved such an act. With this action, their plight was not answered. The soldiers continue up to today to promote their claim in the national media, actively by producing articles, and reports are published about their activities: the old soldiers are well-known for their potential to organize massive demonstrations. They are capable of mobilizing hundreds of soldiers to fill the streets and are considered potentially violent. There is a range of debate on the issue of their demonstrations; the old soldiers emphasize the peacefulness of their demonstrations, explaining that at times they would tie their T-shirts together and walk the streets, and in their narrative they stress peacefulness against the violence of the police towards them. The national and international actors are aware of these actions and respond differently to them, however, bringing notions of chaos, riot and violence which create an image of insecurity.

Violence becomes a tricky issue, as mental images of violence seemed to fit the discourse of the negative construction of 'Doe's army'. In the context of the 2009 international women's colloquium, disbanded soldiers preparing to demonstrate were stopped by the police with violent means. The UN Security Council (S/2007/689) and a range of local media reports quoted the event. There are even narratives of injuries and deaths, and the chairman of the leadership was severely injured (see also Star Radio 10.03.2009 or 03.12.2009). The accounts on the activities of the deactivated soldiers are many. However, it shows that the group was and continues to successfully gaining public attention.[201] In as much as they emphasize non-

[201] In contrary to other groups who state their claims publicly, the disbanded soldiers are actors who were trained and habituated to the use of weapons and physical violence, hence creating a sentiment uncertainty, if not insecurity. Though the leadership constantly

violence, they do use the threat of power and violence to underline their claim. In the end, it shows through that they are soldiers, and familiar to being the muscle of the state. In the course of a group discussion, one former soldier formulated his consternation into a threat: "And let me be frank, let me register this: if this government does not take care of us, we will fight again. Register that. We will fight because we are not satisfied. We are not satisfied today; we will not be satisfied tomorrow" (group discussion, Monrovia, 18.03.2010).[202]

7.5. Election Time! The Making of 'Good Guys' and 'Bad Guys'

In the run-up to the presidential elections of October 2011, the interactions between various Liberian associations and aspiring political candidates intensified. In the case of UDAFOL, this became very visible. The elections were an event that added political weight on their claims, and increased competition among the candidates. It politicized many dimensions of everyday life and society, of public speeches and media reports, even the more so for topics such as UDAFOL's claims. In February 2010, a dialogue had apparently taken place between the UDAFOL and President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. According to a press release by the Executive Mansion, the soldiers had apologized for the petition they had launched to dismiss the President for the unconstitutional disbandment of the army. It further stated that the soldiers pledged loyalty and promised to collaborate with the government. In return, the president accepted the apology and promised tackle the problems the disbanded soldiers are facing regarding integration into society and the economy. A working plan was supposed to be elaborated with the Ministry of Defense.[203] Shortly after, however, news made public that the government was to provide education and vocational training opportunities for old soldiers rather than paying cash contributions to the soldiers.

Rumors circulated among the soldiers later that year that in the context of the 2010 Independence Day celebration the president would honor some of the old soldiers for their service to the nation. Some 15 persons were then announced to be honored; personalities of public and political importance. However, no former AFL soldier was among these. Instead, in September 2010, the government invited the leadership of UDAFOL to a meeting and presented a token to the leadership in order to honor their efforts in contributing to national peace and their collaboration with the government. This was not a public or official event, and consequently, rumors were spread that the UDAFOL leadership had been "bribed by the president", which was

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emphasizes its interest in peace, some degree of impatience can be felt. The international community is aware of this social problem and security issue, and a number of published reports indicate to this problem, such as Alusula (2008: 22): "the Liberian society is put at the risk of having to contend with a considerable number of persons who are well skilled in war and who have no viable source of livelihood". In addition, the disbanded AFL is the only mentioned pressure group in the CIA World Fact book on Liberia Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (2013).

[202] This statement caused a dilemma to me as a researcher. I discussed this openly with the participants of the group discussion in which this statement was made, and it was clear to them as to me that this threat to violence cannot be ignored. With their consent, I discussed the issue with the Director of the Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation, Prof. Debey Sayndee, who has been mediating a range of conflicts in Liberia. This was a viable solution both for the soldiers, but also for me. As a researcher, we are supposed to be neutral and non-influential, nevertheless, we bear responsibilities for what we do or do *not* do.

[203] "Leadership of Demobilized AFL Soldiers Assure President Sirleaf of Unwavering Support" (Executive Mansion 24.02.2010).

reflected in the media (Wenyou 30.09.2010). Old soldiers, however, were aware that the leadership of UDAFOL had received a 'golden handshake'. Apparently, all members of the leadership that were present had received a certain amount, which subsequently brought division within the leadership and the group of soldiers at large. Though it was clear that these acts need to be interpreted as part of the political game in the pre-election context, this event was a turning point in the advocacy of the disbanded soldiers: in order to prevent the basis from rising up against the government or the leadership, some members of the leadership had to be replaced, at least temporally. Though the chairman was contested for a while, he remains the strongman of the group. Nevertheless, the event had consequences for the in-group solidarity – not only of the group of deactivated soldiers, but also within the UDAFOL leadership. The leadership split into two groups. Verbal backstabbing of members against one another took place, for example one group accused others for holding 'secret meetings',[204] which fueled the leadership tension. Though the reasons and accusations about these 'secret meetings' were vague and later rejected, the news and rumors instigated investigations, remanding some of the members in custody. The war in Côte d'Ivoire and the rumors of Liberian irregular and regular ex-combatants involved in it was nurturing an overall sensation of insecurity, and fuelled the fear of a spilling over. Liberian mercenaries were rumored to be among the ranks of Gbagbo as well as Ouattara supporters. Some said that the disintegration and grievance that the deactivation produced among the disbanded soldiers would make their participation in other wars of the sub region to some degree legitimate, hence, the blame was laid on the government.

Shortly before Christmas 2010, the government announced a one-time payment of an amount of 16 Mio *Liberian* Dollars, which would be the last batch of arrear payments of the disbanded soldiers.[205] The soldiers, however, claim that the government owes them more, depending on length of service between five months and three and a half year's arrears, and they initially demanded 17 Mio *US* Dollars. This lead to anger and frustration and again, the soldiers took to the streets on December 21, 2010 (Heritage 21.12.2010). The government officially proclaims shortage of budget and cannot pay more. However, offering a token can be considered as a practice to perpetuate the disbanded old soldiers' hopes. This practice can be observed in other post-war states around the world (Schafer 2007: 125 or Wiegink 2013: 54).

While challenging internal security due to the fear they spread in their demonstrations, the soldiers nevertheless claim national security to be a crucial concern to them, which they often discuss and analyze. For example, they closely observe security issues and politics within the country and in the sub region. As the chain of command still exists and plays a role in their interaction - "we are not a democracy organization",

[204] „Ex-AFL Soldiers Hold Secret Meetings in Monrovia, but..." (Heritage 15.12.2010).
[205] According to official numbers, the 16 Mio Liberian Dollars payment were dedicated to 8'907 former AFL soldiers, 2'935 former police officers and 1'695 retired and current Special Security Service Officers. For the total of 13'537 security personnel, this equals to a total amount of 1'182 Liberian Dollars, that is roughly 16 US Dollars per person. This amount is slightly more than the monthly pension of roughly 15 US Dollars (Liberian Observer 16.12.2010).

this chain of command also serves as a means of information and exchange among the soldiers in the various regions of Liberia. Their group's network is also strengthened by their monthly reception of pay at the Antoinette Tubman Stadium in central Monrovia, opposite 'the barracks', the Barclay Training Center. There are old soldiers in the various counties, and hence, they are aware of news about casual information such as deaths or illnesses, but they also share information in case of disputes or conflict issues, especially the cross-border activities in the context of the Ivorian conflict. They are embedded in a network that is formed and strengthened through alliances by their shared grievance.

Major issue of the debate in 2011 was not only the still ongoing leadership differences, but in the forefield of the 2011 elections, a new option unfolded itself to UDAFOL: Presidential candidates discovered the potential of the large number of disbanded soldiers and their relatives as attractive block constituency. They seemed easy clients to relate to; one simply had to dock onto their claims in order to gain their votes. Hence, the disbanded soldier's plight was now successfully mobilizing public support. In 2011, I was not successful in organizing a formal meeting with the UDAFOL leadership; too many issues were at stake and led to a series of postponements of a formal meeting with them, and once the UDAFOL leadership was gathered, I was repeatedly asked to step aside, as they claimed to discuss confidential issues. Besides the pre-election campaigns which required UDAFOL to decide on whom to create bonds of loyalty to, members of the group were busy with the looming conflict next door – apparently, a number of disbanded soldiers went to support Gbagbo's loyalists, in response to past support of Gbagbo in financing the MODEL rebellion against Charles Taylor (see also Lidow 2011: 204, International Crisis Group 2003). From this perspective, old loyalties and socio-political divides work across borders and "supporting Gbagbo" can be analyzed in the broader context of a political network into which soldiers are interwoven, but it also simply provided an opportunity for them. The nearby conflict was threatening national security in Liberia, and it was a real rather than a hypothetical possibility in Casey's terms (Casey 1971) that it could spill over. From the seriousness of the concern, a number of the disbanded soldiers felt Liberia was on the margin of going back to war. Their experiences of the past led to an evaluation of this situation as one of insecurity in proximity accordingly, and imagination took a new turn now. Imagination of future war was not only shared among the soldiers, but resurfaced on the national level and in the media. At the same time as this uncertain future of possible war, there was the option for renewed alliances and prospects in the forefield of the elections. UDAFOL members were discussing strategies about how to link up with presidential candidates, and more especially, which was the most promising candidate. I gained insight into some of their activities and discussions while sharing beer in a few informal meetings and my repeated, unsuccessful knocking on their door in order to organize a meeting. They had a new office space on Camp Johnson Road, which was apparently sponsored by Chea Cheapoo, an attorney and aspiring presidential candidate from River Gee County in Liberia's southeast. Cheapoo was a former member of the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL) opposing President Tolbert in the 1070s, later

briefly served as Minister of Justice under Samuel K. Doe and was associated with the Liberian Peace Council (LPC) (Dokie 27.01.2011, Gerdes 2013: 129). The disbanded soldiers' strong asset was that their groups' large numbers with common interests and shared grievances. If all deactivated security personnel, the AFL, Liberian National Police, the Special Security Service, would round up to 18'000, multiplied by 10 to include family and relatives, widows and other sympathizers, and organize to register and vote collectively, they could constitute several percentages of the 1'798'930 registered voters (National Elections Commission 2011c). This argument seemed attractive to several presidential candidates who indicated interest to seek their support. Apart from aforementioned Chea Cheapoo also Prince Y. Johnson sought their support, thereby positioning himself as a former soldier (Yates 03.02.2011). Furthermore, Moses Jarbo, the former executive director of the NCDDRR promised support for the soldier's issues (In Profile Daily News 15.03.2011). These candidates promised to pay the benefits to the disbanded soldiers, the widows and disabled former soldiers in return for their votes. Chea Cheapoo, however, was dismissed by his Progressive People's Party (PPP) after he pledged support for the deactivated soldiers (In Profile Daily News 14.04.2011). This shows how delicate and fluid social networks can be and how fast they shift from one *big man* to another, and, secondly, how contested the group of soldiers are. Besides, it also shows how arguments around the old AFL are politicized on the grounds of popular imaginaries of Liberian statehood; power relations define discourse, shared imaginaries are used to underline alliances which shifted and rearranged at specific moments, such as the elections. 'Bad guys' become 'good guys' depending on the context of discourse, which climaxed with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's contribution of rice and money to the disbanded soldiers in return for their votes:

> "In a statement, the President referred to the ex-generals and fighters as good soldiers. (…) President Sirleaf acknowledged that Liberia has experienced six years of uninterrupted peace and security because the ex-fighters supported the peace process in the country. 'Because you cooperated with us that's why we are enjoying this peace. We are trying to open the economy so that you can get jobs. Some of you have talents; some of you have marketable skills that cannot continue to be wasted; that's why we are working hard to get these elections to continue from where we are,' she noted." (Parley 20.09.2011)

In the course of the event, soldiers were given 50'000 USD, and an additional 30'000 USD to the former generals as well 200 bags of rice (Parley 20.09.2011). The chairman pledged support to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on the basis of the achievements of her government in maintaining peace.

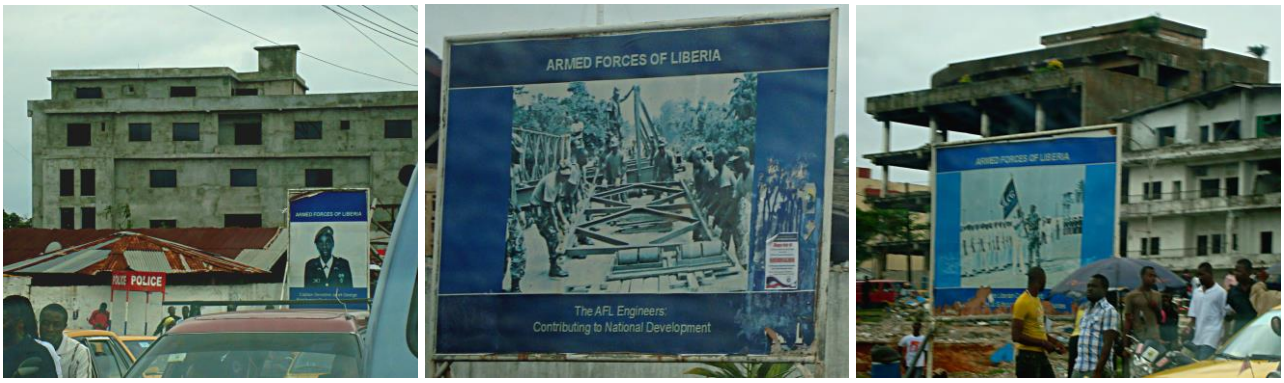
> "We come today, all of us from our head to the last man that used to hold arms, to pledge our support to you, with all the process that we say we are sidelined, but we are seeing what is happening in the country, we move around freely, we do things freely, so we still want to give our support." (Williams 18.09.2011)

On October 05, 2011, shortly before the elections, the leadership of UDAFOL gathered a number of old soldiers, they dressed up to their best, and marched the streets of Monrovia to pledge their support to the incumbent. The events previous to the elections gave insight into the workings of socio-political networks and alliances in post-war Liberia. It also shows that despite the many cleavages working in the post-war context,

alliances are built on a range of temporal and contextual issues, but despite their sentiment of having been left out in the peace process, the old soldiers emphasize an imaginary of peace.

7.6. Popular and Counter-Images: The Discursive Formation of UDAFOL

Previous subchapters elaborated on the claims of the old soldiers and how they are portrayed in the media and by the government. This shows that their claims are effective to the degree that they resurface in public and the fact that the state responds to them. Their issue also came up in everyday discussions. In the following, aspects of the discursive formation of the disbanded AFL will be highlighted. The public is divided on the issue of the old AFL, just like the state actors are. Past experiences have amalgamated into a range of emotional sentiments and politicized opinions. In order to gain a broader understanding of how their plight is reflected and evaluated popular talk, I discussed the claims of UDAFOL with a number of ordinary Liberians of different opinions on the issue, including a member of the restructured army. Furthermore, the attitude of the power holders are publicly available as they are regularly dispersed in press communications by the Executive Mansion or the Ministry of Defense in public speeches and produced on posters such as in pictures 19 a-c, displayed along the main roads of central Monrovia.



Picture 17 a, b and c: Posters displaying the new AFL displayed well visible at central spaces in Monrovia. Picture 19 a shows the first female Captain of the new AFL and emphasizing the role of women, the others accentuate service to the people, morale and discipline.

There exist two broad strands of argumentation. Some say that the AFL have been a warring faction just like the others. They have committed atrocities, especially along ethnic lines and already before the war began. The argument holds that 'Doe's army' was unprofessional and against the backdrop of their activities during the war, the soldiers cannot be trusted. This is the line the present Ministry of Defense represents (cf. Samukai 17.02.2004). Others consider these atrocities and failures as symptoms of a malfunctioning institution, and rather than collective punishment, the malignant individuals ought to be identified and taken to justice, such states for example the religious leader and TRC commissioner Konneh.[206] An in-between group, howev-

[206] TRC commissioner Konneh stated that there has not been a government in Liberia that has not violated human rights (interview, Monrovia, 25.03.2010). Konneh is critical about the issue of the deactivation, and even puts it as one of the reasons that the TRC

er, rather in support of the soldiers holds that despite the contested image of the old army the soldiers were to receive the promised arrear payments and pensions, in favor of calming the tensions. Many informants feel uncomfortable that complex social and political problems like these are not adequately addressed, and were in particular uneasy in the context of the pre-election period. Disgruntled groups may cause tensions, and such uncertainties were felt especially before the elections in 2011. I discussed this issue at the West Point Intellectual Forum (WEPIF), where no participant identified him- or herself as former soldier of the AFL. The group articulated arguments that are found in other parts of the city and its population of ordinary Liberians:

> "...as we are going closer to the elections, one of the problems here, of the deactivated soldiers, is based on their past record. The past record of overthrowing an elected president, this is what is haunting them. So if any president is coming at the scene, they will look at the past record of what they did in the past, and pursue them against their past record. So this is one of the points. But in every solution, there bears a problem..." (Group discussion, West Point, 23.02.2011)

This statement refers to the various coups d'état and coup attempts since the 1980s, in which members of the AFL played central roles. There circulated rumors that a coup attempt in 2006 was masterminded by Charles Julu, a former general of the AFL (BBC News 19.07.2007). Hence, these rumors show that there is a lack of trust in the disbanded soldiers. The argument of the coup plot was also raised by Liberian intellectuals. Others raise critique that the army took side during the war, leading to an often heard statement that no one could be trusted anymore. The issue of trust, however, is a broad one not only limited to the old army, and for this reason President Johnson Sirleaf appointed relatives into key security positions. A further argument concerned the issue of pensions and benefits that the army has received to some degree whereas the ordinary citizens received nothing for their suffering and losses. The following statement summarizes and contextualizes some of these opinions, and also shows in what detail ordinary Liberians have followed news and events surrounding the issue of the deactivated soldiers:

> "... those soldiers that we were depending on, indeed, they served us. But we were not fair to them. Because you will not be expecting me to go and defend you, while I'm defending you, you pass behind me, you go to the same people that I'm fighting, then you give them an entrance where they will come and pass and come and hit me. So I will end up defending myself. This is what happened to the soldiers. Not that they never defended us, they defended us! But certain time came, they had to defend themselves. This is what's happening in our country. And you people are talking about 540. Yes, indeed, they gave some of them 540, some of them 2'000 [USD], we saw it. But they were never told that was going to be the end of what they have for them. Each time they go there [dialogue with the government], they will promise them, each time they go there, they promise them. And promise, as people say: promise is a dept: once you don't pay it, I will continue coming to you. So, not everybody against the deactivated soldiers!" (Group Discussion, West Point, 16.02.2011)

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report did not find consensus: "When the country is attacked, to defend and fight those people who have attacked the country. Now, if you charge the institution, are you not discouraging the current and the future armed forces that in case of any eventuality, form your hand, and don't do anything, for you will be charged for human rights violation? The people were defending the republic. Yet it is true: there are people, there are soldiers, there are commanders, there are generals, who went beyond the statutory requirements of defending the country. Search for those people. Identify them. Name them. With particularity, so that they can be prosecuted, not the institution itself."

The question of the payment, more especially the amount of the payment raised some concern: to some informants the rewards were seen as too high. The problem of payment was raised more often than the one of atrocities. It is an indication of degree of loyalty and moral relations (Bledsoe 1980b: 187), and promises a means to establish and maintain these to a certain degree. Interestingly, ordinary people are often not only quite well informed about the procedure of the deactivation, but also on the activities of the disbanded soldiers, as their demonstrations attain attention.

The public debate found its way into the media and propaganda machines of political parties in the forefield of the 2011 presidential elections, as shown above. The soldiers gained bargaining power as a seemingly large and coherent group with common interests. In the context of electoral clientelism, the disbanded soldiers had expected that the government would answer to their plight in exchange for their support, hence votes (cf. Schatzberg 2001). However, as in any state and society, there are diverging opinions, which serve to underline a political claim. The practices of the Liberian state diverged from the mental images it aimed to produce. In speeches, such as at the inauguration address (Johnson Sirleaf 16.01.2006) or the deactivation celebration (Johnson Sirleaf 24.07.2006), an elaborate image of the old army with a reference on Douglas Macarthur are elaborated in a rhetoric of diplomacy:

> "Distinguished Honorees and Retirees, you have served well. Your names are now part of our national history. We return your salute with this historical recognition. In the words of the late American General Douglas Macarthur, 'Old Soldiers never die, they simply fade away into the annals of history'. As Commander-In-Chief, I say to all men and women of the Armed Forces who have been retired and are being recognized and honored today, your legacy shall remain active as we outline the future mission and force composition of our new Armed Forces of Liberia." (Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, 24.07.2006)

The Defense Minister, by contrast, is rather outspoken and represents the new army to the public and criticizes the old AFL, despite the fact that he is an old soldier himself. He has a long history in the security sector under Samuel K. Doe and had trained the Black Berets under the interim government of Amos Sawyer.

> "The AFL became a political tumor and lost the sacred trust of the population. (…) There was undisputable evidence that the AFL was unprofessionally large, tainted with accusations of abuses, poorly commanded, and blotted with officers. Through caucuses in BTC, the AFL top brass designed their own political agenda for survival and took on bargaining positions. (…) The newly elected government after 2005 will be undermined and subsequently dethroned by the AFL in its present form. Don't trust the faith and allegiance of the AFL as it is presently constituted. The best that has happened to the AFL has remained its matching band of dedicated musicians." (Samukai 17.02.2004)

The Defense Ministry highlights the past practices in regards to the army, and shapes a new, young and regionally and gender-balanced army, built up with and hence qualified through the assistance of foreign actors and institutions. Hence, the present practices and rhetoric of the government are diverging. Nevertheless, the president remains to be the *biggest person* (Utas 2012) in mutual maneuvering and tricking along the client-patron relationship (Bledsoe 1980): the President answers UDAFOL's plight to some degree, however, maintaining not to know, being misinformed, or arguing with a neoliberal rhetoric of all problems re-

solved with local and international companies creating jobs and a range of infrastructures (Junge and Scott Johnson 2007, see also figure 5 below by the well-known Liberian artist Leslie Lumeh).

Figure 5: Comic by Leslie Lumeh, 2008.

State practices and images inform the practices of the citizens (Migdal 2001), who may accept these or oppose by creating and sharing of counter-images (Förster 2012a). The soldiers continuously shape their relations to the *big people* in the political landscape by situationally pledging alliance and support, but if they do not redistribute according to their claims, they use means of contestation and threat. Likewise, state actors appear to use means of trickery such as partial or situational donations of 'tokens' such as money or rice – be it to uphold and reinforce the relations, or, in some soldiers' shared imaginaries, to ruin the one powerful resource the disbanded soldiers have: their big number of aggrieved soldiers, tied together with common interests for a better future.

7.7. Aiming For a Better Future

At my return in 2012, the leadership of UDAFOL was exploring alternative avenues. Previous to a group discussion, part of the group including the chairman were sitting on the wide porch of a soldier, and explaining about how appealing Liberia could have been by now without the war. They went on elaborating possibilities

of creating a veteran's organization and related fundraising options, also asking me for ideas. Though it was clearly in their interest that I would bring light to their issue through my work, I was up to then never directly asked for funding or fundraising opportunities.

The political context had changed; the elections were over, and the conflict in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire calmed down. Their bargaining power had reduced at this moment. For some time now, the disbanded soldiers had not been demonstrating in the streets, but explained that they were engaged with a committee of the Senate to shape out the amendment of the Veterans Act. I was informed that there had recently been meetings with Prince Y. Johnson, the Senatorial Chairman of the Committee of Defense, Intelligence, Security and Veteran Affairs. There had also been a meeting with President Johnson Sirleaf in the recent past, where she promised to restore the former soldiers' honor, however, the group did not have further details about when and in what form this would materialize. The leadership of UDAFOL was composed of a few new members, including a *1990s* representative, but the core group and the chairman remained the same. Of the present members, three were forming their future through studies at the University of Liberia, one studied law, and one was even active in a student's organization. It was also the first time that the chairman uttered his professional training in an American army academy. They are building their capacities and diversifying the activities as an association. We were sitting in the neat living room of one of the *1990s*, a man whom I had earlier experienced as rather dismissive towards me. However, he and his family welcomed and even served food for me. We had arranged a group meeting and a further novelty was that it was opened with a prayer, and had an agenda including the purpose of the meeting. I was asked to write the minutes. They explained to me that they intend to set up an NGO. Different to the previous plan of an NGO in the pre-elections period, they now had more concrete ideas and wondered if funds would be attainable for the cause of old soldiers in need. They have been supporting members before in regards to legal or health matters, however, they took new options into consideration by institutionalizing themselves into a veterans organization. More than in previous discussions, the soldiers' imagination produced and reflected a variety of avenues towards a better future for them, their members and families at large.

However, in doing so, the pattern of argument and discussion repeatedly re-turned to conversant grievances. It was again an indication that the past dimension is strongly habituated to a "narrative construction" in Emirbayer and Mische's sense (1998: 989): their stories and "maps of action" have formed the lifeworld and the stock of knowledge onto which they draw. Only hesitantly, alternative courses were investigated by the soldiers.

> "Experimentation […] rests on the borderline between imagination and action […]; once scenarios have been examined and solutions proposed, these hypothetical resolutions may be put on the test in tentative or exploratory social interactions." (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 990)

The veteran's association did not assert itself against their habitual patterns, as in 2013, UDAFOL took their case not to the streets but to the judiciary, yet another branch of government (Yangian 12.06.2013). Most of their mental images concern the political order and state practices which presently largely diverge from their understanding of how things ought to go, especially in regards to perceived security structures and institutions. They thereby reflect their own life trajectories but also the wider context of the state and especially the (in)security the state was about to produce, they believed. Hence, they scrutinized the processes even though they remained officially excluded from the security sector. They repeatedly questioned the novel order endorsed by the government through replacement of personnel, new structures and with resources and expertise of international actors. However, they acknowledged that many past practices and structures are disputed. Nevertheless, they are critical that the present structural and personal changes will be expedient, as they consider the new security forces as being too small, inexperienced, and are believed to "leave the barracks in numbers". The state production of pictures of might, efficiency, gender-and regional balance and performances of power are not convincing to the soldiers. What does concern them is the re-interpretation and re-making of history by the present government with backing of the international community, which position the former soldiers at the margins of state and society. As in most post-war contexts (Wiegink 2013: 50), the state is in the position of evoking memory by employing powerful images, and make use of such to legitimize practices and actors. The soldiers, however, contest many of the state-produced images and question the legitimacy of specific state actors and their practices, for example the director of the Bureau of Veteran Affairs or the Defense Minister. The Director of the Veteran's Bureau was considered dishonorably discharged by Samuel K. Doe, whereas the Defense Minister – besides being a former AFL soldier himself - had trained the Black Berets of the first interim president Amos Sawyer. They challenge the legitimacy of these actors, notwithstanding the fact that some of their group were part of the Black Berets and other armed groups (cf. Gerdes 2013). As mentioned, a range of powerful actors were or are part of powerful networks to which the old AFL, as southeasterners, have limited access (Bøås and Utas 2014). Apart from moral claims towards *big people*, they continue to uphold the constitution as the remainder of a legitimate institution they consider having defended and which generated their source of legitimacy for their claim as being unconstitutionally disbanded. Now, they perceive particularly this constitution as being used to "put them on the streets", and this act is a central aspect of their repertoire, figuring in the associations' name. Many ordinary former soldiers are occupied with a rather challenging everyday life and think that the lobbying efforts of the UDAFOL leadership are a waste of time, or they claim not to be aware of the activities. However, many remain frustrated about their situation in the aftermath of the war and the turning points in their lives, and the accounts of past demonstrations show that a large number of soldiers can be mobilized to demonstrate if there is a need for the appearance in large numbers. The chairman emphasized their long being in anguish. For all his effort in the common cause of the deactivated soldiers, he had been prosecuted,

detained, and injured numerous times. “I’ve been to jail so many times for this reason. Just because I have my lawyer, they know I’m right. I have been beaten. Me! We’ve been advocating for six good years. There’s nothing good they say about us” (group discussion, Monrovia, 24.07.2012). Categorized as perpetrators by the state, they turn the argument around and consider themselves as victims of the transformation: even though they are conscious about their bad image from the past and the war, which they acknowledge, they consider themselves as those excluded from society in the post-war context. Though much of their argument was still circulating around their shared grievance, their arguments had a new turn; they want a change now, as the host states:

> “…we have our children, we want a better future for them. Some of them are in the streets […]. Liberia would have been beautiful. Liberia would have been beautiful if there would have been no war. The war set us back 50 years.” (Group discussion, Monrovia, 24.07.2012)

Their political articulation took a new turn by emphasizing the future more than before. It was not by coincidence that the meeting took place in a private home and food was served by the host’s daughter, a household that was financed like so many Liberian households by the wife of the soldier. It was at the same time that the National Visioning was on everyone’s lips. Though they still state that they would have the mobilizing power, they re-emphasize peaceful means and cooperation. In their opinion, the security situation in the country is not sustainable. They emphasized how young soldiers are leaving the barracks due to the bad conditions there. Security concerns remained at the core of their interest.

7.8. Conclusion

The meeting of 2012 took place in a private home. New ideas showed that the present disbanded soldiers redirected their collective agency and were brainstorming about new possibilities to organize into an NGO. This had been a disputed strategy in the forefield of the 2011 elections. However, as some of the political aspirations and powerful arguments to underline their claims have faded away after the elections, there emerged a need to redefine their purpose. Allegiance to the president had been re-pledged, and there was a need for a new goal to their collective action. Elaborating a proposal to seek donor support seemed to be both a viable option and a common practice by a range of Liberians; it appeared to be more promising than demonstrating. Veteran’s organizations exist all around the world, and this would give a new frame to their grievances and claims.

The disbanded soldiers, in the end, find themselves in a similar situation like many Liberians that are trying to improve their lives: many are founding associations and organizations, thereby gaining new avenues along their economic activities. Demonstrating had caused attention and fear, but did not bring the goal closer for the disbanded soldiers. Yet they continue to make their claims towards the state. The chapter emphasized the turns and changes of their approach – from petitioning the president to step down, to striving towards an

NGO and supporting the incumbent in the elections are all quite creative attempt to take on new avenues to make their claims.

However, they still demand the government for better pensions, because they are sure the government has the money they request, and they continue to feel that they were those who gained the least from the peace process. They remain with sentiment of being the victims, with a “damaged honor” in the shadows of the state, however, remain with their claims and temporally or situationally take the chance to underline these.

8. MANDINGO'S CONTESTED BELONGING: THE STORY OF COMASL[207]

On the evening of February 26, 2010, shortly after the Lofa Incident, I met some neighbors involved in a heated discussion about "the Mandingo and Loma people fighting each other".[208] Variations of the story soon circulated in the media with catchy titles such as "Lofa explodes". The incident caused anxiety in particular social spaces throughout the country, as was shown in Chapter 4, and had vast impact on a range of social actor's social and economic activities. A selection from newspaper citations shall give an impression of the drama surrounding the events:

> "Mobs of rival ethnic and religious gangs last week roamed the streets of Voinjama, Lofa County, killing, burning and looting as hundreds fled in scenes reminiscent of the war. The bloodletting was sparked, according to eyewitnesses when a woman, 21, of the Lutheran School was found dead in Konia behind the school dead in suspicious circumstances that suggest ritualistic designs. The nearby mosque was then reportedly attacked, sparking to calls to Monrovia. Calls from Monrovia to Voinjama alleging that mosques were under attack ignited more violence that spread in Voinjama, sources said. The violence left at least 4 people dead and 14 others wounded on critical list following the weekend ethnic violence between Mandingoes and Lomas, authorities of the Tellewoyan Memorial Hospital confirmed Saturday in Voinjama." (Dulleh 01.03.2010)

> "It has now been established that more than 2,000 ethnic Mandingo and Loma youths armed with shotguns, machetes, knives and other missiles, partook in the last Friday violent clashes that left the provincial City of Voinjama, Lofa County, in flames with 4 dead and several injured. "There is no exact figure but the only information I've points to well above 2'000 running around in small alleys," UNMIL boss Ellen Margaret Loj told local journalists…" (Garblah 05.03.2010)

The news and pictures informed mental images of disarray and insecurity. Facts and rumors mingled, as variations in details and context circulated. I have analyzed this event earlier in Chapter 4 to emphasize the fragility of the post-war context, such as James' experience in a continuum of war and peace.

The event and news about the incident spread quickly to the capital of Lofa County, where it caused an outbreak of violence and looting in the streets, mostly by young men. Likewise, fragments of information spread by phone calls to Monrovia before radio, newspapers or state agencies reported about the incident. Apparently, the dead girl had a Mandingo name but was said to be affiliated to the Loma[209] ethnic group. The incident initiated a temporal politicized turn in the discursive formation of ethnicity and religion. But this discourse has to be put into context; the ethnogenesis and configuration of actors and groups has long historical roots and regional variations in Liberia and beyond. But all these details sum up into a highly politicized discourse on moral citizenship and imaginary of belonging. Though ethnicity and religion are at stake, there are but the dominant elements of the discourse; reducing this violent incident to tensions of ethnicity or

[207] The material on which this case study is based led to a comparative analysis with Carole Ammann in Kankan, urban Guinea. This comparative work led to a working paper (Ammann and Kaufmann 2013) and journal article (Ammann and Kaufmann 2014).
[208] Besides, the news reported that Gadhafi had announced a Jihad against Switzerland, about which I was also informed by my neighbors.
[209] It was also mentioned that she was a Gbandi. Though she had a Mandingo name, she was not part of the Mandingo ethnic group (personal communication with a well-informed non-Mandingo person hailing from Lofa, Monrovia, 01.03.2010).

religion is superficial and incomplete. The local conflict did not lead to an outbreak of large-scale violence or trigger war. According to a Liberian expert in conflict studies, this was mainly because Liberians are "tired of war". For him, evidence that this event was not about ethnicity or religion was the observation that looting was carried out by random youth in unsystematically selected stores.

The Mandingo in Liberia are one of the most researched groups in present as well as past Liberia (Bøås and Dunn 2013, Hojbjerg 2010, Holsoe 1976-1977, Konneh 1996a, Konneh 1996b, or Munive Rincon 2010a). As most of these studies were conducted in the past or in small towns in the interior, the empirical reality in Monrovia remained on a discursive level with a temporal and situational dimension. Interested in concrete social practices and collective action in regards to these social constrictions, I started to investigate what turned out to be a complex issue rooted in the Liberian past and regional particularities of belonging.[210]

A group that was politically active in this regards was the Concerned Mandingo Association of Liberia (COMASL),[211] which, as its name indicates, is socially and politically engaged towards the interest of their members in micro-and macro political spaces. Of central interested was their social imaginary as part of agency against the background on which COMASL operated and articulated the Mandingo as belonging to the nation: Though eligible to citizenship by formal law, on a local level, ethnic identity and belonging are linked to homeland, and this again defines inclusion and exclusion. This, however, is one of the most frequent issues and nexus of contestation in many other regions of the world, and a number of scholars have provided insights into the politics of belonging in Africa.[212] Through the narratives and practices of COMASL, I gained deeper insight into what such differences mean in a post-war context, that they are far from considered normal even though social cleavages existed throughout the history of Liberia. The imaginary of the state, shaped by the practices of its actors and the image of an overall entity as shaping and defining boundaries and mental maps (Migdal 2004) stands on center stage. COMASL creates and shapes a social space in which a particular social imaginary is created and shaped against competing imaginaries of belonging. These tensions, I will highlight in the following, are not simply ethnic or religious, but are to be situated in a complex arrangement of actors discursively negotiating belonging to and imagining the nation-state.

8.1. Politics of Belonging

The mental maps of belonging at the foundation of nation-state imaginaries (Migdal 2004: 5–7) are complex and require some conceptual background on land tenure in order to understand contemporary political

[210] As pointed out in the methodological reflections of this dissertation, my research assistant was a member of the Mandingo ethnic group. Though through him, I got many insights into the situation of the Mandingo in Liberia, he did not influence the research as he withheld his personal background while in the field. In addition, I gathered much of the information without him. I did not experience a difference regarding utterances about ethnic groups and belonging, whether he was present or not.

[211] The group was also referred to as the Concerned Mandingo Society of Liberia. Association was changed to Society on its Facebook page on June 11, 2014.

[212] See for instance the edition of Bøås and Dunn with comparative case studies of various African countries (Bøås and Dunn 2013), or the Special Issue on land politics in Africa by Lund and Boone (2013).

landscape. As Carola Lentz pointed out, leaning on Sally Falk Moore (Lentz 2007: 39), rights over land and property are not about the things per se, but rather about relationships between social actors and things: "If claims to land are linked to group membership, the reverse is also true: control over land has been and is still used as a way of defining belonging and, in some parts of Africa, as an instrument to control the labor and/or taxes of those who live on the land" (Lentz 2007:37). With regard to land tenure, many cases of West African states show conflicts between pre-colonial land tenure and colonial arrangements of land tenure. Liberia has a different historical context and other categories are at work, but in effect, a plurality of legal systems can be found along the continuum of the statutory law in the realm of the centralized government, and customary legal systems controlled by local governance and authority of elders or chiefs (Olivier de Sardan 2009b). This plurality of legal systems, in particular the dominant statutory legal system, affects the local realities in a similar way as the colonial governance did. Lentz (2007: 34) defines three basic realms in customary tenure that are issue of multiple local interpretations which may lead to conflict. The first concerns the property-holding group, which are those actors who grant or mediate access to land. This refers to the debate about first-comers who have established a relationship to the land. However, this group is often contested, as it is often not clear if those should own the land who were first physically present on a certain land, or those that first cleared the forest on said land. Furthermore, the boundaries of the property-holding group are often not clearly defined, hence issue to dispute. The second realm relates to the fuzzy geographical boundaries of the land. Boundaries are often difficult to define; hunters use more vast landscapes and are not much concerned about boundaries. Farmers on the other hand need their land to be defined more clearly, especially with a growing population and a scarce area of fertile land. Then, the fuzzy borders may become a source of conflict. The third is the issue of multiple layers of rights over natural resources. Land may be used by different right holders at different times. Some actors may claim allodial rights to land, and assign usufruct rights to strangers. Oral tradition created room for interpretation within the plurality of systems:

> "[W]ith the lack of maps, written titles and cadastres, the 'bundle of owners', 'bundle of rights' and territorial boundaries have to be constantly interpreted and reaffirmed through narratives and rituals." (Lentz 2007: 43)

In absence of forms of control, this leads way to misinterpretation and misuse. In the course of social change, economic crisis, during or after war, these arrangements of land tenure can be misused by individuals for example who sell land without transferring all land rights (Heitz Tokpa 2012: 5). This turned complex in the political history of Liberia, where the ruling elite has the power to transform undeeded land into eminent property; the president decided over land in indirect rule, and all transactions were and continue to be approved by the president in last instance (Munive Rincon 2010b: 66, Unruh 2009: 427).

As scholars show elsewhere, land is part of complex processes and cannot be considered as property in a narrow sense as things that can be alienated and acquired. Land is embedded in the social and political - and historical - context of a continuum of rights and right holders (Lentz 2007 or Lund 2002). As such, it is central

part of power relationships. As the political context transforms, the configuration of actors and the rights often change, and the form of relationship changes. This happened in a range of instances and regions of Liberia, for example where elite claimed land as government land and later resold it to Mandingo traders. In recent times, especially since the war, the argument discursively hardened that the Mandingo were foreigners and do not have rights over land. Instead, it belongs to the "sons of the soil" (Geschiere 2011), those who were on the land before the "strangers" arrived (Brooks 1993: 38). This marked the discursive formation and hardening of ethnic boundaries. In Liberia, however, the regionality and temporally of claims is pointed out by a number of scholars.

> "Past and present claims to autochthony, or first comer status reflect this difference in settlement patterns. The Lofa Mandingos' claim to the status as town, chiefdom and nation founders contrasts to the Nimba Mandingos' recognition of an official stranger-host relationship." (Hojbjerg 2010: 284)

Even different and more contested is the history in western Liberia, between the Gola, Dei and Vai (Holsoe 1976-1977). Historic facts and collective memory of the Mandingo and the other groups are contested; "the historians did a bad job. King Sao Boso was not a Mandingo" says for example a Southeasterner in an informal conversation, based on evidence that no ruins of a Mosque could be found in Bopulu to prove the legacy of the Mandingo ruler. This indicates that much of the past was and is socially constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed, and history is discursively shaped by many individuals and groups, political actors or newspaper articles such as "The Mandingo question in Liberian History and the Prospect for Peace in Liberia" (Liberian Observer 20.04.2010). Against the historical background outlaid in Chapter 3, such statements question the belonging of King Sao Bosso and the significance of the Mandingo ethnic group upon the arrival of the settlers. The same sources state that land was granted to the Mandingo because of their favors towards the local communities by bringing goods and trading the local products; hence they became part of the local economic and thus social fabric and gradually later settled. Some explain that the Mandingo traders had stands on the markets, in which they slept, and later claimed these lands to be theirs. However, many Liberians state that in the local settings one could and can only own land if one is part of the first settler families.[213]

Hence, the issue of land has to be complemented by the historical role of the state in these social arrangements.

This context is very central to present-day's social imaginary of the nation-state and who belongs to it. To recall, the ruling elite mainly remained along the coast line and built up a centralized state bureaucracy based in Monrovia. The 'hinterland' was left rather untouched until its 'pacification' and the installment of the indirect rule in the beginning of the 20th century (Sawyer 1992: 242).[214] Multiple land rights systems ex-

[213] Personal communication with a Gio man in Monrovia, 19.04.2010 and a Grebo man earlier the same month.
[214] The controversial "property clause" required proof of land ownership to be eligible to vote. This bill was only abolished in 1979 (Dunn and Holsoe 1985: 273).

isted, roughly divided between formal state law and customary law systems often based on usufruct rights in the interior. Land was the most important means of production, and as land existed in abundance, there was a need to control, but no need to purchase land. Elders and other authorities had the power to oversee the supply of land (Konneh 1996b: 11). The state previously only had partial control in the interior, but this changed in the course of the pacification process. Pacification was a rather brutal process of installing state power, control and sovereignty in the interior, reinforced by the Liberian Frontier Force (LFF) over the local population (Munive Rincon 2010a: 11). The state now claimed ownership over the land; all transactions were made through title deeds signed by the president. "The ultimate arbiter of the acquisition and deeding of the land was the president" (Munive Rincon 2010b: 66). This was part of the system of political control, as anyone who wished to purchase land had to be loyal to the president. The government deeded a lot of land to its main loyalists, mainly the elite, and to foreign companies. To put it differently in the words of Liebenow, it was one of the vastest land-grabbing processes in Africa in those days (Liebenow 1969: 209). Though the Liberian code of law granted indigenous certain statutory rights, still, increasing amounts of land was acquired by 'Americo-Liberians' as farm land; many representatives needed not pay for the land. During the economic slowdown in the 1970s, regions such as Ganta became most affected, and many 'Americo-Liberians' started to sell their land. Many sold their properties to wealthy Mandingo traders and returned to Monrovia.

8.2. Ethnicity and Politicization in Recent History

Against the political history outlined above, close links between homeland, belonging and political participation are central aspects that Mandingo are concerned with today, as they are considered late-comers, hence not citizens of Liberia. Present day discourse surrounding ethnic cleavages are attributed to the practices of President Samuel K. Doe and his personal rivalry with Thomas Quiwonkpa, a member of the Gio ethnic group of Nimba County. Doe extended and shaped patrimonial relations with members of the Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups by giving them government positions while singling out Gio. He encouraged the wealthy Mandingo to buy land and granted them tax advantages against the foreign traders. It led to new power and political positioning of Mandingo in Liberia. As a consequence, resentment and envy arose towards the success of the Mandingo. "By the late 1980s on the eve of the civil war, Liberia had been polarized by Doe along ethnic lines" (Konneh 1996: 136; statements of a number of informants). Charles Taylor instrumentalized these resentments against the Mandingo. Whereas President Doe had emphasized their belonging to the nation, Taylor shaped the image of Mandingo being foreigners and intruders from Guinea. His combatants harassed Mandingo and looted their stores and properties, and urged these to cancel their debts (Munive Rincon 2010a: 14, leaning on Richards 1996). A Mandingo informant added another argument to explain why the Mandingo were targeted during the conflict, pointing at the constellation of alliances in the eve of the violent conflict:

> "I: …it was Mandingo that revealed their [NPFL rebels] hiding places. It was Mandingo that told [President Doe] that there were rebels there. Because the Mandingo were economically empowered, they settle along the main street.
> AK: Because they are traders and have their networks...
> I: Yes, so they had strategic places in the country." (Monrovia, 25.11.2009)

According to Konneh (1996: 117), more than 11'500 of 90'000 persons killed during the first war period were members of the Mandingo ethnic group. Many Mandingo fled the country and sought refuge in neighboring Sierra Leone or Guinea. From there, some formed into rebel movements with the aims of revenging.[215] In many Liberian towns, rebels acquired property they sought to be their pay and therefore, their rightful property, which was especially practiced by the NPFL 'pay yourself logic'. In the case of Ganta, a city mayor was appointed after the war by the local elders and loyalists of Charles Taylor. In order to make Ganta attractive for returnees, the city mayor granted 'squatter rights' to civilians and ex-combatants. Returning Mandingo thereafter found some of their land occupied, endorsed by Ganta's political authorities (Munive Rincon 2010a: 17). The squatters preferred the properties that were close to the market, which were more lucrative; hence Munive refers to this as a third phase of land appropriation in Liberia. This practice, however, caused conflict at the return of the refugees; many cases about property are in court up to today, many others have led to physical fights. "Such disputes often invoke both ethnic and political overtones related to alliances developed during the civil wars" (Munive Rincon 2010a: 17). The authorities made no secret out of their reluctance against the Mandingo (Gerdes 2010: 144).

Many political alliances have roots beyond the civil war. The course of history showed how the configuration of actors changed, and with it the change of hands of land and the arrangements of alliances and relationships of many kinds. Evidence for the contextually of ethnicity and belonging provides the story of a Guinean businessman who identifies himself as Fula. Even more than the Mandingo, the Fula are considered foreigners. Yet this informant explained that he had been forced to join the NPFL shortly after the war started. He had been part of the NPFL for one year, he said, and then he was able to leave the group (informal conversation, 19.11.2009). This shows that ethnicity and nationality are blurred in certain contexts and times, and can become politicized and instrumentalized in others. In addition, regional issues become national ones as they travel through space and time, and shaped to mental images that are used for political legitimacy and for the mobilization of voters. This is where COMASL was active on the political stage. Through their association, they aimed at creating counter-images through the media or other activities. They share a social imaginary of how the nation-state should look like, who belongs to it and who as rights as citizens. They emphasize a discursive formation of ethnicity that is hardening the mental boundaries of belonging and exclusion. Core institutions of the state are at stake, as these imaginaries concern the perceived unreliability of the provision of law and order, which even leads to additional grievances rather than resolving disputes. Though some

[215] United Liberation Movement for Democracy (ULIMO) was founded in 1991 by Krahn and Mandingo leaders to fight the NPFL, and in 1999 the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) was founded mainly by former ULIMO fighters.

people continue to take their cases to court, others prefer taking the law into their own hands; the following extract of an interview gives insight into how local actors deal with these intricacies. It is part of an interview with a member of COMASL and a non-COMASL member, who underlined the discussion with a case through which he experienced the intricacies of the guarantee of property rights. His anger becomes abundantly clear by his repetition of the unimaginable:

> Mandingo man: "…I went with physical force to retrieve my land. Physical fight! To retrieve my land! Very physical. I went to a physical fight to retrieve my land. I was lucky, I came from a large family, and when the war came, we fled. And our neighbor took over our house, and he continued to tell the people that we are Mandingos, and we can't get our land, then he possessed the land for four years, he was occupying the land. I was sued, and the entire family rose up. We went from court to court, we went from place to place, hired a lawyer, and the final analysis was physical fight. We fought physically, and even the sheriff that carried the document - because he works with the court - I attacked him physically, I destroyed the court document, and we took over the house by force. And over two weeks, we had more than 15 men there, if anybody come here, they would be bluffed back. And the other party had to deny themselves, and retrieve. That's how we got our property. From physical fight. Physically…"
> COMASL member: "…you see, physically. Otherwise you won't get your property. And it is the first time, after the war, they came back and a group of people claim other people's property. Where have you seen that? Even if they are not citizens, they don't have a right to possess property? A foreigner who has no rights?" (Group discussion, two Mandingo men, Monrovia, 19.05.2010)

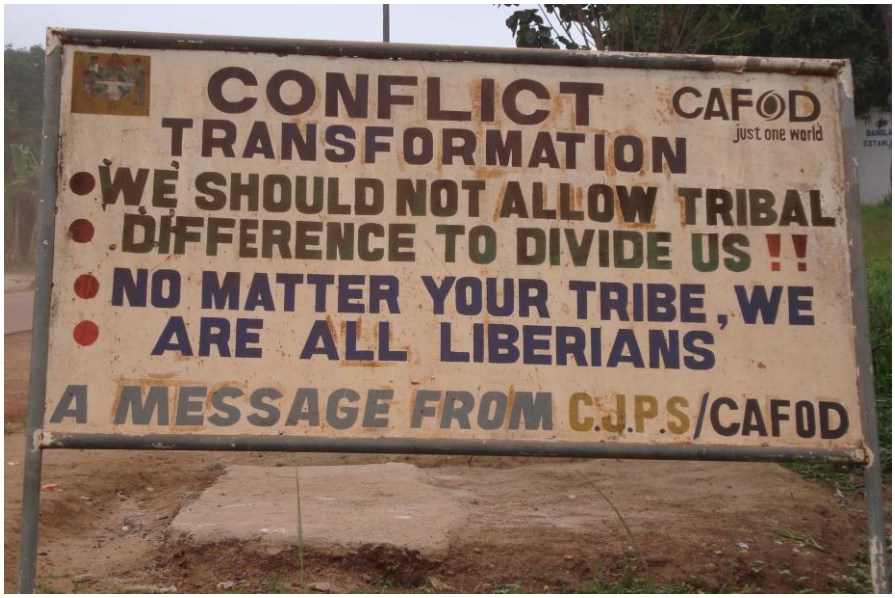
During the war, the family and property of the first speaker was severely affected. Most of his kin fled to neighboring Guinea, after his father was killed by NPFL rebels in his and family members' presence. The family scattered, some fled, others joined rebel forces with intentions of revenging the atrocities committed towards the family members, he explained in this context. When returning many years later, they found squatters on their land and the house they have deeds for. The family went to court but apparently was not support by the judiciary. Past experience and incidents shared among other Mandingo led them to act on their own through physical fight, which had proven the most expedient practice. A range of scholars such as for example Bøås (2008, 2013) or Richards (2005b), and international networks such as Afrobarometer (Topka, Saryee and Asunka 2009) or IRIN News (20.05.2013) have drawn attention to land issues as a major source of conflict and trigger of violence.

Against this backdrop, we should not overlook that social cohesion did exist in the past, and continues to exist in daily life. Though complex tensions are embedded in a long history of changing political and economic configurations, often related to land and belonging, there exist a range of other accounts. Elderly Liberians for example recall intermarriages, even if asymmetric, or mutual benefit in complementary professions. Something of high quality was added the prefix 'Mandingo', for example 'Mandingo shoes' for robust leather slippers. And when Mandingo traders entered a town, children would sing songs in delight of the arrival of traders (elder Kru man, Monrovia, 02.03.2011). It is often imagined that these relationships began to change in the course of Samuel K. Doe's politicization, which led to massive atrocities during the civil wars. There

were attempts to reconcile the cleavages, as for example the marriage of President Charles Taylor with Victoria Addison, a Muslim woman (Waugh 2011: 280),

> "When Charles Taylor came to power, he had some Mandingo with him. In fact, his wife was Muslim. He had two wives. He had Jewel Haja Taylor, he had Hadja Fatumata Taylor. His wife was responsible of telling people to cancel their grievances and should come. Basically, the Mandingoes were closer to Taylor." (Abraham, Monrovia, 25.11.2009)

Hence, this was interpreted by the Mandingo informant as an attempt to reconcile with the Mandingo. Considering the possibility that she is a Mandingo woman, this example pinpoints to the possibility that inter-ethnic boundaries were more fluid than often argued. However, Charles Taylor was not successful in convincing and integrating the Mandingo into his government, mostly at the Mandingo's fear of being deceived and even killed (Gerdes 2013: 156). Whereas former LURD members had lucrative positions in the NTGL and at onset of the Johnson Sirleaf government (Gerdes 2010: 146), at the time of this research it was argued by Mandingo that they were underrepresented in the government and socially marginalized.



Picture 18: Creating awareness for social cohesion with a billboard at the entrance of Ganta.

Today, ethnicity becomes articulated under certain conditions, and the preamble to this chapter showed what shape this potentially can take. The nature of this discourse changes, at times latent, and around certain events such as the parliamentary or presidential elections, they become part of public discourse.

8.3. Ordinary Everyday – Emic and Etic Articulations of Ethnicity

The post-war everyday had become increasingly orderly and allowed people to go about their businesses. Yet, a range of problems remained and resurfaced in certain discussion. Land conflict, and the question of belonging, mainly in regards to the Mandingo, were prominent. Nevertheless, ordinary interactions took place without much reference to socio-cultural categories such as religion or ethnicity.[216] However, this sub-chapter will show where such mental images resurface.

[216] I do not want to go into social organization and culture of the Mandingo in detail, as much has been written about this ethnic group. Apart from origin, professional activities such as long-distance trade and transportation is associated with Mandingo, then

In the everyday, however, the label Mandingo was often used as a stereotypical marker for Muslims in Liberia. Indeed, many Muslims are Mandingo, and most Mandingo are Muslim, and economic activities related to trade and transportation are associated to the "we" understanding of this group. Similarly, Bauer (2007: 34) describes the politicized label Dyula in Côte d'Ivoire. Yet there are a lot of interrelated other social categories, for example gender, in particular as many Mandingo women are engaged in trade, including long-distance trade to neighboring Guinea, where goods are cheaper. The border customs officer in Ganta stated that most of the traders are female, and that they were predominantly members of the Loma ethnic group (interview, Ganta, 12.04.2010). Though many Liberian women of diverse background conduct sub-regional trade, it is likely that Mandingo women switch identity as they expect better treatment by law enforcement officer like him with a non-Mandingo identity. Often, Mandingo women sell textiles in the markets, whereas cloth has been a major good they traded in the past, I was explained. Young Mandingo men were often engaged in transportation, be it in urban public transportation such as taxi, bus or motorbike drivers, or long-distance drivers of taxis, busses or trucks. The means of transportation were often owned by elder and well established *big men* engaged in import and trade of vehicles from overseas, whereas younger men did the physical work of driving, repairing and protecting the vehicles.

The everyday was closely related to physical space: In Jacobtown, one of the peri-urban neighborhoods is composed of parking spaces of countless gigantic trucks used for sub-regional transportation. Jacobtown is also home of one of the biggest mosques, still under construction at the time of this research. Not surprisingly, this neighborhood was home to a large Mandingo community. Like this neighborhood, most parts of Monrovia are predominantly mixed and origin does not play a role, unlike in Ganta or Voinjama where Mandingo live and work in separated areas within a town. The emic and etic construction of Mandingo-related identities include aspects of cultural, religious and social realm, such as festive attire according to cultural norms; many women or girls cover their hair and legs, and some men wear long white gowns on Fridays. Liberian cultural forms and attire is influenced by the 'American way of life', other cultural elements are appropriated, such as prayer beads, or Fridays festive costumes. Many Mandingos pray five times a day in specific places, however, not in public, and are mindful to the food they eat. As 'pigfeet' are a common ingredient in Liberian meals but a taboo for Muslims, many Mandingo investigate where to eat. Religious or cultural norms also inform entertainment practices and spaces, such as green tea rituals instead of alcoholic beverages.

Many of these features apply for Muslim of other ethnic groups as well. Even though ethnic boundaries were created and deepened in the past by state practices in its intention standardize, control and oversee its population by creating created statistics and records of names which created labels and characteristics (cf. Scott

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other socio-cultural elements such as religion (Muslim or Bamana), language or social organization (specifically in Liberia, endogamy is mentioned) (Bauer 2007, Hojbjerg 2010, Konneh 1996b).

1998), some elements are taken up into the repertoire of self-attribution and constitution of a "we" identity, such as economic practices and patterns. Furthermore, their position as foreigners strengthens an in-group solidarity. As for any social group, there exist great differences within, and the social status and religious practices vary greatly. As examples of self-ascription I was even named physical appearance of stature, skin complexion and names that reveal Mandingo identity. In relation to other groups, the most important difference put forward was that the Mandingo in general do not participate in *Poro*, *Sande* or other *secret societies* which are very central in political and social organization. The exclusion marks differences in regards to political participation, knowledge, or physically on the body.[217] Also, they were not part of elite associations such as fraternities often related to Christianity. Even though major characteristic of the Mandingo is their religious background, Islam, it should not be neglected that a range of other ethnic groups are Muslim, such as some of the Vai, Gbandi, Loma and others. Though the origins from Mali Empire constitute a central aspect of Mandingo identity, present-day family relations to Guinea are downplayed and the belonging to Liberia since generations is emphasized, even the more so in politicized contexts such as the elections period in Liberia in 2010-2011.

In everyday life, most of these social markers seemed subtle, whereas others were evident and situatively became explicit in words and practices, such as for example in public transportation or *atay shops*. *Atay* or *hatay shops* are social institutions "important to day-to-day popular sociability in Mandinka culture" (Banegas: 6). They are found throughout the West Africa from Senegal to Nigeria, however, mainly affiliated with Muslim, traders and travelers. In Liberia, they are often led by Muslim, often Mandingo or at times Fula, whereas the customers include travelers from Senegal to Nigeria, and young people of various backgrounds and often mainly from the neighborhoods. There are a variety of such shops in various forms and sizes; but the most common were about four square meters, open but covered shops with benches attached to the shop so that one can sit and eat facing the cook in the interior of the shop. The U-formed arrangement of the benches are ideal for conversations with other consumers. The shops offered a range of snacks and non-alcoholic beverages, but their main specialty is the strong brewed, green tea called *atay* in Liberia. The tea is said to be stimulating, and people attach a number of meanings to it: from healing power, prevention of Malaria or abdominal complications, to simply stimulating work or discussions. Critiques consider *atay* to be a kind of drug, part of 'street food' and associate it with a negative image. These critiques also think that the way the *atay* glasses are washed (normally just with water), is not hygienic. Some *atay shops* have a TV which runs in the evenings, a host of people gather and silently watches the show or film.[218]

[217] I was repeatedly told that Mandingo, as Doe's loyalists and founders of counter-rebellions against Charles Taylor, were targeted by NPFL rebels, and one way of identifying a Mandingo was by his or her absence of scars from *Poro* and *Sande* initiation.
[218] On 01.03.2011, one of the *atay shops* in my neighborhood screened "sometimes in April", a film about the Rwandan genocide. The youthful crowd watched in silence and without movement. Once in a while, somebody commented the "wickedness"; one young man uttered a rhetoric question "which war was more wicked, the Liberian or the Rwandan". Another said that this was how the devil would manifest himself.

During the day, many people come to eat, often those who have nobody that cooks at home. Such as the young and ambitious pastor who was building up his 'ministry' near the *atay shop* I was sitting one day. He started to talk to me about his plans of combining music and religion. As we conversed, he regularly switched tone and bellowed at the young Mandingo man who was preparing his food. "Don't touch the water with your fingers!" he exclaimed, and a bit later "let me take the bread myself!" The pastor seemed concerned about hygiene combined with a rather negative image of the young man. After the pastor had left, I asked the cook in passing what he thought of the pastor. He said with a shrug that in Guinea, a person would respect his brother even if he had no money (Monrovia, 12.05.2010). He used his home, Guinea, as a standard. It is not so common in Liberia to give profuse thank to a service delivery like food in a restaurant, and I remarked the condescending way some 'boss men' and 'boss women' would treat those of lower positions. However, the observed interaction was considered disrespectful also to the cook. This was not an exceptional scene. In the course of my observations at *atay shops*, I learned more about the stereotyping ascriptions of the Mandingo: that they were not clean, or that their food is considered "street food" of low quality.[219] This had changed over time, as a number of actors, especially elder Liberians, state that before the war, something of good quality, including food, was expressed with the prefix 'Mandingo' as mentioned above. These are examples of typical ethnic stereotypisations as they create boundaries and social distance towards the 'other' in difference to oneself, and make the world 'orderly'. These are mainly mental images that are intersubjectively shared for the purpose of inclusion and exclusion (Eriksen 2010: 33–37). Ethnic identity is not as much articulated in everyday life in Monrovia as it is in other parts of West Africa, unlike for example in the Copperbelt described by Clyde Mitchell (1956: 28), where ethnic identification is part of a greeting and exchange like the name. In Liberia, some people have names which serve as ethnic markers, such as Kamara or Sheriff which are associated with Mandingo, or Massaqoui or Paasawee as Vai names. However, due to intermarriages, such markers have become obsolete to some extent. In addition, many have acquired 'American' names like Johnson, Cooper or Moore which are not specific to a certain group or region. Language hardly serves as a signifier in urban everyday life, as everybody speaks Liberian English. The continuation of the Unification Policy, initiated by Tubman and continued by President Johnson Sirleaf aimed at integrating and absorbing differences into a neoliberal rhetoric of unity.

Even if in the bustling every day interactions and encounters seem to be independent from ethnic categories, in specific events or times they are drawn upon, for example in the course of the Lofa Incident, or the election registration in January 2011. The violence in Lofa brought new features and images of discourse to Monrovia, or rather revitalized aspects of it. James explained that temporally, ethnicity materialized in economic practices in Voinjama. The pre-election period of registration and formations of alliances gave way to

[219] Indeed, I observed that often, people would rather send a child to go order and pick some food at the *atay shop* and bring it to them.

articulation of ethnicity and belonging. This is where associations such as COMASL came to play a vital role, mainly in publicly contesting and opposing the mental images and boundaries of the Mandingo 'others' as foreigners from Guinea. Such situational and temporal tensions do not mean that ordinary daily interactions in everyday life discontinued. Many people draw on multiple identities. It had been a strategy during war to switch identity in order not be targeted by rebel groups. Indeed, I was told that many understand and speak other languages, which had been life-saving during the war. Situationally, my research assistant introduced himself with a pseudonym in order not to influence a certain situation.

Though the collective identity of the Mandingo and discursive distanciation practices are continuously shaped and reshaped by themselves and others, the concerns remain that the "root causes of the conflict" are not resolved and would situationally lead to escalations of verbal and physical assault. The tensions in discourse and practices that were brought to Monrovia in the course of the Lofa incident were harsh; threats of violence came up and circulate with other rumors of ethnic and religious tensions. Some Mandingo were apprehensive about their relatives; phones were lost and communication was interrupted, some feared reprisals also in Monrovia and reflected about ways to protect their families (informal discussion, Monrovia, 01.03.2010). Mandingo experienced the post-war context as less peaceful than other Liberians. The discourse of ethnicity and related tension exhibit temporal and spatial variations of the continuum of war and peace, as it became latent again until the run-up to the presidential and parliamentary elections in Liberia, when it re-emerged as an openly discussed topic. The tensions had been latent for some time, however, they had come up at several occasions since the end of the war, such as in the presidential elections of 2005 (Söderström 2011: 214), or the 'Rug War' of 2004 (COMASL group discussion, 25.05.2010).

8.4. The Concerned Mandingo Society of Liberia (COMASL)[220]

COMASL which is one of the driving forces in making claims based on belonging and addressing issues within the regional and national arrangements of social actors and political leaders. Through their chairperson, they were regularly heard or read in the media. By writing and publishing newspaper articles in print and online COMALS made itself visible at the time of this research. They raised public awareness about a bad state of affairs or problems concerning their ethnic group. Since early 2010, I regularly met members of COMASL leadership for a group meeting or informally to get updates on their working. They had a quite well equipped office space including computers and a TV in an 'upstairs building' in central Monrovia. Their meetings were well organized, with the agenda maintained by the chairperson of the organization. We were offered cool,

[220] COMASL is a grassroots organization. There exists a second organization, the National Mandingo Caucus (NMC). It was set up by Musa Bility, an influential businessman, to support Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in the elections (Gerdes 2013: 193). The NMC consists of wealthy and influential members of the Mandingo ethnic group. The Caucus for example has established the "King Sao Boso Kamara Scholarship fund. However, COMASL and the Mandingo Caucus have different interests (COMASL member, interview, 25.05.2010); COMASL mainly operating on a grassroots' level, which they emphasize, whereas the Caucus often figures in media reports and pictures with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

canned soft drinks. I was not recommended to contribute to 'soft drinks'[221] – normally gesture of appreciation that we generally granted to associations or individuals - as the association seemed to be well funded. The leadership was mostly present with four to six members, but the chairperson was always present, as he was the porte-parole. There were no women amongst the leadership. However, women had their own, quite renowned organizations.[222] In our meetings, the other members, including a legal advisor, the vice chairman, or one or the other district or county coordinators, mostly contributed by adding an example upon request by the chairperson. During the time of this research, the group's composition changed slightly, and the chairmanship changed to another of the founding members. This second chairman was younger, had enjoyed education abroad, and was actively engaged in various social spheres, including the university. He was my main informant on the Mandingo topic.

The core of COMASL leadership consisted of a few members that were always available for information, well informed, and that also travelled for their causes. We had met a group of COMASL members in Ganta in April 2010, when my assistant and I travelled to the border region.[223] There, they were investigating land issues, and we met them vividly discussing in an *atay shop*.

In the course of the research period, COMASL' office location changed; first to a smaller office on Benson Street, then, in 2012, they did not have an office space anymore. It reflects the immediacy of their concern, and the political events in pre-election Liberia.

The meetings or interviews were usually quite long, in comparison to other meetings with Liberian associations; the group had a lot of stories and cases to tell and to underline their concern. The Mandingo's grievances stood at center stage of the discussions. Apart from the group meetings, one of the members was a key informant, which I sometimes also met on campus, and who explained in a bit more details what was evolving on the ground. Besides the information directly gathered from COMASL, I collected newspaper articles by or about COMASL. Lastly, vast background information was gathered in informal conversations and observations in public transportation, at *atay shops*, in other public spaces or with other informants or friends, as already mentioned. Even though my assistant is a member of the Mandingo ethnic group, he did

[221] 'Cold water' (small amounts, a few LD bills), 'soft drink' or 'scratch card' (bigger amount, equal to 5USD) are also degrees of money often asked for or after a certain service; a kind of accelerant for services often legitimated for low-earning staff, or, as stated above, a gesture of appreciation.

[222] Notable is the Liberian Muslim Women for Peace, founded by Asatu Bah-Kenneth (Reticker 2008). Due to time constraints, I did not include this group into my data collection and analysis. The women's perspective therefore remains largely absent from this topic, as I focused on COMASL in this chapter. However, I assume that in regards to women, the social interactions are more interwoven and boundaries are soften in regards to women-women, and Mandingo women-Christian-men interactions. Yet the social interactions and collective agency of Mandingo women in post-war Liberia would be an interesting topic to study mental boundaries of a politicized context.

[223] Initially, a comparative perspective with the PhD project partner in Guinea was planned which was later abandoned due to personal reasons. I nevertheless travelled in order to obtain some knowledge on other regions, discourses and practices, which proved to be insightful.

not impose on discussions or social contacts. However, he facilitated contact and hence served as a gate-keeper to informants of interest.

8.5. Formation of COMASL

The Concerned Mandingo Association/Society of Liberia (COMASL) is a registered organization, that is, it is an official and legally operating NGO in Liberia. The organization was founded in the ending phase of the war, as one of the founding members elaborated: "…the Concerned Mandingo Association of Liberia was founded in 2003. And, the rationale behind the foundation of COMASL is to meet the tension and reduce the tension between our tribe and other tribes in this country." (First chairperson, Monrovia, 19.05.2010)

Hence, the forming of the organization was directly war- and post-war-related, and as such, the organization is in itself part of a process in the continuum of war and peace. They had started off with a few individuals of Mandingo ethnicity who shared an imaginary, as another founding member adds the social problems after the war as a reason.[224]

> "This institution was formed 2004, with the intention of buttressing the post-war peace agenda. As you know, Mandingoes were actively involved in the civil conflict. They produced a lot of ex-combatants. If you look at LURD, almost 60, 70% Mandingoes, look at ULIMO, the Krahn faction and the Mandingo faction. Even on Taylor's side. And then, we decided to form such an institution, so that we can be able to transform those ex-combatants to productive ones, and besides, what led the civil crisis, too, we should also come in, to play our own role as an agent of this sorrow. So that we all can smoke a peace pipe, and bring one another together, as brothers and sisters. So that is the idea behind this institution." (First chairperson, Monrovia, 25.05.2010)

The chairperson, one of the founding members of the group, emphasizes possible problems at the transition to post-war as a potential threat to society, hence the rational of the founding of the association to contain the grievances. This problem needed to be addressed from below, from the grassroots, COMASL members emphasized. Though the transformation of the combatants and their integration into society was a founding motive, it seemed to play a less important role as combatants found their ways into manifold hustling activities at the time of this research. Rather, marginalization and contextual politicization of ethnicity was central issue on their agenda. It has been stated by scholars that especially LURD members have not been centrally integrated into the government subsequent to the NTGL (Gerdes 2013: 192, 218). However, addressing the cleavages within society seemed prerequisite for the group to move from past grievances to a projected future of coexistence, which is in the interest of a broad range of Mandingo, and the following excerpt shows that there are also profound issues that may trigger conflict again and again, if they are not resolved:

[224] Note that another year is given as a founding year. I observed in other situations as well that in remembering, an event plays a much more important role than the exact date of it, and hence, this does not have to do with confusion but rather the reference to a period around the ending of the war. Though many Liberians are certain about events, the exact date mentioned is often unclear or even contradictory. Another example was James's age in chapter four.

> "Because there has been that kind of hatred between our tribe and other tribes in this country, that Mandingos are not citizens of our country. And because of that - other issues! National issues, such as security." (First chairperson, Monrovia, 19.05.2010)

COMASL has detailed knowledge about societal cleavages shaped out between the Mandingo and the other ethnic groups especially in Nimba and Lofa Counties. In the above statement they emphasize that unresolved conflicting issues as a threat to national security. Experience from the violent past as well as incidents in more recent times provide evidence for their concern. These cleavages were identified as peace threatening by other national and international actors as well, as for example the TRC stated that "identity conflicts" constitute one of the four realms of causes and sources of conflict in Liberia:

> "…Generally negative discourse encompasses 'ethnic', 'tribal', 'religious', 'cultural' conflicts, and the invariable distinctions between 'the natives', or those deemed to 'belong to Liberia', and 'those who do not belong', typically 'Americo-Liberians' and 'the Mandingos'; b. These categorizations are a diversion from the underlying problem; the formation of the Liberian state preceded any meaningful development of a Liberian nation, or sense of nationhood; (…) The effects continue to be felt today; public discourse is characterized by focus on what separates Liberians, as opposed to what unifies them" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2009: 212).

In line with the identification of sources of tensions by the TRC, COMASL aims at addressing these through their association. This was a central motive for the founding of their association. Within the rhetoric of democratization in post-war Liberia, the association can be understood as a vehicle to transport their claims in a formalized way as many women's groups and 'civil society organizations' conduct awareness in order to reduce the 'ills of society'. This shared imaginary serves as a powerful motor to their collective agency. Yet, the conditions do not change rapidly and their efforts remain disenchanted, it seems to me in their accounts of actions. So the vision of a better future must be robust. Again and again, ethnicity becomes manipulated, and has consequences of many kinds, such as perceived discrimination and marginalization at schools, workplaces or in the public realm; different treatment by officials such as the police; or exclusion or underrepresentation in the government and public administration. Main aim and activity of COMASL therefore is to alleviate the ethnic cleavages, and to integrate their ethnic group into the "national project" (Dorman, Hammett and Nugent 2007: 7). Therefore, they draw on a broad range of agency. Some of the members are highly qualified and built their own capacity and experiences also in refuge. For example, one of the members studied journalism in Nigeria, and mentions in passing how serious religious articulation and cleavages can be and what they can lead to. Mostly, COMASL works through communication of various kinds: the publication of newspaper articles, thereby creating public awareness on certain issues. Besides that, they write letters to the President, often with a copy to various international actors including the Ambassador of the USA, the European Union or UNMIL.[225] Furthermore, they debate with local people and institutions through

[225] It is a common practice of 'civil society organizations' of various kinds to address an issue in a letter to the President with "CC copies" to a range of influential international actors in order to underline their grievance, claim.

the offices they have set up in various counties, and thereby create awareness and sensitization on a grass-roots level.

COMASL does not receive international funding, or any other financial contributions other than those provided by their members. Even their travels to the counties are paid by their own means, which they emphasize as to underline their dedication and determinacy in the matter. Major activities refer to legal cases, most prominently the disputes over land. Although these are often local and contextual matters, the repeatedly mentioned Lofa Incident showed in what way such issues can link up with a common imaginary and turn into national concerns. These events fit into mental images that are situatively constructed over time and space, and merge into a social imaginary of who belongs to the nation state. Mediation and awareness has therefore been considered to be of major importance to soften these hardened social constructions. Therefore, COMASL circulate information on a national level but also on a grassroots level between government and the local population. They contribute to conflict resolution among individuals or groups through their establishments in various regions:

> "Our first project was to establish the branches in the various counties: Gbarnga, Kakata, Lofa, Nimba County, even Sinoe, Grand Gedeh we have our representatives serving there as coordinators, representing the organization in the various counties. We have series of meetings with some tribes, telling them, look, we all are Liberians…" (First Chairman, Monrovia, 19.05.2010)

In COMASL' argumentation, emphasis is laid on the unity of the people in Liberia as Liberians. They are laying emphasis on their being part of the "16 tribes of Liberia" (Ellis 2007: 39)[226] and having status as citizens if naturalized, like any other ordinary Liberian.

> "It is because the old hands, when I mean the old hand, I mean the politicians who want to rule us perpetually, and they cannot do this except they play what we call in the arena of politics: discourse to confuse our political system, continue to marginalize us, out rule us. This is why when they came, they said "oh […], he's a foreigner!" because, he's a Muslim, because he's a Mandingo, because, he or she does not know how to write like this! When they see us writing like this, they say that oh, these people are strange people, look at their writing. Which is of course quite different. It's not like that. (First chairperson, Monrovia, 19.05.2010)

What this member of the COMASL leadership states in these dense four sentences is the core of their present-day articulation, which I want to look at more closely in the following subchapters. It is the discourse about belonging to the Liberian nation-state.

Belonging, Boundaries, and Religion Defining the National Project

[226] The '16 tribes' are part of the image that constitutes the Liberian nation. Even though it does not form part of the constitution, some actors would consider it as something fixed. The statement of a Mandingo man, 25.11.2009, is a typical example: "Ok, the Mandingo in Liberia (…) are part of the 16 tribes in Liberia. If you ask anyone that is a Liberian, 'how many tribes do you have in Liberia?' they will tell you '16'. If you minus Mandingo, you can't get 16. So that tells you, Mandingo is a citizen in Liberia, because, it was not the Mandingo who wrote the constitution of Liberia. In the constitution of Liberia, you are told that there are 16 tribes. And Mandingo is part of the 16 tribes. Those that wrote the constitution were not coerced to put Mandingo there." Indeed, Gus Liebenow uses a table of the Liberian Census of Population of 1962 and 1974 that depicts 16 ethnic groups (Liebenow 1987: 35, 320).

To recall, the Liberian Mandingo are predominantly Muslim, however, not all Muslims in Liberia are Mandingo. Often, the two categories are considered equal by many other Liberians. The issue of religion is linked to belonging, and a social imaginary that has a historical dimension. Non-Muslim claim Muslims to be foreigners, as the nation-state is considered to be Christian, however, Mandingo claim to have been in the country for a long time and had a central position at the founding of the state. Sources are cited that the Mandingo, together with the Grebo, were considered the strongest potential opposition to the ACS (Richardson 1959). These are part of the many boundaries that are constructed by society. Some are more rigid than others, however, most are blurred. "Boundaries are constructed through the practical monitoring devices that groups use to actual and virtual checkpoints to divide one space from another. Checkpoints refer to the sites and practices that groups use to differentiate members from others" (Migdal 2004: 6). Many such boundaries of belonging are discursively constituted, hence of temporal and situational nature, and upheld by mental maps (Migdal 2004: 7). One of such defining lines draws on an imaginary of Liberia as a 'Christian nation' and built on according norms and values, another on the cultural values of interior societies. Such imaginaries manifest for example in past and present campaigns to change the name of Monrovia to Christopolis (Fraenkel 1970 [1964]: 153). Political power and decisions are often related to cultural spaces from which most Mandingo – as Muslims - have been excluded in the past, goes COMASL' argument. One is related to the realm of the 'Americo-Liberian' elite which were part of fraternities, interlocked with Christian-based churches.[227] Another constitutes the realm of the *secret societies*, most importantly the *Poro* and *Sande* in the regions inhabited by Mande speakers.[228] However, some individuals joined such initiation societies, and it seems to be an open secret that a number of actors have joined for strategic reasons, namely to participate in local governance systems:[229]

> "I1: …because of position. I know some of them, I will never mention their name. From my County. They went there [to join the Poro], because that man wanted a position.
> I2: …If you're not there, you won't get a position!
> I1: Thank you! So it has been that way." (Group discussion, two Mandingo men, Monrovia, 19.05.2010)

Socio-political relationships cut across what are believed to be clear cut boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, yet in reality they exhibit a certain flexibility. Mandingo have occasionally joined a *secret society* and even acquire a certain position therein, or despite their exclusion have enjoy the support of non-Mandingo members of the society. Nevertheless, there exists a widely spread image that a person who is neither a

[227] In the past also the Freemasons. If they still do exist, is doubted, however, it is rather accepted that they do not influence national politics as they did in the past.
[228] *Poro* and *Sande* are found mainly in North and Northeastern part of Liberia, but also in Sierra Leone and Guinea. *Sande* are said to originate from the Gola ethnic group. These societies have been and still are of central interest to academics, and a range of studies exist. See for example Bellman (1984), Bledsoe (1984), D'Azevedo (1980), Ellis (2010), Murphy (1980), Zetterström (1980), to name a few.
[229] The same group also explained to me that Charles Taylor, for example, went and joined the Poro society for strategic reasons. Many important decisions seem to be made in the *Poro* and *Sande*. Other leaders affiliated to the 'Americo-Liberian' elite have joined these societies, as stated in the history chapter.

Christian nor 'African traditionalist' to be a foreigner. *Secret societies* and their imagined power are vital part of social imaginaries, one also that COMASL wants to bring into question by referring to constitutional rights and by conveying the idea that the state is built on secular and not Christian values. According to the constitution, Liberia is a secular state.[230] However, the rigid mental image is not only quite different but also widespread, and hence, a range of people are convinced by popular discourse. Inclusion and belonging therefore also has a symbolic dimension. COMASL contests the widespread idea that displaying Islamic symbols, or using the Arabic instead of Latin script are used as signifiers to deny somebody citizenship and according rights. They have cases from rural areas where people were denied of voting because they did not speak English. This however, occurs for a range of Liberians that have not had a formal education, and COMASL included this argument into their repertoire of awareness into various counties. The COMASL leadership believes that this is a sensitive issue and it needs a lot of time and many discussions. One way of closing cleavages is to create knowledge about one another's cultures, and explaining – which sounds too seductive, and in reality is rather challenging practice. In precarious times, such as around the elections, COMASL creates awareness over the media through newspaper articles and radio reports. According to my informant, awareness was fruitful. Against the iteration of the negative image, only the iteration of a counter-image seemed to work.

However, there are a number of ways to substantiate belonging. The COMASL president stated that the organization had spent about 6'000 USD to help some Mandingo obtain birth certificates, which until recently were only obtainable at the Ministry of Health in the capital of the centralized state. Such documentation, however, is a prerequisite for applications to certain positions, such as for the police force (Interview, 25.05.2010). This way, Mandingo can apply for government positions or the international organizations or companies, and shape their own participation in public.

A means to (political) participation is education; education is a label that asserts the individual of certain qualities, and whereas it served as a means to social classification and stratification (Fuest 1996: 76), today, academic education facilitates access to prestigious positions, jobs and social mobility. Until recent decades, many Mandingo parents focused on the religious formation of their children by sending them to Quran schools. Thereby, they laid second or none priority on 'Western'-oriented, formal education. This turned out to be a disadvantage to their participation in many social spaces and spheres. As they did not master the formal English language required for the public administration, there are not many Mandingo working in the

[230] Cf. Article 14 of the 1986 Constitution: "All persons shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion […] All persons who, in the practice of their religion, conduct themselves peaceably, not obstructing others and conforming to the standards set out herein, shall be entitled to the protection of the law. No religious denomination or sect shall have any exclusive privilege or preference over any other, but all shall be treated alike; and no religious tests shall be required for any civil or military office or for the exercise of any civil right. Consistent with the principle of separation of religion and state, the Republic shall establish no state religion." (Government of Liberia 1986)

government. This changed, and there are more Mandingo high school or university courses. Many children are educated in the dual system of Western and religious-based education. And education figures prominently on the agenda of COMASL. They encourage their members to send their children to good schools. The social imaginary of a better future enhanced by education is being shared by Mandingo too: participation in the nation-state is facilitated through voting or being elected, or, by having access to prestigious jobs in government. The Mandingo community encourages education in order to participate, and the representative of the Muslim Student Association explains it plainly:

> "I2: People who were prosecuted, they become strong. They are devoted in their pursuit. Not that I'm being self-centered, but most of the Mandingos are educated today.
> I1: Today, you don't put them on part. It's good for the political students. They put their time, they know there are prejudice against them, so they know they have to be prepared. To clear the - to read, to learn, to be prepared against that [prejudices]." (interview, 25.11.2009)

The University of Liberia Muslim Student Association (ULMSA) connects the Liberian Muslim students, and conducts fundraising for less fortunate ones. Awareness, but also the engagement for education goes hand in hand for a long-run political participation, hence, representation of their interests in the government. In 2012, COMASL had been able to raise funds for scholarship programs for Mandingo to attend university. An association in the diaspora had been supportive and provided money.

Munive Rincon (2010a: 18) states that members of Gio and Mano ethnic groups did not consider such issues as 'tribal' or 'ethnic', but rather as individual cases. However, from many statements I have heard, it becomes visible that there is a line between the two groups which is drawn to situationally. The members of the other ethnic group question the belonging of the Mandingo to the *demos*.

Land and Citizenship

When I met COMASL members in Ganta in early 2010, members of the group were vividly discussing land issues in an *atay shop*. They were clearly upset about the persisting land disputes in Ganta. Four years since the government had set up an Ad Hoc Commission, the same problems prevailed: member of their ethnic group were denied access to their own land by squatters who refused to leave the property even if Mandingo presented their title deeds signed by President Tubman. I was told by COMASL that in Ganta the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) had been involved in resolving some of the most critical tensions by compensating unlawful tenants who had invested in the (re)constructions of the buildings, which was considered a viable solution to deescalate the conflict.[231] State actors and institutions are considered as primary institutions in regards to conflict resolution. In a newspaper article on March 08, 2010, COMASL appealed to the branches of government in regards to the Lofa Incident:

[231] Indeed, a recent IRIN news report confirms that the NRC has resolved a critical number of land disputes (IRIN News, 20.05.2013).

> "The release quotes the group of extending thanks to the Government of Liberia for its swift response in arresting the ugly development. Besides, the group has also asked the president to set up an independent investigative committee to thoroughly and objectively investigate the incident and to punish the perpetrators severely so as to set deterrence for the recurrence of similar situation. (…) 'We are also calling on the legislators to enact a law that would outlaw all derisory remarks or statements in public about other tribes or religions that have the propensity to solicit angry reactions which in most cases lead to violence and conflict.'" (Public Agenda News, 08.03.2010).

Past experience, however, told the affected citizens to turn to alternative, external actors or take the law into their hands. Such practices, as mentioned above, have proven to be more rewarding, efficient and less costly. This is telling about the imagery of the state: state actors and institutions do not function in practice as they are expected to in these people's "mind's eyes". Being far from what they consider "normal", the ordinary people assign such tasks to the state's the official norms, and though the actual practices deviate from these, the real is considered far from normal (Olivier de Sardan 2009a).

Land disputes are very complex and have been major sources of conflict in the past, and today. The degree of the conflicts varies regionally, as for example in Bong country they are not as glaring as in Nimba. In 2006, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf appointed an Ad Hoc Land Dispute Commission under the lead of Internal Affairs Minister Ambulai Johnson. A number of cases were investigated and recommendations elaborated. In 2008, another Commission headed by a prominent Mandingo business man, Musa Bility, was established to look into land disputes in Nimba. The Commission evaluated properties, provided ID Cards and promised "peace packages" to compensate losses and settle disputes. Besides that, it recommended prosecution of those parties that refused to appear before the Commission in a specially established fast-track land court. However, years after these recommendations, the Ganta land issues remain, not much seemed to have happened on the ground, and there were still regular reports on land conflicts, as the following headline indicates: "Violence again in Nimba land feud: Why is government failing to act?" (Liberian Observer, 21.05.2012). In 2009, a Land Commission was enacted, that started to operate in early 2010 (Republic of Liberia 2010).

Picture 19: The house of a Mandingo man in Ganta, who says that due to the unsecure tenure, he does not invest in renovating.

COMASL was looking closely at these processes and the land conflict issues in Nimba. As a grassroots organization, represented the voice of the people. They had been travelling to Nimba and participated in a workshop organized by the American Embassy with representatives of the US State Department. Apparently,

there were some families that did not have their title deeds. Here again, COMASL stepped in and proposed aid to recover documentation from the National Archive.

> "When the war breaks out in any country, the first thing that you want to do is protect your life. You talk about document? So what was our recommendation to them: all the legitimate owners of the land, if you are Mandingo, Gio, Mano, should get their land without no condition! And those who have no document should trace it to the archive. It's there. If you persuade, you will get it. But people should not be harsh, because they could have document. Some of the documents were burnt. Some of the buildings were destroyed." (Interview, succeeding chairman, Monrovia, 19.05.2010)

COMASL has been trying to mediate the land conflicts, make recommendations to the government and the international actors. The founding member of COMASL, an elderly man, told me that he had written more than fifty letters to the President on this issue. The result of such persistent communication was that the Mandingo's concerns were taken serious and it was decided that the encroachers were to be compensated to leave the land. According to my interlocutor, this process had started, and "IDcarding" of squatters had started by the above mentioned commissions. However, in early 2010 the process was still staggering, and COMASL was mounting pressure on the government by stating that they would not participate in the Independence Day celebration of July 26, 2010, in Nimba County. The Independence Day celebration is one of the most important holidays in Liberia.

> "…this organization that wrote the President that if our people don't get their land, we will not take part in the July 26 celebration. It was the COMASL that wrote the President, CC copy to the American ambassador, and other international actors in Liberia. We were the ones that wrote the letter. You see. That was one of our role in the information." (Interview, succeeding chairman, Monrovia, 19.05.2010)

Indeed, the argument was received and became a story in the newspapers. However, there was a remarkable misunderstanding: the threat of the Mandingo to *boycott* the event was interpreted as a threat to *disruption.* This was in turn was harshly condemned by the President:

> "President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf says any threat to disrupt the pending July 26 Independence Day Celebration in Nimba County will be met with stiff resistance. 'Let them try it. We can not tolerate that. The Independence Day Celebration will be held in Nimba, nothing will stop it,' President Sirleaf said. According to President Sirleaf, violence will not be tolerated in settling grievances. The president's comments were in sharp reactions to a formal communication she received from some citizens of Nimba County who threatened to disrupt the pending July 26 Independence Day Celebration due to take place in Nimba County." (Seeton, 22.04.2010)

Why would the government misinterpret such a letter? Basically, COMASL's concern was about the relationship between Mandingo and the broader society, which they intend to ameliorate to the better, as they continue to emphasize. Standing for a group that played an active role in the political history and the war, there is much at stake today and the need level out differences is crucial for sustainable coexistence. The chairman

of COMASL had stated firmly that it had not been their interest to cause troubles or worsen these delicate relationships. They consider it the responsibility of the political authorities, notably the President, to make a clear statement about Mandingo's rights as citizens and "true Liberian" nationals hence having citizenships rights and protection – including property, according to international conventions. "If you go to refuge and return, can your land be occupied?" (Interview, COMASL member, 25.02.2011). Legally, according to the Constitution, Article 27, and the Liberian Aliens and Nationality Law, chapter 20,[232] citizenship is restricted by birth to

> [a] person who is a Negro, or of Negro descent, born in Liberia and subject to the jurisdiction thereof" or "[a] person born outside Liberia whose father (i) was born a citizen of Liberia; (ii) was a citizen of Liberia at the time of the birth of such child, and (iii) had resided in Liberia prior to the birth of such child.

Citizenship hence can be defined by birthright as well as ancestry. This legal framework is of discriminatory nature regarding race and gender (American Bar Association 2009: 13–14). Landownership is linked to citizenship as defined legally, "only Liberian citizens shall have the right to own real property within the Republic", reads Article 22a of the Constitution of the Republic of Liberia (1986). These provisions are contested locally, as debates show that these definitions is not always legitimate on a local level where citizenship has a different meaning in that it is rather linked to origin. As Liberia operates on a dual legal system roughly divided between the statutory law and plural forms of customary law, arguments for citizenship and eligibility to vote cut across these two systems. They merge into a national discursive formation of belonging and citizenship. The state, on the other end of the continuum, has set up commissions, however, especially when it comes to land, the government is in a dilemma: though the government constitutionally is the highest authority, it would be politically thorny to penetrate into the domains of the local governments instituted by councils of elders and chiefs. This, however, happened in the course of the mentioned Independence Day celebration. The performances took place peacefully, however, in her Independence Day speech, President Johnson Sirleaf declared the contested market grounds of Ganta eminent domain:

> "The area that forms the market, and which is the source of tension, remained unaddressed by the Commission's report. We will, therefore, exercise the right of eminent domain so that the area becomes public property, with public facilities, so that it will be available for all the citizens." (Johnson Sirleaf, 26.07.2010)

Apart from this declaration, there was no further state action, which was criticized by a Mandingo youth association from Ganta later on the same year: "since President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf declared eminent domain on the Ganta market, no action has been taken on the other property outside Ganta. According to Mr. Sanoe, the Musa Bility Commission report identified a total of one hundred thirty contested land in Nimba"

[232] See also Article 27 and 28 of the Constitution Government of Liberia (1986).

(Daffah, 25.11.2010). For COMASL in our interviews of 2010 and 2011, these practices are explained as being political; that the non-acting of the government was interpreted as a pre-election strategy. To COMASL it is evident that the government has knowledge on this contested market grounds. Nimba is one of the most densely populated counties, hence, contains a large group of voters. Besides, and more importantly, it is the stronghold of Prince Y. Johnson, who enjoys support of the majority of the Gio and Mano in Nimba. Responding to the claim of the Mandingo would most likely added to the resentment of the Gio and Mano and thereby playing into the pockets of one of President Johnson Sirleaf strongest opposition leaders, Prince Y. Johnson. The intricate and revealing state practices surrounding the elections will be topic of the next section.

8.6. ELECTIONS

COMASL's activity intensified with the approaching elections. As many associations in Liberia, COMASL intensified their advocacy, and monitored the activities surrounding the processes from the margins of society. Though they had no presidential candidate, they nevertheless informed and motivated Mandingo to vote.

The Mandingo were not actively participating with a presidential candidate; the political leader, Alhaji Kromah of the All Liberian Coalition Party (ALCOP) had pledged alliance with the incumbent.[233] Nevertheless, there were a number of parliamentary candidates which gained three seats in the Legislature (Harris and Lewis 2013: 80). This does not mean that there were no subjective interests at stake for members of the leadership.[234] Pre-election also exposed personal political ambitions, as it created myriad possibilities to shape one's identity for example as a knowledgeable and commendable 'civil society activist' in the interest of the people and further the personal reputation within the group.

The pre-election period revealed mental images, maps and boundaries of who belongs to the nation-state and has what rights and duties. In the time before the elections, COMASL encouraged Liberians and those with Mandingo background in particular to turn up and register to vote. Violence was anticipated, and they called out for non-violence, thereby referring to images everybody has in mind from violence in neighboring countries and the own national historical background, of how election violence may look like. Therefore, COMASL was one of the 52 national organizations that was accredited to observe the registration and election process (National Elections Commission 2011a). Having observed a scene myself, I got a sense of how meaningful all the details of the process may be: I had accompanied my research assistant to register to vote. Although it was widely debated that people were not motivated to go to vote, there had been a long queue in front of the school where the registration took place. As I lived not far away, I went to look regular-

[233] Whereas Sekou Damante Conneh, leader of LURD founded the Progressive Democratic Party (PRODEM), he only gained 0.6% of votes in 2005, his campaign was weak and lacked funds. This party competed with Alhaji Kromah who gained 2,8% of votes as Kromah is a more charismatic leader (Gerdes 2013: 193).
[234] One member, for example, was ambitious to enhance his education abroad.

ly, and there were always lines. In the palaver hut of the school were three desks with three NEC employees. Furthermore, there was a woman who took pictures which she printed out right on the spot. A lady inked the fingers of the voters, and a female police officer watched the scene. The scene was quiet; the personnel seemed rather bored. The lady with the ink at some point started to ink all the people that were standing in line. My assistant opposed and corrected her. The people in the line murmured supportively. My assistant, himself registered as an observer of an association, informed immediately the according controlling office per text message. When COMASL mentioned that they were observing the procedures of NEC closely, I got an understanding of the dimension of such procedural errors could have. In COMASL' view, these errors could have vast consequences for minorities such as the Mandingo: once you have your finger inked and you were later denied by the NEC personnel to register, you could not go for documentation and return to register anymore. So they paid close attention to the smallest procedural details. There were hundreds of cases reported in which Mandingo, including prominent Liberians, had been denied registration, and there were myriad more cases of affronting practices in the process. COMASL publicly criticized the NEC strongly for the erroneous and biased employees. Even if the procedures were correct, there were still cases where Mandingo were denied to register. Though NEC had its employees trained and informed, there were a number of accounts where people were demanded to prove their citizenship (The Analyst 27.01.2011). The guidelines for voter eligibility are available through the NEC:

> "(2) Where the Registrar is not satisfied that an applicant meets the legal criteria for registration, the Registrar shall request proof of eligibility. (3) Proof of eligibility shall include any of the following: (a) The sworn testimony of two other registered voters who shall appear in person before the Registrar and confirm the applicant's eligibility to register; or (b) Confirmation by a Liberian traditional leader who is also a registered voter shall appear in person before the Registrar and confirm the applicant's eligibility to register; or (c) A valid Liberian Passport; or (d) A certificate of naturalization; or (e) A birth certificate; or (f) A certificate of renunciation of citizenship of another county; or (g) A 2005 voter registration card." (National Elections Commission 2011b)

A number of voices, including COMASL, had criticized NEC all along for procedural failures, for being biased and not professional. As such, associations become political and control and oppose state institutions. As brokers and mediators, they stand up for their members and their interests, thereby voicing out what in their view is wrong.

8.7. COMASL IMAGINARIES

COMASL, as representatives of and advocates for the interests of the Mandingo people in Liberia, share an imaginary among the members of the leadership. First and foremost, it builds on a thorough analysis of past practices and the social and political position of the Mandingo in Liberian history. Secondly, the social imaginary of a peaceful future of coexistence requires the resolving of present grievances and problems. Lastly, and most importantly for the present context of insecurity and uncertainties, COMASL demands state action

concerning the recognition of Mandingo and against their marginalization in regards to participation in the national project. Above, I have pointed out the realms in which COMASL is articulate and active.

First and foremost, the leadership emphasizes a social imaginary of peace. The group joined together to integrate former combatants and to tackle problems of the aftermath, as they said. In the course of marginalization of the Mandingo within the Johnson-Sirleaf government (Gerdes 2013: 198) and on a societal level of symptomatic land conflicts, COMASL turns to claiming state action in regards to jurisdiction and sensitized institutions to ensure political participation, notably during the approaching elections. At the time of this research, rights and properties of many Mandingo remain at stake. A prerequisite to enhanced predictability of the social life, which might enable a 'decent life', would be the reduction of tensions along constructed social boundaries. This filters through their narratives and translates into practices such as the narrative of "physical fight" above, and practices of temporal vigilantism. At present, many Mandingo feel the consequences of a divided society in the everyday life, which upholds a certain degree of insecurity and an uncertain future. Their motivation is nurtured by wider interests in their advocacy, for example as they are invited to meetings of national and international actors in regards to these problems. The association is noticed and heard.

In our conversations, reference was drawn to Nigeria and the religious conflicts that are experienced there. They fear that this kind of 'confusion', an euphemism for conflict, manipulations and misinterpretations, could emerge in Liberia if their grievances were not addressed and resolved. Though largely speculations, the past experiences of the war and situational occurrences of violence attribute such imaginaries some degree of possibility. Nevertheless, the social imaginary of a better future prevails, and is uttered in idyllic terms upon my question of how they "see the future":

> "The future is a Liberia that is free from sentiment. A Liberia that will not look at an individual from a religious background, rejected simply because he's Muslim, he's Mandingo, or he's different group. A Liberia that will look at the human being from what it stands for…" (COMASL president, 25.05.2010)

However, the leadership agrees that Liberia is still far from this vision. The social imaginary of unity is desired beyond members of Mandingo ethnic group, and sound more like dreams or utopias against the backdrop of a quite fragmented and divided present society:

> "And where we will forget about ethnic nationalism, where were forget about ethnocentrism, carrying about ethnocentrism, carrying on ethnic relativism, egoism, forget about these things. Be one another keepers. If something hurts, we are 16 tribes here, and even the naturalized ones, we all need to work together move and unite, for the betterment of Liberia, Africa and the world at large. We as an institution, we first of all prioritize peace building. Because if even, if we build this place more than the United States, if we are not unified, if we don't work together, we are gonna break it down. It becomes meaningless. I stand to be corrected. It's gonna be meaningless" (25.05.2010)

So even if the physical structures would be as elaborated as they are imagined to be in the USA, it needs a lot of change in the social spaces. From a range of other associations and individuals, this harmonic imaginary is presented in a similar way. The language of peacebuilding has trickled down to a vast part of the Liberian population. This imaginary of COMASL, however, has direct source in experienced marginalization and ethnicity in many Liberian social and physical spaces. It includes tremendous prosperity that seems close to utopic: Liberia would become more prosperous than the USA. The above statements and realms of agency of COMASL showed how they aim at reaching these goals. Crucial role, also for them, plays the government. The letter about boycotting the Independence Day celebration, one of the very important holidays in Liberia, showed how much importance they attribute to the event. Their words are clear in regards to the cause of their demand for state action:

> "We also accuse the government, that government is one of the problems. We think that government, this government is supposed to intervene, unify, reconcile the people. Come as a mediator. To reconcile our differences. As a government unifying the people 'look, if you owe Mr. xyz land, please give it to them' This is what we are expecting from the government." (One of the founding members of COMASL, Monrovia, 19.05.2010)

People are tired of war, as stated many times. So if it is the government that has the key to a better future, what would be their expectations of what the government should do in order to achieve such a future? The group thinks reconciliation to it:

> "…insecurities, social injustices, we forgot about these things. First class, second class citizens, we don't have - there is no rule in the constitution about that. Once it is not there, it should not be carried out in your attitude. Like, if we are grading this government in terms of peace and reconciliation, we must say, the government is not doing well. The government is not doing well when it comes to reconciliation. For we hope that, immediately after the war, the first thing was to build a national - a national reconciliatory forum, where we would come and dump our angers, and where we will begin to trust one another. Because in the absence of trust, we can't work together." (Interview, Monrovia, 25.05.2010)

Life is on hold. There are too many uncertainties about the future, if the condition remains as it is. COMASL plays the ball to the government which is considered to be in the position to enhance changes. The position of the government was not analyzed, so the following section deals with ways in which the President addresses the issue of the Mandingo. What is the way of the government to address these issues?

8.8. State's Production of Images of Efficiency, Change and Unity

Political leaders, mainly the President, nominally follow the international discourse of reconciliation, however, practices remain rather inept as will be highlighted in this section. In the last years, the national Poverty Reduction Strategy had been central aspect of the governments' rhetoric. It had identified and included delicate issues such as land law reforms:

> "The existing systems of land acquisition favor the wealthy and the elite. […] Challenges, however, are many and complex. There is no comprehensive national policy or strategy on land allocation and use, whether for private users, community, concessions, or Government. Laws pertaining to land are outdated and do not serve the country's development goals. In the past, concession agreements have had inconsistent provisions, often providing land areas significantly in excess of what can reasonably be developed, while local communities have experienced significant land pressure." (Government of Liberia 2008a: 67)

In her inauguration address, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf recognized the issue of land tenure as central for sustainable peace and created an ad hoc commission in 2006 to address these land conflicts. A land commission was enacted through the legislative in 2009, which investigated these cases in Nimba and organized public hearings. The commission presented a report including recommendations that entail, among other issues, the need for compensation. This has facilitated to reduce some of the land disputes, say COMASL members, however, in another context it is mentioned that mainly through international organizations burning land conflicts could be resolved. Myriad state actors and institutions, commissions, and the interventions of international actors are active in this domain, yet interviews with experts concluded that policies and their implementations remain inept, and the realities on the ground remain unchanged. Land issues are particularly delicate, as land is not just a property, but of high cultural value and a political minefield. Statements and actions by the president could have political implications in regards to her election or legitimacy, hence, the dilemma seems hard to resolve.

In the meantime, the government continues the rhetoric of efficiency and change, and is considerate regarding the pronunciation of ethnic or religious issues. The image of unity without religious or ethnic cleavages is stressed and the population is urged to consider this a prerequisite for sustainable peace and idyllic coexistence. "Our challenge, therefore, is to transform adversity into opportunity, to renew the promises upon which our nation was founded: freedom, equality, unity and individual progress" (Johnson Sirleaf 16.01.2006). In many of her speeches, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf lays emphasis on the need for unity in Liberia for the interest of sustainable peace. This goes in line with international peace building agendas (Chetail 2009). Her speeches often build on both positive and negative images and practices of the past and its leaders. She highlights the historical sources of conflicts and problems, such as the inequalities of the past and the atrocities of the conflict, and against this backdrop, she highlights present-day reconstruction, unity and a vision of a better future:

> "Fellow Liberians: A very happy holiday season to you! To Christians throughout our glorious land, I say Merry Christmas; and to all the people of Liberia, I say a very Happy New Year. […] So the problems this country faces do not stem from any one group or person or from this government; it's an accumulated problem of dishonesty, corruption and indiscipline that has been passed on from successive governments" (Johnson Sirleaf 17.12.2009)

The year later, in the eve of the Presidential elections, national unity was emphasized in yet stronger tones. It was a time when the notion election was hardly ever mentioned without the notion of violence:

> "As we enter a New Year, I want to appeal to everyone, in a spirit of upholding all that we have worked for, that this be a year of true patriotism and reconciliation; that we accentuate the positive things that unite us as a people, rather than focus on what divides us. 2011 will be a defining year for us Liberians, as we go into another round of the democratic process of holding free and fair elections. In the lead-up to October, every Liberian has an important role to play." (Johnson Sirleaf 31.12.2010)

The Unification Day, a holiday created by President Tubman, was re-declared a national holiday in 2009 through an act by President Johnson Sirleaf. In 2011, she held a speech with the title "There is more that unites us than divides us", delivered on the island the first freed slaves had landed.

> "My Fellow Liberians: 'In union strong success is sure, we cannot fail..., we will over all prevail.' We utter these words every time we sing our National Anthem – a song that proclaims our allegiance to this Land of Liberty, this Liberia. In it, we profess of that we are a people united, regardless of tribe, clan, religion, gender or economic status. We bear witness that, as a people, we shall not stand for divisions and hatred." (Johnson Sirleaf 14.05.2011)

May 2011 was shortly before the elections, and her speech reminded the citizens of the luring violence and summons to political participation and against violence. In addition to the messages that her speeches entail, in various practices, the Johnson Sirleaf government obtains relationships to the Muslim community, for example by making donations and holding speeches at their religious festivities. The President hardly ever makes use the notion of Mandingo,[235] and she does not explicitly addresses ethnic tensions, but rather, in line with the ideology of national unity, she addresses the issue on a broader level, namely, the religious. In fact, the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRCL), founded in 1990, had been a driving force of peace negotiations from the beginning of the conflict. Power holders keep affiliations regardless if it is the domain of the political, religious, or other (Schatzberg 2001: 77). By performances and speeches in context of Muslim events, the President recognizes their inclusion in the Liberian state and nation. For example, she addresses Muslims in their religious events such as the Ramadan:

> "On the national level, Ramadan is a reminder that Islam has always been a part of Liberia and that Liberian Muslims have made extraordinary contributions to our country. The contribution of our Muslim brothers and sisters in advancing peace, tolerance and progress is essential for Liberia's national renewal." (Johnson Sirleaf 17.08.2012)

Gifts are given to mosques, such as bags of rice to the 62 mosques in Monrovia (Public Agenda News Online 03.09.2012). In 2010, the President broke Ramadan and dined with the Muslim community (Liberian Observer 20.08.2012). According images circulated in local newspapers, and are shown on the website of the Executive Mansion. These symbolic practices go in line with her aim of strengthening the image of a brighter future and vision of a united nation regardless of religious, ethnic or class issues. Against an imaginary of underrepresented Mandingo, the present government has appointed a number of Mandingo, amongst oth-

[235] There is a common understanding that one does not talk of ethnic or tribal belonging, as it is said to remind people of the cleavages of the past. Rather, I was told to ask for the languages the actors or their family members speak.

ers, to integrate the various regions[236] and social milieus in her government, and create political allies. Amara Konneh, a Mandingo, has been appointed as Planning Minister and recently reappointed as Minister of Finance. Even though Mandingo were economically powerful, they did not participate on the national political arena. Momolu Dukuly was appointed Minister of Foreign affairs in 1954 by Tubman; though a Mandingo by ethnicity, he had converted to Christianity (Konneh 1996: 215). Also Edward Beyan Kesseley, general and one of the first UP founding members was a converted Mandingo. During Doe's regime, more Mandingo were appointed into higher government positions. Beyond that, however, they remain a minority in national politics and the public offices, and even if Minister Konneh has been internationally praised for his work in the Liberian Finance Ministry, popular talk in Liberia contains critique about a Mandingo heading this prestigious institution.

In the period before the elections, President Johnson Sirleaf faced the dilemma of facing two fronts, which become visible in the question of land issues, especially the contested market ground in Ganta, and the expectations towards her to solve these disputes. The declaration of the disputed market ground in Ganta as eminent domain (Johnson Sirleaf 26.07.2010) was appalling to the Mandingo, some of whom have title deeds to said land. This action fits into the imagery of their group as being marginalized and treated unfairly (Mankor 30.08.2010). This proclamation was interpreted by these Mandingo as a pre-election strategy of the President in order not to lose valuable Nimbadian constituency.

The practices of the state indicate that at center stage is rather the perspective towards the future, in applying images and practices of unity, rather than reconciliation. But there were some challenges attached to the government's practices at the time in which most of this research was conducted: it was the time before the Presidential elections, so the image the people had in mind was that the interest of the President was certainly in being re-elected. This image was furnished for example by elements depicting how "nothing is done" regarding the land issues in Ganta that is claimed by the Mandingo; in contrary, some of the contested land, namely the central market, was declared public land. These images are shaped out and added to fit into a certain imaginary: the one the Mandingo use emphasize their deprivation and grievances, whereas the government emphasizes a future imaginary of unity. A majority of actors beyond the two social spaces consider the government's practices as strategic and mostly self-interested, whereas they would expect the government to do more for them, see similarly for Sierra Leone (Jackson 2008). Especially fulfilling promises and implementing policies instead of just talking.

8.9. CONCLUSION

[236] When mentioned this way, representation of "regions" and "counties" generally stand for "ethnic groups", i.e. representation of all people in the government, and public sphere.

At my visit in July 2012, COMASL did not have any office space anymore. I met the present chairman for an informal meeting in a business shop of a Mandingo lady in town. It was during the Ramadan, a time of fasting, praying and reflecting. The office had been closed due to travels of the chairperson and lack of funding. Besides, a core member of the leadership was suffering severe heart complications. Though the group was not that active at the time of this meeting, they had not seized to exist, said the chairman. I was told that they still meet, but in private places now. Also, from the informal discussion, grievance did not seem to dominate the discourse. The problems seem to be reducing, and so did the marginalization of the Mandingo ethnic group, according to his statement. As in recent years, the President acknowledged and took part in festivities surrounding Ramadan.

2012 was after the elections, and a time where the Vision 2030 was the new national slogan and widely discussed, and which opened up a new space for imagining the future. Altogether, 2012 was thus a period that offered less fuel for political articulation, at least in Monrovia: there are no elections in the near future; there are no major posts in government to be redistributed or deciding (political) alliances to be bounded. Which does not mean that the cleavages/tensions seized to exist; land conflicts are still a problem, and a number of ordinary Mandingo fear that if these are not resolved and reconciled, they might be triggers of conflict in the future.

To recall, social imaginaries are not a set of ideas (Taylor 2002: 91), but rather "the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (Taylor 2002: 106). Social imaginaries, hence, need relationships to form, in a time and space marked by post-war insecurities, scarcities and uncertainties.

This chapter gave insight into complex social boundaries that are articulated as divisions of in society, which have a long history in the history and violent past of the country. These constructed divisions that led to situational tensions and violence. Even though some alliances shift, the tensions have not disappeared, and the social imaginary around the Mandingo is still being shaped and reshaped: The image of the 'Christian Nation' is shared, and in popular understanding the Mandingo are still considered strangers from Guinea, it can be traced back to several centuries that members of this ethnic group came as traders to Liberia and steadily settled along the trade routes. According to the constitution, any person of 'negro' descent can naturalize and become a Liberian citizen. As I have shown, in local understanding, a 'true Liberian' is a person that has a county and village of origin, even if she or he has never been there; it is about access to home land, even if it is imagined only (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:39), and most probably will always be. In most regions of Liberia, the Mandingo cannot make first settlers' claims. Certain of their characteristics are considered to be different both from an emic and etic perspective: they are predominantly Muslim, they are

engaged in business, transportation and trade, and a number of their members are quite wealthy. This made and makes them object to envy, it is said, Konneh (1996) even talks of 'African Jews'. As they were considered attractive partners to marry, and on the other hand they do not give their own daughters to marry non-Muslim, these asymmetric marriage alliances created resentment that is heard quite often in contemporary discussions (Bøås 2008: 10). As shown above, it is not only about land issues, ethnicity or religion only, which became clear after the analysis of the conflict in Voinjama, where plundering took place after a violent incident in 2010: plundering and looting did not take place along ethnic or religious lines, but randomly. It is about a complex amalgam of arrangements and actors: Through their history in Liberia the Mandingo are perceived as an ambiguous group, and their role changed over time and space: on the one hand praised when they entered a village with commodities, on the other hand they created local competition over property including wealth, goods and women. Through the rule of the 'Americo-Liberians', during the conflict and in recent times, certain urban areas (especially Ganta) have become the cradle of ambiguous appropriation of land, first by 'Americo-Liberians', then sold to Mandingo people, and later occupied by ex-combatants. Until the time of field research between 2009 and 2011, unresolved issues of land ownership contributed to tensions and disputes, and the news still regularly report on cases.

The intention of this case study was to show that the recurrent land disputes are deeply rooted in a social, cultural and historical context and require in depth analysis in order to be understood. Even the government is in a dilemma, and its practices are inept. The understanding of the social imaginary highlights the various dimensions of these tensions, and especially actors and associations such as COMASL who serve as brokers on various levels to trigger discussions/action and mediate tensions. According to COMASL leadership, unresolved land issues are imagined to be the key issue of confusion and dispute in post-war Liberia. This case study gave insight into the range of agency of COMASL and their imagination of how their members can more successfully integrate into the nation through education, emancipation, and participation in the public and political sphere. The chances increase, and may, to a certain extent, be better today due, firstly, to their capacity adjustments and, secondly, the improved freedom and values of democracy that the present government proclaims. However, on a grassroots level, the discourse may open up another dimension, as individuals and organizations such as COMASL repeatedly face tensions and differences, for example, the discussions that emerge around Mandingo members of the government.

9. THE WEST POINT WOMEN: AT THE HEART, BUT YET AT THE MARGINS

Of all the images and practices of the state and international actors, the rights of women and gender issues more broadly figure centrally on the political agenda of post-war Liberia: Gender policies are formulated and implemented; institutions and structures are reformed and adjusted to address current problems, in particular gender-based violence. Yet, right in the center of Monrovia on the densely populated West Point peninsula, women experience the consequences of a range of social, infrastructural and health problems, and most of all the socio-spatial stigmatization. Many Liberians have a particular mental image of West Point, related mainly with violence and decay. The perspective from the ruins of Ducor Hotel on West Point is often held in photographs and therefore became almost iconic and a signifier for urban decay due to a notorious population. The perpetuation of the fearful mental image is reinforced by rumors of West Point as a space where child and drug trafficking booms, where criminals hide and where occasionally children are born with a tail. Many urban myths circulate in Monrovia and even more of them are about West Point, an unimaginable place. Rumors and facts intermingle. From a new high-end bar on waterside, overlooking the beautiful West Point coast below, thoughts are aired that the government might transform this slum into a recreation resort. Interestingly, a number of ordinary Liberians have lived in West Point at a certain time in their lives, especially during the war or at their return from refuge, so knowledge about the social reality exists. This chapter will show the peninsula offers many advantages and opportunities against its common image as a violent and poor place.

Once trespassed into West Point from the lively Waterside Market, one finds a neighborhood like many other Monrovian or African neighborhoods.[237] The two main roads are seamed with small stores supplying food, snacks, and a range of goods for daily use. There are a number of make-shift shops selling scratch cards and loading mobile phones. There are a range of entertainment facilities, mainly attracting youth and young men, but also young women who enjoy Nigerian movies. Video clubs also feature video games, next to liquor stores or *atay shops*. Cold water or soft drinks are sold in cool boxes underneath colorful sun umbrellas. Women and children sell fresh or dried fish along the lively street and carry them on flat bowls in direction of the Waterside Market. Narrow paths to the left and right lead between the small concrete houses into the interior of the neighborhood. These paths are at times merely broad enough for a person to pass and they lead and wind around groups of buildings, small courts and once in a while a church. The soil of the peninsula is sandy. In small courts, clothes are hung to dry. No matter how small the courts, young boys find a way to play football in between the houses. Towards the beach or the river, heaps of waste pile up, some to be burnt. Colorful canoes and huge barrels with fires on the bottom characterize the coast side of West Point and mark the central economic activity: men do fishing, whereas women do the drying and selling. The bar-

[237] In neighborhoods such as Vai Town, Clara Town, New Kru Town, and a range of other neighborhoods especially on Bushrod Island have very similar characteristics.

rels contain fires, and on a grill above them, fish is smoked and dried. Back on the main roads, a range of motorbikes transport Westpointers in and out of the neighborhood, thereby skillfully driving around puddles of water and pedestrians with loads on their heads. A number of times when walking into West Point, a group of police officers were accompanying handcuffed young men out of the neighborhood towards the central prison. The group would walk in the middle of the road, the law enforcers behind the handcuffed. Crimes of various kinds are high in West Point; statistics, pictures and experiences are manifold. The negative image of the neighborhood overlaps to a certain degree with the lived realities; everyday life is characterized by a number of intricacies stemming from urban growth and lack of infrastructures. If the everyday life of Monrovians is characterized by insecurity and scarcities, this affects West Point even the more as the scarce resources are even the more strained by the dense population. Even though forms of violence were prevalent before the war, sexualized violence is said to have increased during the war.

This chapter looks at social actors' view of the past, present and future of West Point: What social imaginaries exist, how are they shared, shaped and translated into collective action? A number of actors and associations try to tackle these problems, one of which is the West Point Women for Health and Development Organization, or in short the West Point Women. Since their founding in 2002, they have shaped a particular space in which they address the bad reputation and social problems of women and children of the community. The West Point Women give a particular insight into social imaginaries of post-war, urban Liberia: an environment close to the physical center of the state, yet considered neglected by powerful political leaders. In a range of collective practices which will be highlighted below, they translate their shared imaginary in anticipation of a better future.

A few women formed a self-help association to tackle these complex problems, and their agency is in their view purposeful as it does contribute to orderliness in a space where state actors alone fail to secure the provision of common and public goods, and, in fact, is hardly present. It shows how new social relationships and networks are created and shaped, and how interests are articulated. During the time of my research, much changed in the community, and the women's group transformed in regards to size, form and in-group solidarity. Most insights on the group and their context was provided by the vice president of the group, and the president. As the president was often not around due to her myriad activities, at my spontaneous visits and participation of events I draw strongly on information by the vice president, and the gender-based violence coordinator of the group, as well as some other women that were regularly present at the office. My assistant was a great help as he had lived in the community for some time and knew the setting. The West Point Women's agency is deeply embedded in the socio-spatial setting, which required much background knowledge. Much of this was gained in spontaneous or planned meetings with inhabitants and authorities of West Point, and the West Point Intellectual Forum, which had been a valuable source in interviews, informal conversations and group discussions.

In previous chapters, the state and international efforts in regards to women's issues were given in the context of urban planning, security or gender empowerment. Applied to West Point, such social imaginaries of how the social should be inform the agency of the West Point Women. Influence by international actors, normative concepts from Western organizations but also pan-Africanist movements and women's organizations are apparent, which becomes clear in how images, norms, values, imaginaries are appropriated to the specific context and are given new meanings.[238] The West Point Women draw on the promoted change for women, and demand according state action in their neighborhood.

A methodological reflection is worthy before diving into the West Point Women's world. Throughout this book, gender was not a defining aspect of the relationships between me and informants. In working with the West Point Women, however, it became clear that other categories are much more central in creating shared feminine identities and intersubjectivity: age, having children, being married and having shared some of the intricacies of child care, war-related loss or gender-based violence.

9.1. Brave Women, Vulnerable Women - Agency of Women Along the War-Peace Continuum

> "and then, there were food shortages. So women had to go out there to find food. As soon as a man walks down the road, the next thing you hear, they either kill him or they say 'oh, you're a Krahn man' and when you are on the Krahn people side they say 'oh, you're a Gio man'. So men were being targeted all over. So they were afraid to get out. Sometimes the wife said to the husband: 'you stay, you take care of the children, I go out to look for food'." (Agnes, middle-aged woman, Monrovia, 26.05.2010)

Indeed, many women account that during the Liberian conflict, men and boys had to hide in their homes to avoid being recruited or killed by warring factions, while women became bread winners or protectors which they consider new roles. Women had to find new ways of coping with situations that were challenging to evaluate and respond to, hence there was temporally and situationally a high degree of unpredictability. Agnes explained that due to their daily exposure while looking for food, women developed courage. In her perspective, this opposed the image of women she has as the 'chicken egg' to their husbands; the husbands as the bread winners and protectors, exposed to the public while the women's place would be around the house or in the market. These normative expectations prevail today, however, past and present realities of a gendered labor division loosened. In these changing roles during the war, women were exposed to great risk. Accounts of sexualized violence during the war including rape, gang rape, or slavery, are many and the details are shocking (African Women and Peace Support Group 2004, Schäfer 2008, or Utas 2005b), to name a few sources. Rape was widespread in the Liberian war, but unlike in other conflicts where rape was part of a strategy of ethnic cleansing, Utas categorizes this as a phenomenon of celebration of "hyper-masculine

[238] I draw on Hans Peter Hahn's definition of cultural appropriation as the contextualization of global goods to the local context. These goods' use, function and status are transformed, reinterpreted and may gain new symbolic and practical value (Hahn 2004).

warrior identity" in Liberia. As such, it could target any exposed woman regardless of her identity and belonging (Utas 2005b: 418).

To some extent, these challenges and risks became part of daily life. Though many women circumscribe this situation in notions of habituation, they did not accept this level of violence, and differentiate between the perceived normality and stability of the pre-war arrangements and daily routines, which are in Liberia widely referred to as the *normal days* (cf. Turshen 2001: 79). Yet depicting women in the war-peace continuum as passive or mere victims would be incomplete and wrong. Sources hold that the number of women and girls in rebellions were between two to four percent (Utas 2003: 25) or even as high as ten percent (Ellis 2007: 113). At the end of the war, the numbers for female combatants registered in the DDRR program mount at 19% (United Nations Development Programme Administered Trust Fund 2004: 52). Numbers invite for interpretation, but they depict women as active participates in and masterminds of the war. Women and girls did not only join warring factions but also acted as perpetrators and applied sexual violence (Utas 2005b, Schäfer 2008).[239] Yet it is factual that a large part of the female population experienced sexual violence during the conflict and still does so today. Gender-based violence, in particular physical and sexual violence towards women and girls are prevalent and might even increase in a conflict and post-war setting, a range of studies depict that about half of women and girls in surveys had responded having experienced such forms of violence (Government of Liberia, UN Joint Programme on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Swedish International Development Cooperation (SIDA) 2011: 31). Human Rights Watch confirms that despite the efforts of government and other actors, incidences of sexualized violence towards women and girls were still alarmingly high in 2009. Though increasingly cases are reported to the police, and the special court, prosecution is hampered by a weak justice system (Human Rights Watch 2010, cf. Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen 2001b: 4). Associations such as the West Point Women aim at tackling exactly these issues.

Two aspects remain important in the study of post-war forms of violence and agency surrounding this phenomenon. Firstly, it is noteworthy that more than a third of the respondents of several studies that have experienced physical or sexualized violence experienced so in their marital relations, hence, not or indirectly related to the conflict (Government of Liberia, UN Joint Programme on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Swedish International Development Cooperation (SIDA) 2011: 43). Secondly, sexualized violence is a severely traumatizing and stigmatizing experience for the individuals as well as their relatives, which has effects on the form and extent of reporting such cases. Yet, women in the past and present do not remain in a victim's position. Looking at women as victims only reduces the agentic dimension of women in such situations (Utas 2005b). Many women, individually and collectively, took efforts towards social coherence and

[239] At the same token, there are accounts of men and boys as victims of sexual violence, and the stigma of male sexual violence is said to be even much higher (Government of Liberia, UN Joint Programme on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Swedish International Development Cooperation (SIDA) 2011: 35).

against violence. For example, mothers stopped their sons from joining rebel forces. For this reason, Agnes went into refuge with her son as soon as she saw his friends joining forces and she was afraid that he might join them. Many of my female informants told me similar stories. But keeping sons from joining forces required much effort – leaving the house and home, and exposing themselves to other risks, see also Moran (2009: 14).

Shortly after the beginning of the war in 1990, women started to operate relief programs and address the social intricacies that emerged from the violent conflict. In the same year, the Christian Health Association (CHAL) organized workshops on reconciliations with teachers, health workers, or pastors. Though the women got into the limelight of international media, there were other groups too, for example, the Inter-Faith Mediation Committee and a range of actors from religious, political or humanitarian organizations which were active in Monrovia, and account in what way they have criticized violent actors and collectively took efforts to coexistence.[240] The diaspora was closely linked to activities on the ground. However, it was mainly the women who brought a particular image to the world arena: international actors were impressed by the militancy and determination of women in Liberia (Fuest 2009: 116). In 1995 and repeatedly later, women had organized 'stay-home days', in which they closed the markets. Consequently, the food provision collapsed in Monrovia (African Women and Peace Support Group 2004: 18). In 1994, the founding meeting of the Liberian Women Initiative (LWI) took place in the Monrovian City Hall. The various efforts began to coordinate, and the Mano River Union Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET)[241] was established in 2000 in Liberia. Women had been forming into coordinated efforts already earlier, and mass movements of hundreds of women filled streets and public spaces in 2003. The Women in Peace Building Network (WIPNET)[242] organized rallies and protests. The same year, the Coalition of Women Political Parties called for international intervention in Liberia. This large, coordinated social movement for peace grew to a visible and powerful movement that mobilized for peace and publicly delivered an according statement to Charles Taylor, see for example Moran and Pitcher (2004), Schäfer (2008), or Fuest (2009), and the film "Pray the Devil back to Hell" (Reticker 2008).

After the transition to peace subsequent to the events in 2003, the movement did not fade away. If required, women gather through these channels, such as in February 2011, when some of the Liberian Women for Peace gathered on a public space to pray, sing and dance for peace in Côte d'Ivoire. Likewise, these networks regularly organize awareness marches or international women's day celebrations. In the aftermath of the Liberian war, women and women-lead NGOs are not only part of wider networks but continue to pursue

[240] A range of actors account meaningful and important contributions to peace: the students, the soldiers, the women, the human rights activists.
[241] Mano River Women's Peace Network (http://www.marwopnet.org, accessed 03.06.2015).
[242] Women in Peacebuilding Program (WIPNET) (http://www.wanep.org/wanep/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8:women-in-peacebuilding-wipnet&catid=10:wipnet&Itemid=20, accessed 03.06.2015).

women's interests in their respective neighborhoods in a variety of ways, which I take as central argument. Women, like other social actors, have to deal with an environment of economic and social intricacies. Women often take the lead in tend to children and care for their family members, the sick and the elder. The workload may increase due to the unemployment or absence of men. These factors often challenge marital relations (Obrist 2006: 92), as men are cannot live up to the normative expectations of the co-constructed image of a family man (Connell 2005).[243] As mentioned earlier, the normative image of men as bread winners, school-fee payers and employed workers contradicts with the social realities. This goes in line with findings of Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen (2001a): Gender relations often undergo transformations during war. However, if structures are not changed in this process, it is likely that the changes will revert again. This had political implications which, and many policies and reforms are implement on the state level, with vast efforts by international actors.

Women's political engagement is not a novelty and has to be situated in the historical context. Compared to other West African countries, Liberia's women have played a particular role on the political landscape. As argued elsewhere, women had positions of authority through the *Sande* societies as well as in state institutions, as activists within religious groups, or they have been economically important (African Women and Peace Support Group 2004). Women's collective actions and efforts such as saving clubs or religious groups have a history beyond the conflict and not only in Liberia (Moran 1989). This should not be neglected against the images that are shaped of women's victimcy. Since the beginning of the Civil Wars and until today, Liberia has experienced a strong growth in women's organizations and influence through their joint effort to tackle complex problems, pooling together their knowledge, skills and capacities, as it has been observed by women's collective actions around the world (Sweetman 2013). However, the public – especially international interest in their agency has put them into the limelight. This situation had an effect on women's agency in Liberia; the influx of donor money and support has led to an increase of women's organizations and wider ranging presence thereof (Fuest 2009, Schäfer 2008). They have been providing support for orphans and widows, build up marketing associations or various forms of saving clubs or vocational skills training and thereby empowering women and children (Fuest 2009, Moran and Pitcher 2004). Apart from old forms of collective efforts of women that continue to exist, new forms emerged, and others became more powerful, such as for example the Association of Female Lawyers in Liberia (AFELL). They enforced a range of legal adjustments in the interest of women and girls. After the wars and up to present, many international and national organizations are providing educational and vocational training programs on various topics includ-

[243] Such imaginaries persist in many urban spaces where wage work opportunities are considered in the domain of the men, but due to the limitations of such possibilities, women in many African cities of the present and the past are breadwinners, see Jean Hay and Stichter (1984), in particular Robertson (1984).

ing reconciliation and human rights.[244] Religious institutions, specifically the Interfaith Council or the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, promoted justice and human rights in 1990 (Sawyer 2005: 71, 82). Until today, various workshops, documentations as well as radio programs address a wide range of people with the aim of educating and creating awareness. UNIFEM for instance provided training for female politicians in rights, public speech or campaigning, explained a female parliamentarian (interview, Monrovia, 26.05.2010). These capacities and knowledge were appropriated and applied in the quest of particular problems. In West Point, a particularly challenging environment, the West Point Women applied such knowledge to collectively formulate an improved social order. Their agency is further informed by the contribution of knowledge, experiences and imaginaries of an increasing number and political roles of women on the political landscape. In order to get a better understanding of the setting they live and work in, the following chapter provides some insights in this stigmatized, yet quite ordinary Monrovian neighborhood.

9.2. "People from West Point are very United. We Put Our Community First"

The West Point peninsula is characterized as a highly populated state-owned land, annexed to central Monrovia. The view from the ruins of war-ruined Ducor Hotel down on the neighborhood has been photographed many times and has become part of the imagery of post-war Monrovia. Many mysteries and circulate around West Point, some of which have become cemented by an American 'documentary'.[245] Few have actually entered or spent time there. In fact, as many Non-Westpointers state, the neighborhood is located at one of the most beautiful places of Monrovia, where other cities would construct recreational structures. Such imaginaries, however, are contrasted with the fact that it is hardly possible to 'remove' the inhabitants.

Picture 20a and b: West Point viewed from the ruined Ducor Hotel, and picture 25 b is the reversed perspective from West Point towards central Monrovia.

[244] See also U.S. Department of State (2010). Furthermore, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, for example, organizes nation-wide workshops on conflict resolution and reconciliation Catholic Church (http://jpcliberia.org, accessed 03.06.2015).
[245] Without wanting to generate more publicity for this Vice Guide, I aim at highlighting the critique of Utas and Persson Utas, Persson and Käihkö (2010) towards it. They refer to it as "jackass documentary". The film portrays an unreflected and selective, negative image of West Point and Liberia. This "jackass documentary" had the consequence that informants suspected my research and questioned my research intentions thoroughly due to the bad light previous work brought about them.

As shown in the history chapter, Monrovia started to grow in the late 1950s (Liebenow 1987: 158) and increased the population of West Point, then called Old Kru Town. Old Kru Town and other settlements around the lagoon were composed of 'native Liberians', mostly Kru, whereas central Monrovia was inhabited by 'Americo-Liberian'. Old Kru Town lacked electricity, drinking water and schools (Fraenkel 1970 [1964]: 73). It got the status of a township in 1960 through a presidential proclamation. The quarter is composed of six demarcated communities, and a township commissioner is appointed by the president to implement government policy. Amongst other things, he administers the squatter rights which are obtainable as West Point is government owned land (interview, West Point, 13.07.2012). President Tubman's Open Door Policy created a demand for labor by the incoming international companies and fostering the development of the Freeport, which lead to a migration from the hinterland of Liberia to the urban centers (Lacey and Owusu 1988). The phase of strong economic development created an increase in quite highly paid job opportunities. At the same time, unemployment grew massively due to the migration of uneducated migrants into the city. A later stimulus of migration was the newly constructed roads by President Tolbert which facilitated access to education and employment opportunities in the capital (Liebenow 1987: 163). During the conflict, many people fled into neighboring countries, the United States or into the capital. Monrovia was considered a safe haven. A large number of interviewees stated that the war brought them to Monrovia, but it was temporally also a trap, as food was scarce. The already precarious facilities such as electricity, water or sewage systems were challenged by the rapid population growth in Monrovia, even the more so in low income residential areas such as West Point. Due to its location on a peninsula between the city center and the Freeport of Monrovia, West Point is exposed to natural hazards such as floods, but also social risks of a dense population. Trafficking is facilitated due to the diffuse spaces beyond the control of the state and society. Today's population is estimated between 50'000-75'000 inhabitants, depending on statistics or statements of residents, and it is visible that the community is very densely populated. It is often referred to as one of the rather poor neighborhoods of low or no cash income,[246] and is often quoted as the "biggest slum in Monrovia".[247] According to UN Habitat, a slum household is defined as a group of people living together, lacking at least one of the following conditions: Access to clean water; availability of improved sanitation facilities; sufficient living space; structural quality or durability of dwellings; and security of tenure (2003: 18). Though such definitions do not contain measures of intensity or degree of such conditions, yet, all features apply to West Point to a strong degree. Though it is widely agreed that 'slums' constitute a threat to development achievements, "slums bear witness to failed national public policies, failed international projects that aimed to be replicable and, above all, failed instruments" (Milbert 2006: 316). Slums constitute the antithesis of the "high-modernist" city, as they are not only in failing their aesthetic of "discipline, purpose

[246] There exist many forms of non-monetary income that generate a livelihood. Examples will be given below.
[247] It seems like everybody knows the above mentioned film about West Point that has been produced showing only the worst aspects of the community. It does not represent the reality of the neighborhood.

and order", but are in addition considered "noisy, dangerous, dusty, dark, disease-ridden" (Scott 1998: 116). Such mental images severed as legitimizing "slum-clearances" (Scott 1998: 140), all around global urban spaces. However, in a war-affected setting, many parts of the city are fragmented, run down and densely populated due to internal migration and lack of resources, and many neighborhoods lack infrastructures. Hence, many parts of the city could be characterized according to the UN Habitat definition as slums; however, they differ greatly from each other regarding social or economic construction and infrastructures.[248] Furthermore and most importantly, living in West Point does not necessarily equal being poor and deprived of opportunities, although a range of people surely are. Furthermore, the inhabitants do not use the notion slum in reference to their neighborhood. The residents call it simply West Point, or community. Non-residents also mostly refer to it simply as West Point; the name contains the particularities of the neighborhoods as being overcrowded, notorious and dangerous. In avoidance of normative terms, I will use the notion 'intricate neighborhood' or simply West Point, and its inhabitants as Westpointers, as they sometimes call themselves. Intricate neighborhood accounts for the broad and deep complexities of its manifold social realities, the range of problems but also opportunities the neighborhood comprises. It also avoids the somewhat misleading notion of informality in this context, as the community is integrated into rather formal state administration processes, and squatter rights are managed by the Township Commissioner. However, this urban residential area was not objective to any visible efforts of planning and development activities. As mentioned, the scarcity of infrastructure and services like policing render the everyday to some degree precarious. Water has to be transported by man-power from as far as Vai Town, because the wells in West Point are said to be salty. The Township Commissioner explained that in the context of a development project, a well had been dug, but because of the salty sea water, it had been a useless effort. Bathrooms and other sanitation facilities are scarce and badly maintained. This leaves a vast part of the residents with no alternative than to use the beach or the river, which adds to the existing hygiene- and health risks. The National Housing Authority (NHA) had created housing estates since the 1960s (Government of Liberia: no date). However, the plan to relocate the inhabitants of West Point to another part of Monrovia failed due to two simple reasons: not only were the rents of the low-income estates higher than those in West Point,[249] but the main source of income in West Point is fishing, and because the estates were constructed in the interior of Monrovia, namely the Stephen Tolbert Estate. Up to today, there are constant rumors about the resettlement of Westpointers that in fact never been concretely implemented or planned, and plans and practices to rehabilitate the neighborhood remain inept. Nevertheless, residents told me that they do not invest much in the improvement of structures and living condition, out of fear that the land could be drawn back by the government any time.

[248] Other notions such as Squatters, Ghettos or Township have specific connotations and stand for certain contexts.
[249] Some residents rent out some rooms and hence make a living as landlords. However, the land belongs to the government, and the inhabitants have squatter rights.

West Point was originally inhabited mainly by Kru people. Today, it is composed of a heterogeneous population of various ethnic and religious backgrounds. Monrovia's Fanti fishermen, originating from Ghana, have settled in this part of town, and their colorful fishing boats decorate the beaches. Furthermore, Manding and Fula businesspeople, often from Guinea are represented. The different groups are not living in separated compounds or communities. As various inhabitants of West Point stated, ethnicity is not politicized and does not figure as social marker as in other parts of the city or country. Residents explain this as a consequence of people living very closely together and consider each other as 'brothers' as a result that people interact and live so jammed together. The overcrowded living condition was in this case formulated as an advantage and facilitator of interactions and coexistence. Solidarity is emphasized and intermarriages are said to be common. As for many Liberians, marriage is an expensive event that many cannot afford. The West Point Women used the notion of 'plastic bag marriages' to describe dating a person and taking some things in a bag along for the night. This is common and socially accepted form of partial cohabitation. In West Point, a majority of children are born into such relationships, which can create problems as many relationships are not sanctioned and hence, mothers are often left with the children when the couple breaks up. According to my informants, this can lead to some of the precarious issues of the neighborhood, the 'social ills'. The neighborhood's bad reputation is based upon a high crime rate, and particularly for the post-war context also widespread gender-based violence. Especially forms of male-to-female violence that jeopardize women's and girls' wellbeing are not tolerated by its inhabitants. Local actors evaluate these as the consequences of a 'loose society', often in regards to lack of guidance of the children. These stroll around and engage in activities without the parent's knowledge, and might get into bad company. Informants also consider the video clubs and -games as a negative influence, not primarily on the matter of the content of what is viewed, but rather time lost instead of going to school, doing homework, housework or sleep. Another often debated consequence of a 'loose society' is promiscuity. The Ministry of Youth and Sports rate the teenage pregnancy high and raise the concern of HIV rates. West Point, however, has not been target of their awareness campaigns, even though they consider this neighborhood as one of the worst in these regards (interview, Monrovia, 20.04.2010).[250] An additional challenge to young women's health are the risky abortions, or, if they keep the child, young mothers face difficulties of sustaining themselves and the child if the father of the child is not willing or capable to contribute. Some young women discontinue their education once they are pregnant. At the time of this research, there were hardly any state or international organizations' programs in West Point. There were a number of faith based organizations, mainly Islamic institutions and Pentecostal Churches; and the single clinic in West Point was administered by the Liberian Catholic Church. The clinic is overburdened, and until recently, it did not have an ambulance. In case of emergencies, a person had to be

[250] I had earlier come to the conclusion that a range of Monrovians are afraid of entering West Point. Especially members associated to the higher class lack knowledge about it. However, I was repeatedly told by informants that West Point was not the worst neighborhood in Monrovia. Fraenkel found that Vai town was the most congested area in Monrovia (Fraenkel 1970 [1964]: 84).

transport in a wheelbarrow or a chartered taxi to a hospital. This is especially delicate for example at complications while childbirth.

Yet the central problem of the neighborhood remains the high level of violence. Violence is not considered as a typical symptom of the aftermath of the war in West Point. Rather, it is said to have been prevalent at least since the 1980s, says the vice president of the West Point Women. She remembers and recalls those days lively:

> "I came to West Point 1978, it was so much rudeness, every day, it was one fighting after another. You couldn't really get out there freely. The place was so frightful, people started being so afraid, to you know, move around, because there was so much violence." (interview, 31.03.2010)

Hence, in the past, the state has been unsuccessful in providing security and order to this neighborhood. The intricacies experienced today are therefore a continuation of problems of old. Besides, they are not particular to West Point, says an immigration officer of the West Point police department:

> "West Point is also a part and parcel of the Liberian society. You know, after war, one of the problems we grapple with is the high rate of crimes. You see the crimes of West Point. But West Point is not unique to Liberian situation or the urban situation. There's high rate of crimes here, people are being hijacked.[251] (…) So crime is not unique to West Point. But I can tell you for sure there are criminals in West Point. (Interview, 16.02.2011)

Violence is experienced to have climaxed due to the growing population and influx of refugees during the war. West Point has one police station and a magistrate court; and the capacities and resources of West Point justice and law enforcement providers are limited. Most informants evaluate the general juristic and security services as unreliable, however, improving, says the following West Point inhabitant, who is a *1990* soldier:

> "The police... the police are working. But they are not working according to... like normal days.(…) They work to their head office, they don't pass around frequently. But if you go for them, somebody harms me, they will come. (…) But we thank God, we can see them one, one. But they too, they are not well protected. No arms, you know." (Interview, 18.02.2010)

The police are ambivalent actors to the West Pointers, but interestingly, many talk more positively of the West Point police than other Monrovians talk about the police. In West Point, the police seem to be relying on the collaboration by the residents, as will be further elaborated later on. They were unarmed and only in a small number. Interestingly, it has been very common until recently to take somebody to court "for no reason", explained the Township Commissioner (interview, 13.07.2012). He described that rather than solving problems bilaterally or among family members as it is common for many Liberian interpersonal disputes, individuals would report to the law enforcement officers. Yet others applied and continue to take the law into their hands through "mob justice" (cf. Kantor and Persson 2010: 11, 24). "Mob justice", however, is said to have reduced in recent times. Insecurity remains a problem, and a number of informants had experienced break-ins. In 2011, even the Magistrate Court, situated next to the police office, was plundered. Various ac-

[251] Hijacked meant in this case that money was stolen from the woman. Criminal acts are often verbally dramatized.

tors and groups are interlinked in addressing these problems in the community. Yet it remains to be asked why does West Point remain home of a range of social actors under the mentioned conditions of insecurity, scarcity and uncertainties? Un- or underemployment[252] prevails also in West Point, where a range of youth finds it difficult to sustain themselves. Many are *hustling* but nevertheless have numerous plans and projects in mind. Despite the intricacies and precariousness of scarce public goods and services, West Point contains a range of advantages as opposed to other parts of Monrovia. The opportunities to make fast money in West Point are many, as the population of consumers is dense and fisheries provide goods to be proceeded and sold. Some Westpointers would have the means and opportunities to start their lives elsewhere, and some had moved out before, but returned after a while. Against all odds, many interview partners state that this neighborhood offers manifold prospects as compared to other neighborhoods: business opportunities, notably the fishery, are ample and provide a certain revenue per day. Other smaller businesses flourish as well, as the dense population needs to be supplied with consumer goods, services and entertainment. Expenses for housing and transportation remain low, as residents are in walking distance to the big Waterside market, or employment opportunities in central Monrovia or the Freeport (Lacey and Owusu 1988: 228). As mentioned above, there hardly exist any major tensions between the various segments of society; they are said to coexist and tolerate each other. In addition, tensions and fear within neighbors and family members are relatively low: accusations of creating intentional harm such as witchcraft or poisoning, as compared to other parts of Monrovia, are not often mentioned.

Informants ranging from residents to the authorities or the West Point Women evaluate the major threat to society as violence, especially gender-based violence. The West Point Women have identified a major cause as well: the women's lack of knowledge of their rights, which results in a lack of women's empowerment. This means that aspects of the international discourse and imagery of the woman in power, which matched so well to pre-war and war experiences of women in Liberia, evidently did not stop at the scaring entry points of West Point, but were fetched by some actors, such as the West Point Women. These concepts proved to be useful tools to their engagement for change in social practices in this intricate neighborhood.

9.3. Formation of the West Point Women for Health and Development Organization

To contact the West Point Women for Health and Development Organization had been a proposition by Mr. Swaray, my research assistant. He had lived in this neighborhood for some time and had some knowledge on the social setting, in particular that these women were "very powerful". We knocked at the door of their big, greenish office building one day, which marked the beginning of our interaction.

[252] Formal employment, especially by the government is though much desired as it would create stability through a regular, reliable income, but the formal sector as employer is vanishingly low. The division between *formal* and *informal* is questioned, as the formal sector is not strong and most activities Liberians live on are informal. Most actors find cash or in kind income in other ways (see also Roitman 2004 or Chabal/Daloz 1999).

The formation of the association began in 2002, when a few women assembled and decided to contribute to a change towards the living conditions of women in the neighborhood. During the evenings, they met at a school in the community. At that time, one of the members explains, there was a lot of violence on the West Point peninsula, and these crimes were fought with *sassa wood ordeals* which is a generic term for forms of customary jurisdiction and penalization for example by applying hot irons on human bodies. The initiator of the group, "the lady that brought togetherness in the community" (informal conversation, 23.02.2011), founded the women's group due to diverging opinions about these practices. Togetherness means a situation of increased social cohesion, in the West Point Women's view also changed procedures to increase social integration, in Simone's sense "balancing cohesion and opportunity" (Simone 2001: 105). According to the accounts the women, there has not been a comparable association in West Point before.

The group revived with new ideas in 2005, when a new leadership was elected. They decided to form an organization which they named the West Point Women for Health and Development Organization, following a standardized language of development (Olivier de Sardan 2009a: 53). The vice president, the most outspoken person and my main informant of this case study, explained that there were two interrelated reasons that lead to the founding of the association:

> "West Point Women for Health and Development Organization was founded by the concerned women of West Point. And West Point has a very bad reputation. And we thought it wise that we too can live in a society of good people. Because before we find out that when you tell people like this [strangers] to come to West Point, they be afraid. People will feel that by the time they enter the street of West Point, their bags will be jacked or somebody will stab them; and people used to be afraid. Number two, the main reason for forming the organization: our children were been raped too much [she paused]. Our women were being abused, brutalized. And, when they raped somebody, people were compromising too much! And we find out our children are our future" (Monrovia, 02.02.2010)

It was the West Point Women's reputation, and this statement, that led me to follow their activities for the next three years. According to her evaluation, the neighborhood was and still is stigmatized. Indeed, I had been told by a number of people that I should not enter this community, as many Liberians believe this peninsula to be a space that produces and breeds problems of many kinds, as a politician originating from West Point states. In the statement of the district representative resonates the elsewhere derived mutually constructed image 'Americo-Liberian' and the 'native Liberians' in distant and fearful (mental) 'hinterlands' where the unimaginable is possible (cf. Crapanzano 2004), yet this time, these actors are in physical spaces close to the heart of the centralized state:

> "they have been stereotyped maybe in the 1940s, 50s, you know, a lot of things were brought out, you know. They brought out a myth about woman with tail[253] and so on, you know, funny things came out these days. But if you find the West Pointers today, they don't feel - let me put it this way: most of them, they feel rejected, that people don't like them." (Interview, 26.05.2010)

[253] She is not referring to the common mermaid-like Mami Wata spirit. Though this mystic figure is widely known in Liberia, in this case, the representative is referring to other curiosities that are said to prevail in West Point.

Aim of the group was and remains to change and improve the living conditions of women and children in West Point, an imaginary informed by a national and international narrative of human rights and women's empowerment. As a result of their evaluation, this meant to respond to the key problems, which they though could be achieved by empowering and educating the women, first of all regarding human rights.[254] They started by articulating for basic rights by educating women's rights, as one of the West Point Women's members explains:

> "For Liberia, people felt long ago [for a long time] that only men have the right to education, only men have the right to freedom of speech, only the men supposed to be out there, and not women. Women's place was only in the kitchen. So we decided to fight for these rights. And the right we wanted to fight for was the right to education, the women rights to freedom of speech, the right to gender equality and the right to health care" (31.03.2010)

Although scholars like Moran (1989) or Fraenkel (1970 [1964]) showed that women had leadership roles within society and the political spheres in the past, women often imagine their social positioning differently. The experience of many women as having had children early and having been bound to household and dependent on their husband are aspects of normative roles of women, despite the fact that a number of them have experienced very particular roles during the war as many talk about having had to find food and providing protection for the family. A range of them have acquired specific active roles in spaces of society such as the church, in catering for large events, or participating in social clubs or associations. And many have a respected status as mothers, grandmothers, or wife. The contrast between the normative roles and the everyday practices feed into the repertoire of the women's association. For the interest of social change in society, the image of the dependent, abused woman is used in order to contrast to an idealized, shared imaginary. Indeed, I have been shown pictures of abused women and girls, and I have part when some - though not so horrifying cases, to my relief - cases were discussed.

The association, their shared imaginary and collective actions attracted many other women. After a few first gatherings and a fast growing number of new members, the women decided to hold elections and structure their endeavor.[255] They elected a president, a vice president, a secretary, a chaplain, a treasurer, a public relations officer and a gender-based violence (GBV) coordinator. Bylaws and a constitution were brought to paper, and formal accreditation and an article of incorporation were organized. In addition, a bank account

[254] The plurality of social norms and values are shaped and reshaped on all levels (cf. Olivier de Sardan 2008). The statement of the "confusing new Human Rights" above showed that in a changing environment Liberians constantly have to re-evaluate the present condition and adapt their agency according to these changes. As an example, the idea of "new Human Rights" opens new perspectives of actors in a post-war environment of peacebuilding and reconstruction, as the case study will show. The legal sector is evaluated with suspicion and not really trusted. It is said to be corrupt and only working for the rich, a perception that roots in the history of elite rule of the long history of elite rule and domination. Hence, mob justice was a common means to overcome criminals.

[255] To recall, in 1998, the Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL) was founded with the aim of coordinating the women's NGOs in Liberia, building their capacities and connecting them with international donors, according to the executive director of WONGOSOL (interview, Monrovia, 03.03.2011). This happened in many African countries, as donors can more easily connect to an organization and rely on its functioning of a clear structure and plan is available. I assume that the formal structure of the West Point is linked to this effort; however, apart from the division of tasks and responsibilities among the West Point Women's members, these structures were not visible in their actions nor play a role in the conversations or interviews.

was opened. Originally, the organization was self-funded by contributions of each member during their weekly meetings. The majority of the members have limited resources due to their economic condition, the housework load and other obligations that make it difficult to participate actively and regularly. If needed, however, many would find the time to join, even with their limited resources, so they say. The weekly contributions of the West Point Women members were said to be sufficient to pay the expenditures for the most important cases they pursued, especially paying transportation of a victim to the hospital and the bills for treatment. At the first stage of their collective actions, all work was voluntary and hence unpaid; each member sustained herself from selling fish or other products, party catering, family or church work or other activities.

After the first persistent pursuit of a rape case which was successful, they had attracted attention of AFELL, who thereafter began to assist the group and organized a workshop in West Point, at which more than 1'000 persons participated, I was told. One thing lead to another, the impact of the West Point Women attracted a number of other women, and the organization grew quite fast in membership. Today, they consist of more than 150 members,[256] of which a core of 10 to 15 members is involved in most activities. However, if needed, for example for fund raising, campaigning or demonstrations, the West Point Women would call for action, and most of the registered members would participate. Membership is unconfined, and the group represents different ethnic, religious, social and backgrounds, educational levels and age groups. At least two members[257] of the West Point Women leadership pursue higher education, one of which is the president. The president attends the University of Liberia, whereas her son is studying in Morocco. Another member's husband is a medical doctor. This underlines the argument of a heterogeneous constitution of the West Point population. As a majority of the West Point Women are marketers or street sellers that gain little financial income, others are situated in better circumstances. One lady, as an example, lives alone with the family of another West Point Woman.

In the course of their collective efforts, the West Point Women received attention by a few international organizations such as Oxfam and the IRC. In 2010, globalgiving created a fund raising web page for the West Point Women,[258] which has generated additional attention for example by the Liberian Philanthropic Secretariat,[259] and provided a considerable amount of funding in late 2010 and early 2011. International funds opened up new capacities and possibilities to the group; however, this also provided a testing ground for in-group solidarity. In late 2010, a few men joined the organization, and, according to the president, they collaborated well with the women. Men were considered important partners as they have more influence and

[256] Also this number has been changing over time. This number was given in the formal group discussion on 02.02.2010.
[257] Though I spent a lot of time with the West Point women, I did not get to know all of the members.
[258] globalgiving (http://www.globalgiving.org, accessed 03.06.2015).
[259] The Liberia Philanthropy Secretariat (http://liberiaphilanthropy.org/, accessed 02.02.2013).

access to men involved in cases, for example in issues regarding violent men.[260] However, the men were mostly referred to as partners, and not members. During my subsequent visits, however, these men were not mentioned anymore.

At the onset of this study, national and international organizations had been ambivalent actors in their view: The group had received in kind support in form of education, knowledge or materials, and they profited from the coordination effort of these organizations and the attachment to the Liberian NGO Secretariat (WONGOSOL). On the other hand, they had strived for financial donations or concrete support such as a vehicle or ambulance for West Point. Rather than that, they received a generator and a computer, the use of which was not evident to the group at first. In addition, they explained that so many national and international individuals or NGOs had contacted them, took interviews, pictures and time, made promises, but never returned. The West Point Women did not see the practical benefit they would get from these meetings, as they remained *hustling* to make a living under precarious circumstances, and hence often saw such meetings as being in vain. Large events such as the International Women's Day 2011, where thousands of women and women's organizations took part, generated a level of excitement and change to the everyday routine. But again, the West Point Women had an ambivalent opinion about the event as the vice president said disappointedly: She felt that they were only invited to contribute to a large appearance of women; they had no active part, and in addition, for technical reasons, one could not hear what was said by the "big people there". Earlier, she had stated that the West Point Women would celebrate their own Women's Day 2011 within the community. There were a number of instances where I noticed utterances critical towards *big people* that would look down on the ordinary people, and use their numbers for a personal reason.

Apart from international actors, the organization continued to expect some level of appreciation by the Liberian government, not necessarily monetary, so they said, but for example in support of their common cause. They believe that, in fact, they were filling a gap of missing public goods and services such as transportation of injured persons, access to medical services, and legal support or security. Much had been promised in the campaigns of the 2005 elections, but they believed that government had forgotten about them. President Johnson Sirleaf visited West Point in September 2010, and promised to build the roads, under the condition that the West Point inhabitants would create the space to do so. Public appeals and complaints are useful tools to generate attention regarding the lack of means and hence serve to underline their claims and facilitate fund raising. Vital part of the West Point Women's intention was to create public awareness of the needs of the neighborhood.

Though the members of the organization are of heterogeneous composition, they emphasized a common, shared identity as women – mothers, sisters, wives[261] - and have the same goal: to reduce gender-based

[260] Only in mid-2010, men joined the organization; about the same time that external financial support was generated. Unfortunately, I was not able to talk to one of the men about their incentives or interest in joining the group.

violence. There are two influences that were articulated as strengthening coherence and solidarity within the group: being directly or indirectly affected by gender-based violence, and secondly, the experience of shifting roles of women during and after the war. Experiences of the past, the image of strong women supporting their families during the conflict and their engagement for peace figure centrally as encouragement of these women's collective agency.

The West Point Women decided to make an effort to jointly address the complex social problems. The major interest and aim of the group, as previously mentioned, is to create an environment of improved security to their children and women. The experienced threat to society seems to be the consequences of the 'loose society', the consequences of a loss of norms and values. These consequences are seen as the result of parents who do not care about their children and youth properly in leaving them without control and guidance. Secondly, this looseness is manifested in the high prevalence promiscuity and related challenges to women and girls such as teenage pregnancy. In addition to their core activities around gender-based violence, the West Point Women also address these problems and create awareness. They produce a social space in which a better society is imagined, shared, and which leads to the formulation of ideas and actions to achieve according change. Due to their awareness programs, counseling, mediating, advocating and educating activities in human rights, gender-based violence is said to reduce in West Point, according to interviewee's experiences and observations, as well as statements by the local police. The association can hence be seen as a contributor to the process of (re-)generating social order in the neighborhood. The inhabitants of West Point are aware of their activities and consider the group as one of the active groups in West Point that influence the living conditions. In the following, the range of activities the women address will be looked at more closely.

Fighting Violence

Human rights became a valuable instrument and capacity for the West Point Women: They have served as a useful approach to address their common claim to fight gender-based violence. Human Rights education workshops had been conducted by various international and national institutions throughout the conflict and in the aftermath. These concepts were appropriated to their intricate neighborhood and taken up as a tool to fight violence against women. Central to the West Point Women is the assumption that a woman that is well informed about her rights will apply these to defend and protect herself, rather than remaining silent and keeping it secretly to herself. This section will show how they tackle such problems but also the influence of an international discourse in the use of language and concepts, such as gender-based violence or even awareness, which are adapted according to their interest and necessities.

[261] And for the male partners of the West Point Women, they share solidarity as husbands, fathers or partners.

Today, there are still regular cases of rape of women and girls even though the government has implemented a number of measurements to address this problem, such as the earlier mentioned 'Rape Law' that specified rape as a criminal act, or the Women and Child Protection Section that was implemented in collaboration with UNICEF to strengthen the Liberian National Police regarding such delicate cases. Nationwide, rape remains widespread and has been so also in West Point, however, according to a police officer of the Women and Child Protection Section of the Liberian National Police in West Point, rape cases have decreased in the community:

> "Yes, I see a lot of changes. At first, when I came to West Point, every day, we have cases, gender-based violence, sexual violence, rape. Every other time. Maybe in a week we see two to three rape cases! But for now, we try doing awareness, with the help of our counterparts, we try carrying on awareness, at least, it's decreasing." (interview, 05.03.2010)

Of course no police officer would say that he or she does a bad job. However, I asked police on several occasions about their work, also informally, and they would state that violence against women reduces, and women association's efforts would be an important contribution in these regards for example informal conversation with a police officer at the international women's day in Todee (08.03.2010). A Monrovian higher official accounted in a conversation with others that their emergencies today are rather concerning robberies and mostly insignificant ones, and that the ERU had to be deployed far less frequently than a few years ago (informal conversation, Sinkor, 20.07.2012).

Policing West Point had been tricky for two reasons: the township commissioner explained the people used to report ordinary interpersonal conflict to the police (interview, 13.07.2012). On the other hand, victims of gender-based violence did not report their cases out of fear, shame or other personal reasons. In other cases, parents and perpetrators were compromising, aiming at covering the perpetrator and hiding the case in order to keep the otherwise stigmatized daughter shielded. These were some of the cases that came to the attention of the West Point Women. Today, rape cases are reported more frequently, to the satisfaction of the police. This, however, lead to raising statistics in sexual and gender-based violence. Other interpersonal conflicts were increasingly resolved by other social institutions and processes.

Still, sexual and gender-based violence create shocking emergencies in West Point. Some of these cases are very severe and delicate to deal with, as they include more than one person, and if it results in a pregnancy, it concerns a child's future. The goal to reduce such forms of violence does not in all cases mean that seeking formal justice is the best solution. For many cases, even some cases of rape of minors, for example, the aim is not to have the perpetrator jailed. According to the police as well as the West Point Women, more important is a 'pragmatic solution' to each individual case. If a young girl gets pregnant as a result of rape, they mediate with all involved persons, including the parents of the boy and the girl, and a solution will be found to see how best the circumstances can be improved so that the child is cared after and the girl can continue her education. The police officer goes on explaining:

> "[W]e are there to protect the child. If you say, if this case is persistent non-support, and we try to hold the man for rape, who will support the child? That child will remain vulnerable. So we try to drop the rape side, and at least look at the persistent support first. That is, we try to talk to the man. But we will tell him, we will tell them what it means, we tell him, you have raped this girl, she was under the statutory age, you didn't supposed to do so." (interview, 05.03.2010)

Is this consistent with their aim of reducing gender-based violence? The West Point Women believe so. The first cases they pursued persistently, where formal justice was spoken and the perpetrators were imprisoned, had a signaling effect. Yet, their approach differs from case to case: contextually, the aim is to have the perpetrator punished whereas in another case, a different solution would be needed, as will be shown below. What they want to avoid most importantly and in any case is that a rape case is compromised or concealed. This is why the West Point Women consider awareness as one of the most important part of their activities. In our meetings they often circulate pictures, for example of a young woman that was severely injured, 'chopped', by her former boyfriend. In such severe cases, the women first take the person to the hospital. Thereby, they charter a taxi to the hospital where the person receives treatment. X-rays, pictures and other diagnostic findings will serve as evidence for the legal prosecution of the case, because as a next step, the West Point Women will take the case to court.

In many cases, the West Point Women try to mediate between two parties to find a better solution for both. In many situations, disputes and violence root in misunderstandings, as the West Point Women explain, which could be resolved with the help of mediators. I will dwell on their understanding of dispute resolution and mediation, 'reconciliation', below. In case of disputes the West Point Women are often asked to mediate between husband and wife, or between other forms of relationships. Often, however, they cannot do much, and a frequent problem the West Point Women then have to address is the abandoned women and children. Due to vast migration during the conflict, women and men of different regions and countries formed relationships, and due to their distant relatives and family members, especially mothers lack important family, hence, social security ties. As a majority cannot afford to marry, many have children and live together in loose relationships. There are cases where men and/or their relatives take the children from the woman, or even her belongings. The West Point Women recall one of their first cases:

> "The first person we had to send back home when the man brought her and neglected her, it was one Freetown [Sierra Leonean] woman they call Hawa. And we had to look for transportation, I think 6'000,[262] and send her back home." (interview, 31.03.2010)

They create awareness and teach the women as well as men how to handle a difficult situation. And, last but not least, they give mental support by encouraging and comforting the ill-treated person. Another way of preventing such 'social ills' is by empowering the women through education. The Human Rights education was mentioned above, but furthermore, these educational activities range from informal discussions with other women, purification of water and other health and social issues. Recently, the West Point Women

[262] The amount is in Liberian Dollars which is equivalent to about 80 USD at the time of this research.

opened a night school for women to fight women's illiteracy in the community. This was made possible by funds of the external donors.

FGM

A presently widely debated thorny topic is the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which stands for the clitoridectomy, practiced mainly in the *Sande* societies (Bledsoe 1984: 457). It is said to be widely practiced mostly in rural areas, but also, according to my informants of the West Point Women, in Monrovia. FGM is now situated in the Human Rights discourse as sexual violence (Government of Liberia, UN Joint Programme on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Swedish International Development Cooperation (SIDA) 2011: 7). FGM awareness is not central part of the activities of the West Point Women, however, it comes up in discussions. Officially, the West Point Women position themselves against this practice. The president had told me about a recent case that had been in court and that "the women"[263] are supporting. The case was about a woman from Bomi County who had been forced into the Sande society and was circumcised in 2008. As this happened against her will, she took the case to court. In 2011, the two *zoes* that undertook the clitoridectomy, were found guilty (Daygbor 11.07.2011). This was a break-through for those women that are against the practice. However, this topic was very much in debate, and mainly in rather informal and small groups, at least in my presence. Some of the members reject this practice, whereas others define it to be the heart of culture and tradition. An informal conversation shall elucidate this complex theme. One afternoon, Mr. Swaray and I were sitting on a porch with Mary and Korpu,[264] both members of the West Point Women.[265] As we were engaged in a discussion about the importance of education, Korpu started to talk about the Sande and "these things", meaning the practices of clitoridectomy, stating that it had become a widely discussed and debated topic now. She said that a number of families were now considering whether to send their girl children to the Sande schools, because it is much more rewarding having the girl child in high school or at the university. This generates better opportunities for jobs and hence, better support would flow back into the families. By contrast, a girl that has spent years in the *Sande* bush does not materialize and bring much profit to the family. Apparently, the duration of the *Sande* has already been condensed. Korpu is embedded culturally into the *Sande*, whereas Mary is not. Mary raised the topic of clitoridectomy, a practice that she vehemently rejects. She does not understand why somebody who has gone through "this" wants her children experience it. Korpu, though not arguing against FGM nevertheless accentuated the cultural meaning and values, essentializing tradition in a positive way as the locus of continuation of past habits, practices and social cohesion. Their argument goes on as Mary asked if there could be a Sande school without that "thing". Korpu answered that it would be like taking the heart out of the tradition. However, she did

[263] However, Liberian women are not agreed on this issue.
[264] Pseudonymous names to make the conversation easier to follow.
[265] Informal discussion marked in field notes of 07.07.2012. Names are pseudonym. The discussion was interestingly open, even in the presence of a man (my assistant) and me, a foreigner. I did not initiate nor take part in the discussion but remained listening.

not clearly support nor reject the practice of clitoridectomy openly in her argumentation. Rather, she drew on a discourse that this practice is believed to be the nucleus of the Sande, which is similarly described by scholars (Bledsoe 1984: 457). The discussion took a different turn as they, including Mr. Swaray, agreed that 'traditions' were not upheld in Liberia. Many cultures and customs are experienced to be vanishing. There is a lot of support and money for campaigns against FGM, however, the meanings of traditions and customs are not of interest. All of them agreed on this issue, and this had apparently been a problem ever since. Constructions of 'tradition' and 'modernity' are linked to powerful actors, and the conversation took a new turn as they debated the stakeholders of tradition, and that tradition does not have any supporters in government or actually, in society at large. Their debate on FGM shows that there exist plural understandings about such practices which are not easily arranged into binary oppositions, but rather as a discourse on tradition in a sense of *Tradierung*, passing of norms and values to the younger generations, in fact, a universal and old story of mankind. This is a concern the West Point Women take up and will be discussed below.

In the end, as women, they are "individuals-within-the-community" (Chabal 2009: 37), and as such are concerned with a situational plurality of 'international' and 'traditional' values, and a partial loss of such, which lead to a 'loose society'. Towards the exterior, the organization stands strongly against FGM, however, amongst its members, intensive discussions take place in regards to shaping the meaning of Sande, which remains as a central social institution to many, however, its elements are debated. The frontiers are not hardened, and debates differentiate this very complex theme. Journalist Mae Azango openly contests FGM practices, which lead to a scandal in Liberia. She received life threats due to exhibiting issues of secrecy (Butty 17.12.2012). Nevertheless, many Liberian do not send their girls into the *Sande society*, one reason being the influence of the change in regards to these practices, but mainly due to practical reasons of schooling and education being increasingly prioritized. This topic showed how associations such as the West Point Women serve as a forum to discuss, contest, gain orientation or shape opinions in a context of changes and in search of stability and order. Due to the heterogeneous composition of the associations' members, manifold opinions coexist, thereby challenge and balance dominant images.

Welfare Vigilantes

The West Point Women's reputation started to create some challenges to their association, as they got contacted for and involved into various topics of social problems in the neighborhood. They emerge as a social institutions to address manifold social problems, the West Point Women are evaluated as alternative actors capable for stepping in and resolving challenges: "Usually, the people tell you that so many things are going on in this community. People just feel, we [the WP Women] have to handle that, ok?" (interview, 16.02.2011). The president of the group made this statement in a rather resigned tone. She indicated that they are perceived as welfare actors in the community, which rather overstretch their already limited capaci-

ties. Their case of an old, sick former soldier deprived of family network was exemplary, and I found it an interesting example liking up with the old soldiers' case study. It underlined the fact that some of the old soldiers have weak social networks but also that the West Point Women did not rate a person in moral terms. In fact, they did not problematize ex-combatants nor did they use this term. It shows furthermore that even in most intricate conditions in West Point, people stand in relations to others. This problematic case occurred one night, when a man was found lying outside the West Point Women's office, where he was found by some of the women. He had been taken from the local authority to the police, back and forth for certain time. The vice president had been monitoring the case, as they are aware of what was going on in the community

> "That morning, I think the day before I was going somewhere, then I saw the man in the wheelbarrow. They carried him to one house, across there [direction of the Freeport], they said that's where his family people were. They carried him laying down in the wheelbarrow. But then the next morning, I got up, the people said, they carried one man, I said 'where?' That's how we came, we met the man lying down here. Then, I said, 'Oh! That's the same man I saw lying in the wheelbarrow!' Then the man started explaining how the chief, the town chief, the chief for the... [Another woman adds: 'the government'], for the Grand Kru people there, because that's a Grand Gedeh village man, said that the chief put him in the wheelbarrow, carrying him on this side. So from one to the other - the people them, the chief, drag him and brought him here [someone laughs]. So we couldn't do anything about it. But then, I asked him whether he has somebody, he said yes." (interview, Monrovia, 16.02.2011)

In her account, it becomes evident that there exist a range of institutions in West Point that are contacted for specific events or grievances. Evidently, this particular old soldier had been a problem to the people he interacted with. Being an alcohol abuser did not generate empathy by his social environment.

The women at first did not want to take care of this case, for they knew that this would have the signaling effect that they would take care of such intricate cases in the neighborhood. This would not be possible, as the women are already burdened with their focus on gender-based violence cases. The story of this old man was delicate as neither the police nor other authorities took the responsibility, and so the women decided to arrange care for the old man and tried to find contacts of family members. The West Point Women know the community well and were able to trace a son's contact in Asia. This in fact not extraordinary, as many Liberians went abroad in the course of the war. Being a 'Grand Gedeh man', he was most likely a Krahn speaker, a group that had been targeted by Charles Taylors' rebellion, and many have left the country. The finding of a family member in Asia shows how the West Point Women have knowledge of the dense and intricate neighborhood, and traced family relations beyond West Point as far as to an Asian country. By re-establishing this family relation, the West Point Women were able to shift the responsibility back to the family network of the man. Such cases are challenges to the group, as their own resources are limited, but at the same time, residents had already begun to expect the West Point Women to respond to such problems. This case gives insight into the broadness of the association's agency in finding ways to handle these. The members provide a

pool of experiences and knowledge, imagination and judgment capabilities, hence a repertoire of experiences they can draw on to find a solution to each specific case.

Apart from such spectacular cases which challenge the group's capacities, they are engaged in a range of welfare activities in the neighborhood. Some are directed to reducing health risks in West Point, especially for women and children. Provision as well as regulation is lacking: Latrines and bathrooms are scarce and not properly taken care of, and the water of the public wells is not clean. The government latrine right behind the West Point Women's building caused serious problems, as bad odors and spilling out over the nearby football field challenged the neighborhood. As it persisted, the West Point Women mentioned to plan a demonstration to the Capitol Hill to have this particular problem resolved. Their call was heard before they had to march "up there", and the latrine was repaired soon after.

As one of the encouragements of government, they receive funding to clean up the community. They regularly take a broom and sweep the streets of West Point. This is in fact one of their most regular and visible activities, say some West Point residents. Despite the women's activities, it should not be neglected that West Point is a large neighborhood composed of more than 50'000 inhabitants. The outreach of the West Point Women surely does not expand into all physical and social spaces on the peninsula.

RECONCILIATION

The West Point Women started to organize Saturday afternoon's programs of reconciliation in late 2011. The vice president called it "children's education", and she had explained to me on the phone that it was an effort to gather the children and teach them stories containing moral messages. She had complained earlier, as other West Point Women, that the parents leave their children carelessly on their own. So the women decided to hire a teacher and entertain the children on Saturday afternoons. At my third return to the field, I took part at this event on two Saturday afternoons. The first of two such children education afternoons I participated in had a duration of half an hour only, after it had started much delayed due to the absence of one teacher. There were three young teachers, two women and a man, and they motivated the children to tell stories. Besides the teachers, the vice president with present, but no other West Point Woman. The teachers and the children seemed routinized in this event, as the crowd of 50 children of various ages knew exactly where to sit and how to reply or to sing to the opening and ending of the program. A particular good story would be replied with a gesture of offering an imaginary 'soft drink' that the children would cheerfully pour over the reciter. However, the children were very excited about my and Mr. Swaray's presence, and the teachers had to repeat their warnings to children, and hold their twigs in an alert position in their hands. We listened to their short stories or fables which were framed with the phrase "once upon a time!" and the crowd of children would jointly reply "time!" These stories reminded of the stories Westermann (1921) or Himmelheber and Himmelheber (1958) collected and which are found throughout West Africa. They often

deal with animal figures and account of sanctioned human actions, similar to the stories known from many other regions of the world. Some stories contain Christian values. The three teachers animated the children to tell their stories which they did, some, however, with such fast speech of excitement that the content was hardly understandable. At the end, the children were asked questions about the respective stories by the storytellers. The stories have been learned by heart. I had previously been explained that they deal with stories related to the war and reconciliation matters. However, I have not heard any with such content. But rather, they dealt with theft or greed, and contained a moral message, wrapped in a short story of rhythmic repetitions or could even contain songs. Reconciliation as understood in the war related context is not an issue for small children. Rather, I consider these stories as vehicles used to transmit and reflect social norms and values, thereby contrasted with deviant actions. This event fits into the shared imaginary of the West Point Women who evaluate the neighborhood as suffering from 'social ills' such as 'looseness', and aim at strengthening social cohesion among the children, and a projection to a better future for the children in the neighborhood. Like in church sermons, group gatherings or other events, the war itself is not talked about as frequently as problems of the post-war or urban challenges are addressed. Lastly, stories contain and transmit cultural norms and traditions, as many Liberians criticize that 'traditions' and 'customs' have a weak lobby vis-à-vis the 'modern' society. At discussing with other friends and informants, I learned that the practice of storytelling is very widespread, and any person could tell me a story. Wherever I mentioned the issue of stories, for example at Swaray family's house, the children became eager in telling me stories, starting with "once upon a time", after which the audience is expected to reply with "time!" In the past, such stories had been taught at school, whereas today they are rather part of evenings' entertainment.

Reconciliation, a common notion and emic concept of restoring social cohesion has been known before the TRC. Many Liberians including the West Point Women were engaged in forms of reconciliation. In cases of *palaver*, [266] as interpersonal disputes were called in Liberian English, often very long lasting processes were necessary to resolve them. They often included long hearing of all participants and no detail is left out. Mediators are expected to listen to both sides either independently or in the forefield of the conflict settlement. Then, the two parties discuss their issue in the presence of the mediator. Often, a few other people are present, either family members or close persons. At times, their opinion is asked. Gibbs (1963) differentiated two forms of Kpelle dispute settlement, the official, courtroom disputes which are often coercive and arbitrary, and the informal *house palaver* in presence of an assembled group of family or neighbors. As courts often divided the quarreling parties even further, the *house palaver* were more familiar and mediated the

[266] At times, it is also referred to as *wahala*, a term which hails from Nigeria. Reconciliation is often framed by and embedded in a Christian context, but the argument behind it is more societal: if conflict prevails, often the affected people 'tie their face', meaning that anger is shown in facial expressions of malaise. There is a need to talk about sorrows and angers, and one should not keep it inside. However, reconciliation was also part of everyday talk, as for an example, someone owe money to another person and went to "reconcile with him" as soon as he had the money.

differences more effectively (Gibbs 1963: 2). The urban context of present-day Liberia poses a new context for dispute settlement, as forms of *house palaver* and related institutions have transformed. Though for some time, people took a range of private issues "straight to court", as mentioned before, interestingly even though the justice system is considered untrustworthy. There was and is remains a need for persons to turn to and resolve *palaver*.[267] In absence of family members, associations can step in as an institution to resolve disputes. Indeed, the West Point Women are regularly asked to conduct reconciliation beyond the borders of West Point, says for example the West Point Women's president:

> "P: As I sit here, this gone Sunday I had to go all the way to Gardnerville, Chicken Soup Factory, in a bus. I had to go there, to settle a dispute. Sometimes some of my people leave here, they go up town, you know, into various areas, you know, to settle disputes, sometimes they do this, they do that, you know.
> AK: but you do that as a West Point woman representative?
> P: As a West Point Women! The people hear about us! And they come to us. So we help them. Sometimes we go - I even went to Matadi and all, to settle disputes there."

Resolving disputes and teaching the children are of central importance to contribute to social cohesion and reduce social problems in West Point. The decrease in gender-based violence cases has left room for new activities, and constitutes a shift and re-direction of the West Point Women's agency to more future-oriented plans. As such, they are not only an association conducting welfare work like various other organizations, but work on a shared imaginary which they convert into practices of enhancing *togetherness*. This way, they flexibly combine external donor's agendas with their own ideas to a broad range of agency in this intricate neighborhood. Nevertheless, they would expect the state to be more active and supportive. Throughout the meetings with the West Point Women, they aired complains about state actors and institutions which do not draw attention to this part of town. Promises had been made in the course of the last elections, but the state's performances remains way below what was anticipated. The next section addresses their relations to political leaders and their image of the state.

9.4. Addressing the State and Claiming Election Promises

Apart from providing welfare services to the neighborhood, members of the West Point Women, in particular the leadership, situatively interact with political leaders which are called upon in demand of state action. Political action, however, is not only directed towards state actors, but also towards the community they live in. Finally, the West Point Women are not only organized and structured within their community. There are several levels of institutional and political structures, as they are for example registered member of the national Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL). WONGOSOL coordinates activities of NGOs and connects donors with organizations. As part of a national women's network, large scale events such as the International Women's day or awareness marches are coordinated. Some of the West Point Women had

[267] As mentioned in the methodology chapter, persons such as Ruth spend a vast part of their time resolving interpersonal disputes.

participated at the demonstration on the Capitol Hill when the Rape Law or the Inheritance Law was debated in parliament.[268] Other, smaller events are organized within West Point, and often in collaboration with aforementioned INGOs or the Ministry of Gender and Development. The form of event depends on the audience to be addressed, and the aim. During the time of this research, 'marching' meant a joint action mostly for general awareness topics, executed by the group walking through the main streets of the community or capital in display of unity by similar clothing, typically white T-Shirts with imprinted messages and sponsor logos. At two occasions, the West Point Women had clothing ready for me, so that I would be part of the group walking the streets. I was astounded by the speed of the group, though in small and very rhythmic paces, dragging the shoes along the pavement. This dragging created a sound that came close to the sound of a *sassa*, a percussion instrument widely known in Africa and parts of the Americas as *shekele*, composed of a net of beads around a calabash which played by rhythmically pulling the net around the calabash while shaking the latter. *Sassa* is mostly played by women generally. In such marches, banners with the motto of the event would typically be held. Some of the mottos were for example: "WISE women working together to stop violence", "Equal rights, equal opportunities, progress for all", "Men and Women as Partners in Ending Violence Against Women and Girls or Stop Woman and Child Abandonment". Verbal statements and songs in chorus underline the movement. Such forms of marches are in fact not particular to Liberia, but found in many other social contexts, including the printed T-shirts and slogans presented. People along the pavement often halt and watch the group passing by, or even join the group for a while. Depending on the size of the march, the traffic gets blocked. The audience is watching and listening attentively and often actively takes part in the demonstration by supporting the group with acknowledging statements or by criticizing loudly. These forms of demonstrations are not only literally a collective action by a group, but also a dialogue with the audience of the street. Sometimes, media follow and report on the event. These movements in the literal sense are common, and for a range of occasions, wom-

Picture 21: "MAWPAEVAWG March": Men and Women as partners in ending violence against women and children.

[268] The West Point Women as part of the Liberian women's movement has been highlighted elsewhere (Kaufmann 2011b).

en's groups are seen in the streets demonstrating, a common example are the AFL Widows, or women praying for peace in la Côte d'Ivoire in early 2011 on the Fish Market, an open, public space near the residence of the President.

Another range of political activities of the West Point Women are addressed to those power holders that either have promised to or are per office duty supposed to deliver certain goods and services to West Point. In absence of such delivery, the West Point Women for example had planned to get help for the latrine that was rather a bad than a good to the community. They were planning an action to demonstrate at the house of parliament, not on the streets. Generally, these demonstrations are constructive: they are well prepared, have a clear message and express it to specific politicians. These actions are peaceful, orderly and attract other people to watch or join. They do not cause riots or other forms of excesses, and in contrast to the disbanded soldiers self-attributed peaceful demonstrations, women generally do not cause fear or tension. The demonstration concerning the latrine did not need to take place; the latrine was repaired shortly after the West Point Women were beginning to talk about demonstration, and evidently, the information had been passed. Pressurizing state actors is conducted in two approaches. The first regards a specific theme, and the second approach is by directing towards a particular actor. As such, the West Point Women seek a dialogue with state actors in government, in particular the district representative, Alomiza Ennos. The group was in direct contact with the representative and interacted with her on a regular basis. The West Point Women had drawn attention to their needs, for example the dearly needed ambulance for West Point. Their actions have had certain successes, as for example they have received an office to use by the government. Besides, the representative had promised an ambulance. In an interview with the representative (interview, Monrovia, 26.05.2010), she explained that this was an issue of high priority which she would address in the near future. However, by February 2011 West Point still had not received the ambulance, and the emergencies continued to be pushed by wheelbarrow to the next taxi stand. Whereas the representative stated how she is burdened by high expectations which state actors like her cannot fulfill due to the lack of knowledge and capacities. Though she mentioned a broad range of contributions to West Point, such scholarships and school fees she paid, she admitted to fail to live up to a number of expectations – very high expectations. For example, people expect her to participate at social events, which she cannot due to lack of time.

The West Point Women on the other hand are conscious about their mobilizing power within the community and were aware about the upcoming elections. In early 2011, West Point Women were debating about whom to give their support to. Whereas the ambulance was still not provided, however, community work had been done by Robert Sirleaf, President Johnson Sirleafs' son, certain changes regarding political orientation had started. The West Point Women were confident that they would be able to make a strong claim as they are a densely populated community and constituency, and the association has mobilizing power.

9.5. Associational Life: Sociality, Networks and Politics

Apart from the West Point Women's functioning as a group of welfare and political actors, associational life has another aspect which is often neglected in analysis of such organizations. Associational life can facilitate new spaces of cohesion in an intricate neighborhood. It is a commonplace that such spaces of sociality do not equal a complete absence of disagreement, frictions, or even disputes amongst the group members. Rather, the issue of frictions is quite a vital part of their activities. The example of the discussion about FGM above showed in what way opinions might diverge fundamentally due to belonging or diverging cultural norms and values, and in what ways room remains for differences towards goals. This shows that imaginaries have an individual and a social side, and the difference generates the degree of disagreement. The core of social imaginaries has been shaped out in the past subchapters, and imaginaries continue to serve as a motor for the West Point Women's collective actions.

Individuals also have personal life trajectories, which at times diverge from the common interest of the group. The studies of the president cost her a lot of time. Since she has to travel to the new campus at Fendell, she spends four hours in traffic per day. This also meant that she is often absent from the group. At my visits in 2012 I realized that in case she was present, she was at times not as up-to-date as other members of the group, and I sensed a degree of discomfort by other members, such as passivity. Their endeavor brings along all sorts of challenges, and since they received donor funding, according reports have to be written or international guests welcomed, all of which these involve skills and capacities which are not available to the required extent.

The associations' participation in various activities and events are entertaining for the members. One has to prepare, and the trip to the international women's days was accompanied by much laughter, and excitement was in the air. At the event, there were snacks and drinks, the president offered cold water for all. These events are a change to the everyday life of the women. The event in 2010 at Bensonville included a program composed of performances, in which various women from a range of women's groups participated, with the intent of educating women on aspects of their rights. At the same time, this was entertaining. At the second event, which was much bigger and held at the Antoinette Tubman Stadium (ATS) in Monrovia, the participation was much more limited to that of spectators (Monrovia, 08.03.2011). The vice president complained that they did not have any role beyond just being there in large numbers. Expectations diverge, and besides, among the group are persons with aspirations beyond West Point and the women's group, the vice president with her diverse economic activities was also much engaged in the growing church of her husband. The president of the West Point Women had run for the office of the Township Commissioner, but the position was obtained by Hadja Flowers, the previous chairperson of the West Point Intellectual Forum (WEPIF).

Associational life, hence, is very dynamic and processual, depending on a range of external and internal factors, such as funding, pressing grievances or activities of the leadership. It was clear that the near future would bring about changes to the West Point Women's leadership, and expectations have to be adjusted to the changing conditions and realities. At the time of this research, however, the West Point Women remained active in the group and their manifold activities. At times in which not much activities were planned, there were still always a few women found in the house of the organization. If occasionally no one was there and the door was locked, people around the house would direct the visitor to one of the women that live around the block, for example behind a large, Pentecostal church, where three of the members lived. I often stopped there and enjoyed the informal setting of casual chats. I experienced that these forms of encounters and sociality were of considerable importance. Personal issues could be debated in such arrangements. The vice president, for example, suffered from glaucoma. She was about to go blind, and had already lost sight of one eye. In addition, she had diabetes. So her health was a serious challenge, and she was considering going to clinics and even abroad, to Ghana. As side effects of her health condition, she walked into sharp objects and hurt her feet and her head. Infections and pains were the consequences. This chain of what I would consider bad luck was evaluated by her as a fear that she is a victim of witchcraft. She shared these worries with her fellow members. Though care was provided by her daughter and grandchildren in the house, she was comforted by airing her concerns outside her household amongst members of the West Point Women, who in turn took her concerns serious and reflected on them.[269]

In a social setting of women of various backgrounds, educational levels, ages and other differences, solidarity was often emphasized as based on shared experience as being mothers, wives, and other shared experiences as women. Being a woman, however, does not mean that there are no diverging opinions, this is a commonplace, and it does not mean that women's interests stand at core, for example of female politicians. Against the backdrop of the 'loosening society' and the plurality of norms and values, there has emerged a need to debate and find orientation within these changing norms and values from both within and outside society. Societal problems need new solutions as they are not socially accepted, however, the externalities of a growing and 'loosening society' need to be dealt with. The topic of female genital mutilation exhibited this aspect to a certain degree. The association also provides a forum of debate about current issues and generate certain stability due to shared understandings of how the social is and should be. Solutions are linked to political actors, and especially in the forefield of presidential or parliamentary elections, these issues are debated. On many issues, however, a coherent opinion is hardly found, as the women are integrated into other networks as some are southeasterners while others are Kpelle or Vai, some are young, some older, some are Muslim, some Christian. When it comes to political questions, other characteristics may be juxtaposed against womanhood. At the time I had last met the West Point Women in 2011, they had been

[269] She went to seek treatment abroad and remained out of the country at the time of this writing.

very critical towards the incumbent as well as the district representative. In the end, they had supported President Johnson Sirleaf, however, not the district representative, which was not re-elected. Though they did not mention any pre-elections benefits by the incumbent, it is evident that they have or will demand something in turn of the valuable votes.

9.6. BACK TO *NORMAL DAYS*?

At my return to the community in mid-2012 some change had taken place. The community had received two tarred roads which were lined by electricity poles. Street lights were now functioning in West Point, and some people had bought electrical devices such as TVs or refrigerators. In the evening, lights shone. This gave the community a new appearance; past were the days of stumbling between motorbikes and puddles of muddy water. At the first day of entering West Point from Waterside market through the Market building, I heard loud and high quality music from the middle of the market. Indeed, a huge sound system was installed, one of the kinds that is often rented for parties and that costs about 50 USD a day. Some women rhythmically moved to the music while cutting *greens* or assorting their merchandises. It was like a party in the middle of the day, however, there was no dancing and drinking, but working as usual. There were more cars driving in and out of West Point, some of the shops and restaurants along the road had received a face-lift. One of my informants invited me to visit his home where he stayed with his girlfriend and three children, two of which are classificatory children. He stated proudly that he had been able to buy the squatter rights for a three room apartment in West Point. Passing through the maze of small houses and alleys, I was astonished to find myself in a beautifully painted and furnished apartment with 12 hours electricity to run a television, light bulbs and a radio. It represented a condition of dignity.[270] He now lived under conditions that were previously imagined as conditions of *normal days*, and how a better life was supposed to be. Was West Point "back to normal days"? Later on, at a meeting with the West Point Women, I confronted the group with this question. The GVB coordinator answered firmly that it was even better now than during *normal days*. Those days, she told me, the women were not educated, whereas now, they were. However, not all women agreed with her, and a discussion started about other presidents that had done better than Johnson Sirleaf does today. One woman praised Charles Taylor, because during his presidency, the price for rice had been lower. This statement which is commonly heard, shows that a number of people live in economically deprived circumstances and the availability of basic foodstuff matters a lot to them. Besides, it shows what they expect from a *big person*: creating a symbolic link to them, the ordinary people, by addressing their basic needs, in particular food. However, the discussion went on quite vividly, like discussions of this kind often did. The first speaker interrupted the discussion again and said in a confident and affirmative way that the war had "one

[270] Indeed, he explained to me that he had been fortunate to restore the honor of his family, in that he had acquired land and was a land owner now. His father had rented all his life. Owning a plot of land was mentioned by a number of men as having achieved something in life. Even though there were also women who had bought land, they did not make statements related to social status, however, emphasized that they had a proper place to stay now.

good thing: the women were raped until they were tired!" She thereby emphasizing the word 'tired' in a particular way as it is often done in Liberia: the emphasis on the strongly on the first syllable, accompanied with a forward-downward bending motion of the head. If a person, mostly woman, state that they are tired, then they are completely fed up with the situation. There was no more tolerating of these atrocities – not that there had ever been, however, at this point, change in agency was required. She said that at this point, finally the women started to act. Presently, they agreed that they were seeing the change. The GBV coordinator tells me that since the beginning of the year 2012 until July, they only had to handle two rape cases. The astonishingly low number was also confirmed to me by the acting township commissioner (interview, 13.07.2012). In the West Point Women's view, the situation had improved in the neighborhood.[271] Still, even though there was change in the neighborhood, some of the women remain in their precarious situation. Most of them are selling a few goods along the roads or in the market, such as snacks, cold water or fish. However, electricity now has some advantages: electricity can be bought prepaid.[272] Refrigerators are quite common and allow cooling and hence storing merchandize goods, thereby improving the business options by reducing the challenge of quickly rotting goods. For example, there is better ways to prepare the popular 'cold water'.

However, the West Point Women are faced with new challenges. The influx of money to the organization and relative wealth also had its consequences: whereas the leadership is paid off, some of the volunteers are now no longer willing to work for free. The president of the organization had been engaged in a range of activities and her absence due to her studies consume much of her time. Besides of her running for the office of the district commissioner, she had been facing some complications in regards to writing the reports to the donors due to technical problems. She complained to me that she went from one internet café to the next to write and send the report, and in the end, her laptop got stolen. Therefore, she had not been able to submit the report on the organization's activities and expenditures, she tells me before she has to rush to attend university. Presently, the website of globalgiving marks the West Point Women as "retired project" and no longer accepting donations. Hence, the West Point Women faced leadership crisis due to the many internal and external changes and challenges. As the community changes and aspects of the shared imaginaries were successfully converted into the social reality, the role of the organization and the solidarity among its members changed. At my return in 2012, I felt that the organization as a whole had grown a dislink between the president, the secretary and the rest of the core members. Whereas the president and the secretary attend the university and are connected to influential people, they do not really know what is hap-

[271] As mentioned elsewhere, an informal discussion with a law enforcement official confirmed the fact that these cases were indeed decreasing and that the police now was occupied more with minor crimes such as theft.

[272] This also creates new jobs opportunities. One of my informants who had been charging mobile phones before is now working in „electricity management": he is an intermediary between the providers of electricity and the private households. This gives him a regular income and is less risky than the mobile charging. In fact, he has somebody to do the phone charging for him now (informal conversation, Duala Market, 04.07.2012).

pening on the ground. The president explained that the activities of the West Point Women were dormant due to lack of funding. However, in her absence, other women of the group tell me that they are still involved in counseling and assisting women in need, and I have observed some of the children programs. They did not utter this in the presence of the president. They show me pictures of a current case, as if to prove their activity: color photographs showed a woman standing upright but full of bruises; she had been severely beaten by her husband. They explain that she is a Fanti woman from the neighborhood. Even though the West Point Women seem to be in disharmony among the leadership, they all depend on the president and her secretary because of their educational level and their access to powerful networks. But on the other hand, the group was in the process of thinking that they could act without them. Some of their members are attending night classes and computer classes, so soon they will be able to take over some functions. One of my informants tells me that since their foundation, they have never re-elected the leadership. The *big women* of the organization gain capacities which enable them access to other social networks, whereas new *big women*, namely the vice president and the SGBV officer, were about to move up to new leadership positions and could become the new nodal points of the association.

A further change had taken place; the person representing the Westpointers in parliament, district representative Alomiza Ennos had not been re-elected in 2011. Apart from Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, she had been a much debated personality, and was contested among the West Point Women. Whereas the president of the West Point Women was in favor of her, the rest criticized her. Ennos had not been reelected in 2011, because, according to the West Point Women, she had not been close enough to George Weah, hence, he did not support her.[273] Retrospectively, however, there seemed more agreement that "at least, she tried", even though she had not done well. She had, at last, sponsored an ambulance to the community. The relations to the new representative did not seem clear yet; and rather than delivering to the community - catering to the people - , he had come to present an idea concerning youth training, some of them paid money for a form, and it seemed to me that the women were not really convinced that something was going to happen. My key informant shakes her head; whoever George Weah proposes, will be put there, she says. In the 2011 elections, the West Point Women had supported Johnson Sirleaf, that is why she is still there, she adds. Maybe the opposite is true as well: Ellen Johnson Sirleaf finally 'delivered' a road and renovated the football stadium (though through her son) in West Point, which was considered aspect of proof of having the people 'at heart'.

9.7. CONCLUSION

The densely populated West Point peninsula seemed recurrently disregarded by the state's gaze, but then again situatively resurfaces as a "notorious slum" and the ineptly formulated but not implemented policies

[273] After the elections, she had been appointed to another government position; obviously, she navigates within the networks closer to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

in the context of poverty reduction. Mary Broh and the Monrovia City Corporation were apparently hesitant to actions within the peninsula, maybe due to the city mayor's personal background as a Kru and Westpointer, but maybe also because it is composed of spaces of social cohesion which had previously opposed to state's, that is, resettlement plans. Indeed, I showed in this chapter that West Point is quite a vibrant space, and in Scott's sense, deriving from Jacobs, it is an example of how planners could not create a functioning community as it can actually do so within its own limits:

> "The first flaw [of hubris in high-modernist urban planning] is the presumption that planners can safely make most of the predictions about the future that their schemes require. [...] Second, thanks in part to Jacobs, we now know more about what constitutes a satisfactory neighborhood for the people who live in it, but we still know precious little about how such communities can be fostered and maintained." (Scott 1998: 145)

This flaw can be explained by the partial blindness of many political leaders in regards to the needs of such communities, and in return, how the centralized state institutions are dependent on proximity of residential areas for their low paid employees. Though there are a number of political leaders which are knowledgeable about West Point, a deep analysis of the West Point peninsula is vastly lacking. Paradoxically, on the other hand, the land is administered by the Township Commissioner and squatter rights are granted in turn of a modest amount of money.

A range of actors, including the West Point Women, demand state intervention in order to reduce health risks due to scarce sanitary facilities and high levels of violence, especially towards women and girls. The police depot was added by a section of Women and Child Protection, but the police are deployed in small numbers and inadequately equipped. I have shown in this chapter that in West Point, a different image of the police prevails than in other parts of the city, as discussed in Chapter 5. Police are not only state representatives and law enforcers, but also actors engaged in social processes, and as emphasized by the West Point Women, interactions with the present police commander of West Point take place and contribute to efficiency on both sides. However, the West Point Women's office is in proximity of the police depot, and this opinion might not hold for the entire, large peninsula. Nevertheless, it is a good example of how the state is interwoven in society through its civil servants practices, which create an image of efficiency, in the West Point Women's social space (Migdal and Schlichte 2005: 15). Outside of West Point, however, different practices and images circulate.

I gave insight in the various activities of the West Point Women's association within the neighborhood. Their activities added to their reputation, and their engagement in various realms contributed to social changes to the neighborhood. This chapter showed that their collective action initially started by a commonly identified need for *togetherness*, social cohesion. Their central activities concerned the reduction of violence, especially gender-based violence. Their persistent pursuit of such cases not only was efficient and contributed to the reduction of such cases, but also drew attention from (inter)national actors, for example AFELL with a big

stake in state and society. Over time, they found ways of navigating their relations to international actors and the structuration of NGOs by WONGOSOL. A second realm to which their agency was directed concerned the *big women*: they state their claims on the basis of election promises that were not redeemed. This claim gains additional power as current trends and developments in regards to gender empowerment, policies and their implementation are fostered by the rhetoric but also practices of the state, and as such, the West Point Women dock on and add weight on their repertoire of claims. Interestingly, from the association's perspective, the state is seen as having a solution to all problems, facilitating by the shared understanding of donor's money and a particular focus on gender empowerment. Seeing the state in their minds' eyes, it *could* provide security, electricity, running water, improve the road and increase social welfare. They consider the Liberian government as simply not doing enough, and it is not understandable for many informants in West Point why the government avoids and neglects them. It is common in other debates around the world that political aspirants are very visible and emphasize closeness to the people in political campaigns. After the election, the constituency and promises seem to be forgotten. The West Point Women for Health and Development Organization would expect financial contributions to their work, but most of all: appreciation by official Liberia. In their perception, lacking support by the state could be due to the state's partial blindness, so they will just keep on marching and bargaining their needs.

By way of their own collective action in the neighborhood, their scope of agency generated a space between the state and society which has contributed to social change in parts of the community. Unlike many other groups in Liberia that mainly exist on signboards and focus on fund raising from international donors with fashionable themes and slogans, the West Point Women act on a grassroots level. The group's initiatives address the state's institutions such as the local police, and processes like the elections. This means legitimacy of the state, its actors and institutions exists, especially in the context of the above presented examples. This chapter showed how a group of social actors share an imaginary of how the social should be like and what needs to be done in order to achieve a certain level of change. Past practices have proven right, and they can build on almost ten years of sharing and shaping such imaginaries. In regards to past practices that influence the present and future imaginaries, a last issue needs to be recalled. Such forms of opposition and protest are neither new nor particular to Liberia. Collective action or protests towards presidents or powerful leaders have existed throughout the history, as highlighted for example by Moran (2006: 46-51, Moran 1989). Women also have a long tradition of political institutions in Liberia, such as the *secret societies*, or on an elite level the Freemasons or societies like the Order of the Eastern Star, and other broader economic associations such as the *Susu* saving clubs or *Kuu*, the farming cooperatives. However, what is particular about the West Point Women is their approach and agency within and out of the community, the way that they are known to really do valuable work for the women of their community, which was confirmed by a

number of individuals and institutions in the neighborhood, including the local government's office, and Mr. Swaray, my assistant.

During the time of research, the association went through transition that shaped their common cause and agency. In 2012, the group not only suffered a leadership crisis, but also noted that a number of their volunteers were starting to demand funding. But even though there were a number of challenges, activities were still ongoing. They started to face the challenge towards accountability that the global donors requested. External funding continues to serve as a test of the in-group solidarity regarding the interest of the organization's members.

10. THREE ASSOCIATIONS CLAIMING STATE ACTION

The political landscape of post-war Liberia created a considerable space for political participation which is taken and shaped by a range of associations, activists and individuals. In line with a wide spread slogan "where there is union, success is assured", social actors draw on past and present advantages of joining or forming an association for a common cause. A range of NGOs were formed with the intention of gaining a piece of the *peace industry*, as many international donors provided funding for local projects in the context of post-war reconstruction. This contributed to a mushrooming of groups with similar structures and agendas due to the centralized NGO regulations and promising donor funding prospects. Funding is but one of the many factors I illuminated in this book. The manifold associations and their claims reflect the intricacies of a post-war setting and the problems both the government and the people are facing. Society is characterized by a range of social cleavages, many rooting in the longer past. At this node, the social imaginaries of a heterogeneous population, marked by these social cleavages and underlying grievances, meet – and contest - the state's effort to create an imagery of efficiency and trustworthiness. Also at this intersection, the difference between the aims of the government and of the citizens defines concrete contours.

The associations presented in this book are very diverse in form, type and membership composition. The collective action of the Concerned Mandingo Association of Liberia (COMASL), the West Point Women for Health and Development Organization (West Point Women), and the Unconstitutionally Disbanded Armed Forces of Liberia (UDAFOL) were exemplary in their approach of articulating claims towards a state. As these association's names indicate, they are vastly dissimilar from each other: COMASL emerge and frame around issues of ethnicity, the West Point Women engage with gender issues, and UDAFOL is a profession-based association of soldiers. The group's aims are framed along specific goals which are considered to be achievable through according provision by state authorities; COMASL represent members of a group that is situationally and temporally excluded from socio-political participation due to politicized ethnicity, hence expect fair jurisdiction and full rights as citizens. The West Point Women aim for social change in their intricate neighborhood, and the provision of public goods and services provided by the state in order to reduce women and girls' exposure to risks of violence and health in the absence of health services, law and order. UDAFOL represent the interests of disbanded soldiers who claim to have been sidelined all along the peace process and the Security Sector Reform, and pressure for benefits, possibilities in the security sector or support in economic and social integration.

Hence, all three groups claim to represent a large and quite diverse membership of aggrieved people with common interests in this challenging post-war context. Their emphasis on political and social marginalization is believed to be created and enforced by the use of mental image by others, above all state actors. This leads to negative social positioning of these groups in the shadows of the state and society, goes their grief.

Resulting from these power relations, stereotypes and prejudices are formed and shaped which spread and lead to discriminatory experiences in their everyday, and participation in social life becomes difficult, as these mental images shape social interactions. The West Point Women feel stigmatized by the rest of Monrovians and ignored by political leaders. They believe that their concerns are not taken seriously for example in the court and that they have to make the public and the political leaders aware that - in their words - "they too are good people". The old soldiers experience humiliation in public, for example when receiving their pension pay, and by being ignored by political leaders. COMASL observed discrimination of Mandingo in the elections and in accessing their property. Their members are constructed as foreigners, and are situatively deprived of civic rights such as voting.

Over time, many socio-cultural boundaries have softened whereas others were discursively (re)constructed. The violent past and intricate present led to new discursively formed boundaries: Labels such as 'Americo-Liberian' are but social constructions as boundaries are in reality often blurred and new political and economic elite groups have emerged. Others such as the Mandingo, or UDAFOL being mostly Southeasterners, have weak personal relationships to influential personalities, hence to the state. West Point, though an exception to some degree, is nevertheless affiliated to Southeastern Liberia, as it was first populated by Kru fishermen. West Point, however, is a more intricate case, as it contains a number of challenges and intricacies that are interlinked and difficult to resolve.

The comparison of the three associations brings the manifold challenges of the lived reality in the post-war, urban context to light. Despite their remarkable disparity, the three associations share much common ground. Comparing these three associations, a range of shared features and patterns can be identified and analyzed through which they constitute their shared imaginaries, which are translated into practice.

10.1. Spatial and Temporal Contexts

The precarious spatial and temporal context of the three associations is central to their formation and agency. Like so many ordinary Liberians, all members of the three groups dwell in a precarious social environment of cleavages, weak social cohesion and ruptures of social ties. Secondly, the economic setting is very challenging due to the lack of formal employment and secure (cash and in-kind) income opportunities. And again, this applies for many other Liberians too. However, for the three particular groups, the circumstances are even more challenging due to their particular needs in a social space marked by lack of public goods and services. The context is characterized by an insecure present and an uncertain future, and these intricacies have diverse causes. The social grounds remain shifting for the Mandingo whom COMASL stands for, who are afflicted by the precariousness of land tenure and experiences of biased jurisdiction in regards to their legal cases and rights in general. Their case study also showed that land conflicts have the potential to turn violent. Civic rights are experienced as conditional, situational, and partial, hence, they feel excluded from

the nation-state and society at large. Similar is the perceived situation of many disbanded soldiers who lack in-kind and cash income opportunities in particular in case of advanced age and stigma. For those routinized and habituated to the military context the present everyday can pose a challenge for agency, to recognize types and spaces of familiarity and trust. The West Point Women live in a social and physical environment containing manifold hazards and risks. Yet, they are not devoid of agency. All members of these groups are actively engaged in reducing the intricacies by *trying* to link up with powerful and influential actors or institutions. They dispose of a repertoire of arguments to underline their claims. The most powerful asset of all three groups is the large number of members, which materialized influentially in the context of elections. In lack of strong social ties and support, their main asset is the coherence within the association and shared goals.

In such difficult context, spaces of belonging are contested and require re-negotiation; the three associations share in common is their position and positioning within the discursive formation of the nation-state. Whereas multiple "social forces" (Migdal 2001) are engaged in democratization processes taking place in post-war Liberia, not all parts of society are equally considered part and parcel of the "imagined community" (Anderson 2006). COMASL touch the thorny issue of land rights, belonging and citizenship, and base their claim on the emphasis of having been in Liberia over generations and since the founding of the Liberian state. UDAFOL consider themselves excluded from the new army and are instead imposed onto civil life, whereas they emphasize to belong to the army and consider the disbandment process illegitimate. Lastly, the West Point Women are engaged in a contemporary discourse on women's rights and empowerment that can be seen as a product of the Liberian women's movements, however, the compounded and internationally supported efforts seem to have stopped at the physical boundaries of West Point. The women assemble and articulate claims in order to benefit from state's and International Organization's gender empowerment programs in a neighborhood that dearly seeks social change. This sentiment of exclusion and marginality, on the other hand, has a strong potential for strengthening in-group solidarity and cohesion, and contributes to the (re)building of a certain degree of intersubjectivity. This creates spaces of familiarity, conducive to the sharing of past experiences and future expectations based on a taken for granted, shared lifeworldly reality on the basis of which social imaginaries can be uttered and formed.

But not only the socio-spatial but also the temporal context plays a central and comparable role for all three associations, though interlinked with other contextual factors. Most important is the formation of associations and their claims in a temporal context of political transformation from war to peace, which implicates change along a period of time. All three associations have framed their claim and developed a structure and organization in the ending phase of the war and the political transformation period that followed. Though Liberia has a long history of societal formations engaging with the state, these three associations have not

existed in such form and function before and during the violent conflict. As such, they have their origins in the Civil Wars: The soldiers have been disbanded as a consequence of the implementation of the CPA and the subsequent Security Sector Reform; the West Point Women combat physical and sexual violence towards women and girls that increased during and after the war; and COMASL articulate against ethicized politics that temporally puts their political participation, rights to property and even their lives at risk.

Against the backdrop of processes of political transformation and peace building in the transition period after war, a range of changes occur that affect the dimensions of social life. As association's agency and informants' life histories throughout this book illuminated, change does not occur in a linear way. Quite to the contrary, social actors experience recurring insecurities and intricacies, including forms of violence or food shortages. Hence, unpredictability continues to render everyday life difficult. The associations' form, function and approaches are reshaped in line with these changes. Within this process of peace and state building, institutions are restructured and re-staffed. This does not only affect the state, but also its interlinked social relations in society. The norms are changing, sanctions are increasingly enforced, hence, subjective adaptation and reorientation of agency according to these changes is easily said but difficult to achieve for some social actors. As analyzed in Chapter 7, a range of elder soldiers finds it challenging to integrate into civilian social and economic life after a long time in the army. However, UDAFOL were creative in pooling their experiences and capacities to broaden their agency and strengthen their claims. In using time and spaces in favor of their purpose, all associations used events such as the election period during which they could offer a large number of votes to a potential political leader.

Elections posed a critical moment in Liberia's political transformation period, and a window of opportunity to the three associations. The process and decision of electing as an individual was one side of the token, the other is the individual's loyalty to a group and or political aspirant, who, in turn "buys" the voters with money, commodities or promises (Söderström 2011: 195). Elections showed in what way societal formations are not fixed and static constructions positioned at the margins, but rather, how they become situationally and temporally either blurred into others or singled out by hardening boundaries, and then again highlighted and moved into the focus of political platforms and processes. Nevertheless, they remain linked to products and processes of bargaining or negotiation. The associations' claims have been a valuable point to dock on for aspiring politicians: addressing the claims of a marginalized group would generate a lot of votes from said groups, however, it could irritate other party members that are critical about the groups or claims. The three associations' claims have all been used in different ways in the pre-election period to mobilize supporters for aspiring politicians, or to create pressure on the incumbent government. Their in-group solidarity was fostered by re-formulating their plight, which the group used to argue as a coherent voting bloc and mobilizing power, which was put forward by UDAFOL and the West Point Women. However, this argument does not

hold as much for COMASL; though the Mandingo championed certain candidates, COMASL used procedural and structural nonconformities to underline their grievance as marginalized and called for attention to their claim. Such shared mental images, in turn, may be used to support or reject a candidate.

The associations find avenues in making use of the changes and new possibilities in a context of political transition. The continuum of war and peace, illuminated by the many stories such as James's life history or the continued ruptures due to the Ebola Outbreak in 2014, imply that much is in a non-linear flux of continued unpredictability and present insecurities. Not only with regards to external processes, but also within the organizations, a lot of change occurred. Within ten years since the end of the war, the associations transformed with the changing social and political environment. In-group solidarity was challenged due to individual members' unfolding life plans as opportunities came up, but sometimes vanished again. Some of the association's members found new economic possibilities or projects. As claims contextually loose strength and societal backing, the associations need to reorient and re-define their agency.

10.2. Frames and Labels

All three associations have emerged bottom-up, as all of the three groups emphasize that they have "decided to come together" and "do something" against the situation they found themselves and their members in. Grievances serve as motive and motivation to join forces and for collective action (Engels 2012) in the post-war context. All three associations stress the bottom-up emergence of their collective action. This does not mean that they have not been inspired or supported by other groups' formation and practices. This holds especially for the case of the West Point Women, some of which were in direct or indirect contact with or participated in the women's peace movements. Informed by other forms of collective action in the process, and the vision of themselves as active part in the formation of a new state and society, they found a need to advocate and reposition themselves – UDAFOL against their exclusion in the course of the SSR, COMASL in containing the former LURD fighters and sentiments of marginalization; and the West Point Women against the socio-spatial stigmatization and high rates of forms of violence in their neighborhood. All three groups consider themselves to play a central role in containing these war-related problems that stand in the way of an imagined better future for society.

Collective action is often also informed by other forms of association to which members belong, such as religious or professional associations. Many have existed before and during the war, hence, Liberians are familiar with a range of formalized forms of collective action. However, the respective chapters showed that all three groups build on very particular and profound grievances which led founding members to "mind steer" and initiate first actions. In this founding stage, acquisition of funding does not figure as a central motivation for their efforts.

A further commonality is the frame of an association and conventions at work within. In a context of change in which orientation is difficult as social relations and context seem to be in motion (Vigh 2006), associations provide guiding posts in Goffman's sense (1974) for their member's orientation and agency. Their leadership shapes spaces through articulation and voicing of claims towards the state authorities. This way, new meaning and purpose can be generated for themselves and their members. Associations also provide an opportunity to reframe identities and intentionality, labeled with an according name and acronym. The association follows new conventions of encounters, but also shapes and enforces social norms (Hechter and Horne 2009: 199, 207). Through the association, they have shaped a vessel which is used as a means to interact and bargain with powerful leaders and actors that may influence political processes. As the three associations analyzed in this research, their interest forms around the common cause. Through their practices, the groups become visible and identifiable to the authorities. In turn, this may inform the practices of the association, in particular if state actors engage with the associations or if they block or disregard their claims.

There are always several frames working on an individual and society, according to Goffman (1974). As the frames of war and peace have changed and continue to change with the re-ordering of society, the associations are transforming according to changing frames and conventions in society and their respective social spaces. UDAFOL considered forming an NGO to address veteran's issues, the West Point Women started reconciliation efforts in educating children. Whereas the social context did change in West Point, this was less the case for the Mandingo, whose intricacies of the war remained an issue in the present setting.

10.3. Marginality and Belonging

Being member of a group with a large numerical membership does not necessarily prevent from a perception of feeling marginalized or excluded – in particular from experiencing civic rights and the goods and services provided by a state. The post-war Liberian context is one of high inequality and poverty, and a vast part of the population shares the impression of being left out from the nation-state – which, was shown previously, is considered to be large due to international contributions to peace- and state building, as well as the vast natural resources.

All three associations are in a way marginal in the post-war society and more particularly, the political landscape. They have no strong political *big person* representing or lobbying for their particular interest in any branch of the government. Deriving from war-alliances, a pattern cuts through: resistances towards Charles Taylor have emerged from two groups, the Krahn or Southeasterners more broadly on the one hand, and the Mandingo on the other. Both groups have various forms of alliances that emerged since Samuel K. Doe's rule. Apart from the AFL which increasingly became composed of members of the Southeast, ULIMO emerged in resistance to NPFL and challenged Charles Taylor's presidency from 2000 in the LURD and MODEL rebellion. Not denying the massive atrocities that were committed, they oppose the political marginaliza-

tion of their groups post-war, deemphasizing war-participation, but articulating the interests of their kin and ethnic groups in the post-war setting. This marginalization process has increased in recent years. Despite a rather wealthy and well-connected Mandingo Caucus, the Mandingo are increasingly perceived as singled out from the political landscape. The West Point Women, being in a different political position, are not well-heard on the political landscape. Their neighborhood is deprived of public attention. Their *big women,* their district representative, had ignored them by not holding her promises and providing support to the association and the neighborhood at large. The subsequent district representative proved to be even worse.

All associations strive for more political participation and socio-political inclusion, and despite their large numbers, believe to be neglected by state authorities and respective responsible *big persons*.

10.4. Seeing the State in their Mind's Eyes

A range of Liberians share an imagery of the state as composed of the President as the head of the state. In this very central position, the President as the highest authority is consider to hold over-all oversight and responsibility over the respective state institutions, actors and practices. Though three branches of government are considered to be separated, in practice, Liberians consider ultimate power and responsibility to be allocated to *her*, the President. This becomes evident in the use of the singular feminine personal pronoun in regards to the government: The president is responsible for the corrupt police; "she" should do something against the exaggerated violence used by the MCC or the lack of tarred roads. "She" is questioned for the distribution of the "hundreds of millions" flowing into the country and for the too high stock of national savings at the National Bank. The three associations all hold the President responsible for the situation they find themselves in. UDAFOL's grievances surround their disbandment in the context of the SSR which continued under the government of Johnson Sirleaf; COMASL hold practices such as declaring disputed lands as state property as an act against their group but in her political interest; and the West Point Women consider having been left out despite Johnson Sirleaf's support of Liberian women's issues.

Indirect claims and further responsibilities concern the various domains of underdevelopment in the country and the perception that not enough is being done despite the vast international support and donor money. This includes the blame in the lack of proper monitoring and controlling the official norms and the everyday practices of the intermediaries, such as the corrupt ministers, judges, etc. who fail them, "their people".

The associations hence hold the President responsible for what is happening or rather *not* happening. They are framing the claim that it was them, the people, that have elected the President – due to their large numbers and mobilization potential. In turn, they expect her to "have the people at heart" in a double sense of the term: to care and cater to them in real terms by providing financial support, financial, public goods and

services, and symbolic terms with recognition and honor (UDAFOL) or de-stigmatization and inclusion (West Point Women, COMASL).

This evaluation of the state forms the basis of their interaction with the government. This was a core feature in comparing and analyzing these three associations. The ways of engagement with the government are explicit and take various forms, including the use of media, letters to the President or meetings her or representatives - or messages that are directed to her through various channels including me, a foreign researcher. All groups articulate their belonging to the nation-state and that they have a stake in it, most importantly due to their large number in shared grievances. They address a particular political leader who is legitimated by position or by election to address the groups' plight. Legitimacy is reinforced by the (visible) practice of the government in providing concrete goods and services to the people.

All three associations have knowledgeable and experienced leaders with bargaining power at hand. As such, these organizations have become brokers for claims of their respective social spaces. The women's movement targeted the parliament in the past and the disbanded soldiers had filed a petition to unseat the president in 2008. Seemingly marginal actors have proven to challenge powerful actors through manifold ways, and despite their marginality, they have considerable means to mount pressure and even to shame the government and respective authorities. A powerful means of diffusing information and emphasizing such is by turning to the media, which can include shaming the government. Directly addressing powerful leaders through written statements to the President, often with copies to international actors to mount the pressure and stress importance. UDAFOL has repeatedly staged demonstrations, and due to the sense of insecurity this created, they had a quite powerful tool to mount pressure on the government.

The three associations are vital spaces of imagination. All of them were founded on the basis of imagining avenues towards a better future for their members, which they understand to be facilitated by the government through according decision-making and resource allocation. In Chapter 5 I have portrayed an imagery of the state composed of a selection of mental images. It showed that the future of a better Liberia is considered to be in the hands of the powerful leaders, in particular due to the closeness of the President to international actors, the influx of foreign funding and companies. According political will to distribute and regulate would benefit the population at large, including the members of the three associations. In absence of this, however, and due to subjective and societal positioning of these individuals and groups at the fringes of the state and society, these associations consider themselves to be deprived from access to resources: their rights and opportunities remain conditional, and temporally or situationally at stake.

Yet this is not considered a state of "normalcy", and their social, economic and political participation should be enhanced so that the future would be less uncertain and insecure. They share an imaginary, and make

their claims through emphasizing how the social ought to be. As such, these three case studies provide three foundations of social imaginaries of how the nation-state should look like, and what the respective *big people* are expected to do in order generate such a better future. The leadership of all three groups have experienced *normal days* but from diverse vantage points. They have experienced different forms of rule and transition phases in the 1990s and early 2000s, and have gathered a pool of empirical knowledge that can be compared and evaluated.

Group- as well as milieu-specific mental images make social imaginaries complex because they are composed of personal experiences and knowledge of various kind. This way, social imaginaries are composed of many aspects of subjectively and intersubjectively shared stories, images and legends which match up with other imaginaries that exist in society, beyond the spatio-temporal boundaries of an association. In addition, elder and younger members have a different take on avenues and imaginative horizons. It created a challenge between some of the *1990ies* and *old soldiers*, who have exactly such diverging imaginaries: reintegration into the new army *vis-à-vis* pension payment and old-age care. Younger people imagine Monrovia potentially to be like Paris or New York, whereas elder Monrovians remember solid infrastructures and a decent living standard under President Tubman that led to a conclusion that Liberia could look like Abidjan, without the past war. The city – locus of power, knowledge and possibilities – figures centrally in Liberia's imaginary of modernity. For all three associations, social imaginaries are in Casey's (2000a) sense real possibilities, and, unlike utopias, are expected to become real. Differences between the imaginary and the present state practices are shaped out, and used to exhibit perceived errors and engage in practices of shaming the government and holding the government responsible for their exclusion and marginalization. They highlight the specific "misinterpretation" - *spider stories* - by authorities and other *big people*, such as the perceived abrogation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement by the National Transitional Government of Liberia in the case of UDAFOL's disbandment. COMASL articulated against the erroneous practices surrounding the elections or a public market in Nimba County. The West Point Women approach the district representatives regarding the lack of public goods and services in their neighborhood, thereby referring to the "human rights" and other international standards the government emphasizes, and the promises that were made in the election period.

From the association's perspective, the state is seen as being in the place to have solutions to their problems, facilitated by donor's money and a particular focus on poverty reduction and post-war transformation. Seeing the state in their mind's eyes, it could provide security, electricity, running water, improve the road and hence increase social welfare and living standards. They consider the Liberian government as simply not doing enough, and it is not understandable for many informants why the government lacks political will. For

this reason, they have to continue their collective action - demonstrate, write newspaper articles or letters to the President.

11. ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE, SOCIAL IMAGINARIES AND STATE RELATIONS

Looking at the state like an ordinary Liberian citizen, the evaluation according to the Weberian type would result in a deficient state, as it fails to meet the expectation towards most basic requirements of such a state – the state as a single actor holding legitimate power to the use of violence over a certain territory, and the regulation of the people within it through a centralized government (Weber 1980). Apart from having little analytical value, this perspective does not correspond with the judgement that most Liberians share about the state: in Liberian discourse the state has not disappeared nor is it considered weak - quite the contrary is the case. Empirical evidence from the associations presented in this book illuminates that Liberians consider the state and its actors to be powerful, endowed with means and in the position to enhance change – provided that there is according political will. The emic understanding of the state is formed for example in associations, where social actors intersubjectively develop, share and find means and ways to channel the social imaginaries into practice in order to push for social change. State actors are challenged to provide an alternative social order of just and equal distribution of goods, services and opportunities. This widely shared social imaginary of the state provides an analytical perspective on social practices and discourse in post-war, urban Liberia.

The approach of a "state in society" perspective proposed by Joel Migdal (2001) embedded in a wider conceptualization of agency (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) shows that the Liberian state imagery, shaped by the government and its actors, is in fact opposed by a range of rather stable mental images that are shaped and shared in numerous social and physical spaces of urban, post-war Liberia. Despite the much criticized performance of the state and its actors, as well as a very fragmented post-war society, there exists much common ground in regards to the expectations towards the state in Liberia. The various mental images are not simply shaped in the present, but are historical formations. In line with the conceptualization of agency composed of three interrelated temporal-structural dimensions, the imaginary of the Liberian state is strongly informed by past elements of how things used to be in *normal days*, that is, before the outbreak of the first Civil War. Furthermore, projections into the future are shaped against the backdrop of various very concrete opportunities for change through vast influx of donor funding and transnational companies. Yet, against the backdrop of this conceptual framework, there exist subjective and intersubjective social imaginaries in a present setting of multiple and cross-cutting post-war intricacies and urban precariousness. This intricate present setting retains "life on hold" for a range of social actors, despite the manifold activities they diligently engage in. Regardless of their challenging environment, many social actors shape and forge their future in myriad ways, however, affording the state a central role in paving the way for options and avenues to enhance their economic and social position and governing the public goods and services conducive to everyday life.

11.1. A State Imaginary Informed by *Normal Days*, an Insecure Present and an Uncertain Future

The shared social imaginaries and practices of the three associations showed how surprisingly stable mental images inform their imaginary of the state, despite the much changing social and political context. Despite the violent past, the state might have failed *them*, but it did not fail as a concept in their imaginary. The state has most certainly never ceased to exist in the people's minds (see also Nielsen 2007 for similar state imaginaries in urban Mozambique or Förster 2013a in rural Côte d'Ivoire). Against this backdrop, claims are articulated for a better future; claims that emerged from social actors thorough evaluation of the present and past images and practices of state actors compared against their expectations. Liberia's past plays a central role in contemporary imagination: Particular aspects of pre-war Liberia of *normal days* – its wealth, infrastructure and a dimension of orderliness that contrasts present-day changes and unsteadiness. This imagined past does not only serve as an emic ideal type of how things ought to be like, reflected in the articulation that entails the notion *normal*, but it is also the temporal locus of the tale of 'Americo-Liberian' domination, and furthermore, the source of *social ills* and the *root causes* of the war.

Social cleavages and their discursive constructions play a central role in the past and present. Like Mary Moran showed (Moran 2006: 156), societal constructions and oppositions such as 'the native' and 'the Americo-Liberian' or 'the rural' and 'the urban' continue to be used, often unreflected, despite the fact that they are mere constructions. But because they are rooted in the social imaginary and underlined with narratives of the past, they remain real and continue to inform social practice. In particular in times of change and instability, such stable images of how things were or are supposed to be are needed for subjective and intersubjective orientation and to understand processes, rules and regulations within a social setting (Goffman 1974). The past often serves as a legitimate model of the orderly, and though it is believed to be based on facts and memory, it is in fact mostly selectively remembered and imagined. This imaginary, hence reflects the way people "see the state" and society in Liberia, and can therefore be understood as the flipside of critique towards ongoing political and social transformation, and is constitutive for the challenging and changing everyday of post-war Monrovia. Though these positive imaginaries of wealth and prosperity of Liberia's pre-war past are widely shared, they are but one – though dominantly represented in discourse - aspect of the past. Variations from this view include particularly the fact that despite all the positive aspects of economic growth, there was not much development, and "growth without development" is a common trope (cf. Clower *et al.* 1966). A second one is the capital city. Although Monrovia appears 'modern' in social actors' imagination of the past, it is in fact marked by vast and deep lines of social exclusion. For the vast majority of Liberians, this modernity did not materialize in civic rights, educational opportunities or increased living conditions. Liberia's continuum of war and peace embraces a wider temporal span beyond the turmoil of the 1990s (Utas 2005a). For some Liberians, the Nimba Raids in the mid-1980s were perceived as

a “full scale war”, as explained by a disbanded AFL soldier in chapter 3.6. Hence, for some, the war started much earlier than 1989. Sexual and physical violence from men to women and children are still prevalent, hence, many women and girls remain to experience “front lines” on a daily basis (Enarson 2010: 14). Many *ills of society* and *root causes* of the war are said to have their sources in the longer history of the Liberian state formation. The past is often portrayed in the light of exploitive and authoritarian oligarchy of ‘Americo-Liberian’. Opposition has likewise existed, as the many local wars attest (Levitt 2005), and powerful associations (*secret societies*, fraternities, or urban associations) have a long history in Liberia. During William V.S. Tubman’s rule after 1944, many associations were not engaged in contestation of national politics and actors, but were rather in demonstrating loyalty (Fraenkel 1970 [1964]: 181). Pressure on national politics grew in the 1970s, when critique mounted against the one-party state, exclusion and elite domination. From other West African countries it is well-known that associations became political active in the same time frame, however, in their respective contexts of struggles for independence (Bratton 1989: 411). In Liberia, the call for political participation became louder at the same time, and socialist William Tolbert fostered unions and voluntary associations at the onset of his presidency. These facilitated political participation and led to the emergence of political parties and opposition. Whereas reforms remained largely blocked by the still dominating single party on the one hand, increasing demand for transformation from the oppositions hardening on the other hand, and as a consequence, Tolbert temporally banned certain parties and assembly. This was not the first and would not be the last time in Liberia’s history of oppression and struggle, where in many instances collective action in opposition to the state was responded by state violence, notably during the Rice Riots in 1979 or student’s activities in 1987. In the context of the Rice Riots, students persuaded the Liberian army not to go against the demonstrators, whereupon Tolbert requested aid from his socialist ally Ahmed Sékou Touré of Guinea. In the past, particularly political groups, amongst others the university students, have been prosecuted and a number of violent instances are reported in particular from the 1980s under Samuel K. Doe.

Even if officially banned, political activities and collective actions sourcing in associations never discontinued. These practices have fed into a repertoire of subjective and intersubjective knowledge and experiences which have formed into a particular imaginary of the past; in particular a repertoire of struggle for political participation in an environment of bounded political freedom. However, the social actors were engaged in social relations and are supported by *big people*, which formed various situational and temporal alliances beyond national boundaries. As a consequence, history is experienced by an individual not only as member of a nation-state, but rather as actors of particular social spaces in which they are engaged. These have produced multifaceted imaginaries of the past. Other Liberians imagine that until “the war came” in 1989, everyday life had been orderly and enabled routines and habits, in the concept of *normal days*. These central notions are about sensations of an imagined idealized and stabilized everyday containing the family, a well-

paid profession or a romanticized home against the confusing mobility and losses of relatives and home associated with the violent conflict. The war has affected the social fabric into its least fiber. Yet, nostalgia about the past 'good old days' produces similar tales in other parts of the world, and in particular in urbanizing contexts marked by social and technological change. Though the urbanizing context of Monrovia became a magnet due to well-paid job opportunities since Tubman's Open Door policy, it became challenging to its inhabitants and urban planners. The dense population and the lack of sufficient and maintained public goods and services such as sanitation facilities or policing, certain neighborhoods faced precarious living conditions already in the 1980s (or before, according to Fraenkel 1970). During the war, Monrovia was temporally a "concrete forest" of decay, starvation and disease; a death trap to many of its inhabitants and displaced persons. At the same time it was considered a safe haven due to the headquarters of intervention forces and welfare organizations, hence, Monrovia attracted IDPs from the rural areas. Informants recount this time as unimaginable, stumbling to find the right words, and their account of war existence are filled with expressions of the realm of the unpredictable, unthinkable, and spiritual. James' life story showed in what ways social actors were navigating the largely unpredictable social setting (Utas 2005b, Vigh 2006); working for rebels and being a major bread winner for his 'war parents'. Similar stories are told by women who exposed themselves to risk in search for food whereas men had to hide at home. The *imaginary* social order reversed to some extent, as women fought for peace and social change (Fuest 2008, 2009; Moran 2012). This is, as the authors emphasize, but one aspect of the story, as women have been politically active in the past (Moran 1989), have been fighters (cf. Utas 2005b), and likewise men have engaged for peace and non-violence (interview, LINSU president, 07.03.2011). Supported with the assistance of the diaspora and West African women's organizations, Liberian women have been elevated to a paragon as activists, journalists and organizations, topped off with the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for Leymah Gbowee and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Within the continuum of war and peace, consciousness changed as new concepts became meaningful on the national political landscape, and for example Human Rights discourse was taken up by women's associations and appropriated a tool to fight *social ills* within their respective neighborhoods.

On the backdrop of an intricate past, the post-war present remains complex and requires ordinary people to reorient their agency and short-, mid- and long-term plans according to opportunities that come along unexpected, and while waiting, having to craft their daily lives by *trying* and *hustling*. The present government shapes institutions, practices and policies in accordance of neoliberal reforms and democratization; international companies are attracted. The "world arena" including the manifold international actors present in Liberia have likewise high expectations on post-war Liberia and in particular on the presidency of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf: the media distributed an enthusiastic imagery of the first elected female president of Africa, and the list of awards and prizes she received is long and contains several honorary doctor degrees, including one offered by Harvard University (Harvard Gazette, 2011).

Ordinary people scrutinize the state practices in anticipation of a better future, which seems to emerge all too slow from the distant horizon, but it appears. The popularly imagined *normal days* have become a cultural resource (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 990); a standard against which present state practices and images are compared, and which in turn propels expectations. In line with the neoliberal rhetoric of the government, people expect the government to restore the normal by creating jobs in the government and at foreign companies that are presently attracted to Liberia. At the time of this research, the peace industry was the largest source of opportunities in post-war Monrovia. A range of international organizations and NGOs were active in Liberia, and a few of my informants had found employment opportunities there, after which their social becoming was accelerated: they could finally buy land, start to construct a house, and change their means of transportation. Children received new clothes; the entire family visibly flourished. Such life trajectories were not the rule, however; a majority of social actors remained in *hustling* activities, a temporal entrepreneurship often supported by a family member or a *big person*. I have defined *hustling* in leaning on Munive Rincon (2010b: 206) as a temporal economic engagement in an insecure environment; risk of loss and damage, accidents, theft or harassment by police officers may affect a *hustler's* practices. Yet it contains the possibility of making profit in a densely populated environment with need of physical strength, consumer goods and food. *Hustling* often contains a strong prospect towards a better situation in the future. Manifold activities, such as saving, or obtaining education are directed towards reducing the unpredictability of the future. Through the display of determination and hard work, a person may craft his or her identity as ambitious, moral and trustworthy. A range of informants engaged in such temporal activities emphasize their economizing in order to obtain a University degree. *Studying* is not only a means to craft one's identity, but also to turn from "being for someone" (Bledsoe 1990) to being someone with a University degree or with employment at an international organization, NGO or at the government. Yet social actors remained embedded in dense vertical and horizontal social networks. Family, kin, *secret society,* war-alliances and manifold other social relations are at the center of a person's being and becoming (Lindell and Utas 2012a). In the urban society, the need for social networks increases (Tostensen et al. 2001: 23, Wallerstein 1970), in particular with the highlighted insecurities and uncertainties of a post-war, urban context. I have further allocated participation in a voluntary association as a vital aspect in the context of present insecurities. Associations are diverse in purpose, cause, formalization and often have a (temporally) political intention, and hence, almost all of my informants are members of at least one but mostly several associations.

In the past, the state factually did only selectively provide public goods and services to the population. In particular during the early 'Americo-Liberian' rule there were factually no roads and public schools in the hinterland. This changed after 1945 during the rule of Presidents Tubman and Tolbert. In a West African comparison, there was increasing but still low infrastructure beyond the capital city. The shared past, as

imagined by many Liberians in fact showed that there is a considerable difference between what is reported to be factual in the past, and what people imagine to have been. The decline of infrastructure, but also job opportunities in the late 1980s is not as widely shared. There are considerable differences in time and space.

11.2. Associational Life in Post-war Monrovia

The post-war government's rhetoric is emphasizing democratization and political participation of marginalized groups, protection of freedoms and civic rights. This is convincing and encourages people to raise their voices, and it has led to manifold practices of contestation in Monrovia and beyond. In participatory practices such as inviting social actors with grievances to the Executive Mansion for discussion, state actors directly relate with associations including UDAFOL, COMASL and the West Point Women. Evidence shows how shared imaginaries based on grievances are formulated into claims that are openly addressed in different ways and through multiple channels to the state actors; COMASL through newspaper articles, UDAFOL and the West Point Women through demonstrations and seeking contact to politicians. Groups openly and collectively criticize state practices and images for example in call-in radio talk-shows or by publishing critical articles in newspapers. But not only contestation take place, but also situationally forms of demonstrating loyalty such as in political campaigning prior to elections or emphasizing loyalty for a political actor by criticizing another actor or group. Just like all social actors - including those within the domain of the state - they engage in practices of "bigmanity" (Utas et al. 2012) in order to shape their relations to their advantage to those holding power.

International actors are strongly involved in supplying public goods and services in absence of state capacity. As central component of its peacebuilding approach, the international community strongly follows the objective of strengthening civil society. In peacebuilding and development studies, civil society is considered as a driver of societal transformation, in particular in post-war societies (Paffenholz 2009). International scholars, policy makers and practitioners assign political, collective agency in Liberia a central and particular role, not least due to the quite famous women's movement for peace (Fuest 2007, 2008, 2009), which provide a possibility to connect to for broader aims. Many international efforts aim at implementing UN Security Council Resolutions on women, peace and security (in particular United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)) by including women in all processes and institutions, in particular in post-war peacebuilding and political participation at large.

Civil society, however, is a challenging concept to use in particular in post-war societies, as the Liberian case demonstrates. This book aimed to show that civil society is prone to remain fragmented and in cleavages after a war has ended, as often, grievances are not resolved, and new problems may have emerged. Furthermore, 'good guys' and 'bad guys' are social constructions that depend on belonging, access to networks and resources, but may situationally and contextually shift, as the case studies in this book showed. 'Bad

guys' such as the disbanded soldiers may become 'good guys' in the election period. Furthermore, the peacebuilding discourse often falls short on the historical dimension, which is an important dimension in Liberia where state formation and conflict go hand in hand, and where gender relations were equal in some regions but unequal in others. In particular in the Southeast, women participated in local governments and were influential actors in political engagement on the local and national political landscape (Moran 1989). But not only temporal boundaries require to be reflected. The case study of UDAFOL showed how boundaries of civil society are flexibly stretched, shifted and transcended by the actors: Disbanded soldiers, who still consider themselves soldiers and not veterans or civilians, hence, part of a central state function, form an NGO to bundle their claims towards the government and consider international veteran organizations for their interests.

The financial support by international donors to local NGOs and activists contributed to a mushrooming of NGOs. Such local NGOs often do address issues at many societal levels. Despite the fact that some do have a welfare or economic orientation, many organizations are politically active or at least observant to the political processes and actors. As shown in the previous chapters, civil society is very diverse, formed by multifaceted roles and interests along the continuum of war and peace. In order to control and monitor activities at the grassroots' level, the state has elaborated an NGO policy in 2008, after which associations that demand donor funding are required structure their organization, register formally and pay taxes. Implementation of policies and structuring of these efforts were unfinished at the time of this research, however, for successful fundraising prospects, a number of association did register.

Against this backdrop, I made a strong argument against a reductionist view on associations as acting mainly donor-oriented. Though many are formed based on entrepreneurial interests and to gain access to donor funding, many raise voice against *social ills* and demand state action, or step in to provide certain goods and services in the interest of a common cause. The case studies showed that associational life has specific meanings to its members beyond the access to donor funding. Associations endow a member with novel or alternative social relations, a feeling of belonging and identity, and a space where their grievances are contained.

The availability of funding schemes by international actors and Liberian ministries and NGO networks facilitates efforts from below. However, it bears some challenges. Firstly, many NGOs lack credibility and capacity according to international standards: though formally approved and a formalized NGO, they may have made use of simulacra to obtain access to funding, whereas others simply lack capacity to meet the expectations. International donors request written reports which some grassrooters cannot deliver due to lack of technology and knowledge – concretely, access to a computers and according IT knowledge. This is where the post-war dimension comes in: local realities are marked by precariousness of many kinds – lack of transportation,

electricity shortages, or computer viruses, temporal and situational funding shortages, hence, national and international NGO policies are at risk of excluding groups with through knowledge of situative and contextual problems but lack of *techne* in Scott's sense (1998). A range of Liberian associations and individuals take the place of the state in providing and regulating public goods and services: water is carried to the various households, taxis are run by private businessmen and security is provided by vigilante groups. Such groups take a range of societal functions, such as settling interpersonal disputes, and more complex problems which require great effort and deep local understanding. Monrovia depends on these actors and practices as peopled infrastructure in Simone's sense (2010), as they not only provide goods and services normally allocated to the state, but also organize, contain and channel grievances of their members, thereby contributing to social cohesion and order.

Though many associations may be questioned in regards to their effectiveness and impact – apart from the fact that many lack capacity to meet the expectations of international donors (which is the case in other post-war countries (Fischer 2011)) - a closer examination of associational life shows how individuals with weak social integration may gain access to an alternative social network and new options, avenues, but also to a novel social space of entrainment, sociality and familiarity. They create a space of intersubjectivity, which facilitates discussing and debating shared or diverging views. Mental images are uttered, some of which are shared and formed into a social imaginary (Taylor 2004, Förster 2012a); new members are (re-)socialized according to these shared understandings and conventions (Hechter and Horne 2009: 199).

Associational life is fundamental part of any society, also the urban, post-war context. Merran Fraenkel (1970 [1964]: 152) found in her field research of the late 1950s that a majority of Monrovians were member of some kind of associations. On the basis of a typology of associations she grouped membership into seven types: Churches and mosques; "traditional tribal" societies; "urban tribal" societies; masonic-type lodges; football clubs; occupational associations; and others. Fraenkel holds that by far the largest associations were of the first type, Christian churches of various evangelical denominations and clubs attached to them, but most Monrovians were part of various associations. Despite presupposing a structuralist view on society arranged along "class and tribe", she concluded that a degree of boundaries are blurred between the societal formations (Fraenkel (1970 [1964: 67). Fraenkel's types provide an insightful vantage point for the analysis of the changes of state and society, social practices and the perspectives towards the amalgamation of the various "societal forces" (Migdal 2001) in Liberia. The activities of associations in Fraenkel's study are rather apolitical in a sense that they are rather appraising than contesting the state. This reflects the political climate of Tubman's personalized rule, in which political participation was restricted. Collective action has challenged the Liberian political landscape since the 1970s, and led to political opposition. Unlike in the longer past, civil society is perceived to be increasingly influential in present-day Liberia.

Present-day societal formations are discursively constructed and reconstructed, reflecting the post-war societal tensions and conflicts. As shown in various chapters, in particular in the Lofa Incident of early 2010, societal constructions reflect situatively and temporally blurred or hardened mental boundaries. In comparison of Fraenkel's study to today's associations, the biggest difference is first and foremost the growth in number, visibility, and the patterns of their political action and voice. There is a widely spread imaginary of the role of civil society in post-war Liberia. It is part of a dominant discourse and imaginary, often neglecting, however, that civil society has played a central role since the 1970s and after the war.

The urban, post-war range of associational life is best described as dynamic along a continuum of formalization and political engagement with a temporal dimension. The political dimension becomes intrinsically or extrinsically relevant, as associations are instrumentalized to mobilize votes in times of elections, or make use of their association for such purposes. Despite the continuity of associational life over time and space, and political engagement in Liberia's history, the self-consciousness of such efforts has transformed and political roles have gained significance. Some call themselves or part of their tasks as a kind of 'watchdog' function, thereby closely scrutinizing the state's practices, and raise voice in case the difference between the "official norms" and the practices in Olivier de Sardan's (2008: 13) sense are overstretched. In this function, they afford themselves a quite powerful role.

To recall the conceptual backdrop of associations in Liberia, mainly the approach of the "state in society" Migdal (2001) provided a perspective on social formations involved in negotiation and or bargaining processes with the state. I looked at these "state in society" relationships from the perspective of the societal forces who "see the state" (Scott 1998) with their "mind's eyes" (Casey 2000, cf. Migdal and Schlichte 2005). These societal forces, formed against the backdrop of a shared imaginary of how the social should be like and have a formal frame of their claim, an association. In reality, social actors are conscious that state and society are densely interwoven in various horizontal and vertical social relations (Utas et al. 2012a). From the perspectives of expectations towards the state, however, such a division is formed to emphasize the claims. I have drawn analogy to the spider stories found in Liberian folk tales in Chapter 6.1.: *big people* are praised as well as contested, likewise are clients dependent on the goodwill and are at mercy of their *big people.*

In Chapter 1.3., I have categorized the various associations into a typology in order to contain the diverse intents and spatio-temporal formations in the Liberian urban, post-war context: a. social (youth, women, socializing clubs, etc.); b. religious (Christian or Muslim communities, Bible study groups, choirs, etc.); c. professional (transportation or trade unions, marketers, soldiers, etc.); d. community welfare (neighborhood watch teams, road construction, etc.); e. entertainment (football, basketball, karate, music, etc.); and f. specific interests (regional or community issues, ex-combatants, students, etc.). More often than not, associations cut across or contain characteristics of different types. Furthermore, for many of these associations,

togetherness is an essential feature and part of everyday life in such spaces of familiarity. However, I have shown in the empirical part that in-group solidarity must not be overstated, and that competition within the leadership or between splinter groups may temporally arise. In addition, members may criticize and question the efficiency, which challenges social cohesion and in turn the efficiency of the cause. Members are at times only temporally or passively part of associations. Change within and around the association inform the social imaginaries, structures and processes of an association. For associations formed around a common grievance, a change of the situation may transform them or even make them obsolete.

In this book, a particular focus is laid on associations that have emerged from intersubjectively shared grievances and interests such as the disbanded soldiers or the Mandingo who believe to be politically and socially marginalized groups. There is no clear line between the political and non-political, as even entertainment associations such as football clubs entail political elements (Schatzberg 2001: 105). Therefore, two interlocking dimensions complete the typology of associations, namely the political and the temporal. At certain moments, in particular prior to presidential and parliamentary elections, associations become instrument or objective of aspiring individuals or groups. They are not passive vessels devoid of agency, but rather rearrange themselves within this changing political framework to articulate claims towards their common and individual interests, be it to claim the registration of the football club on a higher league, or to demand an ambulance for a community clinic. Complex social relations between associations and political leaders exist and are shaped, as all parties seek supporters and likewise, elections are instrumentalized to put forward claims towards *big people* (cf. Utas 2012a).

Despite the harshness of the everyday - as elsewhere - Liberians find moments of sociability, enjoy shared free time activities and conversations, or find the need to discuss plans, problems or topics besides the business, the political or issues of the association. Feelings of familiarity among the members of an associations often build a basis for personal relations, and in the case of the disbanded soldiers or the West Point Women, I participated in a number of discussions that resembled rather those of friends than discussions between workmates or political activists. Advice was given, interpersonal conflicts are carried out or settled, and immaterial support is granted in times of personal crisis. This is particularly relevant in a societal setting in which forms of mis- and distrust are central to any discourse. However, in much of my presence, interest-related themes or politics were discussed, and (non)action of the state was debated.

The boundaries of an association are often not clear cut. Membership may be fluctuating or non-members may be beneficiaries. Besides, their interests may cut across a range of topics from the realm of the political to the religious. An individual may be part of a church's women association, several saving organization, a political party, and additionally may have also formed her own NGO with UNDP funding. The task of an association may be manifold, as faith-based organizations may provide peace education and psycho-social coun-

seling, but also articulate specific claims towards the state. As in many other societies around the world, many social actors participate in religious groups such as a choir, women's or youth group. Furthermore, many belong into an occupational association. And often, these categories are interlinked, as in particular in Liberia, where much of the scarce free time is spent in religious activities, often collectively. Groups based on ethnical articulations are not common, and the case of COMASL showed that their formation based rather on political causes based on societal constructions than essentialistically cultural elements. On the other hand, there is an increase of associations with post-war claims, such as human rights including gender-based issues or reconciliation. These have adopted the language, concepts and terms of the international community for their use to underline their claims.

From a "good governance" perspective, most Liberian associations would not meet the international standards of an NGO and hence, many fail to rise funding. They do not meet the requirements in regards to functions, impact, and might not be aware of the technical development concept, and lack capacity and equipment. However, the post-war, urban setting of rather high unpredictability and insecurity, and the range and complexity of problems individuals and groups engage with on a daily bases have to be taken into consideration. Applying an actor-oriented, emic perspective and exploring their agency in particular social and political spaces over time reveals that associations play multiple, complex and central roles in society and constitute to the state with imagery that, though, in many ways differs from the imagery the state produces. This was confirmed in the Ebola Outbreak of 2014 which not only revealed the precariousness of state capacity, but also the central role of local associations before, during and after the outbreak (Mutima, Gitomer and Hobson 08.04.2015).

A range of associations, including COMASL, UDAFOL and the West Point Women, continue to deal very centrally with the manifold war-related grievances and intricacies, and interact with state authorities in aiming to resolve these and improve the situation of their members. In doing so, associations are not only a central component of urban governance. They also strengthen the state authorities' legitimacy in that they consider them to be the rightful actors to facilitate change for the better. The respective state actors are considered to be endowed with capacities, capabilities and funding due to their foreign education and international donor support.

11.3. Spaces of Imagination

At the time of this research, Liberia stood at a crossroads, and while some of its citizens were looking towards the other travelers along the roads, others focused on their pace and direction. Many looked back to better times in the past, while others looked ahead to new opportunities. Many changed perspective once in a while, whereas others focused on their personal aims within the intricate post-war context. Yet, roads continued to be bumpy and often blocked. Everyday life in Monrovia draws many parallels to the road meta-

phor; whereas much effort is allocated to hustling and moving one's life forward, it yet remains "on hold" (Diouf 2003). Once a business runs well, it remains at risk to impairment by accident, interpersonal dispute or other misfortunate events. An association's claim is promised to be addressed by the state, only to find out soon after that the state authorities' priorities re-shifted again. However, once someone is blocked in traffic, figuratively, another may step in with a new solution and the person's life moves on. At the time of this writing, the Ebola Outbreak of 2014 had caused many fatalities and insecurities (Heitz Tokpa, Zanker and Kaufmann 2015), and once again acted as a brake upon people's lives – work opportunities diminished, schools closed, and university graduations were postponed by about 9 months.

I have used the roads metaphor in Chapter 5.6. not only as a central part of much demanded state deliverables, but as a physical infrastructure that enables encounters and social relations to other regions of Liberia and to a person's past, culture and homeland. In another way, roads facilitate journeys to other African countries to buy goods, visit kin, and thereby behold foreign cities, infrastructures and social arrangements. These travelers may be ordinary Liberians, former refugees, husbands, wives, elder, former combatants, youth, or members of an elite or academic milieus. They stand at the crossroads of a violent past that affected everybody and all aspects of society in a direct or indirect way. Despite the present insecurities and their subjective uncertainties, many people are certain about "a bright future for Liberia". Everyday life is exhausting, and risks and hazards are manifold. At times, the life trajectories are blocked, and for many, life is on hold. I portrayed a range of individuals and groups which form and forge their lives and their social environment with smaller or bigger success.

The central part of this book showed in what way the state creates and shapes images of change and improvement, which then are countered by ordinary people in their everyday talk and practices. The state is not a distant actor, nor is it considered weak or failing, but figures centrally in post-war social imaginaries as composed of powerful actors. Yet one seems to agree on a need to "change mind and attitudes", starting from the head of government – hence the president - and transcending into all fibers of the social fabric. Society and the state are densely interwoven as a result of temporal and structural processes and physical proximity; nevertheless, there exist quite articulate mental images of how the state should be, hence, expectations towards political leaders. As this research has shown, there are a range of individuals and social groupings that oppose, demand or correct state action. In Scott's sense, this is constitutive for any "state in society" (Migdal 2001), as it restrains ruling elites with utopian visions of society (1998: 88). Applied to my argument, imaginaries of political leaders with partial understanding or attention to the local reality and symbolic structures in Castoriadis' sense (1998 [1975]), will not be convincing to ordinary people. Unlike the scenarios such as the Ujamaa projects and other examples illustrated by Scott (1998), the Liberian context has created opposition and resistance by ordinary people in post-war Liberia, as it did in the past. People

voice their opinions by publishing articles in newspapers, by actively participating in radio talk shows, by challenging political aspirants and in taking action by themselves, and by collective actions such as demonstrations, enhanced by democratic liberties fostered by the present government. Associations are not merely learning grounds of democratic values and participation (Tostensen et al. 2001), but spaces of imagination which challenge the imagery and practices of the state. There exists quite harsh critique towards particular kinds of national and international intervention, in particular the lack of local ownership (Jaye 2006: 13), of the production of blue prints and plans (Bøås 2009, Utas 2008), testing untested approaches (Sayndee 2008) and without considering local complexities. Scholars have criticized the rather helpless approaches to include locals into their endeavors, however, neglecting the societal particularities of a post-war society. Furthermore, being a local does not mean that the person understands and reflects the local processes, institutions and needs of the context (cf. Fuest 2010: 5). Blueprints for reconstruction are well elaborated, but as a range of actors said, for example the young Westpointer (group discussion, Monrovia, 21.07.2012): "We are good at making policy. That's one part - we are good at making those policy. But to put it into practicality, that's the problem we have. And sincerity." Without considering local processes, institutions, the people's experiences and concerns, *metis*, these plans will not be able to transform into practice. There exists a gap of knowledge about the Monrovian everyday, leading to the suggestion that state actors fail to see and understand the local realities, in particular as many government employees have been called from the USA where they have been since the 1980s. Though highly educated, they do not share the same knowledge and experiences as Liberians that have experienced the unrepdictabilities, insecurities, ruptures and scarcities of the war and post-war. Associations have the potential to step in and function as intermediaries in problems between the state and society, as they contain the grievances of the people. Towards the state actors, they can translate and transfers messages, clarify glitches and facilitate the flow of information from the grassroots to the state authorities. In taking their social imaginaries into consideration, actors of civil society do have the potential to play a central role in being drivers of transformation.

Almost all of my informants have concrete and abstract ideas about the future and are actively forging and shaping these futures. I have shown along individual's life trajectories, for example in James' life history that he anticipates further education to expand his range of agency. He grasps opportunities that come along in this shifting and changing social environment. The short insight into his biography not only showed how his life is and was affected by the war but also by events independent of the war, and secondly, how precarious such life trajectories are. Opportunities come along, but hindrances and setbacks are all too frequent. Ruth re-considered an NGO she had thought about earlier, and subsequently obtained a substantial fund from UNDP. Abraham opened his own business and applied for a foreign scholarship. Emmanuel has bought a plot of land and started to construct a house. He still has his modest salary from his employment as a civil servant. Nelly had started as a businesswoman and travelled to other countries to purchase merchandises, and

subsequently enrolled at University of Liberia. These are individual informants that do belong to one association or more. They all have support from "parent, ami ou connaissance" (Olivier de Sardan 2009a: 48), but to different degrees. I have pointed out a range of avenues that social actors forge in order to reduce risks and shape out spaces to diminish insecurities and uncertainty. Education, especially being enrolled into the University of Liberia, calls distant imaginaries closer on the horizon. As scholars showed earlier, being part of a prestigious educational institution is a way of dwelling in a particular milieu for some time (Fuest 1996: 76). It is a masquerade of style, knowledge and "being someone", held at the physical center of power, but also transported into the various neighborhoods of residence by displaying the ID around the neck and by mentioning one's educational status and the university one is enrolled into. It transforms personal biographies and contains strong symbolic capital in Bourdieu's sense, as one is not only a *hustler*, but enrolled at the University, the location where connections are made and where access to *big people* may be facilitated. I showed how having a university degree is a central aspect of identity; stating that one is now a masters' degree holder in sociology pushes other components of the personal biography into the background. Personal projects are one way of doing things. Another is, especially in the case of a common interest or grievance, to form an association. Voluntary associations in Liberia are very frequent, often have standardized forms that make them appear like organizations, and they exist in a range of realms. These associations have been helpful in researching post-war urban state imaginaries: In groups composed of individuals that know each other well, discussions are often vital and rewarding in a way that they openly reflect the past, evaluate the present state of affairs, and also have quite clear imaginaries of the future of their group.

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APPENDIX: TIMELINE

The following timeline gives a chronological overview over the events in Liberia. They are drawn from the African Women and Peace Support Group (2004), Stephen Ellis (2005, 2007), Felix Gerdes (2013) and Mats Utas (2009).

1816	Founding of the American Colonization Society (ACS)
1822	Arrival of the first freed slaves from America at Cape Mesurado, today's Monrovia
1847	Declaration of independence, Joseph J. Roberts as first president
1869	Founding of the True Whig Party (TWP)
1903	Established boundary with Sierra Leone
1904	Extension of citizenship to the Liberian interior population
1926	Firestone agreement
1927	Fernando Po scandal
1944-1971	Presidency of William V. S. Tubman; Open Door Policy and Unification Program
1945	Suffrage extended to women
1946	Native Liberians obtain right to vote
1971-1980	Presidency of William R. Tolbert
12.04.1980	17 enlisted men of the ALF launched a Coup led by Samuel K. Doe. Tolbert is killed
1980-1986	Samuel K. Doe is head of state. The "first native president"
1983	Nimba raids against Doe loyalists as a result of rivalries between Doe (Krahn) and Quiwonkpa (Gio)
1985	"Campaigns of terror" in Nimba against Gio
1985	Elections take place, Doe wins. Thomas Quiwonkpa's coup attempt, in which he gets killed
24.12.1989	National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), led by Charles Taylor, invades Liberia at Butuo from Côte d'Ivoire
Jan 1990	Liberian Inter-Faith Mediation Committee calls on Doe to resign
Jan-Jun 1990	War escalates. Heavy fighting between the NPFL and Doe's army
1990	Prince Y. Johnson separated from the NPFL due to discrepancies and founds his own rebel movement Independent Patriotic Front of Liberia, INPFL. INPFL ceased to exist in 1993

04.08.1990	Charles Taylor declares himself President of Greater Liberia
24.08.1990	The ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) has been sent to Liberia
30.08.1990	Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) was formed in the Gambia. Dr. Amos Sawyer as interim president
09.09.1990	Samuel K. Doe is killed by Prince Y. Johnson
1991	Founding of the United Liberation Movement for Democracy (ULIMO) by Krahn and Mandingo leaders. Together with the Liberia United Defense Force (LUDF) they fight against the NPFL
20.10.1992	Operation Octopus: NPFL attacks Monrovia
1993	The Liberia Peace Council (LPC) was founded by George Boley. Boley is a Krahn-speaker and was Minister in Doe's government
1993	The Lofa Defense Force (LDF) was established by François Massaquoi
1993	Liberian Network for Peace and Development, initiated by the Carter Center
25.07.1993	Cotonou Peace Agreement includes factions as well as civilians represented in the Liberian National Transitional Government
22.09.1993	United Nations Monitoring Group in Liberia (UNOMIL)
04.02.1994	Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI) is founded
1994	NPFL-CRC, Central Revolutionary Council was another splinter group of the NFPL, led by Tom Woewiyu and Sam Dokie
1994	ULIMO separated into ULIMO-K lead by Alhaji Kromah and contained Mandingo, and ULIMO-J by leader Roosevelt Johnson. ULIMO-J was founded mainly on Krahn ethnic articulation
06.04.1996	"April 6" in Monrovia: ULIMO-K and NPFL fight ULIMO-J, fighting ends in June 1996
Jun 1996	ECOWAS Abuja meeting: Ruth Perry appointed head of state of the 3rd transitional government
19.07.1996	National elections. Charles Taylor is elected president
1999	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) formed by former ULIMO-K fighters and loyalists. Rebellion starts in the North
May 2000	Mano River Union Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) is founded
Mar 2001	Security Council Resolution 1343 approves arms embargo, travel ban on government officials and other sanctions
05.05.2001	March of thousands of Liberian women to the UN office in demand of international intervention

Mar 2003	Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), founded by Thomas Y. Nimeley, composed of former ULIMO-J fighters and AFL soldiers, mostly Krahn
Mar-Jun 2003	Women in Peace Building Network (WIPNET) and other women march against war
04.06.2003	Peace talks begin in Accra
17.06.2003	Ceasefire agreement
01.08.2003	UN Security Council Resolution 1497 approves a implementation force for the ceasefire
11.08.2003	Charles Taylor leaves for exile to Nigeria and leaves the office to Moses Blah
18.08.2003	The Comprehensive Peace Agreement is signed by the warring factions
19.09.2003	UN Security Council Resolution 1509 approves a UN mission with a strength of 15'000 peace-keepers
14.10.2003	Charles Gyude Bryant is installed as interim president of the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL)
11.10.2005	Liberian elections; Ellen Johnson Sirleaf wins in the run-off against George Oppong Weah
16.01.2006	Inauguration of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
07.10.2011	Nobel Peace Prize is awarded to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, peace activist Leymah Gbowee and Yemeni Tawakkul Karman
11.10.2011	Liberian elections; Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is confirmed for a second term

Lebenslauf

Mein Name ist Andrea Kaufmann, ich wurde am 24. Juni 1980 in Luzern geboren. Mein Heimatort ist Hergiswil bei Willisau, Luzern. Ich besuchte die Sekundarschule Aarberg, Bern, das Gymnasiums Neufeld, Bern, sowie die Deutschen Schule Washington D.C., USA, wo ich im Jahre 2000 mit dem Deutschen Abitur abschloss. Von 2000 bis 2006 studierte ich Ethnologie, Volkswirtschaftslehre und Pädagogik an der Universität Basel. Mein Studium schloss ich im Sommer 2006 mit dem Lizentiat ab. Zwischen 2006 und 2009 ging ich verschiedenen beruflichen Tätigkeiten nach, unter anderem in der Organisation des Nationalen Bildungs- und Forschungsgipfels (2006) an der Universität Basel, oder in der Forschungsverwaltung als Assistentin bei SystemsX.ch.

Im Sommer 2008 entstand in Zusammenarbeit mit Prof. Till Förster der Antrag des wissenschaftlichen Forschungsprojektes „The Work of State Imageries: How Imageries of Governance and the State Constitute Everyday Practice in Conflict Affected West Africa“. Der Antrag wurde 2009 vom Schweizerischen Nationalfonds (SNF) bewilligt. Daraus resultierte die vorliegende Dissertation mit dem Titel „Spaces of Imagination: Associational Life and the State in Post-War, Urban Liberia”. Die mündliche Doktorprüfung im Fach Ethnologie fand am 15. Oktober 2013 in Basel statt.

Seit 2014 arbeite ich als Expert Gender am United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) in Genf.