

CIVILIANS AND CIVIL WARS IN AFRICA: THE CASES OF LIBERIA, SIERRA LEONE, AND CÔTE D'IVOIRE

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Unlike traditional wars, which were typically fought between the armed forces of various states with civilians playing marginal roles, civil wars since the end of the Cold War have witnessed the increased involvement of civilians in multiple capacities: perpetrators, victims, local peacemakers, and war-time capitalists, among others. These roles played by civilians on both sides of the conflicts are complex, fluid, dynamic, and at times conflicting. This has transformed the nature and conduct of warfare in several major ways, and has profound implications for conflict management and resolution. This paper examines the multifaceted role of civilians in the first and second Liberian civil wars, the Sierra Leonean civil war, and the first and second Ivorian civil wars.

INTRODUCTION

With the increased incidences of civil wars in many regions of the world since the end of the Cold War, notably in Africa where the 1991 implosion in Somalia was followed by a wave of civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), Guinea Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, and Sudan's Darfur region, scholarly interest in civil wars has been growing. As Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Andrea Ruggeri observe, "the salience of civil war in the contemporary world has gained a great deal of scholarly interest in its causes. The theoretical literature on civil war has postulated a variety of explanations for why government and insurgents may resort to violence against one another."¹ The emergent corpus of scholarly

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literature has been dominated by three major issues: the causes of civil wars, the cost, and conflict resolution.²

Some studies have examined the roles of civilians in these conflicts. According to Andreas Wenger and Simon J. A. Mason,

Civilians play an increasingly important and complex role in armed conflicts, both as victims and perpetrators. . . . The nature of war has now clearly changed, and the role of civilians is central to this change. . . . From a strategic point of view, the growing involvement of civilians in the conduct of . . . non-international armed conflicts is linked to at least two trends: (1) the decline of interstate wars [and] the revolution in military affairs, . . . and (2) the growing relevance of intra-state armed conflict, the pervasiveness of civilian agency in such conflicts, and the blurring of lines between civilians and combatants.³

This paper argues that, given the nature of civil wars, especially the multifaceted role of civilians, there is a need to rethink the perpetrator-victim binary in warfare. Traditionally, state armies have been characterized as the principal perpetrators and civilians have been depicted as victims. The new reality of civil wars is that this assumption no longer holds. Civilians can, for example, be both perpetrators and victims in the same civil war. The two Liberian civil wars, the Sierra Leonean civil war, and the Ivorian civil war demonstrate the complexities of the civilian presence and how these complexities create major challenges for local and global peacemaking actors.

Some definitions follow. *Civilians* are defined as people who are not members of a country's armed forces (including government officials, civil servants, and other citizens) but who may play various roles in a civil war, such as perpetrators, victims, peacemakers, and war-time capitalists. The same people may perform several roles in the same civil war. They may, for example, be victims at one point and then become perpetrators at another point. *Root causes of civil war* are the foundational or base factors that provide the necessary conditions for a civil war to occur; while these factors are required for the occurrence of a civil war, they cannot independently be the cause. *Proximate causes* serve as the immediate catalysts for the occurrence of a civil war. They cannot independently precipitate a conflict but are the sufficient factors that must be combined with the root factors to cause a civil war.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section surveys literature on the multiple roles civilians have played in civil wars across Africa and then focuses more narrowly on Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire.

Civil Wars across Africa

Jean-Paul Azam and Anke Hoeffler examine the motives for violence against civilians in African internal wars.⁴ Using data on African refugees, they test two major hypotheses regarding the role of civilians as victims in civil wars. The first is that the victimization of civilians by militias is motivated by the latter's desire to plunder and loot the former's possessions. The second is that violence against civilians is a military strategy designed to deprive rival factions of civilian support. They see a strong relationship between the use of violence against civilians by warring factions and the undermining of opponents' military capacities.

Kasper Thams Olsen argues that the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) committed atrocities against the Acholi civilian population in northern Uganda, its professed base of support, for several interlocking reasons. First, the LRA looted and raided the civilian populations to gain food and other commodities.⁵ These attacks facilitated the private accumulation of wealth by LRA leaders. The LRA also employed violence for strategic reasons: through attacks on civilians, the LRA remained a relevant threat to the government throughout the Ugandan civil war. Essentially, the LRA believes that the use of violence gives it power and it does not hesitate from threatening to use it in other political circumstances.⁶

Zeray Yihdego interrogates the role of civilians as perpetrators in the genocidal war in Sudan's Darfur region. He notes that, like the Sudanese military and its Janjaweed militia, civilian-based rebel groups also committed atrocities against civilians. For example, the Sudanese Liberation Army and the Justice and Equality Movement, the two major rebel groups, were "involved in the killing of civilians and pillage."⁷

Luke Moffett investigates the conduct of various civilian-based militias in the civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). These groups, he argues, have committed horrendous acts against civilians, including murder and rape. Regrettably, the prevailing culture of impunity in the DRC creates barriers to holding these groups accountable; this has contributed to a seemingly endless cycle of violence in the country. According to

Moffett, “as long as impunity remains, there will be no deterrence, and [this situation] will rather perpetuate further conflict as [civilian] victims . . . redress the situation themselves.”⁸

Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d’Ivoire

Stephen Ellis interrogates the use of “spirituality” by warring factions in the first Liberian civil war as a justification to victimize civilians. First, they argued, they could call on God and kill civilians indiscriminately with God’s approval because their war served larger purposes. Second, the fighters searched for “spiritual powers” to protect them from being held accountable for the atrocities they committed against civilians, and to guard them from physical and “spiritual attacks” by rival factions.⁹

Danny Hoffman posits that during the second Liberian civil war, internal power struggles help explain the warring factions’ motivations for violence. He argues that the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), the main rebel outfit, used violence against civilians, including amputations, torture, sexual violence, and death, as retaliation. LURD perceived the interventions by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and non-governmental organizations as efforts to erode its power, especially its access to natural resources such as gold and diamonds. LURD blamed the civilians for precipitating these interventions and the resulting decline of its power. Hence, the raining of violence on civilians was retaliatory.¹⁰

Paul Richard examines the role of the youth fighting for the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) as perpetrators of violence in the Sierra Leonean civil war. He contends that the government’s failure to provide them with basic human needs like jobs and education led them to become frustrated and join the RUF as a way to challenge the corrupt Sierra Leonean state. The violence perpetrated by the RUF’s youth fighters substituted for the lack of modern warfare equipment.¹¹

Lansana Gberie asserts that the mass atrocities committed by the RUF in the Sierra Leonean civil war contradicted the group’s claim to be a liberating force for the country’s subaltern classes, who had suffered decades of undemocratic governance, mass and abject poverty, and social malaise. According to Gberie, the RUF’s violent actions demonstrated that the militia was actually a marauding band motivated by the acquisition of power and the predatory accumulation of the country’s vast diamonds resources.¹²

Youssouf Diallo probes the role of the various civilian-based militias and their associates in the first Ivorian civil war. The three rebel movements, he argues, were closely connected. For example, the *Mouvement pour la justice et la paix* (MJP) was an offshoot of the *Mouvement patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire* (MPCI). Further, the three rebel groups committed physical violence on residents in the areas under their control. In addition, Diallo posits that the MPCI, the main rebel group, mobilized the *Donsos*, a civilian-based association of hunters, to join its ranks. In turn, the *Donsos* also inflicted violence on their fellow civilians.¹³

Abu Bakarr Bah examines the roles of civilians as both perpetrators and victims in the first Ivorian civil war. As perpetrators, civilians organized the three major rebel groups: MPCI, MJP, and the *Mouvement populaire ivoirien du Grand Ouest* (MPIGO). Later, these groups coalesced into a new movement called *Forces Nouvelles* (FN) under the leadership of Guillermo Soro, a former student leader.¹⁴

AN INTEGRATIVE MODEL OF CIVILIANS' ROLES IN CIVIL WARS

The scholarly literature tends to examine the civilian role in civil wars as a one-dimensional phenomenon. Studies often focus on a single role, with two major roles dominating the literature: civilians as perpetrators, including child soldiers, and civilians as victims. Consequently, other important civilian roles—local peacemakers and war-time capitalists, among others—have received little scholarly attention. The examination of these other roles is important to demonstrate the complex involvement of civilians in civil wars and the challenges this complexity creates for war termination and broader conflict resolution. This study presents an integrative approach or model that highlights the multiple, fluid, interlocking, and often conflicting roles that civilians play in civil wars, including as perpetrators, victims, local peacemakers, and war-time capitalists. Determining these multiple roles is important because they reflect the complex nature of intra-state wars, and conflict management and resolution models and methods need to take these multiple civilian roles into account.

As perpetrators, civilians generally join various warring factions and use them as the basis for a range of crimes against non-combatant civilians from looting to rape to murder. Civilians organize the warlordist militias and the fighters consist of civilians who are usually recruited or conscripted. So,

although the warlordist militias operate as military outfits, their leadership corps and fighting forces are civilian-based.

As victims, civilians are on the receiving end of atrocities that are carried out by various belligerents. These civilians, caught in the cross-fire, may be randomly victimized by warring factions who loot their material possessions, or may be used as “trophies” as part of the ruthless cultures of the warring factions. For example, warring factions often require their new fighters to kill civilians, often by random selection, to prove their bravery, prowess, and ruthlessness.¹⁵

Civilians also act as local peacemakers. Various local groups, including civil society organizations, religious groups, and women’s groups, often play key roles in helping to mediate the end of civil wars. Efforts include both formal and informal means, such as the formulation of peace plans, the undertaking of peace education, mediation, and engagement in quiet and behind-the-scenes discussions with the warring parties. These peacemaking efforts have succeeded in some cases and failed in others. The outcomes are dependent on the warring parties and the nature and dynamics of the civil war.

Another role that civilians play is as war-time capitalists. This role has two major complexions: (1) as warlordist militia leaders who collaborate with other warring factions to sell natural resources such as oil, gold, diamonds, timber, and rubber, and (2) as merchants who sell weapons to one or more warring factions. The war-time capitalists may be citizens of the war-affected country or of other countries.

These various civilian roles are conditioned either over time or during a civil war. If the roles develop over time, they are often shaped by the challenges of the state-building project in a war-affected country. At times civilians are targeted by warring factions because they belong to the “wrong” ethnic group or the “wrong” religion. In such cases, the animosities that make the civilians the targets for harm are shaped and conditioned by the travails of state-building. During a civil war, a civilian’s role is determined by the dynamics of the war. For example, civilians may choose to become combatants because this is the best way to survive, or because they seek vengeance against those who might have killed their relatives. Overall, an integrative model is important because it offers a comprehensive picture of all the civilian roles in civil wars.

CIVILIANS AND CIVIL WARS IN WEST AFRICA: CASE STUDIES

The First Liberian Civil War (1989-1997)

The Root Causes. The first Liberian civil war was the by-product of two root causes: (1) the multidimensional crises of underdevelopment that plagued the country from its independence in 1847 to the military coup in 1980, and (2) the failure of both the post-coup military and civilian regimes to provide the requisite leadership to address these crises. The various regimes that managed the Liberian state from 1847 to 1980 failed to promote national unity, human welfare, and democracy. Ultimately, these failures and crises provided the pretext for the military coup against the ruling True Whig Party on 12 April 1980 by seventeen non-commissioned officers led by Master-Sergeant Samuel Doe. Among other promises, the coupists pledged to transform Liberia through democratization and development.

The second major root cause was the poor performance of the Doe regime in both its military (1980-86) and civilian (1986-90) complexions. During military regime years, contrary to its pledge, the Doe regime committed severe political human rights abuses, including the muzzling of freedoms of association, of the press, and of speech.¹⁶ These actions led the US-based Committee for Human Rights to accuse the Doe regime of "a promise betrayed."¹⁷ On the economic and social fronts, the material conditions of the Liberian people did not improve, evident in deteriorating standards of living. Even after Doe became the President of Liberia following a controversial election in 1986, his regime failed to establish democracy and promote socio-economic development. The resulting crises of underdevelopment provided the pretext for the first civil war.

The Proximate Cause. The proximate cause of the war was the armed attack by the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) against the north-central region of Liberia on 24 December 1989. Led by Charles Taylor, a former official of the Doe government who allegedly escaped from a prison in the United States while pending extradition to Liberia to stand trial for corruption, the NPFL used the territory of neighboring Côte d'Ivoire as the base for its initial attacks. Fearful that the attacks could lead to the downfall of his regime, President Doe mobilized all his regime's military and security assets to repel the NPFL's attacks. The resulting clashes led to the first Liberian civil war. Over time, the war engulfed the entire country as the NPFL scored military victories over the Doe regime forces and seized territory. During the

war, Doe was captured and subsequently killed by the Prince Johnson-led Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), a breakaway faction of the NPFL.

The Roles of Civilians. As perpetrators along with the forces of the Doe regime, several civilian-based warlordist militias—the NPFL, the INPFL, the Liberian Peace Council (LPC), the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy—Johnson faction (ULIMO-J), the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy—Kromah faction (ULIMO-K), and the Lofa Defense Force—committed horrific atrocities against civilians,¹⁸ including murder, maiming, rape, torture, and looting. Collectively, the warlordist militias conscripted and used fifteen thousand child soldiers, children as young as nine years old, to commit violent acts against civilians (see Table 1).

Civilian victims fell into two main groups. The first group included all civilians, irrespective of their ethnic, regional, class, religious and other backgrounds. This pattern of indiscriminate victimization by the warring parties was symptomatic of the general rudderless nature of war, seen in the fact that the various warring factions lacked national visions grounded in overarching ideological or philosophical convictions. The other major group usually consisted of targeted civilians sought because of their positions in the government; their class, ethnic, regional, and religious backgrounds; or their adversarial relationships with particular warlords or other top militia members. Liberia's ethnic groups had developed an antagonistic relationship due to Doe's instrumentalization of ethnicity amid his government's loss of legitimacy. That is, lacking the support of the majority of Liberians, Doe relied on his Krahn ethnic group as his sole political base. From this point he then framed the power struggle between him and his chief rival, General Thomas Quiwonkpa (a member of the Gio/Mano ethnic group), as a struggle between two ethnic groups. In a classic case of scapegoating in 1985, Doe blamed the Gio and Mano ethnic groups for his regime's problems. He accused them of harbouring treasonous ambitions following an abortive coup led by General Quiwonkpa, a former confidante of Doe and a leader of the 1980 coup that brought Doe to power.¹⁹ Again, the forms of victimization ranged from murder to looting. As Table 1 shows, about 250,000 civilians were killed, one million were internally displaced, and about 850,000 others sought refuge in other countries, including Côte

d'Ivoire, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, and the United States.

The major local peacemaker was the Religious Leaders of Liberia (RLL), an amalgam of Christian and Muslim clerics.²⁰ In June 1990, a few months after the outbreak of the civil war, the RLL formulated a peace plan that included a ceasefire, the holding of a peace conference, and the improvement of internal security. The group presented the plan to the warring Doe regime and the NPFL, the largest warlordist militia. Constrained by its tenuous hold on political power, the Doe regime accepted the plan, viewing it as its best option for survival. The NPFL, however, rejected the plan because it did not include its major demand for the immediate removal of the Doe regime from power. Ultimately, this opposition led to the failure of the religious leaders' peace initiative.

The role of war-time capitalists was performed at two major levels. In terms of the country's natural resources—diamonds, gold, iron ore, timber and rubber—both Liberians and foreign nationals, including the warlords and their top officials, relied on the illegal production and sale of these resources to accumulate great wealth. Charles Taylor, for example, controlled an average of US\$75 million a year of illicit business activities.²¹ This domination of the local economy gave Taylor the means to attract and arm fighters who found little opportunity elsewhere.²²

The Second Liberian Civil War (1999-2003)

The Root Causes. The second Liberian civil war stemmed from two root causes. The first was the incompleteness of the major transitional activities—disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration (DDRR) of the ex-combatants into the larger society—and the critical task of security sector reform. With its intervention fatigue, the international community, led by ECOWAS, determined that holding an election following the Abuja II Peace Accord, which ended the first civil war, was the best exit strategy. Accordingly, the DDRR processes were quickly implemented but, unfortunately, their implementation was incomplete. For example, neither the NPFL nor the other militias fully disarmed. Thus the election was held in the context of what Terrence Lyons has called “militarized politics.”²³ Taylor threatened to restart the civil war if he was not elected the president.²⁴ Fearful of another war, the Liberian electorate elected him as the country's president.

The second root cause of the war was the generally horrendous

performance of the Taylor regime in the cultural, economic, political, security, and social domains.²⁵ At the centre was the failure of the regime to address the underlying causes of the first civil war.²⁶ As Hizkias Assefa observes, “As soon as the [first] war was over, and a new government was installed, things quickly reverted to the way they were before the war. Abuse of power, corruption, manipulation of state division, abject poverty, alienation, oppression of a large sector of the population, and hopelessness of the youth were still rampant.”²⁷ In the cultural sphere, for example, the Taylor regime accused Doe’s Krahn ethnic group and the Mandingo ethnic group, some of whom had supported the Doe regime, of plotting to overthrow his regime. In the ensuing campaign of terror, prominent members of both ethnic groups were imprisoned and tortured. Economically, amid the continuing plundering of state resources by Taylor and his supporters, the material conditions of the Liberian lower classes did not improve. In terms of security, the regime refused to honour its promise to design and implement security sector reform. Instead, Taylor transformed his NPFL militia into the national military, police, and security apparatuses. This created insecurity among the leaders and members of the former rival militias that participated in the country’s first civil war. Fearful of Taylor’s emergent “reign of terror” and their own safety, many former rival militia leaders and members fled into exile in neighboring countries, particularly Guinea.

The Proximate Cause. The proximate cause of the second civil war was the September 1999 launching of armed attacks from neighboring Guinea against targets in the west and northwest regions of Liberia by the Liberians United for Reconstruction and Democracy (LURD). LURD was an amalgam of the leaders and members of several former militias that were involved in the country’s first civil war and had fled the country as a result of growing insecurity. LURD’s disparate factions were united by their opposition to the Taylor regime. Subsequently, LURD extended its attacks to other regions of the country.

Fearful of the threat posed by the armed attacks, the Taylor junta mobilized all its military assets and launched counter-offenses against LURD. The resulting clashes triggered the second civil war. The scope of the war expanded when the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) joined as a second anti-government rebel faction in 2003. Operating from a base in Côte d’Ivoire, MODEL launched attacks against the southeastern regions of

the country.

The Roles of Civilians. Civilians together with combatants in the two warlordist militias—LURD and MODEL—committed murder and various other atrocities against civilians. As in the first Liberian civil war, both militias also used about eleven thousand child soldiers to perpetrate violence against civilians (see Table 2). Children as young as eight or nine were responsible for launching grenades and firing AK-47, Beretta, G-3, and UZI guns.²⁸

The victims consisted primarily of two categories of civilians: the members of the society at large and those who were targeted by LURD and MODEL. The former were usually victimized by the random acts of violence that characterized LURD and MODEL's war-making strategy. Both militias violated civilians mainly to loot their material possessions. The latter group were those targeted for various reasons, including opposition to the militia or their roles as officials of the Taylor regime.²⁹ Together, LURD, MODEL, and the Taylor regime's military caused the death of approximately 50,000 civilians, the internal displacement of 531,616 civilians, and a refugee exodus of an estimated 631,000 civilians (see Table 1).

The key local mediator and peacemaker was the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, organized in April 2003. Led by Leymah Gbowee, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011, the group was an umbrella organization of women from diverse ethnic, religious, and class backgrounds. The group formulated a peace plan with three major points: (1) the termination of the civil war, (2) the holding of a peace conference, and (3) the intervention of an international peacekeeping force. Among other things, the group held daily prayers, conducted public education campaigns, and pursued quiet mediation with the warring parties and other major stakeholders. The organization played a pivotal role in efforts towards the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2003 that ended the war and set in motion the transitional process.³⁰

There were several major clusters of war-time capitalists. One group collaborated with LURD and MODEL in facilitating the illegal sale of Liberia's natural resources, especially diamonds, gold, iron ore, and timber. These capitalists profited from the proceeds from the natural resources. Another group accumulated capital by selling arms to the Taylor regime, LURD, and MODEL. A third group, consisting exclusively of Liberians in the United

States, provided financial and material support to LURD and MODEL. In return, LURD and MODEL rewarded this group of capitalists with various positions in revenue-generating public institutions. The capitalists then used these positions to pillage the state's financial resources and extort bribes from businesses.³¹

The Sierra Leonean Civil War (1991-2002)

The Root Causes. The taproots of the Sierra Leonean civil war lay in the multifaceted crises of the neo-colonial state that was fashioned by British colonialism and subsequently shaped by the country's local ruling class.³² A central political dimension of the state crisis in Sierra Leone was the cult of the presidency—the entire polity revolved around the priorities of President Siaka P. Stevens, who was aptly described as “prince.”³³ As architect of the “cult of the presidency,” Gberie notes, “Stevens created extra-legal institutions and channels which came to supersede the formal state institutions and fatally undermined them.”³⁴ In addition, the Stevens regime suppressed the citizens' political human rights. For example, in 1978, Stevens declared the country a one-party state under the ruling All People's Congress (APC). A major consequence was that the space for political participation shrank for both opposition politicians and the general public. Economically and socially, amid the corrupt accumulation of wealth by Stevens and his supporters, there was mass abject poverty.

Intensifying the situation, in 1985, Stevens retired. To ensure that his regime would be protected from prosecution for its economic and political crimes, he selected his military chief, General Joseph Momoh, as his successor rather than allowing his replacement to be chosen through a democratic process. Not surprisingly, the Momoh regime carried on Stevens's legacy, reflected in continued political repression and economic and social malaise. This complete loss of legitimacy set the stage for the country's degeneration into a civil war.

The Proximate Cause. The proximate cause of the war was an armed rebellion by former Army Corporal Foday Sankoh of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) against the regime in March 1991. The RUF was organized by pro-democracy forces led by intellectuals who were disgusted with Sierra Leone's sordid state of affairs. They sought to provide an alternative vision rooted in the democratic reconstitution of the state to serve the interests

of all Sierra Leoneans. Unfortunately, the group's leadership was hijacked by Sankoh and other followers who had little interest in a democratic and prosperous Sierra Leone for all. Instead, Sankoh and his supporters aimed to accumulate wealth by capturing the country's diamond mines. Thus the transformative agenda of the RUF was derailed. With the support of the Taylor-led NPFL, the RUF launched armed attacks against targets in Sierra Leone. These attacks generated responses from the government and drove the country into civil war.

The Roles of Civilians. The RUF was the main civilian-based warlordist militia that perpetrated atrocities against the various segments of the Sierra Leonean population. The most widely used form of violence was the amputation of civilians' limbs. The use of this method originated in the 1998 election: in its efforts to prevent civilians from voting in the election, the RUF undertook a systematic campaign of cutting off civilians' hands and legs as a way to instill fear in the larger civilian population. In what Gberie calls Sierra Leone's "dirty war," the RUF used approximately 5,400 child soldiers to perpetrate violence against civilians (see Table 2).³⁵

Two major civilian groups were the victims of the RUF's atrocities: the larger Sierra Leonean population and former officials of the Sierra Leonean government. Against the Sierra Leonean population, the RUF employed violence for several reasons. In some cases, the violence was used as a cover or shield for the RUF's various acts, including looting civilians' possessions. In other cases, violence against civilians was the litmus test to determine the bravery of new recruits, a part of the rituals and brutal culture of the warlordist militia. Former government officials were targeted because the RUF blamed them for the country's chronic multidimensional underdevelopment.³⁶ The RUF's violence resulted in the deaths of approximately 75,000 civilians, the internal displacement of about 2.5 million others, and the forced migration of about 600,000 civilians (see Table 1).

The premier local peacemaker was the Interfaith Contact Group (ICG), a coalition of Christian and Muslim clerics from the Sierra Leonean Council of Churches and the Supreme Islamic Council of Sierra Leone. The ICG sought primarily to help mediate the end of the civil war, and undertook discussions with both the Sierra Leonean government and the RUF. The two warring factions were receptive to the clerics' peacemaking efforts, giving the ICG a major role in the peace talks that culminated in the Lome Peace

Accord in July 2009. However, the accord was short-lived largely because the RUF saw it as a hindrance to their illicit mining and sale of diamonds.³⁷

Two clusters of actors constituted the core of the war-time capitalists in the civil war. The RUF leadership used war-making as a vehicle for the illegal mining and sale of Sierra Leonean diamonds. The violence used against civilians in the plundering of diamonds led to the gems being described as “blood diamonds.”³⁸ During the ten years of war, the RUF raised an estimated US\$25 million to US\$125 million per year through the sale of diamonds, with a reported high of US\$200 million.³⁹ The largest other war-time capitalist was Liberia’s Charles Taylor, who profited from the “blood diamonds” in exchange for aiding the RUF.⁴⁰

The First Ivorian Civil War (2002-2007)

The Root Causes. The taproot of the first Ivorian civil war was the failure of the neo-colonial state to promote democracy and human-centered development. Not one of the country’s regimes from 1960 to 2002 provided the requisite leadership for the democratic reconstitution of the state. First, after independence in 1960, France handpicked its quintessential client, Felix Houphouët-Boigny, who had been educated and trained in France and had served in the French colonial administration in Côte d’Ivoire, as the country’s president. Backed by the French military, the Houphouët-Boigny regime had a carte blanche to design an authoritarian post-colonial state that was subservient to the interests of the French ruling class and its government. With French protection Houphouët-Boigny suppressed the political rights and civil liberties of the Ivorian people, including the opposition and civil society, with impunity. After independence, the country was quickly made a one party state under the ruling Democratic Party of Côte d’Ivoire. Economically and socially, although French businesses accumulated tremendous wealth from the country’s cocoa and coffee resources, the Ivorian subalterns experienced little significant economic and material improvement.

After Houphouët-Boigny died in office in 1994, he was replaced by his handpicked successor, Henri Konan Bédié, the Speaker of the Parliament.⁴¹ Bédié continued his predecessor’s legacy of political repression and mass alienation from the political process. Further, the Bédié regime failed to improve the material conditions of ordinary Ivoirians. The resulting failures and alienation provided an enabling environment for the military coup that brought General Robert Guei to power in 1999. However, the Guei

military junta failed to reconstitute the Ivorian state democratically. Amid its attempt to consolidate power through a fraudulent election in 2000, the junta was forced from power, and long-time opposition leader Laurent Gbagbo was declared the winner of the 2000 presidential election. To the disappointment of many, the Gbagbo administration continued some of its predecessors' policies, including the insidious policy of *Ivoirité*.⁴² Under this policy of exclusion, aimed particularly at those of Burkinabe ancestry, an Ivorian was someone whose parents (both mother and father) were born in Côte d'Ivoire. This contributed to the mutiny by a segment of the military who felt targeted by the *Ivoirité* policy, which metamorphosed into the country's first civil war.

The Proximate Causes. The proximate causes of the first civil war were two-fold. First, in September 2002, about eight hundred soldiers of the Ivorian Armed Forces mutinied because they had been retrenched from the military due to their connections to the late General Guei and their ethnic and regional backgrounds (most were from the country's north and of Burkinabe ancestry, the immigrant group targeted by the *Ivoirité* policy). Although the mutiny was quelled by the Gbagbo regime, it exposed major tensions within the military. Using the mutiny as a springboard, various militias emerged with the shared goal of deposing the Gbagbo regime from power. Other militias expressed their desire to establish separate and independent states. The resulting armed attacks and counterattacks between the Gbagbo military and the various militias plunged the country into its first civil war.

The Roles of Civilians. Along with the government's military forces, civilian-based militias were the principal perpetrators of violence against civilians. Among the militias were the Patriotic Movement of the Ivory Coast, the Ivorian Popular Movement for the Greater West, and the Movement for Justice and Peace. These groups later coalesced into the New Forces. As in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the New Forces utilized about five thousand child soldiers who were mainly recruited from Liberia (see Table 2).⁴³ The recruits were offered financial compensation for fighting and for each additional recruit they brought.⁴⁴

Victims of the violence perpetrated by the New Forces and the Ivorian military forces were the general population and targeted groups of civilians. Thousands of civilians in the general population suffered various forms of

violence, including murder, maiming, and rape. These acts, especially looting, were committed indiscriminately, usually to instill fear in the victims or to physically eliminate them. Targeted civilians mainly included officials and other functionaries of the Gbagbo regime.⁴⁵ As a result of the violence, 10,000 civilians were killed, 519,000 others were internally displaced, and 25,000 civilians became refugees, especially in the neighbouring countries of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone (see Table 1).

The Ivorian national soccer team, led by the famed international superstar Didier Drogba, held the role of local peacemaker in two major ways. First, after winning their World Cup qualifying round in 2005, the team members went down on their knees in the locker room and appealed to the warring parties to end the war. Second, in 2007, at the team's request, Côte d'Ivoire played its qualifying match for the African Nations' Cup in Bouake, the citadel of the rebel-controlled north. Interestingly, security for the match, which was watched by over twenty-five thousand persons, was jointly provided by units of the Ivorian military and the rebel group, the New Forces. Given the importance of soccer and the iconic status of Drogba, the national team played an influential role in helping to end the war in 2007. However, the post-conflict peacebuilding project failed to address the underlying causes of the war.

One group of war-time capitalists were those who illegally sold cocoa. These included the leaders of the militias who then became the New Forces, the operatives of the Taylor regime, and various foreign merchants. The other main group of capitalists consisted of arms merchants who purchased weapons on behalf of the rebel groups, and subsequently the New Forces. The personal economic benefits accrued by these war-time capitalists undermined efforts to end the war and thus prolonged it.

The Second Ivorian Civil War (2011)

The Root Causes. The taproot of the second Ivorian civil war was the failure of the Gbagbo regime to resolve the crises of underdevelopment, especially in the political arena, that had plagued Côte d'Ivoire since independence. To the exclusion of many segments of society, especially those of Burkinabe ancestry, factions of the local wing of the Ivorian ruling class continued to manipulate the political system (the external wing consisted primarily of French capitalists who owned large businesses). Essentially, the Gbagbo regime did not demonstrate that it was fundamentally different from its

predecessors.

Although the first civil war ended in 2007, its undercurrents were never resolved. For example, the divisive policy of *Ivoirité* was never annulled. A major consequence was continual tension between the Gbagbo regime and Ivoirians of Burkinabe ancestry. In addition, politics remained militarized. Despite the fact that the war had officially ended and a government of national unity had been established, full disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration did not occur. The various armed groups and factions still retained their military arsenals, which fueled the underlying mutual mistrust and worked against political dialogue and compromise. To make matters worse, the presidential election, one of the major contours of the peace agreement that ended the war, was postponed several times. This deepened the antagonistic relationship between the Gbagbo regime and the main rebel group and its supporters.

The Proximate Cause. In this unstable context, the presidential election was held on 31 October 2010. Among the contestants were the three leaders of the major factions of the local wing of the Ivorian ruling class: the incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo, Alassane Ouattara, a former prime minister during Houphouët-Boigny's regime, and Henrie Konan Bédié, the former president who had been deposed in a military coup in 1999. Since none of the candidates received the required majority in the first round, a second round took place on 28 November 2010 between Gbagbo and Ouattara, the top two vote-getters in the first round.⁴⁶ Both claimed to have won the run-off, separately inaugurated themselves as president, and formed rival governments.⁴⁷ As various peacemaking efforts failed to resolve the post-election impasse, tension between the Gbagbo and Ouattara camps escalated and eventually degenerated into violence. Both rivals chose military force as the means to subdue the other. By January 2011, the country was in the grip of a full-scale civil war.

The Roles of Civilians. The main perpetrators of violence against civilians were the various groups associated with Gbagbo and Ouattara. Besides his official Ivorian military and security forces, Gbagbo was supported by two civilian-based groups: the Ivorian Popular Front and the Young Patriots.⁴⁸ The Rally of the Republican Forces and the so-called "Invisible Commandos" constituted the civilian base of Ouattara's forces.⁴⁹ Collectively, the rival

forces rained violence on civilians, especially in the capital city region of Abidjan and the northern part of the country. About three thousand child soldiers, recruited mainly from Liberia, served among the forces of the rival camps (see Table 2).

The general population and targeted supporters of each of the political rivals were the victims of atrocities that both sides perpetrated. In the larger population, civilians were victimized randomly and in the cross-fire. Targeted victims were Gbagbo's and Ouattara's known supporters.⁵⁰ The violence led to the deaths of about three thousand civilians, the internal displacement of one million others, and the forced migration of about 150,000 civilians to neighboring countries, especially to Liberia (see Table 1).

Although the war lasted only about three months, war-time capitalists, especially arms merchants, used the conflict as an opportunity to accumulate wealth through the sale of arms to the forces aligned with the rival factions.⁵¹ Also, some of the leaders of the pro-Ouattara civilian-based forces used their control over the northern and western portions of the country as a way to gain wealth through the illegal sale of cocoa.

A COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT

General Common Patterns

Regarding the contexts of these civil wars and the roles of civilians in them, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire share two major patterns. First, all three countries were authoritarian states. The political rights and civil liberties of their citizens were suppressed. Citizens could not freely associate or speak without engendering punitive action from the regime in power. More broadly, the political space was closed, which made it impossible for citizens to participate freely in the affairs of the state. This lack of political space made resorting to extra-legal means, such as armed rebellion, almost inevitable. The authoritarian nature of the state each of the three countries helped to plant, nurture, and germinate the seeds of civil conflict and eventually war.

Second, the nature and dynamics of the political economy in the three countries are similar. All three have what Immanuel Wallerstein calls peripheral economic systems. Under these arrangements, monocrop economies essentially serve as plantations for the production of raw materials to help feed the industrial and manufacturing complexes of developed states: Liberia produces rubber and iron ore, Sierra Leone exports diamonds, and

Côte d'Ivoire serves as a plantation for producing cocoa. In essence, the economies of the three countries are geared toward addressing the needs of developed countries rather than their own. Further, the three countries serve as havens for multinational corporations and other businesses from developed countries to accumulate profits for their own national needs. Like other peripheral states, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire do not benefit from the profits that these businesses generate through the exploitation of their natural resources. This dependent and exploitative relationship contributed to the human development deficit and to authoritarianism in all three countries, and ultimately helped to create the conditions for civil conflict and war.

Patterns of Civilians and Warfare in the Case Studies

Several common patterns can be discerned from the multiple roles that civilians played in the Liberian, Sierra Leonean, and Ivorian civil wars. Regarding the perpetrator role, the chief civilian perpetrators of violence were the civilian-based warlordist militias (and, in the case of Sierra Leone, civil defense forces). All of these belligerents used child soldiers.

In all of these civil wars, the victims were civilians who were harmed by acts of indiscriminate violence and those targeted because they were officials of the government in power or belonged to what were considered the wrong ethnic groups. In the Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars, civilians were also harmed as a result of the brutal warlordist culture, in which new recruits were to kill civilians as the litmus test of their bravery. Some civilians died because they were the subjects of bets among fighters. For example, during the first Liberian civil war, pregnant women were killed because fighters were betting on the genders of the unborn babies. To determine the unborn babies' gender, the fighters dismembered the women.⁵²

As for the peacemakers in the civil wars, a major pattern emerged. The initial intervention of the local peacemakers led to the temporary cessation of hostilities among the various warring factions. However, after a brief hiatus, hostilities resumed. In all three countries, the incumbent regimes' power-maintenance agendas and the opposing factions' power-acquisition agendas took priority over the common good of ending the wars and devastation that landed especially on the unarmed civilian populations.

War-time capitalists were mainly government officials and the leaders of the various civilian-based militias. They used the civil wars as opportunities

to accumulate wealth through the illegal sale of natural resources and the sale of weapons to the fighting factions. The use of these civil wars as “business” helped to prolong conflict by undermining efforts to terminate these wars.

CONCLUSION

This study offers several major findings. First, in each of the civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d’Ivoire, civilians played multiple roles—as victims, perpetrators, peacemakers, and war-time capitalists. Second, in these wars, the line between civilians who were combatants (perpetrators) and non-combatants (victims and peacemakers) was often blurred because some civilians were combatants at one juncture and non-combatants at another. These oscillating roles were conditioned and shaped by the specific circumstances of the war. This lack of a clear distinction between combatants and non-combatants poses major challenges for both local and international intervention, whether in the form of humanitarian aid or military intervention for the purpose of protecting civilians.

Third, measures are needed to help prevent the occurrence of civil wars. This requires addressing the causes and dimensions of the underlying conflict before it degenerates into civil war. For example, in the case of the first Ivorian civil war, a major cause of the conflict was the government’s policy of *Ivoirité* that sought to exclude a substantial segment of the population. This issue could have been addressed through the concerted efforts of both domestic and external peacemakers. The thrust should have been to help the Ivorian government recognize that the policy was not even in its own interest because it could easily plunge the country into a violent conflict.

Fourth, once a conflict degenerates into a civil war, measures are needed to prevent it from becoming intense, expansive, and prolonged. In this regard, conflict management faces several major challenges. One challenge is to persuade the conflicting parties to cease hostilities temporarily while ways are explored to end the war. This will require mediatory efforts by both internal and external actors, and incentives for the warring parties to negotiate. The thrust of both mediation and negotiation should be to encourage the conflicting parties to agree to cease armed hostilities temporarily. Complicating things further is the fact that conflict management efforts in a civil war context are comparatively more difficult to navigate when there are three or more warring parties rather than two. The Liberian,

Sierra Leonean, and Ivorian civil wars are good examples.

Fifth, conflict resolution must transcend war termination and focus on addressing the root causes of civil conflicts. For example, the state needs to be democratically reconstituted. This entails several changes. First, in peripheral societies like Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire, the mission of the state needs to shift—from creating favourable conditions for multinational corporations and the ruling class to accumulate capital—to serving the interests of the citizens. A second major requirement is to prioritize respect for political rights and civil liberties. The rule of law needs to be established and applied by an independent judiciary. The people will then have confidence in the legal mechanism for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Third, class inequities need to be seriously addressed to ensure that the material well-being of all is promoted. Finally, ethnic, regional, and religious pluralism needs to be promoted based on mutual respect. Both within the government and the broader society, power relationships need to be restructured to ensure both balance and the empowerment of all citizens.

APPENDICES

Table 1. The Human Costs of the Liberian, Sierra Leonean and Ivorian Civil Wars, 1989-2010

Country/ Civil War	Number of Civilian Deaths	Internally Displaced	Refugees
First Liberian civil war	250,000	1,000,000	850,000
Second Liberian civil war	50,000	531,616	631,000
Sierra Leonean civil war	75,000	2,500,000	600,000
First Ivorian civil war	10,000	519,000	25,000
Second Ivorian civil war	3,000	1,000,000	150,000

Sources: Compiled from Global Security.org, Mano River War, <http://www.globalsecurity.org>; The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, Global Statistics on Internal Displaced Persons, 1990-2011, Geneva: IDMC; and United Nations High

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Table 2. The Number of Child Soldiers in the Liberian, Sierra Leonean and Ivorian Civil Wars, 1989-2010

Country/ Civil War	Number of Child Soldiers
First Liberian civil war	15,000
Second Liberian civil war	11,000
Sierra Leonean civil war	5,400
First Ivorian civil war	5,000
Second Ivorian civil war	3,000

Source: Compiled from Child Soldiers International, Global Reports, 1999-2011, London: CSI.

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