http://www.diva-portal.org

Postprint

This is the accepted version of a paper published in *Journal of International Relations and Development*. This paper has been peer-reviewed but does not include the final publisher proof-corrections or journal pagination.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Sjöstedt, R., Söderberg Kovacs, M., Themnér, A. (2019)
Demagogues of Hate or Shepherds of Peace?: Examining the Threat Construction Processes of Warlord Democrats in Sierra Leone and Liberia
Journal of International Relations and Development, 22(3): 560-583
https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-017-0111-3

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-369458

Demagogues of hate or shepherds of peace? Examining the threat construction processes of warlord democrats in Sierra Leone and Liberia

[a]Roxanna Sjöstedt, Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs and Anders Themnér

[a]Department of Political Science, Lund University, Box 52, 221 00 Lund, Sweden

E-mail: roxanna.sjostedt@svet.lu.se

Abstract

How are threat images framed and constructed by the so-called warlord democrats (WDs)? Societies that have suffered from large-scale civil wars are commonly permeated by inter-group fear and hate. In these contexts, former military or political leaders of armed groups sometimes become involved in post-war politics. These WDs can act as reconciliation spoilers by making securitising moves, *i.e.* they construct threat images that are potentially very costly for fragile post-conflict democratisation processes. It is therefore crucial to explore WDs' speech acts. Yet, the literature on post-war politics has largely overlooked these individual aspects. This article argues that the central components of securitisation theory can be useful in understanding this phenomenon if adjusted to the contextual circumstances of post-war societies. By analysing speech acts by seven WDs in post-war Liberia and Sierra Leone, two forms of framing strategies stand out as particularly relevant. First, WDs' securitising moves are often framed as veiled threats of violence, as it is often deemed too risky for these individuals outside formal power positions to overtly express threats in a generally de-securitised setting. Second, when WDs construct threats, they often chose to frame themselves or their constituencies or followers as the referent object of security.

Keywords: Liberia; post-conflict politics; securitisation; Sierra Leone; threat construction; warlord democrats.

Introduction

Post-civil war politics are often characterised by intense elite competition over the ethos of war-affected communities (Bar-Tal 2000). By defining the beliefs and ideals that permeate society, political leaders can gain legitimacy for their claims to power, not least in connection to the holding of elections (Lyons 2005). Some elites have incentives to present themselves as agents of change, calling for societal reconciliation and the construction of new inclusive identities and fostering a peace ethos (Kaufman 2006). Other leaders may oppose such shifts. Fearing that an ethos of peace may undermine their chances at the polls, they have incentives to keep wartime communities polarised and in fear, fostering a conflict ethos. Some elites may employ dual strategies, at times acting benevolently and in other instances seeking to inflame societal tensions (Themnér 2017). Struggles to shape the ethos of war-ridden societies are commonly waged through the usage of speech acts, whereby leaders either stress the merits of tolerance, reconciliation and commonality, or point to societal divergences and imminent threats towards their own group. The type of ethos that eventually evolves in society has an important impact on the durability of peace. In communities permeated by an ethos of war, seemingly minor incidents can easily escalate into large-scale violence and a return to warfare.

Warlord democrats (WDs) – former military or political leaders of armed groups that take part in elections – often play a key role in struggles to define the post-war ethos. In many post-civil war societies, former military leaders 'reinvent' themselves as politicians, as democratic participation has become the established route to ensure that military might is transformed into post-war political influence. Many former leaders of armed groups, ranging from Nelson Mandela (South Africa), Burhanuddin Rabbani (Afghanistan) and Hashim Thaçi (Kosovo) to Afonso Dhlakama (Mozambique) and Yoweri Museveni (Uganda), have contested elections to gain access to political power. While some WDs, such as Mandela, have made positive contributions to building a peace ethos in their respective countries, others have played on their military past and used inflammatory rhetoric in order to mobilise voters or acquire concessions from their political opponents (Lyons

2005; Themnér 2017). For instance, in Liberia's first post-war elections in 2005, Prince Johnson – a notorious ex-warlord renowned for having executed former president Samuel Doe in 1990 – was elected senator for Nimba County. A cornerstone of his campaign was to remind 'voters (of the Gio and Mano communities) of his role as leader of an armed group and assure them of his commitment to their defense should there be another war' (Sawyer 2008: 195). Such speech acts polarised already tense relations between Gios and Manos on the one hand, and Mandingos on the other – two ethno-political groups that had been on opposite sides during two successive civil wars – and generated fears of renewed violence.

Yet, in spite of the potentially important role WDs have in re-creating or sustaining a conflict ethos in a post-war environment through speech acts, we do not yet have sufficient knowledge about their discursive practices and how WDs frame threat constructions. The literature on post-war politics has so far largely overlooked the role of WDs as individuals. In this strand of scholarly work, the focus has generally been on macro-level processes of change at national or organisational levels, for example on electoral institution-building or the transformation of armed groups into viable and functioning political parties (*e.g.* Doyle and Sambanis, 2006; Jarstad and Sisk 2008; Manning 2004; Paris 2004; Söderberg Kovacs 2007). This is a serious oversight. Post-civil war societies – which as often characterised by weak institutions, lack of a strong civil society and political parties, and limited independent media reporting, and where the citizens tend to distrust the state – are especially susceptible to the roles, framing, and behaviour of individuals in power positions (Fischer 2014). In this context, WDs often possess a competitive advantage over many other political elites due to the resources and networks they have acquired during the war (Themnér 2017). In order to attain reconciliation, and by extensions build stable and accountable democracies, in post-civil war societies, it is therefore crucial to better understand the threat construction practices of WDs. The research question that this article attempts to tackle is thus: how are threat images framed and constructed by WDs in post-war settings?

In the absence of existing theories that address this question, this article seeks to assess whether we can learn new dimensions about WDs' threat constructions by employing elements of securitisation theory as an analytical tool. Securitisation offers an analytical framework that serves to highlight and structure threat constructions shaped by discursive practices (*e.g.* Balzacq 2011). It could therefore be fruitful to employ some of the key components of the securitisation framework – the securitiser, the referent object, and the securitising move – when analysing the discursive practices of WDs in a post-war setting. However, considering that securitisation theory has been criticised for being stuck in a 'Westphalian straitjacket' (Wilkinson 2007: 11), it is crucial to acknowledge that there may be limitations to how well these theoretical constructions capture the central political dynamics of post-war societies in the developing world. Bearing this in mind, this article attempts to develop a theoretical framework that adapts and adjusts the key elements of securitisation to a post-war context.

In order to increase our understanding of how WDs can frame and construct threat images, we conduct a comparative study of WDs (the securitisers) in Liberia and Sierra Leone, two post-civil war societies where ex-military-turned-politicians have been key political agents since the arrival of peace in 2003 and 2001 respectively. Through this analysis, we identify three main findings. First, WDs' securitising moves are often frames as veiled threats of violence. Post-war societies, permeated by fears, suspicions and arms, are often trapped in a 'silent security dilemma' (Hansen 2000) making it too risky to express threats overtly, especially for former members of armed groups who are attempting to navigate the post-war political landscape. This obliges WDs to frame threats in a more indirect and veiled manner. Second, when WDs construct threats, *Self is often the referent object of security* (*i.e.* the WDs or their constituencies or followers). Such framing practices can be seen as an electoral tactic to either prevent wartime supporters from switching political allegiances or shifting blame from Self as war perpetrator to Self as post-war victim. Third, WDs' threat framing concerns almost exclusively war-related issues that are (re)securitised. However, WDs' obsession with the past should not be interpreted as a desire to go back to war. In fact, WDs often

mix aggressive speech acts with messages of peace and reconciliation. Securitising moves should rather be seen as a strategy by WDs to maximise their political leverage over other political elites. A negative side-effect of such tactics is, however, that it risks polarising identities and undermining societal reconciliation, resulting in a premature closure of the peacebuilding process, where peacetime politics becomes a continuation of wartime dynamics through other means (*e.g.* Söderberg Kovacs 2008).

A securitisation framework for post-civil war politics

Since the late 1990s the premises of securitisation theory have been employed to structure the empirical analysis of threat construction processes by political actors. A multitude of different issue areas – including migration, minorities, epidemics, environment, as well as terrorism and other military threats – have been analysed in a number of different empirical contexts (*e.g.* Huysmans 2000; Wilkinson 2007; Curley and Wong 2008; Roe 2008; Sjöstedt 2008; Vuori 2008; Ilgit and Klotz 2014). However, prior applications of the framework to threat constructions in post-war settings have been limited, with some important exceptions, notably Buur *et al.* (2007), Haacke and Williams (2008), MacKenzie (2009), and Fischer and Anderson (2015). Some critics argue that due to its European ethnocentrism, securitisation theory has limited analytical powers in contexts 'that are characterized by different configurations of state-society dynamics' (Bilgin 2011: 401). Others claim, however, that the possible difficulties in applying the framework to different contexts is really 'an empirical question' and can be overcome by placing 'particular attention to possible limitations stemming from Western assumptions' (Greenwood and Waever 2013: 486). Acknowledging these caveats, this article nevertheless finds some central tenets of securitisation useful as the point of departure for an empirical analysis of the threat framing strategies of individual WDs, although its usage has to be adapted and adjusted both in terms of the levels of analysis and the empirical realities of the post-war context.

Securitisation, as originally suggested by Buzan *et al.* (1998), concerns the process of how key political actors construct issues as threats to referent objects in order to move these issues to the top of the security agenda. The success of such attempts at threat construction depends on whether or not the audience, for instance the public or broader political elite, accepts the threat construction. The aim of the securitisation process is thus 'legitimating future acts' such as emergency measures (Vuori 2008: 76). Although some empirical studies follow the original assumptions of securitisation theory literally, others investigate only parts of the securitisation process or deploy the theoretical postulations in a broader sense (*e.g.* Sjöstedt 2013; MacKenzie 2009). In addition, and as argued by Vuori (2008: 76), there are different types of securitisation and these have different illocutionary logics and aims, for instance '(1) securitization for raising an issue on the agenda, (2) securitization for deterrence, (3) securitization for legitimating past acts or for reproducing the security status of an issue, and (4) securitization for control'. In other words, not all securitization processes look the same or follow the structure of the original framework.

In line with the assumptions of these works, our take on securitisation, in order to be applicable to the post-conflict context and to help us analyse the threat constructions by individual WDs, is limited to three analytical components of the securitisation framework: the securitiser, the referent object, and the securitising move. All three components and our interpretation of their empirical applicability to a post-war political context are discussed in greater detail below.

As a general point of departure, this article agrees with the claim that speech is central in the construction of threat images and execution of security behaviour (Buzan *et al.* 1998). This means that the statements of key political figures, the so-called securitising agents, are to be viewed as 'performatives as opposed to constatives' (Balzacq 2011: 1) as they help to shape the contextual setting and construct different threat images within that setting, rather than solely being reflections of an objective state of affairs. In line with recent contributions to securitisation theory, we believe that the importance of 'practices, context, and power relations' (Balzacq 2011: 1) needs to be stressed, and that 'the performative power of a speech act cannot be captured only in the abstract

and in the form of a single linguistic act, but needs to be contextually located within broader structures…' (Stritzel 2014: 46). We thus analyse the discursive processes of WDs in Liberia and Sierra Leone in order to highlight how contextualised speech acts and narratives construct threats in the post-war context.

We view the WDs as the securitising actors, *i.e.* individuals with the power and capabilities to initiate a securitisation process. Although it has been claimed that the actor-centric focus of traditional securitisation studies 'presupposes an excessively strong (and arguably unrealistic) concept of a speaker's pre-existing authority' (Stritzel 2014: 45), we argue that the focus on individuals is well motivated in a post-war context. In the aftermath of war, especially in war-torn societies in the so-called developing part of the world, institutions and political parties are commonly weak or non-existent, as they have been systematically undermined or targeted by the armed belligerents. Within this context, electoral politics becomes a question of 'Big Man' politics, where prominent individuals – each controlling their own networks of dependents – compete for political and economic influence and media visibility (Utas 2012). Power structures and societal relations are in flux, with great uncertainty about the outcome of the transition. Hence, unlike other contexts that have been analysed through the lens of securitisation theory, in a post-war context it is relevant to move beyond an analysis that focuses exclusively on the actors in formal and traditional power positions.

In this context, WDs are critical actors that often hold a comparative advantage over other Big Men in an electoral process. Although many WDs may have limited formal political knowledge and experience, they often have better access to both resources and networks, which may be used to mobilise large groups of supporters and make their imprint on both traditional and social media outlets (Themnér 2017). In addition to using their former wartime networks and spoils of war, WDs have occasionally also gained additional sources of leverage through the peace settlement, for example access to formal power structures and economic benefits through a transitional power sharing arrangement. At the same time, the ending of the war could also have hurt the prospects for

WDs to advance politically, especially if they are associated with widespread human rights abuses and other war crimes. Regardless of the case, most WDs are acutely aware that time is not likely to be on their side, and they have strong incentives to use their potentially waning power structures to get access to more permanent power positions through post-war elections.

Having established the importance of WDs as key actors in the post-war period, we are interested in the securitising moves performed by these individuals. The securitising move is here conceptualised as public declarations of perceived threats. In line with the assumptions of Buzan *et al.* (1998), these declarations do not need to correspond to some 'objective' danger – rather they are speech acts in which anyone or anything can be constructed as a threat. As noted above, this study does not examine traditional securitisation processes by established political actors who aim to influence national policies or legislation. Rather, we analyse the threat constructions of a particular set of individuals who strive to reach formal political positions in a new and uncertain post-war landscape, and use threat constructions as a way to enhance their own electoral success and political survival. The securitising moves we are concerned with are thus speech acts aimed at constructing threats, which have the potential to advance the WDs electoral prospects in an upcoming post-war election.

However, and in line with what has been previously stressed by Hansen (2000) and Wilkinson (2007), it is important to note that contexts outside the traditional Western democracy may suffer from a 'silent security dilemma' (Hansen 2000: 287) in the sense that not even public figures in leading positions always possess 'the ability to express societal security concerns actively' (Wilkinson 2007: 12), as fears of repercussions from adversaries are too great. Thus, an analysis of threat framing in these settings requires the attention to indirect or less explicitly declared threats. Relating this to the illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects of speech acts (Balzacq 2011), we can assume that the threat constructions of WDs, *i.e.* the illocutionary aspect, will be less straightforward compared to, for example, threat constructions regarding terrorism as a national security threat by democratically elected leaders in Europe. Studies have also shown that, in

communities permeated by societal fears, intended audiences usually understand the underlying meaning of implied threats since they belong to the same cultural-political context (James 1997). In order to capture this contextual aspect, we argue that some securitising moves by WDs are likely to be framed as *veiled threats of violence.* The threat framing is 'veiled' as it is unlikely to contain any clear-cut declarations of threats. Open and direct threats would be very dangerous and could potentially backfire in a context of an ongoing peace process and where there is an overarching move towards de-securitisation. This is particularly true if the peace process is protected by international peacekeepers who are keeping a watchful eye on potential spoilers or a domestic regime that may not only have access to loyal security forces, but also have a history of engaging in abusive behaviour (Themnér 2017; Stedman 1997). In 2004, for instance, one of the former leaders of the Congolese (Republic of Congo) *Cocoye* militia – Emmanuel Boungouandza – warned that his ex-fighters may return to violence if the government did not cease harassing them. With this statement, Boungoundza – who was generally seen as the defender of ex-Cocoye interests and was hoping to be re-elected as a member of parliament – cleverly alluded to the possibility of new violence without implicating himself. This was arguably a wise decision, considering that president Denis Sassou-Nguesso's regime frowned upon public challenges from the opposition (Themnér 2011). The threat images vocalised by any WD in a post-war context characterised by a general trend towards de-securitisation are thus realistically expected to be much more subtle and contain vaguely expressed threat images that are open to interpretation and may be easily denied if needed. Yet, if the intended audience interprets the subtle message correctly, it is equally likely to be effective in achieving the objective.

Concerning the *referent object* of security, that is, the issue or object being threatened, it is also necessary to adapt the usage of the analytical framework to the post-civil war context. In prior studies on securitisation, the referent object is often the state, national identity, or broader issues like democracy or the so-called Western values (Vuori 2008). In our study, due to the fact that our securitising actors are WDs that are trying to secure power through the ballot box rather than heads

of states or government representatives that are already in formal power positions, the referent object must be defined differently by necessity.[1] In addition, the WDs run for elections in a context that is radically different from the established and peaceful democracies in Europe and the United States that are usually analysed through the lens of securitisation theory (Vuori 2008). In a war-torn society that only recently saw the ending of large-scale violence and where local and international peacemakers have initiated a de-securitisation process, one of the greatest societal fears is the risk of a return to war. Hence, WDs are likely to frame their threat constructions against this background, consciously creating threatening scenarios that only they – given their war-time and militant credentials – will be able to address, if elected. The referent object under threat may be either peace itself or, more specifically, threats against the WDs own constituency (for example an ethnic group or a particular ex-combatant community). These threat constructions play on lingering societal fears and insecurities that may have temporarily been removed or mitigated during the peace process and the overarching process of de-securitisation, yet remain vivid in people's memories (James 1997; Themnér 2017). For WDs it may be crucial to play on similar fears in order to prevent fledging clients from leaving their networks. In developing countries in general, and war-ridden societies in particular, the most central resources for politicians is 'wealth in people' – access to networks of clients that can be mobilised as voters, workers or fighters (Bledsoe 1990; Utas 2012). According to this perspective, loss of followers spells political doom. South Sudan constitutes a vivid example of the role speech acts can have in keeping faltering clients in line. After being sacked as vice president in 2013, the former rebel leader Riek Machar accused president Salva Kiir of promoting 'Dinkocracy' – favouring the latter's Dinka community at the expense of Machar's mostly Nuer constituency. By framing his traditional constituency as being under threat, Machar hoped to retain his followers even after losing access to valuable state patronage (Brosché and Höglund 2017). Thus, we theoretically posit that, unlike many previous empirical applications of securitisation, it is not unusual that WDs create threat constructions in which the in-group is the referent object of threat, rather than, for example, the customary state or a national identity.

These two theoretical constructs, veiled threats of violence and Self as the referent object, are – together with our interpretation of the securitising actor – to be viewed as a reconceptualisation of the original tenets of securitisation theory which forms an analytical tool that can be employed in the analysis of the threat framing of the WDs.

Research design

This study uses securitisation theory as a point of departure for analysing speech acts by high-profile WDs in post-war Liberia and Sierra Leone. There are two reasons for why we chose to focus on individuals in these two countries. First, post-war Liberia and Sierra Leone share many contextual similarities; both societies suffered from long and destructive civil wars with a multitude of armed groups during the 1990s, which eventually came to an end through negotiated settlements in the early 2000, when they both experienced large-scale international peace- and state-building interventions by the United Nation and other international actors. Importantly, in both countries, the security situation improved considerably in the post-war period despite weak democratic institutions and fragile political party structures. The overarching context in which the WDs emerged was thus characterised by a general move towards de-securitisation. Second, a large number of formerly armed actors have contested local and national elections in both post-war settings. Some of these ex-military leaders have been successful in their attempts to gain political influence through the ballot box, while others have faced little electoral support and subsequent marginalisation. We illustrate the discursive practices of altogether seven WDs who previously belonged to seven different armed groups: Sekouh Conneh, Alhaji Kromah and Prince Johnson in Liberia, and Johnny Paul Koroma, Sam Hinga Norman, Issa Sesay and Maada Bio in Sierra Leone. All seven WDs were key leaders during the Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars, and their electoral participation generated much domestic and international publicity.

By investigating statements by WDs in Liberia and in Sierra Leone found in newspaper reporting we are able to highlight some dominant speech acts and detect different types of

securitising moves. These framing strategies are analysed through discourse analysis of texts covering the time period from 2004 to 2014 for Liberia, and from 2001 to 2014 for Sierra Leone. The reason for selecting 2001 as the starting point for the analysis of Sierra Leone and 2004 for Liberia is to capture speech acts and events leading up to both countries' first post-civil war elections in 2002 and 2005 respectively. For statements made by the WDs, we employed FACTIVA,[2] searching for articles using the name of the WDs, the country (Liberia/Sierra Leone) and time period (2004–2014 for Liberia and 2001–2014 for Sierra Leone). This resulted in a large number of articles in which the WDs appeared, including both local newspapers (*e.g. Analyst* and *Informer* in Liberia and *Exclusive* and *Standard Times* in Sierra Leone) and international news agencies (*e.g.* Agence France-Presse, IRIN News, Reuters and Voice of America). Due to space considerations, not all statements made by the studied WDs – indicating a securitising move – are reported in this article. Oftentimes a selected WD made recurring declarations on the same theme. For this reason, we have selected quotes that we consider typical and hence illustrative of the rhetoric employed by the selected WDs at that time period. In addition, although the material covered by FACTIVA records only a fraction of all public statements made by these individuals during these time periods, it is likely to pick up at least the most dominant framing strategies by high profile figures, hence alleviating potential concern about how representative these quotes are.

The empirical investigation is guided by a theoretically derived understanding of what constitutes a securitisation process (*cf.* Sjöstedt 2007). This understanding can be operationalised into a number of overarching questions that guided the empirical examination. With regard to the securitising actor, we try to contextualise the emergence of each WD and situate their attempt to gain political power through elections both against the dominant narrative of the individual during war times and against the political dynamics of the selected post-war time period. With regard to the securitising move and referent object, we try to determine the illocutionary aspects, and how threat images are framed and constructed in relation to a referent object. Since the theoretical framework argued that WDs' security moves are often likely to be formed as *veiled threats* and *Self*

framed as the referent object of security, special attention will be given to these dimensions in the empirical analysis.

A brief introduction to post-war Liberia and Sierra Leone

The Liberian Civil War commenced in 1989 when the rebel group National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPLF) invaded Liberia from the neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire.[3]The ultimate objective of the attack was to overthrow the regime of president Samuel Doe, and already the following year the regime crumbled as Prince Johnson, the leader of a NPFL faction called Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), attacked the capital and executed Doe. The immediate result was the proliferation of new rebel groups: United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), ULIMO-Johnson faction (ULIMO-J), ULIMO-Kromah faction (ULIMO-K), Liberia Peace Council (LPC), and Lofa Defense Force (LDF). In 1996, the war came to an end through a negotiated peace agreement. The subsequent election in 1997 was won by the former NPFL leader Charles Taylor with an overwhelming majority of votes, and fielded by several other ex-military leaders such as Alhaji Kromah (ULIMO-K) and George Boley (LPC).

Despite the initial efforts to appease his former enemies, Taylor soon began a crackdown on his political opponents. In response, a new rebellion was launched in late 1999 by these opponents, which in 2000 became known by the name Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). From 2001 and onwards, Sekou Conneh headed the force. In early 2003, the fighting escalated with the appearance of an additional rebel group: the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). By August of the same year, the regime was on the military defensive and Taylor was left with little choice but to sue for peace. The immediate result of the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was to remove Taylor from power, install an interim government, deploy peacekeeping troops (United Nations Mission in Liberia, UNMIL), and pave the way for multiparty elections in 2005. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and her Unity Party (UP) won the election, and were subsequently re-elected in the second post-war general elections in 2011.

A central feature of the post-war period were efforts by the key segments of the political elite, backed up by the international third party actors present including the UN, to de-securitise politics and wartime identities, and create a peace ethos. This was, for instance, apparent in the inauguration speeches of both Gyude Bryant (president of the interim government) and Johnson-Sirleaf. While the former called on Liberians to forgive one another, the latter preached the importance of promoting healing, inclusion and harmony, rather than disharmony (Sengupta 2003; allAfrica 2006). Such efforts were formalised with the launch of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – mandated to promote national peace, security, unity and reconciliation – in 2006. For Liberia's ex-military leaders, participating in the 2005, 2011 and 2014 (only senatorial) elections constituted the most efficient way to safeguard the position of power they had acquired during the war. In this process, many integrated threat constructions in their electoral framing strategies in an effort to stem the tide of post-war de-securitisation and maximise their chances at the polls.

The war in Sierra Leone began in 1991, when armed Sierra Leonean political exiles under the name of Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF) invaded the country to overthrow the one-party regime of the All People's Congress (APC).[4] In 1992, a coup brought the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) to power. However, the politically inexperienced soldiers were ill equipped for governance and in response to the deteriorating security situation, various local defence militias appeared, notably the Kamajors, led by Chief Sam Hinga Norman. In January 1996, an internal palace coup brought Brigadier-General Julius Maada Bio to power, but facing increasing pressure domestically and internationally, the junta was soon forced to announce the return to civilian rule. The 1996 elections brought to power the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) under president Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. In May 1997, another coup brought further chaos to the country. Major Johnny Paul Koroma was announced as the leader of the new Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), an alliance between renegade government soldiers and the RUF. In 1998, the AFRC was chased out of the city and Kabbah was reinstated. In July 1999, the Lomé peace accord was signed between the Government and the RUF. Following a turbulent and violent

implementation period, eventually resulting in the military defeat of the rebels, the first post-war elections were held in May 2002 under the supervision of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL).

The post-war period in Sierra Leone has repeatedly been described as something of a success story considering the relatively quick restauration of security throughout the country and the rebuilding of democratic institutions. Key international actors, notably Britain and the UN, invested heavily in the de-securitisation of the country and the commitment to a stable peace (Söderberg Kovacs 2014). Some domestic political actors benefitted from this peaceful trajectory and were able to profit politically from the improved security situation. Notably, this has been considered the key explanation for the landslide victory of Kabbah and the SLPP in the first post-war elections in 2002 (Kandeh 2003). Other war-time actors struggled to remain politically relevant and powerful in a political context that quickly threatened to render their war-time strengths, resources and networks increasingly out of date. Both the Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF-P), the party of the former rebel group with former AFRC Minister Alimany Paolo Bangura as its presidential candidate, and the Peoples Liberation Party (PLP), led by former APRC leader Johnny Paul Koroma, participated in the elections, but neither of them received more than a fraction of the votes. In the spring of 2003, the Special Court of Sierra Leone issued its first indictments, with Koroma and Norman as two of the accused.

However, the increasingly fierce political polarisation along more traditional regional and ethnic lines and heightened fear and insecurity surrounding the run-up to both the 2007 and 2012 elections opened the door for a potential political comeback for wartime individuals who were able and willing to play on their former militant backgrounds and latent wartime networks.

Post-war re-securitisation: examining the threat constructions of WDs

To recall, we argue that in the context of a post-civil war transition, characterised by national and international efforts to de-securitise politics, WDs' securitising moves are likely to take the form of

veiled threats of violence, while Self is portrayed as the referent object of security. But how, more specifically, are these threat images framed and constructed by WDs and what role do power relations and dominant narratives about the selected WDs' war- and peace-time actions play in these processes? In the following, we seek to address these questions by analysing a few key speech acts of the selected WDs in post-war Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Veiled threats of violence

Veiled threats of violence by the WDs against either the peace process at large, or against a specific group, was an especially popular strategy for candidates perceived as the so-called political underdogs and those possessing waning political-economic resources. For instance, when he was running for president in the 2005 Liberian elections, the wartime influence of Sekou Conneh (ex-leader of LURD) had begun to wane. After a conflict with his wife Aicha over the distribution of LURD portfolios in the interim government, Conneh lost support from LURD's main economic-political patron, Guinea's president Lansana Conté (Aicha was a powerful figure in LURD due to her close relations with the Guinean president). This, together with the growing unpopularity amongst ex-LURD commanders and fighters due to charges of corruption, meant that Conneh needed to remind the voters of his wartime credentials in order to boost his political relevance. The corner stone of Conneh's presidential bid was therefore to present himself as the only candidate who could control the violent agency of ex-combatants in the country. For instance, in an interview in October 2005, he stressed:

> Somebody who comes into the presidency, who has not been to this country in over 10, 20 years, do not even know how to talk to fighters, do not even know how to approach the issue of ex-fighters. And they come to head this government. You know there will be problems here every day. (Voice of America 2005c)

Conneh thus constructed an image of the ex-combatants as one of the most acute threats to post-war stability in Liberia, and himself as the most suitable candidate to handle this threat. To drive home the point, Conneh stressed that he was the preferred candidate of ex-combatants of all

factions; not only did he claim that the latter had petitioned him to run for office, he also said that he would rely on the ex-fighters to 'canvass' his political message across the country (Voice of America 2005c). By securitising the ex-combatant issue, Conneh probably also hoped to mobilise voters outside his small Mandingo constituency, an ethnic group that often receives scorn from members of other groups. Ex-fighters – irrespective of ethnic belonging – were often seen as a source of insecurity amongst Liberians irrespective of ethnic belonging.

Conneh succeeded in gaining considerable media attention through his veiled threats, thus creating a political platform for himself that he may otherwise would not have had (IRIN 2005a, 2005b; Houreld 2005; Sieh 2005; Melville 2005; Voice of America 2005a, 2005b). There may have been historical reasons for why Conneh believed that using threatening speech acts could be an efficient way to increase his chances at the polls. During the 1997 elections, Taylor surprised many observers with his ability to mobilise voters amongst ethnic communities that had supported his opponents during the war. In fact, one of his main campaign slogans had been 'He killed my ma, he killed my pa, I'll vote for him' (Polgreen 2006). One interpretation of Taylor's electoral success was that, by instilling fear amongst Liberians, he reminded the voters that the country would only be at peace once he was elected president (Waugh 2011).

At times, WDs have also made veiled threats in the aftermath of an election. One motive for employing such framing has been to ensure continued political relevance even after being defeated at the polls. For instance, the 2005 presidential elections constituted an important opportunity for the former ULIMO-K leader Kromah to make a political comeback. Having played a marginal role during the second civil war, Kromah faced political marginalisation if he could not re-establish himself as a Big Man. Even if Kromah hailed from the Mandingo community – and thereby had few chances to actually win the presidency – the elections offered him much needed visibility and a certain amount of agency. As expected, Kromah lost in the first round of the presidential elections, receiving only 2.8 percent of the votes. However, Kromah was later able to utilise post-election turbulences to his advantage. When UP supporters celebrated in the streets, Kromah warned that

such manifestations may result in 'opposition involvement with cutlasses in the euphoria' (Ciapha 2005). Kromah thus implied that peace and order in Liberia – the referent object – could come to be attacked by his own supporters, many of them ex-generals and combatants who still obeyed his command. He was, however, most likely deliberately vague about whether it was himself who would instigate such violence or it would erupt spontaneously from below. The diplomatic community, who held strong fears that Kromah – and other WDs – would incite violence if Johnson-Sirleaf won the elections, did not take such threats lightly (Toweh 2005). However, Kromah somewhat cunningly mixed words of violence with appeals to opposition supporters – claiming electoral fraud – to remain calm (Jabateh 2005; Analyst 2005). By playing the dual role of villain and peacemaker, he could, without taking too great risks, increase his bargaining position *vis-à-vis* the new government. This strategy proved successful: not only was Kromah appointed Director General of the Liberian Broadcasting System (LBS) by president Johnson-Sirleaf; he was later assigned Ambassador-at-Large.

Another common source of veiled threat constructions in the context of post-war Liberia has been the work and recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Soon after its establishment in May 2005, the TRC came under heavy attack from WDs. For instance, in an interview in March 2006, ex-INPFL leader Johnson – who had been elected senator for Nimba County as an independent in 2005 – declared:

> When someone asks me, 'What about the war-crimes tribunal?' I say, 'It's not going to be a good thing.' Not that I feel guilty about something that I've done, that I'm afraid to appear – no! But if you start arresting a few people for war crimes the other who wouldn't want to be arrested will go to the bush. Don't forget that the arms may not have been totally given to the peacekeepers. (Anderson 2006)

Two years later he followed up by declaring that '[m]y people, the Nimba people, will resist any attempt by the TRC to forcibly have me appeared before it (TRC) to explain circumstances in connection to Doe's death' (Analyst 2008). In May 2012 – three years after TRC published its recommendation to set up a war crimes tribunal – Johnson proclaimed that 'it is illegal if you arrest anybody here, you are opening a Pandora Box of confusion' (Informer 2012). Through his speech

acts, Johnson thus deliberately constructed a daunting scenario in which armed actors would plunge Liberia (the referent object) into new civil strife due to the actions and recommendations of TRC. By defining the source of this threat as the TRC, he could, rather ingeniously, send a message of impending doom without incriminating himself.

Similarly, at the time of the first post-war elections in Sierra Leone in 2002, the former junta group AFRC had been virtually defeated as a military force. However, this did not prevent their ex-leader Koroma – acting from an underdog position – from occasionally portraying himself as the only guarantor of peace during the election campaign. In fact, he suggested, between the lines, that unless he was able to secure a seat of political power there would be a return to war by his forces (Onishi 2002). At stake – as the referent object – was thus the hard-won peace itself. Koroma was also quoted to have threatened more explicitly to make Sierra Leone 'ungovernable' if he lost the elections (Guardian 2002). However, these attempts at securitising moves through veiled (yet occasionally less disguised) threats of violence are likely to have been received as relatively non-credible by the audience in question, the population of Sierra Leone, and his political party eventually faired poorly at the national polls. The only securitising move by Koroma that seemed to have caused a more pronounced reaction was his proclamation that there were 'cracks within the army', suggesting the lack of loyalty to the regime in power (Standard Times 2002). Having been personally implicated in two previous *coup d'états* and with strong networks in the armed forces through the large number of former AFRC soldiers who had been reinstituted in the army, Koroma's threat construction was perceived as both credible and serious.[5] This was especially the case, as there were well-known tensions between Kabbah and his government forces at the time, and another *coup d'état* was generally considered a realistic security threat in an otherwise relatively de-securitised post-war setting.

Much like in Liberia, another source of fear and resentment among some WDs in Sierra Leone in the post-war period was the announcement of the establishment of the Special Court of Sierra Leone – mandated with the task of trying those most responsible for war crimes and crimes

against humanity during the war. Ex-Kamajor leader Norman was generally considered something of a war hero in the eyes of large parts of the population, a defender of the people against both the rebel forces and renegade soldiers. As a reward for his loyal duty during the war, Kabbah appointed him as Minister of Internal Affairs after the 2002 electoral victory. While still in office, Norman had everything to gain from reinforcing the image of himself as a stout supporter of the peace process and the ongoing de-securitisation efforts. However, after the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) issued its first indictments in March 2003 and Norman was named as one of the top commanders of the armed actors who would be arrested and tried, Norman's public framing changed radically. Instead of advocating peace, Norman bitterly engaged in statements that served to securitise wartime identities (Bangura and Söderberg Kovacs 2017). His reaction to his arrest shifted between a tendency to exclaim his bitterness against the SLPP government in general and President Kabbah in particular, blaming them for betraying both him and the country, and veiled threats of re-mobilising his former militia men to undermine the peace. When asked specifically in an interview, if he felt betrayed or let down by president Kabbah, Norman is alleged to have responded:

> I feel more than being let down or betrayed […] what I feel is that the impunity which is prevailing here today through the Special Court, with state complicity, if not checked, would plunge this country into another bloody conflict even when some of us are behind bars. (Exclusive 2003)

Other securitising moves by Norman during this period were less explicit, yet had significant effects on the intended audience. In January 2004, Norman had all his external communication and visits restricted for 14 days after the Special Court had intercepted a telephone conversation between Norman and an unidentified person. According to the official statement by the court: 'The content of the intercepted conversation indicated his involvement in coordinating activities calculated to cause civil unrest in Sierra Leone […]. Effective immediately, Norman will no longer be able to make or receive telephone calls, except to his legal representatives.' At the same time as the alleged call, it was reported that a group of Kamajors in the south of the country had threatened to storm the court's prison if Norman was not set free (Reuters News 2004). According to the

Special Court Chief Prosecutor, the telephone conversation 'demonstrates that Hinga Norman may be prepared to call various factions to arms' (IRIN 2004). The incident is interesting, as it was most likely a deliberate threat construction by Norman, who probably was well aware that all his communications were closely monitored. In fact, he may even have made the calculation that, by pretending that he was trying to keep the communication secret, the threat was going to have a greater effect on the intended audience.

Former junta leader Maada Bio who returned to the country after the ending of the war and almost a decade in exile, also engaged in veiled threat constructions. He became a member of the SLPP in 2005 and joined the race for becoming the party's next presidential flag bearer in the elections scheduled for 2007. In August 2005, during the internal nomination campaign, he made a statement on Radio Democracy 98.1, where he claimed that he had no regrets concerning his involvement in the *coup d'état* that ousted the All Peoples Congress (APC) of late president Momoh in 1992 and would do likewise should the APC win the 2007 elections and 'repeat the same old APC tricks' (Concord Times 2005). The statement caused a considerable stir, and Maada Bio later had to go public to deny the allegations that he was contemplating coup plans in the event that the APC won the elections. Bio claimed in his apology that he had only described the conditions leading to the 1992 coup as appalling and that, in similar circumstances, he would not hesitate to act in the same way (Global Insight Daily Analysis 2007). This incident is typical for Bio's attempts at political navigation in the post-war period and illustrative of an overarching tendency to balance references to his wartime legacy as a military strongman and veiled threats of violence with messages of peace.

Self as the referent object of security

In both Liberia and Sierra Leone, it has been common for WDs to make proclamations about how their constituencies were in danger or risked being relegated to the margins of society. Such framing strategies have either been employed when the WDs were positioning themselves for approaching

elections, or as a move to warn their supporters of the ramifications if they were arrested for war crimes. For instance, when ex-ULIMO-K leader Kromah inaugurated the headquarters of his All Liberian Coalition Party (ALCOP) in Monrovia in October 2004, he attacked the immigration policies of the interim government. Reacting to the recent arrest of three persons from the Mandingo ethnic group – to which he also belonged – he accused the government of only pursuing Mandingos (Analyst 2004). For Kromah, who was running for president in 2005, it was strategic to attempt to securitise the Mandingo issue. By convincing his Mandingo constituency (the referent object) that they were being targeted by the sitting government, he could evoke old memories of abuse and victimisation: not only has Mandingos' right to hold Liberian citizenship historically been questioned; during the civil war some of their armed opponents sought to solve the so-called 'Mandingo problem' by killing and evicting them from Liberia.

Likewise, as part of his general onslaught against the creation of a war-crimes tribunal, ex-INPFL leader Johnson sought to (re-)securitise the ethnic divisions between Americo-Liberians – who have traditionally dominated economic and political life in Liberia and continued to do so in the post-war period through the coming to power of Sirleaf Johnson – and the so-called 'native' Liberians.[6] More specifically, Johnson – who, as a Gio, considers himself a native Liberian – tried to convince his supporters that there were ramifications for them if he was to be arrested. In an interview in May 2012, he burst into anger when asked to comment on a plan by a Liberian NGO to forward the names of those responsible for the gravest wartime abuses to the International Criminal Court (ICC). According to Johnson, efforts to put him and other wartime leaders on trial were an attempt to get rid of 'native' leaders, so that the traditional Americo-Liberian elite could continue to dominate the country (Informer 2012). Johnson thereby constructed his own arrest as a threat to native Liberians – the latter being the referent object – since it risked making the economic-political dominance of the Americo-Liberians' permanent.

In Sierra Leone, individuals from the militarily defeated rebel forces who attempted to enter the electoral game after the war were generally quite careful in their public statements during the

2002 electoral campaign. In a general context of de-securitisation, any threat constructions – particularly by individuals associated with former warring parties – that implied the risk of a costly return to violence were harshly monitored and quickly reprimanded by the international actors on the ground in cooperation with the government. Yet, at the same time, one of the few promising avenues for mobilising support in the run-up to elections was for the newly created rebel party RUFP to appeal to a general sense of marginalisation and victimisation among the large pool of ex-combatants who commonly expressed disappointment with the peace dividends. Against this background, a few attempts were made to construct threat images of the government, accusing them of discriminatory practices against the rebels and deliberate attempts to provoke them into renewed violence. For example, former RUF commander and RUFP party leader Issa Sesay, running for parliament in 2002, accused president Kabbah and the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) of trying to obliterate the ex-rebels: 'We are not being treated good. We have no funds to run the party; we had no time to campaign', and '[t]hey want to dissolve us' (Agence France-Presse 2002). These statements show that the construction of Self as the referent object was perhaps a careful and deliberate way to take advantage of their underdog position, and shift blame from Self as the key war perpetrator to Self as post-war victim.

Likewise, in Sierra Leone, after ex-junta leaders Maada Bio had succeeded in securing the position as presidential flag bearer for the SLPP in the run-up to the November 2012 elections and entered into a very competitive and at times heated electoral campaign, he often made a point of constructing an image of the government as a threat against the population of Sierra Leone, in particular, his own core electoral constituency, the Mende ethnic group in the southern and eastern districts. For example, in May 2012, Maada Bio publicly commented on a controversial 5 million USD arms deal made by the APC government in January the same year. The shipment had consisted of assault weapons, including heavy machine guns and grenade launchers, allegedly imported for the purpose of equipping the paramilitary wing of the police ahead of the elections. In responding to a question about the arms shipment, Maada Bio was quoted saying:

> We are worried about the situation because we think the government is preparing for another war, not elections […] At a time when we are talking about elections, in fact at a time when most people are not receiving regular pay, they are bringing in arms and ammunition. (Reuters 2012)

In particular, Maada Bio frequently evoked images of the government posing a threat to his own members and supporters. About two weeks before the elections, and in direct reaction to an incident during an SLPP campaign rally in Kono, he issued a press release where he expressed his concern regarding what he called 'the continuous violence and intimidation of SLPP supporters across the country'. Maada Bio claimed that, since the APC had came to power in 2007, supporters of the ruling party had been carrying out violence against his party's supporters: 'Apart from the attack on our party office and the rape of SLPP women, stabbing and killing of an SLPP member at Fourah Bay in the eastern part of Freetown about two weeks ago, among others, there has been sustained violence,' he said (Politico 2012).

Concluding discussion

We started out with the observation that there is often a competition in post-civil war countries to define the ethos permeating society. During these struggles, WDs often play a key role in sustaining a conflictive ethos by engaging in threat constructions. Such speech acts, which are often employed for the purpose of securing a post-war relevance by mobilising voters or undermining the support for their political opponents, are potentially very damaging for efforts at societal reconciliation and can at worst sow the seeds of renewed violence. It is therefore essential to understand better how WDs engage in threat constructing practices, and the micro-level dynamics of these processes in the context of post-war electoral politics. It was, furthermore, argued that securitisation theory could offer important insights into the dynamics of threat constructions by these individuals, granted that adjustments were made in regards to the analytical components – the securitising actor, the securitising move and the referent object – borrowed from the original theoretical framework.

Before we summarise our main findings from the analysis of the speech acts, some more general observations and potential limitations to our study ought to be commented upon. First, can

the statements made by our selected WDs during this time period be realistically considered securitisation moves according to the theory's original understanding, or are they just examples of normal everyday post-war politics? Based on the available empirical material, it is difficult to address this question with certitude. However, evidence suggests that the WDs' threat constructions did constitute disruptions in a more general trend towards de-securitisation in both countries. First, the WDs aggressive speech acts often received considerable attention in the media and amongst international peacemakers, as many of these individuals were already identified as potential spoilers to the peace accord. Second, it has not been possible to identify similar threat constructions by other categories of politicians, who often focused more on positive messages of reconciliation and unity as a way to promote their electoral candidacy. A more in-depth analysis that also includes closer considerations regarding the different audience reactions and the eventual outcome of each threat construction would most likely contribute to a more complete picture in this respect.

Second, are the two post-war countries from which the WDs are selected sufficiently comparable for an analysis of this kind? Even if Liberia and Sierra Leone share many contextual similarities, such as protracted civil wars, weak state institutions and party structures, and large-scale UN peacekeeping operations in their respective post-war periods, there are also important differences. For instance, while the outcome of the civil war in Sierra Leone *de facto* constituted a victory for the incumbent SLPP government and its military allies, the outcome was less clear-cut in Liberia, where all the armed factions eventually agreed to share power in a transitional power sharing arrangement, and president Charles Taylor was forced into exile. However, since there were no major differences between the discursive behaviour of Liberian and Sierra Leonean WDs and threat constructions were a commonly employed strategy among WDs in both countries, there are few reasons to believe that these country-specific factors bias the results of our analysis in any significant way.

What insights are gained by analysing WDs' threat constructions through a theoretical framework inspired by securitisation theory, but adjusted to our specific empirical setting? Based on

the experiences of seven WDs in Liberia and Sierra Leone, it is possible to identify four main takeaways. First, as proposed in our theoretical point of departure, WDs' securitising moves often take the form of *veiled threats of violence* where a WD constructs a threat image that is hypothetical. For example, should they fare poorly at the polls, should a war crimes tribunal be established, or should some other political competitor win the election, the fragile post-conflict equilibrium may be disrupted and may lead to renewed violence or even a return to civil war. These scenarios are portrayed as 'veiled threats', in the sense that the securitising move is framed in indirect terms and includes a threatening statement from the WD himself, often in the form of the suggested solution to the problem. There might, of course, be several reasons for this choice of threat construction. One interpretation is that publicly declaring something as a threat is too risky in a post-conflict context, and the framing therefore tends to be indirect, hence, 'veiled'. This is in line with what has been argued by Hansen (2000) on the 'silent security dilemma'. In our cases in particular, the peace processes received a significant amount of international attention and the establishment of far-reaching peacekeeping operations, leaving little room, and potentially high costs, for explicitly threating statements and behaviour. Interestingly, it appears that it is often WDs with waning influence that chose to engage in veiled threat constructions. It could be argued that by employing such rhetoric they hope to remind their constituencies, political opponents and international actors of their continued political relevance. If true, this has important implications for the literature on peacebuilding and spoiler management (see *e.g.* Stedman 1997); if peacemakers only focus on the most verbally aggressive actors, they risk overlooking other elites who may possess more power and resolve to engage in violence.

Second, and again in line with what was proposed at the outset of this study, WDs often depict *Self as the referent object of security.* In other words, the WDs often portray themselves or his/her constituency as under threat. This finding highlights the malleability of what constitutes the referent object in post-civil war societies. Rather than portraying the state or nation as being threatened, the referent object is often the WD's own identity group or political constituency. Such

actions can be an electoral tactic amongst 'underdog' WDs whose constituencies are shrinking as traditional followers acquire new identities and allegiances. By seeking to install fear amongst the latter, WDs may hope to pull fledging clients back and ensure continued political relevance. Framing self as the referent object of security is also possibly a calculated strategy to shift blame from Self as war perpetrator to Self as post-war victim. The latter strategy can be particularly useful when Self is socially shunned due to previously committed atrocities. As there are generally many more WDs that are struggling for their political survival in the periphery of politics than those that actually make it to the limelight of executive power, this type of rhetoric is voiced frequently. From a peacebuilding perspective, this form of political speech act poses a significant challenge to domestic and international peace custodians in war-torn and polarised societies.

Although veiled threats of violence and efforts to frame Self as the referent object of security are analytically distinct in regards to the specific framing of the threat – the content of the securitising move and the referent object – they are closely interlinked empirically and most WDs engage in both types, sometimes simultaneously, or switch between them. What they have in common is a threat framing that is intrinsically linked to the WDs' military past or wartime cleavages and events. While these speech acts have been voiced by the WDs throughout the electoral cycle in order to navigate the post-war landscape, they have been more commonly resorted to when the circumstances are believed to challenge the WDs' political survival, for example by the idea of a war crimes tribunal or a power shift favouring political opponents.

The third takeaway is that WDs' threat framing concerns almost exclusively the (re-)securitisation of war-related issues rather than new security issues exclusive to the post-war context. In other words, and in line with what has been argued by MacKenzie (2009: 260), 'the hierarchy of policy priorities [are still] associated with traditional conceptions of security'. Thus, the securitising moves by the WDs are rarely based on new issues of concern to the general peacebuilding contexts in Sierra Leone and Liberia, such as poverty, corruption, or post-war development, but are primarily linked to wartime actors, identities and events. Both these aspects of

the securitising move – *i.e.* indirect framing and absence of 'new' security threats – clearly highlight Wilkinson's claim (2007) that the securitisation framework needs to be contextualised in order to be applicable to various empirical settings. The securitising speech act in our investigated contexts might be voiced less clearly, and expressed less straightforwardly in identifying a threat image, but this does not mean that the threat construction does not exist. On the contrary, securitisation measures in the post-war context can have far-reaching consequences in terms of polarisation of identities, undermining societal reconciliation and the return to violence. Previous research has highlighted the risks associated with a premature closure of the peacebuilding process, where peacetime politics becomes a continuation of wartime dynamics with other means (*e.g.* Söderberg Kovacs 2008).

A fourth, and final, finding is that there is an inextricable linkage between WDs' own identity, the power relations between the different actors competing for electoral influence within the same political space, and the structure of the speech act. This linkage between the WDs' identity and the structure of the threat framing is drawn from the reading of the two post-conflict settings. Securitising moves implying violent behaviour are continuously mixed with peaceful and democratic statements. This signifies different types of constructions of Self, and the WD can assume the role of a particular Self depending on what the situation requires; for instance, 'the underdog identity' to gain sympathy from the electorate or the dual role of 'villain and peacemaker' to increase the bargaining position *vis-à-vis* the government. Disguising inflammatory rhetoric in peaceful framing strategies portrays the Self as the 'statesman', someone who can bridge societal cleavages and unite former warring identities. This observation has important implications for the literature on peacebuilding and post-war democratisation. When WDs employ contradictory speech acts they are not necessarily seeking to ignite new violence, but rather maximise their political leverage over other post-war elites. When faced with such shape shifters, it is therefore crucial for peacemakers not to isolate them mechanically from forums of dialogue. If they do, there is always the risk that WDs become the total spoilers they are often assumed to be (Stedman 1997). We

believe that this corroborates what has been proposed by prior works on securitisation, *i.e.* that the agent and the act are interlinked, and that central aspects of agency lie in 'the power position and the personal identity of who 'does' security' (Balzacq 2005: 178). Developing this claim further, we conclude that the contextual setting is central in shaping agency as it influences both the speech act and the role of the securitising actor.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Anders Sjögren, the editors of *Journal of International Relations and Development* and the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article. This article would not have been possible without the generous financial assistance provided by Swedish Research Council, Development Research Section.

Notes

[1] It is important to note that, in some contexts, WDs are heads of state, such as Paul Kagame (Rwanda), Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe) and Charles Taylor (Liberia).

[2] FACTIVA is a news search engine. See https://global.factiva.com/factivalogin/login.asp?productname=global.

[3] For detailed accounts of the civil wars in Liberia, see Ellis (1999), Gerdes (2013) and Utas (2003).

[4] For more information on the civil war in Sierra Leone, see Gberie (2005), Keen (2005) and Richards (1996).

[5] Koroma's PLP eventually received a large proportion of votes from members of the armed forces, who voted separately in the 2002 elections (Kandeh 2003).

[6] From its creation in 1820 to the 1980 coup, Liberia was ruled by Americo-Liberians. They are ancestors of freed American, West Indian and Congolese slaves, and constitute approximately 5% of the country's population. Yet, in the post-war period, they still retain an unproportional amount of political-economic influence. 'Native' Liberians usually refer to the 15 officially recognised groups who predated the Americo-Liberians in the territory now known as Liberia.

References

Agence France-Presse (2005) 'Liberia Rebel Leader Sekou Conneh to Stand in Presidential Poll', Paris, 28 April.

allAfrica (2006) 'Liberia: Text of Inaugural Address by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia', 17 January.

Agence France-Presse (2002) 'RUFP party leader accuses UN', Paris, 11 May .

Analyst (2009) 'Umpire or Inciter – TRC under Spotlight', 26 June.

Analyst (2008) 'Prince Johnson Warns TRC to Stop Bothering Him', 1 February.

Analyst (2005) 'Sekou Conneh's Olive Branch', 18 November.

Analyst (2004) 'Kromah Criticizes Immigration Policy', 5 October.

Anderson, Jon L. (2006) 'After the Warlords; Letter from Liberia', *New Yorker*, 27 March.

Balzacq, Thierry (2011) 'A theory of securitization. Origins, core assumptions and variants', in Thierry Balzacq, ed., *Securitization Theory. How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, 1-30, Milton Park: Routledge.

Balzacq, Thierry (2005) 'The three faces of securitization: Political agency, audience and context', *European journal of international relations* **11**(2): 171–201.

Bangura, Ibrahim and Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs (2017) 'Shape Shifters in the Struggle for Survival: Warlord Democrats in Sierra Leone', in Anders Themnér, ed., *Warlord Democrats in Africa*: *Ex-Military Leaders and Electoral Politics*, 177–98, London: Zed Books.

Bar-Tal, Daniel (2000) *Shared beliefs in a society: Social psychological analysis*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Bilgin, Pinar (2011) 'The politics of studying securitization? The Copenhagen School in Turkey', *Security Dialogue* **42**(4–5): 399–412.

Bledsoe, Caroline (1990) 'No Success without Struggle: Social Mobility and Hardship for Foster Children in Sierra Leone', *Man* **25**(1): 70–88.

Brosché, Johan and Kristine Höglund (2017) 'Riek Machar: Warlord-Doctor in South Sudan', in Anders Themnér, ed., *Warlord Democrats in Africa: Ex-Military Leaders and Electoral Politics*, 199-221, London: Zed Books.

Buur, Lars, Steffen Jensen and Finn Stepputat (2007) *The Security Development Nexus. Expressions of sovereignty and securitization in southern Africa*, Cape Town: HSRC Press.

Buzan, Barry, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde (1998) *Security: a new framework for analysis*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

Ciapha, Welemongia (2005) 'Kromah Threatens Up Partisans', *AllAfrica Global Media*, 23 November.

Concord Times (2005) 'RSLAF Angry With Maada Bio', 24 August.

Curley, Melissa and Siu-lun Wong (2008) *Security and Migration in Asia. The Dynamics of Securitisation*, Milton Park: Routledge.

Doyle, Michael W. and Nicholas Sambanis (2006) *Making War and Building Peace: United Nations Peace Operations*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ellis, Stephen (1999) *The Mask of Anarchy. The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, New York: New York University Press.

Exclusive (2003) 'ICG', 27 May: 7, footnote 41.

Fischer, Jonathan (2014) 'When it pays to be a 'fragile state': Uganda's use and abuse of a dubious concept', *Third World Quarterly* **35**(2): 316–32.

Fischer, Jonathan and David M. Anderson (2015) 'Authoritarianism and the securitization of development in Africa', *International Affairs* **91**(1): 131–51.

Gberie, Lansana (2005*) A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Gerdes, Felix (2013) *The Political Economy of War and Peace in Liberia*, Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag.

Global Insight Daily Analysis (2007) 'Former Military Leader in Sierra Leone Denies Coup Plan Rumours', 31 July.

Greenwood, Maja T. and Ole Waever (2013) 'Copenhagen – Cairo on a roundtrip: A security theory meets the revolution', *Security Dialogue* **44**(5–6): 485–506.

Guardian (2002) 'Voters prepare to avenge the agony of a nation', 14 May.

Haacke, Jürgen and Paul D. Williams (2008) 'Regional arrangements, securitization and transnational security challenges: The African Union and the Association of Southeast Asian nations compared', *Security Studies* **17**: 775–809.

Hansen, Lene (2000) 'The Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* **29**(2): 285–306.

Houreld, Katherine (2005) 'Liberian Ex-Rebel Leader Launches Presidential Bid', *Reuters News*, September 2.

Huysmans, Jeff (2000) 'The European Union and the securitization of migration', *Journal of Common Market Studies* **38**(5): 751–77.

Ilgit, Asli and Audie Klotz (2014) 'How far does 'societal security' travel? Securitization in South African immigration policies', *Security Dialogue* **45**(2): 137–55.

Informer (2012) 'Interview Prince Johnson', 28 May.

IRIN News (2006) 'Post-War Justice Stirs Division', 4 August.

IRIN News (2005a) 'LIBERIA: Former rebel leader to run for president', 27 April.

IRIN News (2005b) 'Presidential Hopefuls for 11 October Polls', 9 October.

IRIN News (2004) 'Special Court Accuses Indicted Militia Chief of Inciting Civil Unrest', 22 January.

Jabateh, Mike (2005) 'S.A., Ghanaian Govts Didn't Sanction Weah's Self Declaration' – Says Alhaji Kromah', *Analyst*, 14 December.

James, Wendy (1997) 'The Names of Fear: History, Memory and the Ethnography of Feeling Among Uduk Refugees', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* **3**(1): 115–31.

Jarstad, Anna and Timothy Sisk (2008) *From War to Democracy: Dilemmas of Peacebuilding*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kandeh, Jimmy D. (2003) 'Sierra Leone's post-conflict elections of 2002', *Journal of Modern African Studies* **41**(2): 189–216.

Kaufman, Stuart (2006) 'Escaping the Symbolic Political Traps: Reconciliation Initiatives and Conflict Resolution in Ethnic Wars', *Journal of Peace Research* **43**(2): 201–18.

Keen, David (2005) *Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone*, New York: Palgrave.

Lyons, Terrence (2005) *Demilitarizing Politics: elections on the uncertain road to peace*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Manning, Carrie (2004) 'Armed opposition groups into political parties: comparing Bosnia, Kosovo, and Mozambique', *Studies in Comparative International Development* **39**(1): 54–76.

MacKenzie, Megan (2009) 'Securitization and desecuritization: Female soldiers and the reconstruction of women in post-conflict Sierra Leone', *Security Studies* **18**: 241–61.

Melville, Christopher (2005) 'Election 2005: Former Liberian Rebel Leader Announces Intention to Run for President', 28 April.

Onishi, N. (2002) 'For Sierra Leone Ballot, Hope Trumps Despair', *New York Times*, 13 May.

Paris, Roland (2004) *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Polgreen, Lydia (2006) 'Master Plan Drawn in Blood', *New York Times*, 2 April.

Politico (2012) 'Bio expresses grave concerns', 31 October.

Richards, Paul (1996) *Fighting for the Rainforest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*, Oxford and Portsmouth: James Currey and Heinemann.

Roe, P. (2008) 'Actor, Audience(s) and Emergency Measures: Securitization and the UK's Decision to Invade Iraq', *Security Dialogue* **39**(6): 279–94.

Sawyer, Amos (2008) 'Patterns in Liberia's Post-Conflict Politics: Observations from the 2005 Elections', *African Affairs* **427**(107): 177–99.

Sengupta, Somini (2003), 'Calling for Reconciliation, New Liberian Leader Takes Office', *New York Times*, 15 October.

Sieh, Rodney D. (2005) 'Is Liberia Ready for Another Rebel-Turned President? Sekou Conneh Thinks So', *All Africa*, 28 April.

Sjöstedt, Roxanna (2007) 'The Discursive Origins of a Doctrine: Norms, Identity, and Securitization under Harry S. Truman and George W. Bush', *Foreign Policy Analysis* **3**(3): 233–54.

Sjöstedt, Roxanna (2008) 'Exploring the Construction of Threat: The Securitization of HIV/AIDS in Russia', *Security Dialogue* **39**(1): 7–29.

Sjöstedt, Roxanna (2013) 'Ideas, Identity, and Internalization. Explaining Securitizing Moves', *Cooperation and Conflict* **48**(1): 143–64.

Standard Times (2003) 'Kabbah Accused – Chief Norman Complains of Ill-Treatment', 13 April.

Standard Times (2002) 'Cracks in the Army', 22 May.

Stedman, Stephen J. (1997) 'Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes', *International Security* **22**(2): 5–53.

Stritzel, Holger (2014) *Security in translation: Securitization theory and the localization of threat*, Houndsmill, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Söderberg Kovacs, Mimmi (2014) 'Bringing in the Good, the Bad and the Ugly into the Peace Fold: The Transformation of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces after the Lomé Peace Agreement', in Roy Licklider, ed., *New Armies from Old: Merging Competing Military Forces after Civil Wars*, 195–211, Georgetown: Georgetown University Press.

Söderberg Kovacs, Mimmi (2008) 'When Rebels Change Their Stripes: Armed Insurgents in Post-War Politics', in Anna Jarstad and Timothy Sisk, eds, *From War to Democracy: Dilemmas of Peacebuilding*, 134–56, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Söderberg Kovacs, Mimmi (2007) *From Rebellion to Politics: The Transformation of Rebel Group to Political Parties in Civil War Peace Processes*, PhD dissertation, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University.

Themnér, Anders (2011) *Violence in Post-Conflict Societies: Remarginalization, Remobilizers and Relationships*, London & New York: Routledge.

Themnér, Anders, ed. (2017) *Warlord Democrats in Africa: Ex-Military Leaders and Electoral Politics*, London: Zed Books.

Toweh, Alphonso (2005) 'UPDATE 2-Liberia Mediator Cautions Weah over Poll Dispute', *Reuters News*, 16 November.

Utas, Mats (2003) *Sweet Battlefields: Youth and the Liberian Civil War*, PhD dissertation, Department of Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University.

Utas, Mats, ed. (2012) *African conflicts and informal power: Big Men and networks*, London: Zed Books.

Voice of America (2005a) LIBERIA/POL (L-O), Press Releases and Documents, 12 May.

Voice of America (2005b) LIBERIA / POL (L-O), Press Releases and Documents, 28 May.

Voice of America (2005c) *Liberian Ex-Rebel Campaigns for Rights of Former Combatants*, Press Releases and Documents, 6 October.

Vuori, Juha A. (2008) 'Illocutionary logic and strands of securitization: Applying the theory of securitization to the study of non-democratic political orders', *European Journal of International Relations* **14**(1): 65–99.

Waugh, Coli (2011) *Charles Taylor and Liberia*, London: Zed Books.

Wilkinson, Claire (2007) 'The Copenhagen School on tour in Kyrgyzstan: Is securitization theory useable outside Europe?', *Security Dialogue* **38**(1): 5–25.

About the Authors

Roxanna Sjöstedt is Senior Lecturer at the Department of Political Science at Lund University. She holds a PhD in Peace and Conflict Research from Uppsala University (2010). Her main areas of research and teaching are securitisation, international relations theory, security studies, non-military threats images, and international interventions. She has previously published on these topics in *Journal of Peace Research*, *Security Dialogue*, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, *Cooperation and Conflict*, and *International Relations* as well as in edited book volumes.

Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs is Head of Research at the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA). She holds a PhD from Uppsala University (2007) and has a background as Senior Researcher in the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University and at the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI). She has conducted research and published on non-state actors in civil wars, rebel-to-party transformations, conflict resolution processes, and post-conflict democratisation, with particular focus on Sierra Leone. She has published on these topics in several edited volumes and in journals such as *International Peacekeeping*, *International Studies Review*, and *Review of International Studies*.

Anders Themnér is Assistant Professor in the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University and Senior Researcher at the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI). He holds a PhD from Uppsala University (2008). His areas of research include among other things disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes, ex-combatant violence, informal military networks in post-conflict societies, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding, with a particular focus on Liberia. Themnér has published on these topics in a monograph published by Routledge, an edited volume by Zed Books and in journals such as *Journal of Comparative Politics* and *Security Studies*.