

Bush Generals and Small Boy Battalions

Military Cohesion in Liberia and Beyond

Ilmari Käihkö



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Abstract

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All organizations involved in war are concerned with military cohesion. Yet previous studies have only investigated cohesion in a very narrow manner, focusing almost solely on Western state militaries or on micro-level explanations. This dissertation argues for the need to broaden this perspective. It focuses on three classic sources of cohesion – coercion, compensation and constructs (such as identity and ideology) – and investigates their relevance in the Second Liberian Civil War (1999-2003). More specifically, this dissertation consists of an inquiry of how the conflict's three main military organizations – Charles Taylor's Government of Liberia (GoL), the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) – drew on these three sources to foster cohesion. Based on thirteen months of ethnographic fieldwork with former combatants, this dissertation contains five parts: an introduction, which focuses on issues of theory and method, and four essays that investigate the three sources of cohesion in the three organizations. Essay I focuses on the LURD rebels, and provides an insider account of their strategy. It shows that even decentralized movements like the LURD can execute strategy, and contends that the LURD fought its fiercest battles not against the government, but to keep itself together. Essay II focuses on coercion, and counters the prevailing view of African rebels' extensive use of coercion to keep themselves together. Since extreme coercion in particular remained illegitimate, its use would have decreased, rather than increased, cohesion. Essay III investigates the government militias to whom warfighting was subcontracted. In a context characterized by a weak state and fragmented social organization, compensation may have remained the only available source of cohesion. Essay IV investigates identities as sources of cohesion. It argues that while identities are a powerful cohesive source, they must be both created and maintained to remain relevant. Taken together, this dissertation argues for a more comprehensive approach to the investigation of cohesion, and one that also takes into account mezzo- and macro-level factors.

Keywords: Coercion, cohesion, compensation, ethnography, identity, ideology, Liberia, micro-dynamics of civil war, military sociology, strategy

Ilmari Käihkö, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Box 514, Uppsala University, SE-75120 Uppsala, Sweden.

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War is my food.

No men.

No war.

Graffiti in wartime Liberia

List of Essays

This thesis is based on the following papers, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

- I Kähkö, Ilmari. (2015) ‘Taylor must go’ - the strategy of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 26(2):248–270
- II Kähkö, Ilmari. (2015) “No die, no rest”? Coercive Discipline in Liberian Military Organisations. *Africa Spectrum*, 50(2):3–29
- III Kähkö, Ilmari. Contracting War in West Africa. Cohesion and the business of war in Charles Taylor’s Liberia. Unpublished manuscript. An earlier version was presented at the conference “The Origins of Military Cohesion: Broadening the Perspective”, Swedish Defence University, December 4th, 2015.
- IV Kähkö, Ilmari. (2016). Mystical and Modern Transformations in the Liberian Civil War. In *Transforming Warriors: The Ritual Organization of Military Force*, edited by Peter Haldén and Peter Jackson. London/New York: Routledge.

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The origins of military cohesion: Broadening the perspective

Introduction

Welcome to Liberia, scene of one of the wackiest, and most ruthless, of Africa's uncivil wars. It's a war with a general named Mosquito, a war where soldiers get high on dope and paint their fingernails bright red before heading off to battle. It's a war where combatants sometimes don women's wigs, pantyhose, even Donald Duck Halloween masks before committing some of the world's most unspeakable atrocities against their enemies. It's the only war that hosts a unit of soldiers who strip off their clothes before going into battle and calls itself 'the Butt Naked Brigade.' It's a war where young child soldiers carry teddy bears and plastic baby dolls in one hand and AK-47s in the other. It's a war where fighters smear their faces with makeup and mud in the belief that 'juju,' West African magic, will protect them from the enemy's bullets. It might be easy to dismiss Liberia as an oddball case if the consequences of the continuous warfare weren't so brutal...¹

The rebel boy soldiers not only shot people to death on any whim that seized them, they stole everything of value before hacking women and children to death. Rape was commonplace, too... Witnesses also reported numerous instances in which rebels, over 70 per cent of whom were aged twelve to seventeen, drank the blood of their victims and ate parts of their bodies.²

These graphic accounts illustrate how contemporary warfare in Liberia, and more broadly in Africa, is often perceived. Emphasising that the situation is deteriorating rather than improving, one journalist observed "the decline of the classic wars by freedom fighters and the proliferation of something else – something wilder, messier, more predatory, and harder to define." As a result, "the continent is plagued by countless nasty little wars, which in many ways aren't really wars at all. There are no front lines, no battlefields, no clear conflict zones, and no distinctions between combatants and

¹ Richburg, Keith. 1998. *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa*. San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt Brace, p. 134.

² Edgerton, Robert. 2002. *Africa's Armies: From Honor to Infamy: A History from 1791 to the Present*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, pp. 160-161.

civilians... Many of the armed groups that operate in this atmosphere of near-complete breakdown of state power are driven by raw greed and brutality, without any pretenses of an ideological excuse for their violence. They have no cause, and no plans to build a political organization of any sort.”³ Nostalgia regarding a “cause” in these conflicts contrasts with previous rebellions, where at least some semblance of ideology was publicly professed.⁴ According to this viewpoint, without a core ideology the warring parties lost all pretence of cohesion, and lacked discipline and order. This led to poor organization of force, and resulted in wars that were difficult to define.⁵ To take one prominent example, Mary Kaldor saw that whereas “old” wars were “a construction of the centralized, “rationalized”, hierarchically ordered, territorial modern state”, “new” wars were fought by more amorphous actors who blurred distinctions between war, organized criminality and systematic violations of human rights.⁶ Robert Kaplan’s widely cited account described West Africa as a criminally anarchic place where “a premodern formlessness governs the battlefield, evoking the wars in medieval Europe prior to the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, which ushered in the era of organized nation-states.” To this author, West Africa epitomised the coming anarchy, a future that would “eventually... be that of most of the rest of the world.”⁷ In summary, these bleak – if not outright dystopian – views of the non-Western “other” emphasise an anarchic Hobbesian state of nature and resonate with the horrors of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.⁸

This dissertation introduces a different kind of Liberia, and does not attempt to disgust the reader with the descriptions of “pretty much the worst

³ Gettleman, Jeffrey. 2012. “Africa’s Dirty Little Wars”. *New York Review of Books*, March 8, 2012.

⁴ Reno, William. 2011. *Warfare in Independent Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 167.

⁵ Some attempts include Lind, William, Keith Nightengale, John Schmitt, Joseph Sutton, and Gary Wilson. 1989. “The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation” *Marine Corps Gazette* 73 (10): 22–26; Cerny, Philip. 1998. “Neomedievalism, Civil War and the New Security Dilemma: Globalisation as Durable Disorder.” *Civil Wars* 1 (1): 36–64; Duffield, Mark. 1998. “Post-modern Conflict: Warlords, Post-adjustment States and Private Protection.” *Civil Wars* 1 (1): 65–102; Duffield, Mark. 2002. “War as a Network Enterprise: The New Security Terrain and Its Implications.” *Cultural Values* 6 (1-2): 153–65. Perhaps the most lasting contribution came in Van Creveld, Martin. 1991. *The Transformation of War*. New York: Free Press. The recent debate regarding so-called “hybrid warfare” also illustrates these problems of definition. See Kähkö, Ilmari. 2016. “All Krigföring är Hybrid [All Warfare is Hybrid].” *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*.

⁶ Kaldor, Mary. 2012. *New & Old Wars*. 3rd edition. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 17.

⁷ Kaplan, Robert. 2000. *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War*. New York: Random House, pp. 8-9. The article on which this book is based on was faxed to all US embassies around the world.

⁸ For an enduring criticism of some of these views, see Richards, Paul. 1996. *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth & Resources in Sierra Leone*. London: International African Institute, pp. xiii–xxiv.

that human beings can do to one another” that are mentioned above.⁹ Instead, understanding is here sought in a more dispassionate manner. Focusing on the Second Liberian Civil War fought in 1999-2003, this dissertation investigates the three actors that fought for power: President Charles Taylor’s Government of Liberia (GoL) and the rebel movements, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). In contrast with the anarchic view that depicts rebel movements (not only but especially) in Africa as formless, uncontrollable and undisciplined, or as the outright antithesis of the conventional forces in the West, this dissertation views these three actors as military organisations, or organisations specialised and engaged in organised violence. Departing from the understanding of war as organized violence, Siniša Malešević points out that the Hobbesian

war of all against all is an empirical impossibility: as any successful violent action entails organization and as organised action requires collective coordination, hierarchy and the delegation of tasks, all warfare is inevitably a social event.¹⁰

In other words, war, by definition, cannot be anarchic, as it requires cooperation, leadership and organization. From this perspective Liberia cannot be dismissed as an outlying, or “oddball” case: like all other military organisations around the world, those in Liberia still needed to strategize, and to unite individuals into a collective through fostering cohesion.¹¹

In this dissertation cohesion is defined as “the state of unity in an organization”. Cohesion thus results in turning “I” into “we”. And though Liberia may not appear a likely context for investigating military cohesion, with its brutal, drugged, and ill-disciplined child soldiers rampaging without any obvious source of cohesion, this dissertation argues precisely that it offers an important case to investigate mechanisms of cohesion. While the three organizations investigated herein were clearly not anarchic, even a moderate view must recognise that Liberia offers a context characterized by the lack of a centralized state and a society fragmented along ethnic and religious lines. Nevertheless, this dissertation argues that, although this context differs greatly from that of Western examples of military

⁹ Richburg 1998, p. xiv.

¹⁰ Malešević, Siniša. 2010. *The Sociology of War and Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 3.

¹¹ For previous literature on Liberia, see Ellis, Stephen. 2007. *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*. 2nd edition. London: Hurst; Reno, William. 2007. “Liberia: The LURDs of the New Church.” In *African Guerrillas: Raging Against the Machine*, edited by Morten Bøås and Kevin Dunn, 69–80. London: Lynne Rienner; Utas, Mats. 2003. *Sweet Battlefields: Youth and the Liberian Civil War*. Phd. diss.: Uppsala University.

organisation, the militias, rebels, and state militaries in Africa have also managed to foster military cohesion, despite their frequent lack of an obvious ideology.¹²

While cohesion is a central aspect of any group or organization, its importance is magnified for those engaged in war. As war is characterized by the four elements of danger, physical effort, uncertainty and chance,¹³ military organizations face unique problems when it comes to collective action. While cohesion is necessary for any organization to exist in the first place, military organizations are especially reliant on cohesion to perform. Furthermore, their core activity of employing organized violence entails the risk of losing life and limb, which invariably tests a group's cohesion. As the 19th century French military theorist Ardant du Picq claimed, it is the human heart that is ultimately the "starting point in all matters pertaining to war."¹⁴ And because the human heart so easily wavers in the face of danger, the importance of fusing and organizing individuals into a single collective with a firm will to fight is undeniable. Carl von Clausewitz provided the following analogy: "the physical are almost no more than the wooden handle, whilst the moral are the noble metal, the real bright-polished weapon."¹⁵ Just as fighting with a handle or a blade alone is futile, creating and maintaining cohesion becomes just as important a task for military organizations as providing the material means necessary for fighting wars. At the very least, it has been established that with everything else being equal, the side with more cohesion wins.¹⁶ Cohesion thus wins wars, brings peace and overthrows governments. Furthermore, it can influence atrocities committed,¹⁷ as well as help to explain the emergence of spoilers after non-state military organizations fragment.¹⁸ The centrality of cohesion in military organizations also extends to the post-conflict period. To give just two examples of the impact of cohesion on peace building, transitions from violent rebel movements to non-violent political parties¹⁹ and the design of

¹² For other literature on African rebels, see for instance Boås, Morten, and Kevin Dunn, eds. 2007. *African Guerrillas: Raging Against the Machine*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner; Clapham, Christopher, ed. 1998. *African Guerrillas*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press.

¹³ Clausewitz, Carl von. 2004. *On War*. New York: Barnes and Noble, p. 39.

¹⁴ Du Picq, Ardant. 2013. *Battle Studies - Ancient and Modern Battle*. Forgotten Books, pp. 30-31.

¹⁵ Clausewitz 2004, p. 138.

¹⁶ Du Picq 2013, p. 34; Henderson, William. 1993. *Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat*. Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, p. xx.

¹⁷ Chirot, Daniel, and Clark McCauley. 2006. *Why Not Kill Them All? The Logic and Prevention of Mass Political Murder*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, pp. 57-58.

¹⁸ Pearlman, Wendy, and Kathleen Cunningham. 2012. "Nonstate Actors, Fragmentation, and Conflict Processes." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56 (1): 3-15.

¹⁹ Söderberg-Kovacs, Mimmi. 2008. "When Rebels Change Their Stripes: Armed Insurgents in Post-War Politics." In *From War to Democracy: Dilemmas of Peacebuilding*, edited by Anna Jarstad and Timothy Sisk, 134-56. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs²⁰ both require understanding of internal dynamics and cohesion of armed organizations. Ultimately, cohesion is also connected to the responsibility for crimes committed by subordinates, as seen in post-conflict trials in Nuremberg and after.²¹ Consequently, cohesion is inherently relevant to policy makers, and across several academic disciplines.

This dissertation examines how three Liberian military organizations created cohesion during the Second Liberian Civil War. This investigation is situated at the intersection of two bodies of literature: those investigating state militaries, and alternatively those describing civil wars and rebel movements. While both have touched upon questions related to cohesion, the results have thus far illuminated only part of the picture. This dissertation is founded on the viewpoint that the combination of these two literatures will broaden existing perspectives of cohesion, and will provide a more nuanced understanding of how cohesion was formed during the Second Liberian Civil War. It is worth noting here that both bodies of literature suffer from major gaps. This dissertation therefore also aims to bring together research from each field that may complement the other. For instance, the literature on state militaries has almost exclusively focused on Western cases, and is furthermore based on assumptions that resemble early sociological writings from the late 19th and early 20th century regarding the question of what keeps societies together. Here, the literature on civil war can enrich the field with new cases, which may allow for the formation of broader theories that apply to all military organizations. The literature on civil wars and rebel movements in turn concentrates predominantly on non-Western, non-state armed groups such as militias and rebels. Since these cases have been more difficult to investigate at the micro-level, groups' internal dynamics have to some extent remained "black boxes".²² While this literature has addressed the causes of war and the initial mobilization of force into non-state armed groups, scholars have paid less attention to how these groups hold themselves together. Contributing to this is the fact that these scholars rarely consider such armed groups as organizations specialized in the use of organized violence. As a result, the literature on civil wars and rebel movements provides little description of how military functions and war influence movements' organization and cohesion. This is a gap that the literature on state militaries can help to fill.

²⁰ Themnér, Anders. 2011. *Violence in Post-Conflict Societies: Remarginalization, Remobilizers and Relationships*. London: Routledge.

²¹ Kelsall, Tim. 2009. *Culture Under Cross-Examination: International Justice and the Special Court for Sierra Leone*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

²² Eck, Kristine. 2010. *Raising Rebels: Participation and Recruitment in Civil War*. Phd. diss.: Uppsala University, p. 34; Weinstein, Jeremy. 2007. *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 34-39.

The three Liberian organizations described herein are investigated through qualitative methods, including 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork with former combatants in Liberia. Depending on one's perspective, there are two ways to justify the choice of this context. Since the literature that concentrates on state militaries has neglected the investigation of non-Western cases (as described above), Liberia offers a typical example of what is missing: analysis of a non-Western setting that is characterized by a weak state and a fragmented society. Considering that the vast majority of contemporary wars take place in these kinds of contexts,²³ investigation of the civil war between the forces of the Government of Liberia, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy and Movement for Democracy in Liberia is not only useful, but necessary. From the perspective of the civil war literature, these three factions are typical cases. The contribution to this literature comes both from the length of fieldwork, and the way the cases are treated: the three factions are examined as belonging to a broader category of military organizations. Combining the research on cohesion from both bodies of literature enables cross-pollination, as well as the broad use of comparative historical material. Treating the factions in Liberia as military organizations also emphasises the prevalent view of cohesion as a universal factor that influences all organizations engaged in warfare. This approach allows the dissertation to make at least five distinct contributions.

The first contribution concerns the concept of cohesion. While scholars in several disciplines have recognised the importance of cohesion, this importance has been understood in different and sometimes incompatible ways. This dissertation develops the concept further, arguing that cohesion cannot be understood as simply military effectiveness or bonds between individuals, and that it more broadly concerns unity in an organization.

Second, this dissertation investigates cohesion in a novel empirical context. While previous studies have examined cohesion in Western state militaries, this dissertation probes the utility of concepts of cohesion for understanding state and non-state militaries functioning in areas lacking a strong central state and a unified society. Doing so helps to speak to the scope of extant theories of military cohesion.

Third, the dissertation derives new theoretical insights that transcend traditional theories of cohesion. In particular, this dissertation finds that the three classical sources of cohesion suggested by previous literature – coercion, compensation and constructs (such as identity and ideology) – are best understood in interaction with each other. For example, coercion and compensation cannot be studied in isolation from each other when salaries and other material benefits are necessary for survival. Similarly, coercion is

²³ Themnér, Lotta, and Peter Wallensteen. 2014. "Armed Conflicts, 1946–2013." *Journal of Peace Research* 51 (4): 541–54.

difficult if the participants' normative constructs deem it illegitimate. These findings suggest that classical theories of cohesion should not be investigated independently of each other.

Fourth, this dissertation addresses current limited understandings of the three military organizations in the Second Liberian Civil War, including their formation, internal dynamics, use of force and attempts to manage and foster cohesion. With its foundations in fieldwork, the dissertation proffers new empirical data regarding this conflict and thus improves understandings of Liberian and West African history.

Fifth, following on from this dissertation's contribution to regional historical understanding is its relevance to policy makers. For example, the new empirical data contained herein may help to build a shared historical narrative in Liberia. This can contribute to bridging existing cleavages, and thus advance long-term peace building.

This introduction focuses on questions of theory and method in order to prepare the ground for the four ensuing essays that investigate different aspects of cohesion in Liberia. The initial sections discuss current discourses on cohesion, and identify the omissions in the literature that this dissertation seeks to address. The third section presents the theoretical framework and defines three sources of cohesion: coercion, compensation and constructs. The fourth section connects this theoretical framework to the research methods used in this research. The fifth section presents the four essays, and the sixth and final section discusses the main findings and offers suggestions for future research.

The origins of military cohesion

This section traces the origins of military cohesion, and how the concept has developed during the past five hundred years. It is in the military context especially that the concept of cohesion has been used to describe a core aspect of organizations' functioning and sustainability. In fact, for military organizations, the creation of cohesion has been a pressing practical problem. The term cohesion has two different origins. The first derives from the 16th century French *cohérence*, which was introduced into English as *coherence* by William Shakespeare circa 1590 to connote a figurative "association other than material".²⁴ The second and more literal origin comes from *cohesion* – "the action or condition of cohering; cleaving or sticking together" – first used in English by philosopher Thomas Hobbes in 1678 in a discussion on gravity.²⁵ While it took time for the concept of cohesion to

²⁴ Oxford English Dictionary. 2016. *Coherence*. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/35933>

²⁵ Oxford English Dictionary. 2016. *Cohesion*. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/35943>

make its way to discourses on military theory, like many other military concepts, its origins lie in physics. It appears that cohesion was first used in its military denotation in the late 19th century, giving this definition relatively recent provenance. For instance, although Clausewitz used the term *Kohäsion* once in his classic *Vom Kriege*, posthumously published in 1832-1834, he more often employed the terms *Zusammenhang* (“hanging together”) and *Zusammenfügung* (“putting together”). These expressions indicated a more mechanistic order, with soldiers assuming the role of cogs or automata within a larger whole: as with many other military thinkers at his time who were primarily fascinated with different kinds of marching and fighting formations, Clausewitz too liked to see soldiers “move... like a well-oiled machine” kept together by the will of their commander who “stands above the masses and continues to be their master.”²⁶ At this stage cohesion was a new term which, furthermore, was not yet used in a military sense. This can be inferred from Clausewitz’s use of the term to describe an enemy state, rather than its military force.²⁷ James John Graham, who first translated *On War* to English, similarly employed the term cohesion just once in his *Military Ends and Moral Means*, published in 1864. In this case, cohesion referred to a force without which “the whole mass [of society] would crumble into dust”, or the way individuals are professionally self-interested, yet are united “in one general development... all fancying they are only following their personal impulses.”²⁸ In other words, cohesion concerned societies, not armies. Yet in 1873 when Graham’s translation of *On War* was published, cohesion appeared nine times, and was now variously used to describe armies, ideas and states.²⁹ One plausible explanation of this change was later well captured by Peter Paret in his investigation of the difference between the French and Prussian tactics in the shadow of the war of 1806. Whereas the Prussians still relied on drill, rigid formations and draconian discipline, the French had harnessed nationalism, relying more on patriotic commitment and enthusiasm. According to Paret, Prussia’s defeat well exemplified how the changed political context had made a previously well-oiled military machine obsolete.³⁰ This development continued: Du Picq’s *Battle Studies*, first posthumously published in 1880

²⁶ Clausewitz 2004, p. 40. See also Kleemeier, Ulrike. 2007. “Moral Forces in War.” In *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, 107–21. New York: Oxford University Press.

²⁷ The author is grateful to Jan Willem Honig for the insights regarding both the original and Graham’s translation of *On War*.

²⁸ Graham, James. 1864. *Military Ends and Moral Means: Exemplifying the Higher Influences Affecting Military Life and Character*. London: Smith, Elder and Co, p. 52.

²⁹ Clausewitz, 2004.

³⁰ Paret, Peter. 2009. *The Cognitive Challenge of War: Prussia, 1806*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 12-16. See even Paret, Peter. 1966. *York and the Era of Prussian Reform, 1807-1815*. Kingsport, Tn: Princeton University Press.

and translated into English in 1921, mentioned cohesion no less than seventeen times in the main text. Recognizing both technical developments that saw the dispersion of soldiers, and the societal changes that prohibited draconian punishment, Du Picq argued that there was a desperate need for cohesion.³¹ By this stage cohesion had not only been established in the military context, but furthermore acquired the meaning that most people associate it with today: where cohesion denotes bonds – and especially bonds of solidarity – between soldiers, and where these bonds have a direct influence on their performance.³² Cohesion had thus returned from its more mechanical meaning to its earlier affinitive roots better captured by the term coherence.

While Du Picq's treatise was, and continues to be, used as an example of the importance of cohesion, the concept's prominence was cemented in Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz's pioneering article.³³ Writing soon after the Second World War and building on information provided by German prisoners of war, Shils and Janowitz investigated the question of why the Wehrmacht never disintegrated, even after it was obvious that it could not win the war. Unlike Du Picq who saw his countrymen as having unparalleled capacity to create cohesion,³⁴ Shils and Janowitz departed from the idea that the Germans had been able to create and maintain more cohesion among their armed forces than their opponents. Their purpose was to understand why. Debunking the prevailing understanding of the totalitarian National Socialistic ideology as decisive, they traced the answer to the social organization of the Wehrmacht, and more specifically to the individual soldier's relationship with his immediate primary group. If the primary group was able to provide the soldier's basic organic needs, the soldier would in turn seek to maintain the group even at the risk of losing his life. This balance of need and provision contributed to upholding the social organization. For Shils and Janowitz, the primary group was a source of identification, intimacy and security. Quoting a German student, they saw the primary group as "the only truly existent community... [which] forces us into its circle, for life is at stake."³⁵

In a sense, this change in understandings of sources of military cohesion paralleled the changing tactics used in the different World Wars. Whereas the First World War had begun with ideology and mass assaults, by the end of 1917, armies began to break down into small groups that transformed the previously static trench warfare. According to Randall Collins, these groups

³¹ Du Picq 2013, pp. 60-61.

³² Du Picq 2013, pp. 75, 102, 106.

³³ Shils, Edward, and Morris Janowitz. 1948. "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 12 (2): 280-315

³⁴ Du Picq 2013, p. 121.

³⁵ Shils and Janowitz 1948, p. 283.

were moved by their self-perception as elite formations, rather than nationalistic feelings.³⁶ Shils and Janowitz's article exemplifies how the understanding of combat motivations followed these tactical developments. After the Second World War the main sources of cohesion changed from more macro-level moral reasons propped by ideology to micro-level intergroup dynamics.³⁷

A more recent debate on concepts of cohesion is found in the pages of *Armed Forces & Society* and centres on publications by Anthony King and Guy Siebold. This debate has dominated discourse on cohesion for the past decade, and highlights the limitations of contemporary discussion regarding the concept. While both King and Siebold built on the work of Shils and Janowitz, they each emphasized different parts of the articles' argument. Whereas King understood cohesion as essentially performance, and saw professionalization and training as leading to cohesion,³⁸ Siebold saw cohesion as interpersonal solidarity and trust within primary groups.³⁹ The two scholars understood cohesion in very different ways and, as a result, each talked past the other. With the two mostly disregarding each other's arguments, the debate rather deadlocked than advanced the discourse on cohesion. Both authors had a narrow perspective that concentrated on Western armed forces during the 20th and 21st centuries. This scope is spatially and temporally so narrow that their discussion of cohesion was far from universal. King himself noted that both theories were deeply rooted in particular historical eras.⁴⁰ As a result, they arguably say little about the vast majority of military organizations in the world. Considering that the modern Western context brings with it many assumptions, such as nation states with comparatively homogenous populations and strong institutions, this debate contributed little to broader theoretical developments regarding the concept of cohesion.

³⁶ Collins, Randall. 2013. "Does Nationalist Sentiment Increase Fighting Efficacy? A Skeptical View from the Sociology of Violence." In *Nationalism and War*, edited by John A. Hall and Siniša Malešević, 31–43. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 35–36.

³⁷ Wessely, Simon. 2006. "Twentieth-Century Theories on Combat Motivation and Breakdown." *Journal of Contemporary History* 41 (2): 269–86, p. 275. See also Stouffer, Samuel, ed. 1949. *Studies in Social Psychology in World War II. Vol. 1, The American Soldier: Adjustment during Army Life*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

³⁸ King, Anthony. 2006. "The Word of Command: Communication and Cohesion in the Military." *Armed Forces & Society* 32 (4): 493–512; King, Anthony. 2015a. "On Cohesion." In *Frontline: Combat and Cohesion in Twenty-First Century*, edited by Anthony King, 3–23. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³⁹ Siebold, Guy. 2007. "The Essence of Military Group Cohesion." *Armed Forces & Society* 33 (2): 286–95.

⁴⁰ Siebold, Guy L., Tyler Crabb, Rachel Woodward, and Anthony C. King. 2015. "Combat, Cohesion, and Controversy: Disputatio Sine Fine." *Armed Forces & Society*, March. doi:10.1177/0095327X15573213, p. 9.

The body of literature that has investigated civil war has followed a very different trajectory. Initially building on a different kind of normative foundation, scholars in this field sought to turn Hobbes' "war of all against all" to "peace of all with all". This literature criticised "realist" thinkers like Hobbes, but was also inspired by utopian thinkers. It thus sought to make the world a more peaceful place, through efforts such as investigating the causes of war.⁴¹ Civil wars and rebel movements stood at the centre of this literature. This was in part attributable to scholars' aim of solving conflicts in peaceful ways. As increased attention was afforded to intrastate conflicts following the Cold War's conclusion, the structural reasons underlying violence became of paramount interest. The logic here is simple: if the underlying causes can be resolved, there is no violence. This literature accordingly focuses more often on curing the causes than remedying the symptoms. A classic example of this tendency is Ted Gurr's *Why Men Rebel*. Although it was first published in 1970, this text remains in many ways a representative work in the literature on civil war. According to Gurr, the answer to why men rebel is that when enough men feel deprived and sense an opportunity, rebellions occur.⁴² While difficult to argue against, this proposition says little of how the aggrieved group holds together and builds the organizations that can force a regime to change its ways.

The view of war as a pathology rather than an instrumental continuation of politics also entailed that the military functions of rebel organizations were often disregarded. Some scholars went so far as to propose that "rebel groups will be better understood if they are seen as predatory organizations focused on resource extraction and survival."⁴³ Danny Hoffman's investigation of the Kamajor militias as what he calls "the militarization of a web of social relations" offers another kind of example.⁴⁴ His testimony at the Special Court for Sierra Leone and his resulting article concerned culpability of war crimes: he argued that leaders' guilt was dependent on the existence of hierarchies and discipline within the movement. Yet whereas the prosecution focused on military matters and mapping chains of command, Hoffman sought to contextualize the movement and the war it fought in. As a result of this disregard of rebel movements as military organizations, their internal dynamics have in some respects remained

⁴¹ Wallensteen, Peter. 2011. "The Origins of Contemporary Peace Research." In *Understanding Peace Research: Methods and Challenges*, edited by Kristine Höglund and Magnus Öberg, 14–32. London: Routledge, pp. 14–16.

⁴² Gurr, Ted. 1970. *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

⁴³ Beardsley, Kyle, and Brian McQuinn. 2009. "Rebel Groups as Predatory Organizations: The Political Effects of the 2004 Tsunami in Indonesia and Sri Lanka." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53 (4): 624–45.

⁴⁴ Hoffman, Danny. 2007. "The Meaning of a Militia: Understanding the Civil Defence Forces of Sierra Leone." *African Affairs* 106 (425): 639–62.

poorly understood – a metaphorical “black box” of sorts.⁴⁵ Issues of cohesion have only recently gained importance with the recognition of the significance of rebel group fragmentation.⁴⁶ For instance, Paul Staniland has drawn attention to the social bases of rebel movements and their importance in fostering cohesion.⁴⁷ He argues that this in turn influences how organizations employ external material support, and suggests that these two factors help to predict the emergence of internal divisions and hence cohesion in rebel organizations. Staniland concludes that the rebel organizations with the highest level of cohesion are those built by a homogenous leadership and whose relationships are characterized by solidarity and trust.⁴⁸

Questions inherently related to cohesion have however often been discussed in the civil war literature without using the word itself. Investigations on collective action and the incentives that encourage individuals take up arms in civil wars offer a case in point.⁴⁹ According to this literature, organizations assume certain behaviours and structures according to the various incentives used to lure individuals to rebel. One prominent example of this comes from Jeremy Weinstein’s influential *Inside Rebellion*, which proposed that organisations organise and use force against civilians according to their resources.⁵⁰ According to Weinstein, rebel movements lacking in resources emphasise social incentives in the form of ideology and identities. He argues that because these movements are more disciplined, they are less violent towards civilians. Conversely, ample resources have the opposite effect, because immediate material incentives attract undisciplined opportunists who have no need to win over civilians. Kristine Eck recently contributed to the literature on material and social incentives in her investigation of the use of coercion in rebel recruitment.

⁴⁵ For some exceptions, see Haer, Roos, Lilli Banholzer, and Verena Ertl. 2011. “Create Compliance and Cohesion: How Rebel Organizations Manage to Survive.” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 22 (3): 415–34; Hansen, Stig Jarle. 2013. *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005-2012*. London: Hurst & Company; Kriger, Norma. 1992. *Zimbabwe’s Guerrilla War: Peasant Voices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Marks, Zoe. 2013. *The Internal Dynamics of Rebel Groups: Politics of Material Viability and Organizational Capacity - RUF, Sierra Leone*. Phd. diss.: University of Oxford; Young, John. 1997. *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People’s Liberation Front, 1975-1991*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁶ Pearlman and Cunningham 2012.

⁴⁷ Staniland, Paul. 2014. *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press

⁴⁸ Staniland 2014.

⁴⁹ Lichbach, Mark. 1995. *The Rebel’s Dilemma*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; Olson, Mancour. 1965. *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; Tullock, Gordon. 1971. “The Paradox of Revolution.” *Public Choice* 11 (1): 89–99.

⁵⁰ Weinstein 2007.

Whereas Weinstein focused on initial incentives that essentially remained fixed, Eck recognized the reciprocal nature of war that entails a more dynamic process. After all, most rebel movements do not initially employ violence when recruiting, and do so only as a result of changes in their resource base or during military escalation. Negative incentives such as violence are however deemed suboptimal: they not only result in weak cohesion and require the organization to dedicate substantial resources to keep the recruits from deserting, but also risk alienating local support.⁵¹ While the literature on civil war has much to say about the causes of rebellion and how rebel movements are initially mobilised, the methods used to keep these organizations together are less understood. What is required is the recognition of rebel movements as military organizations influenced by the reciprocal and violent nature of war.

Broadening the perspective

To summarize the limits of the existing literature, it has too narrowly focused on state militaries in Western contexts during the past century, or incentives for participation in rebel movements in non-Western ones. Whereas the first has more recently emphasized micro-level dynamics, the second has been more interested on macro-level. As a result, separately these literatures tell us little about the vast majority of armed groups and state militaries around the world. Bringing together these two bodies of literature can arguably help to begin doing so. The purpose of this section is to use the limits of the existing literature as a place from which to propose some possible steps forward. This is best done by beginning with a discussion of the micro-level primary groups that have become the focus of recent literature on military cohesion. Three factors underline the importance of investigating non-Western cases: military institutions, social organization and the state. While previous literature investigating Western military organizations has often taken the influence of these three for granted, this can hardly be done with non-Western cases. This in turn questions the usefulness of some of the previous ideas of cohesion in general, but especially in non-Western contexts where military institutions, social organization and the state can take forms different from those in the West. The following parts of this section question whether some of these previous assumptions work in non-Western cases.

With Shils and Janowitz's Wehrmacht study and other similar works that emphasized that soldiers first and foremost fight for the comrades next to

⁵¹ Eck, Kristine. 2014. "Coercion in Rebel Recruitment." *Security Studies* 23 (2): 364–98.

them,⁵² cohesion became mostly associated with interpersonal solidarity within micro-level primary groups. Primary groups, or groups “characterized by intimate face-to-face association and co-operation,” were first envisaged in a 1909 study by Charles Cooley.⁵³ Cooley saw primary groups as fusing individuals into a whole or a “we”, similar to current understandings of cohesion. Because family offered the least mutable and the first sense of social unity, he used it as his main example of a primary group. Cooley recognized that society and state’s influence was limited compared to the power that families and other primary groups had on the formation of what he argued was a “universal human nature”. Primary groups, he therefore argued, were the most important factor in understanding societies, and should be understood as primordial units from which “everything social is the outgrowth.”⁵⁴

It is important, however, to recognize that what constitutes a family and how family members are expected to function, are far from universal. In the military context the instrumental function of primary groups is often de-emphasized by the more romantic view of comradeship in war. It could however be proposed that human action is complex enough to encompass both. As the American soldier-philosopher Jesse Glenn Gray described in his description of comradeship during the Second World War, the threat to life posed by war forced people to depend on each other despite their differences. Yet while these links forged by danger were “no less passionate”, they were “utilitarian and narrow”.⁵⁵ Similar examples of circumstantial mutual dependency that developed to ensure survival reportedly existed within the Wehrmacht,⁵⁶ but also help to explain why few American soldiers had contact with their comrades after rotating home from Vietnam.⁵⁷ The sceptical military sociologist Charles Moskos described this type of dependency as follows:

the intensity of primary-group ties so often reported in combat units are best viewed as mandatory necessities arising from immediate life-and-death exigencies... rather than viewing soldiers’ primary groups as some kind of

⁵² Marshall, S.L.A. 1947. *Men against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War*. Washington: Combat Forces Press; Shils and Janowitz 1948; Stouffer 1949.

⁵³ Cooley, Charles Horton. 1910. *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, p. 23.

⁵⁴ Cooley 1910, p. 31.

⁵⁵ Gray, J. Glenn. 1998. *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*. Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, pp. 26-27.

⁵⁶ Neitzel, Sönke, and Harald Welzer. 2012. *Soldaten: On Fighting, Killing, and Dying : The Secret World War II Tapes of German POWs*. London: Simon & Schuster, pp. 336-337.

⁵⁷ Moskos, Charles. 1970. *The American Enlisted Man*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, p. 145.

semi-mystical bond of comradeship, they can be better understood as pragmatic and situational responses.⁵⁸

At the very least, this characteristic of primary groups requires us to question the value of applying Cooley's more positive definition of primary groups to all military settings.

Primary groups offer just one example of how discussions of military cohesion in many ways resemble the broader 19th century sociological debates. These were brought about by fears of modernisation's negative effects on what can essentially be described as societal cohesion.⁵⁹ For instance, in German sociological debates, Ferdinand Tönnies' dichotomy between the warm and personal *Gemeinschaft* (community) and the distant and formal *Gesellschaft* (society) was used to express these anxieties.⁶⁰ Similar worries lay behind 20th century military deliberations regarding the relationship between soldier, state and society – or what today is often simply called “civil-military relations”. In this case, the debate regarding the citizen army in the first part of the 20th century offers a pertinent example of how these discussions resemble each other: while early sociologists had sought remedies for the disintegration of social bonds and solidarity in modernizing societies, a citizen army was seen to bridge the military and the nation, and thus contribute “much toward restoring the unity of nation and army.”⁶¹ From this perspective, military cohesion and societal cohesion were strongly interconnected, and, ideally, were the same.

When it comes to primary groups, it could be argued that, whereas family represents *Gemeinschaft*, the military can be an example of *Gesellschaft*. As Janowitz and Little wrote,

cohesive primary groups do not just occur but are fashioned and developed by complex military institutions... the goals and standards or norms that primary groups enforce are hardly self-generated; they arise from the larger military environment and from the surrounding civilian society. Consequently, the empirical study of primary groups must extend beyond the factors that contribute to social cohesion in the smallest tactical units.⁶²

⁵⁸ Moskos 1970, p. 156.

⁵⁹ The author is thankful for the many still ongoing discussions with Peter Haldén concerning these broader sociological perspectives.

⁶⁰ In a sense both *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* are comparable to coherence and cohesion – their meanings too have changed over time, as with the affinity now associated only with the former. Bond, Niall. 2013. *Understanding Ferdinand Tönnies' "Community and Society": Social Theory and Political Philosophy between Enlightened Liberal Individualism and Transfigured Community*. Zürich: Lit, pp. 15-38.

⁶¹ Stern, Frederick. 1957. *The Citizen Army: Key to Defense in the Atomic Age*. New York: Macmillan, p. 280.

⁶² Janowitz, Morris, and Roger Little. 1974. *Sociology and the Military Establishment*. 3rd edition. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, p. 94.

Malešević seems to agree, and argues that military units and groups such as families are in many ways opposite: whereas the former is a “fixed and formal bureaucratic entity created and sustained by the wider organizational structure, group-ness is much more flexible, dynamic and informal unit of sociality.”⁶³ In other words, these military entities – units – serve a specific function within a broader institutional context, which the renowned sociologist Erwin Goffman has described as nothing less than total.⁶⁴ While the degree of totality can usually be debated, all military primary groups are produced by broader military institutions,⁶⁵ and cannot exist independent of them.

While there is little controversy in emphasising the links between military institutions and cohesion,⁶⁶ it is problematic that this is sometimes where the discussion ends. To give two examples, the recent debate between King and Siebold regarding military cohesion assumed military organizations to be essentially closed systems. This was likely a consequence of the focus on Western state militaries, which made consideration of the surrounding social organization peripheral, despite the fact that already Clausewitz had recognized its importance for warfare.⁶⁷ This was made clear in King’s emphasis on training, which explicitly played down the importance of social influences on the performance of professional militaries.⁶⁸ While Siebold in turn admitted that “internal and external factors of social control... stabilize relationship patterns and provide a sense outside and above a person that there is something more than just a collection of individuals,”⁶⁹ his narrow focus on micro level and Western cases did not allow him to take the logical next step of fully recognizing the importance of macro-level factors. As Malešević reasonably argued, “social organization, an external mechanism of social control, is a backbone of military might.”⁷⁰ Whereas Siebold saw social horizons extend from military primary groups upwards,⁷¹ Malešević argued for essentially the opposite idea,⁷² thus highlighting the importance of

⁶³ Malešević, Siniša. 2015. “Social Cohesion and Organised Violence: The Structural Origins of Micro-Solidarity?” A paper presented at the conference “The Origins of Military Cohesion: Broadening the Perspective”, Swedish Defence University, December 3rd, 2015, p. 7.

⁶⁴ Goffman, Erving. 1987. *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. London: Penguin.

⁶⁵ Shils 1950, p. 34.

⁶⁶ Greenwald, Howard. 2008. *Organizations: Management Without Control*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.; Selznick, Philip. 1952. *The Organizational Weapon : A Study of Bolshevik Strategy and Tactics*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

⁶⁷ Clausewitz 2004, pp. 650-660.

⁶⁸ King, Anthony. 2013. *The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁶⁹ Siebold 2007, p. 288.

⁷⁰ Malešević 2010, p. 113.

⁷¹ Siebold 2007, p. 289.

⁷² Malešević 2015.

social organization. As even Shils wrote, just as military units are embedded in military institutions, these institutions are in turn enveloped in a broader social organization.⁷³ The interplay between macro and micro levels was arguably something that earlier writers had recognized.⁷⁴ This was certainly the case for Shils who, perhaps worried that his and Janowitz' article on Wehrmacht had been interpreted as a celebration of the primary group, later explained in plain English that the German military they had investigated could not be reduced to a mere collection of primary groups.⁷⁵

It is important to note here that Western state militaries are hardly representative for the overall range of military organizations. These institutions not only typically enjoy long histories, but also tend to have stronger foundations than their likes in other parts of the world. The populations of Western countries are comparatively homogenous, and can be united under national symbols and by a strong state. The Western military organizations however exemplify well the interplay between military institutions, social organization and state: militaries as state agents build and emphasize social organization. It is hardly a coincidence that Western militaries employ a communal rhetoric that refers to a shared historical narrative, and draw heavily on national symbols such as flags in order to foster cohesion. They also employ religion, even in increasingly secularizing countries. Any soldier thus becomes a representative of both a national community and a political project, which is essentially how Moskos' theory of latent ideology can be understood. He argued that primary groups only sustain soldiers' functionality when the individual is – often unconsciously so – committed to the larger social system he is fighting for.⁷⁶ On the matter of soldiers' unconscious commitment, Shils argued,

*a set of generalized moral predispositions or sense of obligation... need not be strongly present in consciousness but some measure of identification with the collectivity and some sense of generalized obligation and readiness to acknowledge the legitimacy of its demands in numerous particular situations must exist.*⁷⁷

⁷³ Shils, Edward. 1982. *The Constitution of Society*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, p. 48.

⁷⁴ Moskos 1970, pp. 135-136; Janowitz and Little 1974, p. 40; Bartov, Omer. 1991. *Hitler's Army - Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁷⁵ Shils, Edward. 1950. "Primary Groups in the American Army." In *Continuities in Social Research: Studies in the Scope and Method of "The American Soldier"*, edited by Robert Merton and Paul Lazarsfeld, 16–39. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press; Shils 1982, p. xi.

⁷⁶ Moskos 1970, pp. 146-148.

⁷⁷ Shils 1950, p. 22 (emphasis in original). In retrospect, Moskos' "latent ideology" seems little different from Shils' "tacit patriotism" discussed here.

Given the importance of social cohesion to cohesion, it is therefore not surprising that some civil war researchers have recognized its absence as a cause for seemingly indiscriminate violence.⁷⁸

The prevailing arrangement for Western military organizations as state monopolies has obfuscated the importance of military institutions, social organization and the state in fostering cohesion: their influence is simply taken for granted. Yet the state (or Hobbes' "leviathan") is just one factor that has formed assumptions of some of the most important structural foundations of violence. According to Hobbes, humanity's basic condition was "warre... of every man, against every man", which resulted in "continuall feare, and danger of violent death", and thus a life that is "poore, nasty, brutish, and short."⁷⁹ It is understandable that Hobbes held a rather pessimistic view of human nature after witnessing the English Civil War. He contended that war could only cease if populations entered a social contract that limited all individuals' rights over each other. Yet this was not enough, as human nature could not be trusted. For Hobbes, the only way to truly attain salvation from misery and the horrors of war was for a "visible Power to keep them [a population] in awe, and tye them by feare of punishment to the performance of their Covenants." Punishment, or "terroure of some Power", was necessary, since "Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all."⁸⁰ As Max Weber later confirmed,⁸¹ what Hobbes was calling for was a state.

While Hobbes was certainly correct in marrying coercive (including military) and political power,⁸² his view can be criticized on at least the point of regarding life without a sovereign state resulting in war of all against all. While leviathans led to internal pacification of communities that subscribed to the same social contract, they also resulted in increasingly stronger states. That these states do not employ coercion as openly as they did before is not a sign of their weakness. In fact, they possess more coercive power than ever

⁷⁸ Abdullah, Ibrahim. 1998. "Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 36 (2): 203–35; Mkandawire, Thandika. 2002. "The Terrible Toll of Post-Colonial Rebel Movements in Africa: Towards an Explanation of the Violence Against the Peasantry." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 40 (2): 181–215; Staniland 2014. Kaplan arguably takes this view to its extreme.

⁷⁹ Hobbes, Thomas. 1985. *Leviathan*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 185-186.

⁸⁰ Hobbes 1985, p. 223.

⁸¹ Weber, Max. 1994. *Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 310-311.

⁸² Hobbes 1985, pp. 234-235. Malešević, Siniša. Forthcoming. "Nationalism and Military Power in the Twentieth Century and beyond." In *Global Powers: Michael Mann's Anatomy of the 20th Century and Beyond*, edited by Ralph Schroeder, 117–42. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 118-122.

simply because they don't need to use violence.⁸³ This was the paradox of Hobbes' attempt to free mankind from war: it also led to a previously unparalleled capacity for violence against those who did not subscribe to the same social contract. As Ian Clark argued, the presence of a state offered war its scale, bureaucratic structure, technology and military professionalization.⁸⁴ This capacity was unleashed⁸⁵ not only in Europe, but all over the world. Colonial conquests and subjugation, the French Revolution and the following Napoleonic Wars (rightfully dubbed the first total war),⁸⁶ as well as the two World Wars all serve as cases in point.

The connection between coercive and political power is evident in the many ways that stronger military organizations are tied to stronger states. For example, it was only bureaucratically structured armies that enabled the pacification of large territories.⁸⁷ In turn, resourcing war required centralization of states in Europe.⁸⁸ The centrality of the state arguably also helps to explain the finding that violence decreased in intensity when civil wars became the prevailing type of conflict following the end of the Cold War:⁸⁹ operating in contexts where it was difficult to draw on strong existing social organizations or states, these conflicts acquired a different form. This not only questioned previous (often normative) understandings of war and warfare, but also the prior categories and concepts used to describe internal conflicts.⁹⁰ The prevalence of civil wars furthermore had concrete implications for the way force was used, and also how it was organized in the first place. For instance, being unable to rely on existing structures and constructs, such as the state and nationalism, raised the practical conundrum of how to form cohesion.

In order to broaden perspectives on cohesion, a relatively open definition of the term is required. As noted above, contemporary literature tends to

⁸³ Malešević forthcoming, pp. 122-125; Lukes, Steven. 2005. *Power: A Radical View*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁸⁴ Clark, Ian. 2015. *Waging War: A New Philosophical Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 74-75.

⁸⁵ As Hobbes believed to be perfectly legitimate, especially when it came to those who denied the authority of the leviathan and thus rebelled against it. Hobbes 1985, p. 360-361.

⁸⁶ Bell, David A. 2007. *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Modern Warfare*. London: Bloomsbury.

⁸⁷ Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Vol. 1. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, p. 981; Clark 2015, pp. 71-77.

⁸⁸ Tilly, Charles. 1990. *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990*. Oxford: Blackwell.

⁸⁹ Melander, Erik, Magnus Öberg, and Jonathan Hall. 2009. "Are 'new Wars' More Atrocious? Battle Severity, Civilians Killed and Forced Migration before and after the End of the Cold War." *European Journal of International Relations* 15 (3): 505-36.

⁹⁰ Angstrom, Jan. 2001. "Towards a Typology of Internal Armed Conflict: Synthesising a Decade of Conceptual Turmoil." *Civil Wars* 4 (3): 93-116; Kalyvas, Stathis. 2001. "'New' and 'Old' Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?" *World Politics* 54 (01): 99-118.

view cohesion as battlefield performance, or as interpersonal bonds of solidarity that contribute to battlefield performance. However, these bonds of solidarity are a relatively new phenomenon in the sense that earlier battlefield cohesion emphasised draconian discipline and mechanic order, rather than social ties. This also explains why Clausewitz never highlighted solidarity between comrades in arms as the more recent literature tends to. While bonds of solidarity can explain why small groups stay together, they neither explain how large organizations cohere, nor do they allow for other explanations. Following Shils and Janowitz, primary groups have remained the micro-level explanation of choice for cohesion. But, as Shils cautioned, analysis of the micro-level alone cannot explain cohesion within mezzo-level military organizations. Even macro-level factors such as state and social organization need to be included, which requires an altogether broader perspective on cohesion. This dissertation will employ such a broader perspective, and understand cohesion as the state of unity in an organization. At an organizational level, cohesion refers to having both membership in an organization, and also marching in the direction dictated by that organization. While cohesion is a condition, it cannot be assumed as a constant: cohesion is inevitably tested in war, since a main objective of violence in war is to break the enemy's cohesion. It stands to reason then that military organisations must foster cohesion to operate. The next sections describe research on the sources that organisations draw from to build cohesion, and begin with the theoretical frameworks that supported this research.

Theoretical framework

All military organizations must address three fundamental questions: how to mobilise individuals, how to hold these individuals together as a force, and how to apply this force. Two types of propositions are commonly offered to solve these questions: voluntary and involuntary encouragement towards collective action.⁹¹ These strategies can be characterized as “carrot” and “stick”, or as compensation and coercion. Both ultimately rest on the assumption of rationalism and free will: either one acts willingly because it is beneficial, or unwillingly, because there are no alternatives. Conscriptio serves as an example of these two explanations, as it is certainly “encouraged” by the legal consequences of conscientious objection and the (usually meagre) monetary rewards. Conscriptio also suggests a third option: where collective action may be sourced from the construction of identities and ideologies that make a certain course of action nothing less

⁹¹ The standard work concerning the two is Olson 1965.

than the *proper thing to do*. So in the case of conscription, individuals may be influenced by construct of normative expectations that vary from a rite of manhood to a citizen's obligation to defend a national community. Here a clear difference arises between coercion and compensation on one hand, and constructs on the other. Whereas the first two better correspond to the more impersonal and mechanical cohesion, constructs, in turn, emphasize the more affinitive coherence. Another way to characterize the difference is to think of coercion and compensation as examples of individualistic and self-interested *Gesellschaft*, and constructs as more collective *Gemeinschaft*, which emphasizes bonds between individuals.⁹² Any conceptualization of cohesion needs to encompass both.

This section discusses the theoretical framework used in this dissertation, and focuses on the three explanations of cohesion briefly outlined above: coercion, compensation and constructs. These three explanations are classical in the sense that they are referred to by scholars across various literatures. For instance, Hobbes saw reward and punishment as constituting the nerves of his leviathan, "by which fastned to the seate of the Sovereignty, every joynt and member is moved to performe his duty."⁹³ Weber in turn recognized that social life rested on three pillars of coercion, trade and legitimacy.⁹⁴ Erik Ringmar too noted that, according to the traditional view, people fight wars because they are either coerced or because they can gain from it. He however offered a third alternative that underscored the limitations of individual choice: that we "act, not in defence of our interests, but in defence of our identity."⁹⁵ More recently Jan Willem Honig summarized sources of army cohesion found in previous literature as punishments, rewards and feelings of loyalty between soldiers and towards a higher authority.⁹⁶

At this point it is helpful to pause and critically reflect on these classical explanations following Randall Collins' example when he stated, "whatever the motive or interest that individuals or groups might have for fighting, the overriding empirical reality is that most of the time they do not fight." Consequently, "a theory of motives for fighting explains little, because having motives is a long way from actually committing violence on their

⁹² As suggested in Parsons, Talcott. 1964. *The Social System*. New York: Free Press, pp. 98-101.

⁹³ Hobbes 1985, p. 81

⁹⁴ Malešević 2010, p. 26.

⁹⁵ Ringmar, Erik. 1996. *Identity, Interest and Action: A Cultural Explanation of Sweden's Intervention in the Thirty Years War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 4.

⁹⁶ Honig, Jan Willem. 2015. "The Strategic Cohesion of Organised Armed Groups: Towards a Historically Informed (neo-Medievalist) Socio-Normative Approach." A paper presented at the conference "The Origins of Military Cohesion: Broadening the Perspective", Swedish Defence University, December 3rd, 2015, p. 3.

behalf.”⁹⁷ The factor that is missing between motives, on the one hand, and violence at the scale of war on the other, is an organization’s ability to manage fear and command obedience.⁹⁸ Organisations’ increased capacity for violence is evidence of their improved techniques of compelling us to obey them.⁹⁹ Recognizing organizations’ centrality in fostering cohesion, this dissertation sees the main value of these three explanations in the way organizations can draw on them in order to foster cohesion. This follows Michael Mann’s four sources of social power – ideological, economic, military and political – that “give collective organization and unity to the infinite variety of social existence” and “are capable of generating collective action.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, these four sources are “*organizations, institutional means of attaining human goals.*”¹⁰¹ While Mann’s four sources of power differ from the three employed in this dissertation,¹⁰² his idea that organizations draw from these sources is relevant to the investigation of cohesion, for instance, in the ways organizations create punishment and reward distribution systems and diffuse norms. As Howard Greenwald argues, promoting cohesion and coordinating individual efforts are key functions of all organisations, and organisations thus take an interest in building mechanisms that limit individual action.¹⁰³ In the section that follows, the employment of coercion, compensation and constructs by organizations in order to foster cohesion are each investigated in detail. They will also later be used in the essays as structuring elements in the investigation of cohesion in Liberia.

Coercion

Coercion can be defined as the use of punishment to force someone to do something they would otherwise not do. Formulated thus, coercion ultimately concerns the use of power, defined by Robert Dahl as a situation

⁹⁷ Collins, Randall. 2008. *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p. 337.

⁹⁸ Grossman, Dave. 2009. *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*. Revised edition. New York: Little, Brown and Co., pp. 141-194; Malešević 2010; Newsome, Bruce. 2003. “The Myth of Intrinsic Combat Motivation.” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 26 (4): 24–46.

⁹⁹ Collins 2008, pp. 28-29, 50-57; McNeill, William Hardy. 1983. *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000*. Oxford: Blackwell.

¹⁰⁰ Mann, Michael. 2005. *The Sources of Social Power. Vol. 1, A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 28.

¹⁰¹ Mann 2005, p. 2 (emphasis in original).

¹⁰² For pertinent criticism regarding the difference between Mann’s division of military and political power, see Malešević forthcoming, pp. 118-122.

¹⁰³ Greenwald, Howard. 2008. *Organizations: Management Without Control*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, p. 67.

where “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.”¹⁰⁴ C. Wright Mills added more specifically that, “the ultimate form of power is coercion by violence.”¹⁰⁵ Coercion has long characterized military organizations, which as a result are often considered the archetype of coercive bureaucratic organizations. Du Picq saw that “cohesion means discipline,”¹⁰⁶ and that men ultimately fight because of fear. This follows on from the recognition that, since fighting entails the risk of losing life and limb, fear of death arises. According to Du Picq, “discipline is for the purpose of dominating that horror by a still greater horror, that of punishment or disgrace.”¹⁰⁷ In this he was echoing the maxim by Fredrick the Great, who famously contended that a soldier should be more afraid of his officer than his opponent. Coercion was thus used to counter one fear with another, even greater fear. In reality however, most coercion is not this drastic, and may include “pay freezes or reductions, assignment to undesirable (or hazardous) duty, career immobility, ostracism, demotion” but it still may extend to the use of “corporal punishment, and termination.”¹⁰⁸ These kinds of punishments can be used to enforce the organizations’ goals ahead of individual interests and needs.

Historically, coercion was inseparable from everyday military life. An example from 18th century Europe illustrates why. At the time, soldiering appealed to few “except social drop-outs, criminals, dupes, and half-wits who could only be kept under control by ferocious discipline and who when the opportunity presented itself were liable to behave with quite bestial savagery.”¹⁰⁹ The introduction of such “ferocious” military discipline during the previous century may have been necessary due to the tactical developments following the introduction of muskets, but it certainly had not been easy.¹¹⁰ It had, however, improved the prevailing view of soldiers as undisciplined oafs and outcasts who preyed upon the civilian population rather than fighting their opponents.¹¹¹ During the 19th century Du Picq and other more reformist authors emphasized the severity of a soldier’s disgrace as a form of coercion in a way that portrayed war as almost literally democratic. This provides another example of Western states’ coercive power rendering the use of violence relatively unnecessary (as mentioned

¹⁰⁴ Dahl, Robert. 1957. “The Concept of Power.” *Behavioral Science* 2 (3): 201–15, pp. 202-203.

¹⁰⁵ Mills, C. Wright. 1999. *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 172.

¹⁰⁶ Du Picq 2013, p. 79.

¹⁰⁷ Du Picq 2013, p. 57.

¹⁰⁸ Greenwald 2008, p. 132.

¹⁰⁹ Howard, Michael. 2001. *War in European History*. Updated edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 66.

¹¹⁰ Howard 2001a, p. 56.

¹¹¹ Forrest, Alan. 2006. *Napoleon’s Men: The Soldiers of the Revolution and Empire*. London: Hambledon Continuum, p. 59.

above). Social changes have also influenced the nature of coercion: for instance, draconian discipline would hardly aid recruitment efforts in contemporary, professional Western militaries.¹¹² Offering a stark contrast, investigations of coercion in non-state military organizations have often been limited to physical forms of punishment. Often equated with executions, the focus on physical punishment suggests that these non-state organizations rely on them more extensively when fostering cohesion.

Scholars in the fields of both management¹¹³ and mobilization tend to describe organizations' use of coercion as an inefficient solution to the task of retaining recruitment: in rebel movements it suggests low commitment, high attrition, low discipline and reputation costs.¹¹⁴ After having forced mobilization, organizations then need to continue enforcing compliance through credible threats of punishment for recruits who abscond.¹¹⁵ The situation is similar for states, which however can rely on existing mechanisms of social control. States' importance becomes especially clear during protracted conflicts, where an escalation of war is often followed by hardening attitudes towards those not fighting. This was the case during the wars that followed the French Revolution,¹¹⁶ the American Civil War,¹¹⁷ and the Finnish Continuation War alike.¹¹⁸ In all these instances, executions – both at the frontlines and behind them – were deemed to increase discipline and restore military authority.¹¹⁹ Similar ideas certainly exist within non-state military organizations.

War itself becomes a central factor in the formation of cohesion. With its danger, physical effort, uncertainty and chance, it inevitably influences individuals' choices regarding collective action. For instance, individuals can be swept up by war and find themselves squeezed between a rock (the enemy) and a hard place (their own organization). Another example is where people faced with violent persecution from their own states may have little

¹¹² Strachan, Hew. 2006. "Training, Morale and Modern War." *Journal of Contemporary History* 41 (2): 211–27.

¹¹³ Greenwald 2008, p. 151.

¹¹⁴ Eck 2014.

¹¹⁵ Gates, Scott. 2002. "Recruitment and Allegiance: The Microfoundations of Rebellion." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46 (1): 111–30.

¹¹⁶ Forrest, Alan. 1989. *Conscripts and Deserters: The Army and French Society during the Revolution and Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 176–178.

¹¹⁷ Gwynne, Samuel C. 2015. *Rebel Yell: The Violence, Passion, and Redemption of Stonewall Jackson*. New York: Scribner, pp. 408–410.

¹¹⁸ Ylikangas, Heikki. 2009. *Yhden Miehen Jatkosota* [One Man's Continuation War]. Helsinki: Otava.

¹¹⁹ Holmes, Richard. 2004. *Acts of War: The Behaviour of Men in Battle*. London: Cassell, pp. 331–340; King, Anthony. 2015b. "Discipline and Punish: Encouraging Combat Performance in the Citizen and Professional Army." In *Frontline: Combat and Cohesion in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Anthony King, 93–115. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Strachan 2006.

choice but to seek security from rebels.¹²⁰ The case is similar with soldiers who may be “damned if they do and damned if they don’t”. Mann described this as being “organizationally caged”, where the organization “was a true cage... in which the well-fed animals [the soldiers] felt securer inside than outside, and from which they couldn’t see outside.”¹²¹

This “organisational caging” was exemplified in the Second World War when soldiers from various countries were shipped overseas and essentially marooned there until the end of the war.¹²² Another example of this organizational caging was how, when the war was already lost, German soldiers had reason to fear execution if they surrendered to their Soviet opponents but were also worried for their families’ and their own safety due to warnings and threats from their commanders if they attempted to desert.¹²³ The case was similar in Sierra Leone, where many children orphaned by war had little choice but to join rebel groups: “Once their parents were dead, children formed relationships with their military commanders out of sheer vulnerability and economic desperation.”¹²⁴ And once with the rebels, it was often safer to choose a known evil rather than an unknown one. Just as for the German soldiers, surrendering had its own risks, and this made compliance the best of the existing alternatives. In sum, there are many ways coercion can contribute to organizations’ unity, not all of them easily observable.

Compensation

Compensation refers here to the use of rewards to entice someone to do something they would otherwise not do. Often viewed as preferential to coercion, rewards are not restricted only to a soldier’s pay. Other forms of compensation such as companionship, status enhancement and task satisfaction can have similar functions.¹²⁵ In the current literature on civil war, pay as compensation is often conflated with looting. This has resulted

¹²⁰ Goodwin, Jeff. 2001. *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Kriger, pp. 149-157.

¹²¹ Mann, Michael. 2013. “The Role of Nationalism in the Two World Wars.” In *Nationalism and War*, edited by John A. Hall and Siniša Malešević, 172–96. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 181.

¹²² Lachmann, Richard. 2013. “Mercenary, Citizen, Victim: The Rise and Fall of Conscription in the West.” In *Nationalism and War*, edited by John A. Hall and Siniša Malešević, 44–70. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 49.

¹²³ Rush, Robert. 1999. “A Different Perspective: Cohesion, Morale, and Operational Effectiveness in the German Army, Fall 1944.” *Armed Forces & Society* 25 (3): 477–508, pp. 499-500.

¹²⁴ Bolten, Catherine. 2012. *I Did it to Save My Life: Love and Survival in Sierra Leone*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 21-22.

¹²⁵ Greenwald 2008, p. 132.

in a bias towards greed and economic agendas at the expense of ideological ones in civil wars. According to this view, loot forms one of the main causes for violent conflict,¹²⁶ especially when lootable natural resources are present.¹²⁷ This has led some authors to equate non-state warfare with a “predatory social condition,”¹²⁸ and to view looting as “the main activity of soldiers in most of the civil wars that afflict poor countries.”¹²⁹ It is important to point out that looting is a pejorative term, which reveals the view that war and warfare is deemed illegitimate and criminal in some contexts.¹³⁰

Practically speaking, greed is difficult to differentiate from other motivations. For instance, Gurr’s concept of relative deprivation could be described both as greed, but also as a sense of injustice that needs to be corrected, by violent means if necessary.¹³¹ In practice, it is often difficult to differentiate between political purposes and private gain.¹³² While looting is an activity exercised in all wars,¹³³ an alternative lens for viewing this phenomenon is to focus on the instrumental necessity of supplying military organizations. This logistical effort was once described by Martin van Creveld as “absolutely basic”, but unappealing to the imagination, and hence one often ignored in previous literature.¹³⁴ Logistics is not only required for organizations to exist in the first place. It has furthermore been established that the more centrally controlled the resources, the more unified the

¹²⁶ Collier, Paul. 2000. “Doing Well out of War: An Economic Perspective.” In *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, edited by Mats Berdal and David Malone, 91–112. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner/International Peace Academy.

¹²⁷ De Soysa, Indra. 2002. “Paradise Is a Bazaar? Greed, Creed, and Governance in Civil War, 1989–1999.” *Journal of Peace Research* 39 (4): 395–416; Ross, Michael. 2006. “A Closer Look at Oil, Diamonds, and Civil War.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 9: 265–300.

¹²⁸ Kaldor 2012, p. 113.

¹²⁹ Azam, Jean-Paul. 2002. “Looting and Conflict between Ethnoregional Groups: Lessons For State Formation in Africa.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46 (1): 131–53, p. 151. See also Beardsley and McQuinn 2009.

¹³⁰ Mac Ginty, Roger. 2004. “Looting in the Context of Violent Conflict: A Conceptualisation and Typology.” *Third World Quarterly* 25 (5): 857–70. For a good criticism of “greed”, see Keen, David. 2012. “Greed and Grievance in Civil War.” *International Affairs* 88 (4): 757–77.

¹³¹ Gurr 1970. See also Stewart, Frances. 2008. “Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: An Introduction and Some Hypotheses.” In *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies*, edited by Frances Stewart. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹³² Keen, David. 1998. *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars*. London: Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

¹³³ Holmes 2004, pp. 353–355.

¹³⁴ Van Creveld, Martin. 2004. *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton*. 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 2.

organization.¹³⁵ Correspondingly, the more that military organizations live from the land, the less unified they become.¹³⁶

Historically there have been three approaches to logistics: living from the land, carrying resources with the troops, or shipping in resources to troops from behind. In most cases there has been limited freedom for organizations to choose between these alternatives.¹³⁷ Much depends, for instance, on the availability of resources. It is especially non-state military organizations that lack steady support, and as a result, have little choice but to find ways to maintain their own upkeep. This was the case for the French revolutionary armies:

on foreign territory the French armies, like all the other forces at the time, had few qualms about feeding itself by wholesale pillage, and booty was one of the principal goals of the serving soldier and one of the few ways in which he might hope to turn the war to his personal advantage... looting parties were military 'expeditions' like any other, planned and organized.¹³⁸

According to Michael Howard, these armies had little choice but to do so, considering the weak state of the governments that struggled to supply them. As a result, "they learned to look for their reward not to a bankrupt government at home but to loot and plunder abroad."¹³⁹

According to Howard, it was during the 16th century that the commercialization of making war became "systematic and complete" with "wars of the mercenaries", whose "only bond of loyalty to their employer was the assurance of cash payment, punctually and in full."¹⁴⁰ However, it took until the 18th century for European military organizations to become professional in the sense that they were now maintained by the states (if not the kings) they served. If military professionalism is understood as concentrating more on enemies than harassing civilians, then the underlying foundation of professionalism must again be based on structural developments, not least the strengthening of states and their increased emphasis in logistics. After all, it was during this era that it truly became possible to fight wars where soldiers were not required to find ways to pay themselves. Considering that professionalism increasingly isolated soldiers from civilians, chances for looting too declined. Yet the practice has

¹³⁵ Kress, Moshe. 2016. *Operational Logistics: The Art and Science of Sustaining Military Operations*. 2nd edition. Cham: Springer, p. 3.

¹³⁶ Collins, Randall, and Stephen Sanderson. 2009. *Conflict Sociology: A Sociological Classic Updated*. Abridged and updated edition. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, p. 177.

¹³⁷ Kress 2016, pp. 9-11.

¹³⁸ Forrest 1989, p. 183.

¹³⁹ Howard 2001a, pp. 33-34.

¹⁴⁰ Howard 2001a, pp. 36-37.

continued, and will likely do so, since even state militaries loot – and worse.¹⁴¹

Professionalism underlines the continuities of soldiering as labour. The payment of monthly salaries that binds the soldier to the organization is, however, easy to take for granted in modern Western military bureaucracies. The situation is not so in other parts of the world when it comes to both state and non-state military organizations, whose members need to find ways to make do.¹⁴² While historically poverty and promises of regular pay were certainly a factor for enlistment even in the West, non-material benefits such as respect and opportunities for social advancement should not be underestimated either. As Richard Holmes argues, aside from plunder, decorations have also been used to motivate men to fight. These rewards are by nature exclusive, and this helps to build self-esteem and cohesion within the groups eligible for such recognition.¹⁴³ Bill Mauldin, a cartoonist who gave a voice to the American infantry soldier during the Second World War, explained this logic thus: “civilians may think it’s a little juvenile to worry about ribbons, but a civilian has a house and a bankroll to show for what he’s done for the past few years.”¹⁴⁴ And in other examples, some soldiers simply find joy in agency,¹⁴⁵ if not from the unity brought by comradeship.¹⁴⁶ All told, compensation comes in many forms. Perhaps the best summary is provided in Henrik Vigh’s discussion of militias in Guinea Bissau. He found that soldiering offered an opportunity to become *someone* – to “bring about a realization of being.”¹⁴⁷ Even many Westerners can see enlisting as a way to escape the frustration caused by “blocked avenues for advancing a meaningful life and from a sense of relative deprivation.”¹⁴⁸ Similar to the case of coercion described above, the effects of compensation

¹⁴¹ Some recent works have shed light on the questionable things “soldiers do.” Lowe, Keith. 2012. *Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II*. London: Viking; Roberts, Mary Louise. 2013. *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France*. Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press.

¹⁴² Hoffman, Daniel. 2011a. “Violence, Just in Time: War and Work in Contemporary West Africa.” *Cultural Anthropology* 26 (1): 34–57. Verweijen, Judith. 2015. *The Ambiguity of Militarization: The Complex Interaction between the Congolese Armed Forces and Civilians in the Kivu Provinces, Eastern DR Congo*. Phd. diss.: Utrecht University, pp. 101-109.

¹⁴³ Holmes 2004, pp.355-359; Neitzel and Welzer 2012, pp. 277-284.

¹⁴⁴ Mauldin, Bill. 2000. *Up Front*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, pp. 133-134.

¹⁴⁵ Wood, Elisabeth. 2003. *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 234-237; Neitzel and Welzer 2012, pp. 44-69.

¹⁴⁶ Junger, Sebastian. 2010. *War*. New York: Twelve; Van Creveld, Martin. 2009. *The Culture of War*. Brimscombe Port: Spellmount, pp. 106-128.

¹⁴⁷ Vigh, Henrik. 2006. “Social Death and Violent Life Chances.” In *Navigating Youth Generating Adulthood: Social Becoming in an African Context*, edited by Catrine Christiansen, Mats Utas, and Henrik Vigh, 31–60. Stockholm: Nordic Africa Institute, p. 47.

¹⁴⁸ Standing, Guy. 2011. *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. London: Bloomsbury, p. 19.

as an influence on cohesion must be investigated in a manner that takes into account aspects that are more difficult to empirically observe.

Constructs

The use of constructs is defined in this dissertation as the employment of non-material motivations to convince someone to do something they would not otherwise do. Constructs such as one's identity have real influence on peoples' lives and behaviour, and have been seen to constitute the most efficient way to mobilize people.¹⁴⁹ In a sense, constructs become one's stories and the *Gemeinschaft* one belongs to. Ringmar argues that "as long as we are loyal to our communities and identify ourselves in relation to them, we may have no other choice and very little bargaining power *vis-à-vis* our political and military authorities."¹⁵⁰ Others write of more clearly constructed roles that organizations assign to their members in order to prescribe duties and expectations.¹⁵¹ In a manner that brings roles and identities together, it has been argued that "people act as they think is expected of them", with these expectations deriving from "the groups of which individual people are a part."¹⁵² Or as Talcott Parsons iterates, "*All* institutionalization involves common moral as well as other values. Collectivity obligations are, therefore, an aspect of every institutionalized role."¹⁵³ This makes constructs of paramount importance to all organizations when they seek to limit individual action in order to achieve their own goals.

It should however be emphasized that, unlike in everyday discussion, identity here is not an essentialist category, but a construct. Furthermore, it is in practice difficult to differentiate identity from ideology,

as the discourse of identity is nearly always embedded in the rhetoric of a specific ideology... there is no identity without ideology and no ideology can successfully mobilize mass support without constructing meaningful group labels.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Gould, Roger. 1995. *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Jenkins, Richard. 2008. *Social Identity*. 3rd edition. London: Routledge, p. 8; Littman, Rebecca, and Elizabeth Paluck. 2015. "The Cycle of Violence: Understanding Individual Participation in Collective Violence." *Political Psychology* 36 (Issue Supplement S1): 79–99.

¹⁵⁰ Ringmar 1996, p. 4.

¹⁵¹ Greenwald 2008, pp. 69-98; Neitzel and Welzer 2012, pp. 15-17, 19-22.

¹⁵² Neitzel and Welzer 2012, p. 7.

¹⁵³ Parsons 1964, p. 99 (emphasis in original).

¹⁵⁴ Malešević 2010, pp. 325-326. Note however that this does not mean that these masses fight better. Collins, Randall. 2013. "Does Nationalist Sentiment Increase Fighting Efficacy? A Skeptical View from the Sociology of Violence." In *Nationalism and War*, edited by John A. Hall and Siniša Malešević, 31–43. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

These two points are best illustrated by what has been called the most potent ideological discourse today – nationalism. As Malešević argues, “there is nothing natural in nationalism: just as other ideological projects it too requires a great deal of organizational work and skill.”¹⁵⁵ After all, nationalism is a phenomenon closely tied to the development of modern state institutions: nationalism gives legitimacy to nation-states and helps to foster cohesion within them. Through states’ monopolies over education and use of force, they were able to make nationalism nothing less than “a principal source of one’s identity in the modern era.”¹⁵⁶ That identities and ideologies are closely linked is also suggested by the manner in which the civil wars that proliferated after the Cold War were often linked to identities.¹⁵⁷ This, however, likely resulted from the decline of the ideological divide following the failure of Communism, and the way ethnic identities were seen to replace nationalism in intrastate conflicts where at least one actor lacked territory. Whereas states could mobilize their citizens to fight for them in the name of nationalism or some other political ideology, it was now seen that ethnic groups would do the same with their own members through referring to identities.¹⁵⁸ That ethnicity is formed in the same way as ideology¹⁵⁹ is clear in Paul Williams’ survey of literature on ethnic conflict: “ethnicity is not a static feature of the political landscape but can be constructed and deployed strategically by actors in order to shape the contours of that landscape.”¹⁶⁰

The best way to illustrate the importance of constructs to military cohesion is to investigate the creation of a military identity,¹⁶¹ or the transformation of an individual into a warrior. Whether taking the form of modern military training or something else, this process may be likened to a ritual that helps warriors to cross the threshold into the usually forbidden realm of violence.¹⁶² Whereas historically, military training in the form of conscription was an important way to educate subjects as citizens and

¹⁵⁵ Malešević 2016, p. 128. See also Anderson, Benedict. 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edition. London: Verso; Malešević, Siniša. 2006. *Identity as Ideology: Understanding Ethnicity and Nationalism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Malešević, Siniša. 2013. *Nation-States and Nationalisms: Organization, Ideology and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Polity.

¹⁵⁶ Malešević forthcoming, pp. 125-126.

¹⁵⁷ Kaldor 2012.

¹⁵⁸ Collier, Paul. 2009. *Wars, Guns and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*. London: Bodley Head, pp. 52-53; Horowitz, Donald. 1985. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley: University of California Press;

¹⁵⁹ Sanin, Francisco, and Elizabeth Wood. 2014. “Ideology in Civil War: Instrumental Adoption and beyond.” *Journal of Peace Research* 51 (2): 213–26.

¹⁶⁰ Williams, Paul. 2011. *War & Conflict in Africa*. Cambridge: Polity, p. 118.

¹⁶¹ Polletta, Francesca, and James Jasper. 2001. “Collective Identity and Social Movements.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 283–305.

¹⁶² Haldén, Peter and Peter Jackson (ed.). 2016. *Transforming Warriors: The Ritual Organization of Military Force*. London/New York: Routledge.

members of national states,¹⁶³ contemporary Western military training concerns individuals whose citizenship is not in doubt. Modern-day Western societies task dedicated military bureaucracies to militarize these pre-existing identities, or to turn citizens into soldiers through military training. Holmes argues that aside from the more ritualistic purposes, military training has two main functions. Firstly, organized violence requires a skillset that has limited relevance in the civilian sphere, and that all soldiers need to master. Secondly, and just as importantly, operating and using violence in a military organization requires socialization of certain norms and values. In sum, Holmes believes that training explains “a great part of a man’s behaviour on the battlefield.”¹⁶⁴

Training however arguably explains much more than battlefield behaviour. For instance, it also illuminates to a great extent why the soldier can be found on the battlefield in the first place. This is because the socialization brought by military training inevitably comes with an identity – that of a soldier. It should immediately be emphasized that neither military training nor the resulting identity needs to be entirely voluntary. This is even the case with other identities: our idea of who we are is intimately connected to who we think others are (and the other way around).¹⁶⁵ It is therefore easy to see how, especially in war, individual agency is constricted, and identities can be forced on people.¹⁶⁶ This is especially important in the military context, since identities come with certain normative expectations, which, for instance, can be used to shame people into doing things they might not otherwise do. This is captured by Janowitz and Little, who explain that training is not only necessary to learn the necessary technical skills required by a soldier. They argue that additionally, “in the process of assimilation the recruit learns the roles, the required behavior of his office, which he must perform regardless of his personal preferences.”¹⁶⁷ In this sense, it is constructs that offer the best way to realize what Steven Lukes called the “third dimension of power”:

the power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or

¹⁶³ Lachmann 2013, pp. 47-48. This no doubt contributed to the idea of the military as the “school of the nation”.

¹⁶⁴ Holmes 2004, pp. 36. See also Strachan 2006.

¹⁶⁵ Jenkins 2008, p. 12.

¹⁶⁶ For instance, see Jabri, Vivienne. 1996. *Discourses on Violence: Conflict Analysis Reconsidered*. Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, pp. 119-144; Maček, Ivana. 2009. *Sarajevo under Siege: Anthropology in Wartime*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

¹⁶⁷ Janowitz and Little 1974, p. 66.

imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial.¹⁶⁸

One interesting modern example of the connection between identities and normative expectations comes again from France, which first created the citizen, and then militarized these citizens into conscripted soldiers. As the Jacobin constitution from 24th June 1793 decreed, “all Frenchmen are soldiers: all have training in handling arms.”¹⁶⁹ These conscripts soon

found themselves increasingly drawn to the institution of the army itself, which became a focus for loyalty every bit as strong as the nation, and stronger than any particular regime. The practice of military service gradually changed the mentalities of those who turned aside the temptations of desertion.¹⁷⁰

By the time these men marched under Napoleon, the long process of turning citizens into soldiers had arguably succeeded: “where once they had fought for their rights as citizens and for the liberties of the French people, honour was now far more openly emphasised, the honour of fighting men and of military units.”¹⁷¹ Similar understandings of martial honour exist even elsewhere, and are, for instance, maintained by the British regimental system. Literally constructed as an answer to military reforms and the need to appeal more than punish, they were considered central to the establishment of *esprit de corps*.¹⁷² Similar constructs that similarly encourage uniqueness exist in other countries, with Special Forces serving as the best recent example.

The importance of constructs in the formation of cohesion is encapsulated in the sobering conclusion of Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer’s investigation of Second World War German soldiers: “People kill for various motives. Soldiers kill because it’s their job.”¹⁷³ In a similar manner Janowitz and Little argue that the “job” regulates behaviour.¹⁷⁴ If these people were not soldiers, the chances are they that would never kill. This was likely the case in Liberia, the site of the fieldwork that forms a detailed

¹⁶⁸ Lukes 2005, p. 28.

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in Forrest, Alan. 2002. “La Patrie En Danger: The French Revolution and the First Levée En Masse.” In *The People in Arms: Military Myth and National Mobilization since the French Revolution*, edited by Daniel Moran and Arthur Waldron, 8–32. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 14.

¹⁷⁰ Forrest 2002, p. 30.

¹⁷¹ Forrest 2006, pp. 71–73.

¹⁷² French, David. 2005. *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, c. 1870–2000*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁷³ Neitzel and Welzer 2012, p. 343.

¹⁷⁴ Janowitz and Little 1974, p. 66. See also King 2013.

case study of these three sources of military cohesion. I now turn to this as the topic of the sections of the dissertation.

Method

The organizations I studied consisted of people who participated in at least one war in Liberia. During the wars they not only fought, but also killed, looted, raped and murdered. They starved, drank liquor, smoked marijuana and prayed. They feared, laughed, cried and endured difficult situations that most human beings will hopefully never need to face. Ultimately, each one of them survived; yet none of them was left untouched by war. Many of them were physically wounded, with various scars and injuries bearing witness to their struggles. A few still carry bullets or grenade fragments in their bodies, a decade or two after they were wounded. Others suffer from symptoms of posttraumatic stress, or the consequences of drug abuse. While some describe having nightmares, others find it difficult to speak of their experiences at all. A few still revel in their past, and continue to boast about their exploits. Some clearly see the war as their finest hour, and, perhaps because of their present marginalization, long to be back in the bush. Several speak of the sound of battle, and compare it to sweet music in a way that reminded me of the ancient stories of siren song. Others lie about their past, or at least certain aspects of it. Facing the same everyday struggles as most other Liberians, the vast majority of participants felt that the war did not matter much a decade after it ended. Virtually everyone had mixed feelings and thoughts about it all.

My task was different. It was to talk to these former combatants and to understand what happened to them and what they did during the war. More specifically, in my attempt to probe questions of cohesion, I needed to recognize the factors that drove to fight and those that kept them fighting. In understanding how these individuals became a collective, it has been my ambition to comprehend not only individual motivations, but also (and especially) the workings of the organizations that these individuals formed. It was only through these people and the life histories they narrated to me that I could succeed in my task. These narratives and my interaction with former combatants were my starting point. From here – and only here – I could begin to understand factors relevant to the three sources of cohesion described above.

During the four years of research, many of these people became my friends. When a person I met described witnessing one of my main informants burn a civilian alive, I was only mildly shocked. After all, it was impossible to see my informant in black-and-white terms after getting to know him as a brother, a father and a friend who invited me into his life and

offered me a sleeping place beside him every time I visited him in his village. I could condemn the act, but I knew him too well to be able to condemn the person. And how could I, since I was not present for the fourteen years he had fought? Even further, condemning him would hardly have helped me in my task of understanding the reasons that drive a human being to carry out such horrific acts.¹⁷⁵ It was only through investing time and building and maintaining personal relationships that I could get to what I wanted to know. As most relationships are complicated, so too were mine with my informants. Building and fostering these relationships was vitally important, but also required sacrifices in terms of personal life and health. While fieldwork was at times difficult, I genuinely enjoyed much of it, and found it not only professionally necessary, but also personally rewarding. I hope that it will result in a better understanding of difficult issues, and ultimately, a better world.

This section of the dissertation is dedicated to a discussion of the methods used in researching this dissertation. The methods section is divided into two parts: the first describes my general research design, and the second recounts how I went about my research process. I outline an approach I call conflict ethnography, in order to highlight the specific challenges that arise from the study of conflicts in comparison to ethnography in more peaceful contexts. Before going to the details, I first discuss the methodological foundations of this dissertation, which are formed by three general propositions. Firstly, to better understand cohesion, it is necessary to engage in qualitative research. Secondly, to investigate micro-dynamics of war and violence in a context where few written sources exist, field research is required.¹⁷⁶ And thirdly, ethnographic methods are necessary to really get to the bottom of such cases.

With these three general propositions in my mind, I felt compelled to engage in more explorative research of cohesion in Liberian military organizations. To this end, I sought to learn the “thick” narratives of life histories from former combatants. First used by the British philosopher Gilbert Ryle,¹⁷⁷ Clifford Geertz borrowed the idea of “thick description” to define the intellectual effort of the practice of ethnography. The goal of thick description was to distinguish a wink from a twitch, or in other words, meaningful cultural categories.¹⁷⁸ While this concept was arguably both clever and useful, the practice itself was hardly new. Thick description merely allowed Geertz and those who found his arguments compelling to do

¹⁷⁵ On the importance of not passing judgment on informants’ narratives, see Marks 2013, pp. 45-46.

¹⁷⁶ Kriger 1992, pp. 6-8.

¹⁷⁷ Ryle, Gilbert. 1971. *Collected Papers. Vol. 2, Collected Essays, 1929-1968*. London: Hutchinson.

¹⁷⁸ Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 5-10.

what they had done before: observe, analyse and weigh evidence against an argument – all without excessive reliance on theory or method. Geertz' use of theory was mostly implicit, but it was still necessary to know how to make the right choices in order to turn narratives into good theory.¹⁷⁹ That ethnographers still study his work can be taken as proof of his success.

In my research I have constructed a chronological series of “thick” narratives from my interactions with my informants throughout the years. Subsequently I have examined these narratives in the light of the three sources of cohesion discussed above in the theoretical framework narratives in. The overarching aim is to investigate how the Liberian organizations created cohesion. While this aggregation from individual-level narratives to organization-level explanations can certainly be questioned,¹⁸⁰ I found no suitable alternatives to this approach. While organizations have power, they cannot speak. This is at least the case in Liberia, where the organizations were not very formalized or bureaucratized, and where very little internal documentation seems to have been preserved. While interviewing leaders of the Liberian military organizations might have offered a solution to this problem, this was not feasible in practice. Several of the leaders have died, President Charles Taylor remains incarcerated and the war remains a politicized subject that would have further biased such elite-level approach. Given this lack of documentation and the unfeasibility of other research paths, I chose to conduct my investigation through the individuals who formed the organizations. I then analyse individuals' narratives from the perspective of coercion, compensation and constructs. I “peeled back” each of these successive layers during my analysis, making new discoveries as I went. I found that each successive layer informed both my understanding of the context, but also the analysis of subsequent layers. This approach led me to a more comprehensive understanding of how cohesion was formed.

The two following sections focus on my ethnographic fieldwork in Liberia. While I agree with the view that fieldwork is “always messy”,¹⁸¹ I used the methods described below to assist me in the process of turning intense complexities into meaningful simplicities. I also consider it important to shed light into how this research was conducted in order to allow the reader to better judge its results.

¹⁷⁹ As Sanjek put it, “ethnography requires the person who improvises the performance, who not only knows how to do it but does it.” Sanjek, Roger. 1993. “On Ethnographic Validity.” In *Fieldnotes: The Makings of Anthropology*, edited by Roger Sanjek, 385–418. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 409-411

¹⁸⁰ See Weinstein 2007, p. 355.

¹⁸¹ Hoffman, Daniel, and Stephen Lubkemann. 2005. “Warscape Ethnography in West Africa and the Anthropology of ‘Events.’” *Anthropological Quarterly* 78 (2): 315–27, p. 316.

Fieldwork in Liberia

Ethnographic methods typically focus on a relatively small number of individuals, yet at the same time require a broad understanding of the surrounding context. As C. Wright Mills asserts, “neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both.”¹⁸² It could be argued that one without the other results in a “thin” description. A thin description is usually unsatisfactory, and at worst misleading. Mills’ approach also usefully underlines the interplay of individuals and collectives in a specific context. In order to succeed in my research of military cohesion in Liberia, I undertook three fieldwork trips to the country between March 2012 and November 2015, which in total lasted 13 months. During these trips I visited seven of the fifteen counties of Liberia. I prioritized three of these counties, each of which was the stronghold of a warring faction in the latter civil war (1999-2003): Grand Gedeh, Lofa and Montserrado, where the capital Monrovia lies. I visited four other counties – Bomi, Bong, Grand Cape Mount and Nimba – for shorter periods of time.

As John Gerring suggests, social science exists to say something about the world. As a result, it almost by necessity touches generalizability, or how large population beyond the sample of cases theories speak to.¹⁸³ In this dissertation the issue of generalizability mostly concerns the cases investigated here: the three military institutions of the forces that fought for Charles Taylor’s Government of Liberia, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy and Movement for Democracy in Liberia. How much can one generalize about cohesion from the examples of three Liberian military organizations? To answer this question, I refer back to my introduction, where I discussed my case selection as based on the two bodies of literature this dissertation seeks to bring together – those investigating state militaries and civil wars. When it comes to the literature on state militaries, Liberia offers a good case of those that have not been investigated: it is a non-Western context, with a weak state, and fragmented social organization. Liberia therefore offers a case in which to observe factors that this literature has previously taken for granted. Yet with the prevalence of intrastate conflict it is arguably contexts like Liberia that are likelier to experience war in the foreseeable future. In regards to the literature on civil war, Liberia offers a typical context. Although its war is often portrayed as a particularly horrific one,¹⁸⁴ the organizations that participated in it are reasonably

¹⁸² Mills, C. Wright. 2000. *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 3.

¹⁸³ Gerring, John. 2012. *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*. 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 61-64.

¹⁸⁴ For instance, see the oft-quoted Ellis 2007, pp. 21-22.

representable of other cases characterized by a weak state and fragmented social organization in Africa and elsewhere.

During my fieldwork I spoke to around 300 Liberians whom I could positively identify as former combatants. Interactions between them varied from brief and unplanned encounters to meeting them on daily basis. Despite the sometimes short lengths of these encounters, all have contributed to this dissertation. Around 40 of these informants became what I refer to as key informants. I spent at least a few dozen hours with each of them. Others I have lived together with for an extended period of time varying from a week to six months. In fact, aside from the time spent in Monrovia during my shorter second and third trips, I always lived together with my informants, most of whom were former combatants. At the time of writing I have known some of my key informants for over four years, and continue to have contact with many of them when not in Liberia.

As already discussed, from the outset I focused on learning “thick” narratives of my informants’ life histories or biographies. I later tried to structure these narratives together chronologically, and to revisit issues that remained undisclosed. Some narratives changed over time, likely as a result of many factors, including my changing relationships with my informants,¹⁸⁵ the situation my informants found themselves in, and also issues of memory. It was important to have the benefit of time on my side. To provide just one concrete example, in 2015 one of my informants (who in Essay III is called Tamba) who had fought with the government militias repeatedly refused to discuss his participation in the Taylor-supported invasion of Côte d’Ivoire. In our discussions at this time he claimed that he had vowed to never reveal details of these events. Yet when I had a chance to revisit my notes from previous field trips, I found that he had already provided several accounts of these events in 2012 and 2013, both to his family when I was present, and later directly to myself. It should also be mentioned that when I first met him, this same informant for several months declined that he had anything to do with the war in the first place. That the truth came out at all was because of a chance encounter. I was walking with his former commander on the street when we met Tamba, who reflexively gave a military salute, and thus exposed his dishonesty. Several similar cases emphasize the importance of long term interaction.

From the outset of my fieldwork I sought to guide discussions towards topics concerning cohesion and organization. The methods I relied on included semi-structured interviews, sometimes conducted with several informants at a time, and participant-observation. The usefulness of

¹⁸⁵ On a discussion of the importance of who is perceived to be asking questions, see Venkatesh, Sudhir. 2002. “‘Doin’ the Hustle’: Constructing the Ethnographer in the American Ghetto.” *Ethnography* 3 (1): 91–111.

participant-observation in a study of a war that had ended a decade earlier may not at first be clear. Would not participant-observation have required my presence on the ground during the war? Shouldn't I have followed Danny Hoffman's example from the war in Sierra Leone and later in Liberia with the LURD rebels?¹⁸⁶ Strictly speaking, I have no argument with these suggestions. Yet, ten years after the war, I found participant-observation to be an appropriate research method for two main reasons: it allowed me to build relationships and trust, and it furthered my understanding of the context and thus allowed contextualization.

Trust was essential to the success of my fieldwork. Kieran Mitton's examples of seemingly mundane discussions of football that led to accounts of atrocities committed during wartime are illustrative of how long-term presence contributed to trust.¹⁸⁷ In this sense, it was important to hear from some of my informants that "we[']ve got used to you now", signifying that my presence was understood not as a nuisance but as something more positive. Oscar Jansson describes this transition as the importance of "the human encounter" that became "the fundamental means of obtaining information."¹⁸⁸ This "human encounter" aspect was necessary for the best interviews, which in my case were strictly speaking not interviews at all. While I sought to create opportunities for more formal and private interviews in secluded places (which I occasionally recorded and later transcribed), casual interactions with informants became parts of my everyday life in the field and often provided the most salient information. It was often these more informal moments that yielded the best insights, when my informants chose at their own volition to speak of their experiences. Sometimes all I had to do was to listen and take notes. These kinds of opportunities often emerged when discussions on other topics veered onto the subject of war, particularly when two or more former combatants began to discuss their experiences together.

The study's four-year data collection period enhanced reliability, due to the possibility of repeated interactions with informants over the years. This enabled me to revisit old topics and to test new ideas with informants. These revisitations culminated in 2015, when I showed two of the dissertations' essays to some of my main informants. While I was initially uncertain regarding their reaction, the reception was at worst cautiously positive, and at best provided a segue into new and interesting discussions (and at times

¹⁸⁶ Hoffman, Danny. 2011b. *The War Machines: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia*. Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press.

¹⁸⁷ Mitton, Kieran. 2015. *Rebels in a Rotten State: Understanding Atrocity in the Sierra Leone Civil War*. London: Hurst, p. 27.

¹⁸⁸ Jansson, Oscar. 2008. *The Cursed Leaf: An Anthropology of the Political Economy of Cocaine Production in Southern Colombia*. Phd. diss.: Uppsala University, p. 14.

arguments) that greatly contributed to my understanding of the issues concerned.¹⁸⁹

I now briefly address the feedback I received on the two essays. One issue that was noted in Essay I regarded the excessive emphasis given to the two ethnic groups that dominated the LURD rebel movement, the Krahn and the Mandingo. While I had spoken to many former LURD fighters and commanders from other ethnic groups, my resulting chronology was admittedly built around the predominant narrative regarding the conflict and mistrust between these two groups. In my defence, the fact that the rebels organized around a principle of power sharing between these two groups alone proves that my decision was valid for this context. However I strongly agree that further research on the movement and the war should provide space for the voices of other groups.

The second weakness concerned the elusive origins of the LURD provided in my chronology. Very few people had been present from the very beginning, and many of these elites were careful to deny their role in any of it. The fact that the LURD was first organized abroad too made it more difficult to investigate its beginnings. While these omissions¹⁹⁰ have little influence on my overall argument, it is important that future researchers address these issues. In addition, I contend that these issues do not detract from the importance of this study, and of long-term research and collaboration.

Turning back to my fieldwork process, I return to my experience of sharing my research with my informants. Inspired by the initial positive responses I received and enabled by improved access to electricity, I began to read parts of my writings to several informants. While I was careful not to let my informants control my findings or to take their support as proof of my getting closer to a “truth”, I did find that informants’ comments nevertheless contributed to my confidence regarding my ideas. This time spent together and my attempt to focus on subjects wider than war itself added to the research and helped illuminate informants’ complex realities. If I focussed on only matters of war, this no doubt would have left me with an overblown sense of its importance in their lives today. My approach also shed light onto questions of the durability of their wartime organization, and thus cohesion.

¹⁸⁹ For a longer discussion of what this kind of “dialogic editing”, see Feld, Steven. 1987. “Dialogic Editing: Interpreting How Kaluli Read Sound and Sentiment.” *Cultural Anthropology* 2 (2): 190–210.

¹⁹⁰ Not only did the movement have two leaders before Mohammed Jumahdeh (whom I portray as the first chairman of the rebels), but the LURD also formed in Sierra Leone from five different organizations operating in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, probably around mid-1999. The name LURD was chosen through ballot from the five names of the joining organizations. Finally, it was argued that more of the military practice of the LURD came from the Special Forces, who had fought with the Kamajors in Sierra Leone.

Arguably, my immersion through participant-observation was the only way to understand the complexities of the surrounding context. This approach also resulted in new sources of information. For instance, I was able to compare what informants said with what they did. A relevant example of this concerns the durability of wartime organization. Whereas many former combatants and especially commanders highlighted these relationships in words a decade into post-conflict, this was often not the case in deeds. Although previous literature had prepared me for much tighter networks between former combatants, the ones I witnessed were almost always weaker than those based on family, labour or neighbourhood relations.

The downside of my undertaking the research at the time I did was the fact that I was investigating a war that had ended almost a decade before I began my research. With every year the events grew more distant in my informants' minds, further calling into question the accuracy of the narratives I collected. For example, some informants forgot dates in their retellings of widely known events, and others narrated events that they could not possibly have been present for (and then there were of course exaggerations and lies). Ultimately, it was often my own accumulated knowledge of Liberia and the specifics of the war that determined what I believed plausible or not. Here, I sympathise with Mitton, who struggled with similar issues when investigating atrocities in the neighbouring Sierra Leone. The length of my fieldwork, interviewing a wide range of actors on different levels and geographic locations, and triangulating accounts with other sources all helped to alleviate this problem. I therefore stress that, while the material is not perfect, it has nevertheless resulted in new and important information regarding the conflict and its dynamics.¹⁹¹ Here I also wish to underline the importance of the ethnographic approach in striving for reliability, which I will discuss in further detail in the following section. In order to further underline the difficulties the study of conflict brings, I call this approach conflict ethnography.

Conflict ethnography in practice

Researching war and violence – which ultimately always results in suffering, death and destruction – is not easy in any context. As Koen Vlassenroot wrote, scepticism is the prevailing viewpoint regarding the possibility of conducting research in conflict zones.¹⁹² In order to understand and do

¹⁹¹ Mitton 2015, p. 29.

¹⁹² Vlassenroot, Koen. 2006. "War and Social Research. The Limits of Empirical Methodologies in War-Torn Environments." *Civilisations. Revue Internationale D'anthropologie et de Sciences Humaines* 54: 191–98. See also Sluka, Jeffrey A. 1990. "Participant Observation in Violent Social Contexts." *Human Organization* 49 (2): 114–26; Zahar, Marie-Joëlle. 2009. "Fieldwork, Objectivity and the Academic Enterprise." In

something about these conflicts, Vlassenroot contented that we must conduct field research in these contexts. While my fieldwork only included four months in a setting characterized by conflict (a sporadic insurgency that took the form of attacks across the border to Côte d'Ivoire), I experienced the lasting legacy of conflict every day. Over a decade after the peace agreement, the Liberian civil wars I was investigating remained polarized and politicized. Elizabeth Wood has argued that such polarized contexts often leave few data sources unbiased.¹⁹³ In this sense it was helpful to have some time between the events and my investigating them, as I found that it was easier to discuss them with informants some time later rather than would likely have been the case immediately after the war.

In order to attain a balanced picture of the war in Liberia and respond to the likelihood of informant polarization, I undertook fieldwork with all the three factions that participated in the second part of the civil war. This was however only my first step towards ensuring the reliability of my results. Informant selection ultimately played the strongest part in ensuring reliability: I constantly made an effort to source representative informants when it came to ethnicity, faction, geographic location, military rank and social background. I initially concentrated my focus on unit commanders who were in contact with both grassroots fighters and the top leadership. Gradually building up to half a dozen independent chains of informants through the snowball method of chain referrals,¹⁹⁴ my informant base grew to span the entire chain of command from the level of political leadership down to the most inexperienced underage fighters. Working in the former strongholds of all three movements helped to ensure representability when it came to ethnicity, geography and faction membership. Finally, I found that living in local communities also exposed me to civilians' points of view on daily basis. I deemed this important for assessing the plausibility of some narratives, and for gaining a better understanding of the local and historical context.

Selecting representative informants was, however, not always a straightforward exercise. Firstly, former combatants are a hidden population, difficult to study. The problem is not that there are few former combatants; in a country like Liberia, which has emerged from a long civil war, former combatants are literally everywhere. The problem is rather, in the words of one of my informants, that the "war [is] not written [onto] anybody's skin."

Surviving Field Research: Working in Violent and Difficult Situations, edited by Chandra Lekha Sriram, John King, Julie Mertus, Olga Martin-Ortega, and Johanna Herman, 191–212. Abingdon: Routledge.

¹⁹³ Wood, Elisabeth. 2006. "The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones." *Qualitative Sociology* 29 (3): 373–86, p. 373.

¹⁹⁴ Bernard, H. Russell. 2006. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. 4th edition. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, pp. 192–194.

By this he meant that it is difficult to identify a former combatant. This said, identifying a former combatant is only the first step of the informant recruitment process. A mix of stigmatization, suspicion, trauma and a general feeling that the war is past history best left alone posed an ever greater barrier to gaining access to informants and their life experiences. A third complication was that the only way to get “thick” material was through establishing trust. Trust has been seen to contribute to access,¹⁹⁵ and is also linked to the quality of information gathered. Philippe Bourgois¹⁹⁶ described the importance of trust in relation to both his drug selling and using informants, and extended its importance to working with virtually anyone involved in dishonest (if not potentially disgraceful) activities. According to Bourgois, the only way to get past fabrications was “establishing long-term relationships based on trust.”¹⁹⁷ Conducting similar research as I, Mats Utas found that his formal interviews resulted in official, standardized stories that emphasized victimhood, and that more time and trust was required to get to the more complex private stories.¹⁹⁸ After all, why should anyone discuss a difficult issue – let alone potentially criminal activities – with strangers in the first place, when many would not even with close friends and family members? This fundamental question became central to my fieldwork. Because I worked without translators and research assistants (although the latter was a role that some of my informants took upon themselves at times in order to help me), I realized early on that it was only through participant-observation and the resulting long-term relationships that I could get meaningful answers.

There is, however, a contradiction between long-term relationships based on trust and the selection of representative informants. This is because in practice, these informants are not chosen by the researcher: the informants and researchers choose each other.¹⁹⁹ Such relationships are furthermore often characterized by a power imbalance, as it is the researcher who is more dependent on the informant than the other way around. Many Liberians associate research with organizations that provide aid and other concrete benefits, and as a result expected immediate material rewards for disclosing

¹⁹⁵ Ross, Amy. 2009. “Impact on Research of Security-Seeking Behaviour.” In *Surviving Field Research: Working in Violent and Difficult Situations*, edited by Chandra Lekha Sriram, John King, Julie Mertus, Olga Martin-Ortega, and Johanna Herman, 177–88. Abingdon: Routledge, p. 181.

¹⁹⁶ Bourgois, Philippe. 2003. *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁹⁷ Bourgois 2003, pp. 12–13.

¹⁹⁸ Utas, Mats. 2004. “Fluid Research Fields: Studying Excombatant Youth in the Aftermath of the Liberian Civil War.” In *Children and Youth on the Front Line: Ethnography, Armed Conflict and Displacement*, edited by Jo Boyden and Joanna de Berry, 209–36. New York: Berghahn. For a similar case, see Mitton 2015, p. 23.

¹⁹⁹ Bernard 2006, p. 196.

information. This association is understandable, and not only because I was obviously a privileged white foreigner. I found that former combatants, who can claim monopoly on information related to the micro-dynamics of war, often put this association into action. Many of them were anything but shy when it came to viewing their knowledge as a commodity. I saw that in some areas, former combatants tried to ensure that researchers needed to deal exclusively with them in order to make themselves indispensable. Other former combatants established non-governmental organizations, and have made a business out of helping researchers gain fast access to seemingly unlimited numbers of former combatants.

I chose not to pay for interviews, as I believed that this would have led to an expectation of a monetary reward, thus influencing potential informants' willingness to discuss with me in the first place. More importantly, paying informants might have negatively influenced the quality of information received, for instance by adding a bias in the form of standardized narratives of what Utas calls "victimcy", or self-representations as victims without agency.²⁰⁰ Expectations of immediate material reward would also have made the development of long-term relationships and trust difficult. I often addressed this issue when I first met my informants. While in several cases potential informants chose not to talk to me, I ultimately believe that this was for the best.

In practice, some forms of exchange were, however, often inevitable. For instance, I often felt bad when I was offered food by clearly impoverished informants, or when family members, especially children, fell ill. I often invited my informants to eat together with me, and sometimes bought liquor, cigarettes, rice or sardines to compensate for the trouble I caused them. Not to have done so would not have been culturally inappropriate in a context where sharing is expected: in Liberia I found that, lacking other means of external support systems such as state-sponsored social security, people most importantly depend on each other to survive in what Carol Stack has called "swapping" of resources and the creation of reciprocal obligations.²⁰¹ To provide no input whatsoever would furthermore have made me feel very uncomfortable, especially with the informants who had certainly invested more time, effort and resources into me than they would ever receive in return.

It could be argued that there is a conflict between establishing trust and ensuring objectivity, since some of my informants have admittedly become nothing less than friends during the years. Few social science researchers

²⁰⁰ Utas 2004, pp. 209-210.

²⁰¹ It should be underlined that Stack wrote not of West Africa, but of black communities in the United States. Similar strategies are used even elsewhere. Stack, Carol. 1974. *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community*. New York: Harper & Row.

today believe that their research provides an objective representation of reality, yet the idea of objectivity serves as a useful ideal to protect against sloppiness by rejecting relativism.²⁰² A discussion of objectivity and other methodological concerns can however only be realized if methodological choices and their consequences are openly discussed in relation to research results. In my case, it was far from all of my informants whom I became intimate with. Triangulation too helped objectivity, as did the fact that I could triangulate information that came from informants independent of each other. Nevertheless, I believe that the best information often came from those closest to me, since these informants were willing to invest more time and effort into assisting me. In this sense the question of proximity is closely connected to reliability, or the idea that repeating the study would result in similar results.

Reliability is a complicated issue in all social science with a fieldwork element, because the researcher effectively becomes the instrument of study and relies on personal relationships to acquire reliable information. Some scholars argue that that reliability as it is described in the natural sciences is simply irrelevant to the social sciences.²⁰³ Yet reliability issues arguably depend on validity. Assuming that I had found a representative sample of informants who were willing to work with me, issues of reliability would have played a subordinate role. After all, I expect that another researcher could find a similar sample of informants and, after a sufficient investment of time and effort, arrive at more or less the same conclusions as I did.

My decision to employ the more familiar social science terminology in the above discussion derives from the fact that ethnography still tends to be discussed in its own methods literature. This has perhaps been influenced by descriptions of fieldwork as “messy.” And while anyone who has conducted fieldwork in conflict settings should know that this messiness is an indisputable fact, this does not mean that ethnographers (who are often anthropologists) do not care about methods. In reality it is rather the opposite: it could be argued that Bronislaw Malinowski – the pioneer of ethnographic methods and especially participant observation – set the standard of fieldwork too high, as his posthumously published diary clearly shows that even he failed to live up to them.²⁰⁴ James Clifford calls this the “myth of fieldwork” – myth because

²⁰² Zahar 2009, p. 193.

²⁰³ Yanow, Dvora. 2006. “Neither Rigorous nor Objective? Interrogating Criteria for Knowledge Claims in Interpretive Science.” In *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Method and the Interpretive Turn*, edited by Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, 67–88. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe.

²⁰⁴ Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1984. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. Long Grove, Ill.:

[t]he actual experience, hedged around with contingencies, rarely lives up to the ideal; but as a means for producing knowledge from an intense, intersubjective engagement, the practice of ethnography retains a certain exemplary status.²⁰⁵

Perhaps then the main issue is poor communication. After all, the issues of generalizability, validity and reliability discussed above concern all social science research, but are rarely explicitly taken up by ethnographers.

Ethnographic accounts on conflict dynamics are however more necessary than ever, at least if one accepts the recent developments outlined by Mark Duffield and Jonathan Fisher.²⁰⁶ In a discussion of contemporary research on Rwanda, Fisher raised questions regarding research agendas that have become both highly polarized and partisan. He argued that researchers' capacity to "be there" and the right to write representations of the country have recently been seriously challenged. This challenge comes from leaders who seek to govern knowledge production in order to protect their sovereignty, with the aim of monopolizing representation of the country and its regime.²⁰⁷ Perhaps a more general trend has been presented by Duffield, who theorises that less fieldwork is conducted in conflict settings as a result of the decline of area studies. While these arguments especially apply to ethnographic fieldwork, it is possible that other kinds of conflict-related fieldwork are actually on the rise, possibly because changing logistics have resulted in increased accessibility. Fieldwork has increasingly become a component of much qualitative conflict research, although in forms that diverge from previous anthropological norms. As Duffield described his fieldwork (which betrayed a possible rural bias) in the 1970s, "it was then expected that you'd adapt to local conditions, live modestly, learn the relevant language and spend at least a year in the field to observe a complete seasonal cycle."²⁰⁸ In investigations of conflict it has been much more common for researchers to spend a week or two in the capital, attended by local research assistant. Improved infrastructure may have allowed the expansion of this style of veranda research to include tarmac research outside urban areas. As Fisher discussed, the Rwandan government has used this style of fieldwork to criticise research results.²⁰⁹ Even further, such

Waveland Press; Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1989. *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*. London: Athlone.

²⁰⁵ Clifford, James. 1983. "On Ethnographic Authority." *Representations* 2, 118–46, p. 119.

²⁰⁶ Fisher, Jonathan. 2015. "Writing about Rwanda since the Genocide: Knowledge, Power and 'Truth.'" *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 9 (1): 134–45; Duffield, Mark. "From Immersion to Simulation: Remote Methodologies and the Decline of Area Studies." *Review of African Political Economy* 41, no. sup1 (2015): S75–94.

²⁰⁷ Fisher 2015, pp. 141–142.

²⁰⁸ Duffield 2015, pp. S79–S80.

²⁰⁹ Fisher 2015, p. 141.

fieldwork methods also fall far short of the ethnographic ideals. This trend is especially worrying because it is exactly the type of in-depth information that ethnographic studies with citizens provide that is needed when governments seek to limit access to information. This said, a similar decline may also be taking place in the field of conflict ethnography as a whole. It is arguably graduate students who do the bulk of fieldwork in conflict areas, as they are less burdened by academic tenures and personal restrictions than the more established researchers who instead more often focus on theory than long-term fieldwork. And for many students nowadays, a number of shorter visits of perhaps a month or two at a time to central locations have come to replace the much longer visits in more remote places. To compound these issues, research in conflict settings in general is increasingly curbed by the increasing awareness of ethical constraints and risks involved with fieldwork in conflict zones. Combining the views of Duffield and Fisher paints a troubling view of the future: the decline of long-term conflict ethnography is distressing, because it is needed more than ever.

I conclude with a brief mention of the ethical considerations that came into play throughout this research. As Elizabeth Dauphinée did, I too built my dissertation on the shoulders of the people who chose to assist me, and to open up their lives for me and this research project.²¹⁰ Their decision to do so has incurred a substantial debt, which I can never repay. The least I can do is try to ensure that no harm will come to any of my informants.²¹¹ To this end, I have always striven to be open about my intentions to research wartime organization through my collection of personal biographies, and have refrained from including any information in notes or publications that could be used to identify my informants. I also took care to end interviews if informants displayed their discomfort. When making the decision to share research with my informants, I was willing to remove their information if any had not given their consent to be involved (though none did so).

One aspect of conflict ethnography that I feel is disheartening is the emphasis given to “surviving fieldwork”,²¹² as though it is a task to be

²¹⁰ Dauphinée, Elizabeth. 2007. *The Ethics of Researching War: Looking for Bosnia*. Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press.

²¹¹ Others see that research can or should be beneficial to those studied. See Hoffman, Danny. 2004a. “The Submerged Promise: Strategies for Ethnographic Writing in a Time of War.” *Anthropological Quarterly* 77 (2): 323–30; Höglund, Kristine, and Magnus Öberg. 2011. “Improving Information Gathering and Evaluation.” In *Understanding Peace Research: Methods and Challenges*, edited by Kristine Höglund and Magnus Öberg, 185–98. London: Routledge, p. 197.

²¹² This is reflected in the names of several books designed for those planning fieldwork, including: Howell, Nancy. 1990. *Surviving Fieldwork: A Report of the Advisory Panel on Health and Safety in Fieldwork*. Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association. See also the newer Sriram, Chandra Lekha, John King, Julie Mertus, Olga Martin-Ortega, and

endured rather than a privilege. This emphasis often comes at the cost of conducting comprehensive fieldwork. This is not to say that safety issues should be neglected or flat out ignored, as has sometimes been the case in the field of anthropology.²¹³ Rather, discussing dangers should be met with equal emphasis on discussing how to do good fieldwork. After all, my own fieldwork came with risks including malaria, parasites, infected wounds and fear, mostly of bleeding to death on small bush roads as a result of a traffic accident.

Despite these potential risks for my personal security, I learned that for me the only way to conduct ethnographic fieldwork is not in isolation from my surroundings, but rather in immersion in them. As with many other ethnographers before me,²¹⁴ I too found safety in being *with* people, instead of seeking safety *from* them. I provide the example here of the drug ghettos – houses or rooms used for purchasing and consuming drugs. My main worry was not what could happen to me, but to the people surrounding me. What if my presence had invited a raid? Not only would this have caused significant danger to others, but it may also have made continued fieldwork in those locales impossible.²¹⁵ My professed view is that building trust-based relationships during fieldwork, ethnographic or otherwise, is hardly possible if the researcher is afraid of the people investigated. At worst, it betrays an underlying view that these very people are somehow different from us. This too I consider a very problematic notion, for both professional and personal reasons.

To conclude, this section has described the methods I used during my research. Because of the particular difficulties that the study of conflict involves, I consider my approach an example of conflict ethnography. Although I have discussed some issues with this approach, I deem it most suitable for this kind of research. This is because it was only by using this approach, and its emphasis on long-term fieldwork and trust-building, that I could succeed in understanding how Liberian military organizations fostered cohesion. I will now move on to a summary of my research results.

Johanna Herman, eds. 2009. *Surviving Field Research: Working in Violent and Difficult Situations*. Abingdon: Routledge.

²¹³ Lecocq, Baz. 2002. "Fieldwork Ain't Always Fun: Public and Hidden Discourses on Fieldwork." *History in Africa* 29: 273–82; Sluka 1990. For perhaps the most potent counterexample, see Winkler, Cathy. 2002. *One Night: Realities of Rape*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

²¹⁴ For only one example, see Contreras, Randol. 2012. *The Stickup Kids: Race, Drugs, Violence, and the American Dream*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, p. 23.

²¹⁵ For comparison, see Sluka 1990, pp. 118-119.

Summary of the essays

The following four essays investigate how Liberian military organizations created cohesion. The thread running throughout these essays is the realization that the concept of cohesion in military organisations has so far been investigated in too narrow a manner. I argue that cohesion cannot simply be understood as military effectiveness, or as bonds of solidarity between individuals. Instead I contend that cohesion concerns unity in an organization, and that in order to create this unity, military organisations employ the three sources of cohesion discussed earlier in the theoretical framework – coercion, compensation and constructs. In investigating the three Liberian military organizations, I use the three sources as lenses to illuminate how cohesion worked and was formed. The resulting essays build on each other, and successively offer a comprehensive picture of Liberian military organizations and how they create and maintain force. In so doing these studies also exemplify how the three classical theories of cohesion interact.

Aside from the investigation of cohesion, it is also my hope that this chronology of events will help to establish a better understanding of a tumultuous period in Liberian history. It is a difficult prospect to build a nation when it lacks a shared understanding of history and a common identity. Many Liberians still struggle to understand what happened in their country during the “civil crisis”, and the next generation will hopefully have a more nuanced understanding of these tragic events. As Stephen Lubkemann has discussed, any attempt to understand past events based on the recollections of those in the present is necessarily selective and fragmentary. And any historical accounts built from such recollections are complex, political and subjective. At the same time “there is simply no way around actually ‘doing history’ in the classical sense of attempting to reconstruct a past to be treated, at least for purposes of any given analysis, as ‘settled’ and (relatively) authoritative.”²¹⁶ It could be questioned whether objective history exists in the first place, as witnessed by the constant reinterpretation of history. Because of their politicised and polarised nature, this is certainly the case with wars (and especially civil wars). This subjectivity also extends to the post-conflict situations where “accountability institutions” such as war crime courts can craft a historical account biased towards those who emerged victorious.²¹⁷ In contributing to the historical record of the Liberian civil wars, it is my hope that the following essays will

²¹⁶ Lubkemann, Stephen. 2008. *Culture in Chaos: An Anthropology of the Social Condition in War*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, pp. 30-31.

²¹⁷ See Hoffman, Danny. 2004b. *The Kamajors of Sierra Leone*. Phd. diss.: Duke University, pp. 337-365. By not assigning blame I hope to have avoided at least some of Hoffman’s pertinent criticism regarding the unavoidable “doing history”.

serve as a relatively fair, if modest, contribution to fostering unity and cooperation in a country divided by many fractured, contradictory and often polarising narratives of its past. This is what Roland Marchal suggested in the case of Central African Republic, when he argued that national narratives could alleviate insecurity and foster long-term cooperation and development.²¹⁸ If it is true, and I am able to make such a contribution, this would help me repay the debt I owe to Liberians.

Essay I: “Taylor must go” – the strategy of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy

The first essay serves several purposes in the context of this dissertation. Firstly, it provides an insider account of the historical context in which Liberian military organizations operated during the second part of the civil war. Such contextualization is necessary for any in-depth investigation of the internal dynamics of military organizations, and in this case it provides a foundation for the following essays. Secondly, the essay makes a case for the centrality of cohesion for the LURD’s strategy aimed at ridding Liberia of President Charles Taylor. The fact that the quote in the title of this essay comes from President George W. Bush is not a coincidence (nor is the fact that many former LURD combatants repeated the president’s words without being aware of their origins). As this article argues, the LURD could never focus solely on their enemies, and furthermore had to communicate with other audiences, such as the United States government. In addition, the rebels had to concentrate on uniting themselves. Without cohesion, there would be no organization to implement strategy, and without organization and strategy there was no prospect of victory. As a result, the LURD employed three ways to unite itself. Firstly, the rebels focused on the efficient minimum common denominator: the persona of Charles Taylor. This formed a very loose ideology that lay foundations for a common identity. This exemplified the importance of constructs in the creation of cohesion. Secondly, after having found physical coercion difficult, the ethnically and religiously diverse rebels enacted interfaith rituals that called for a god to punish those who opposed the cause. This kind of coercion required the existence of a particular kind of belief system attuned to the surrounding cultural context. Thirdly, the political wing of the LURD controlled the supplies, without which it was impossible to continue fighting. This can be taken as an example of compensation. The fact that the LURD disintegrated soon after the war’s end can be attributed to the fact that most

²¹⁸ Marchal, Roland. 2015. “Being Rich, Being Poor: Wealth and Fear in The Central African Republic.” In *Making Sense of the Central African Republic*, edited by Tatiana Carayannis and Louisa Lombard, 53–75. London: Zed Books, p. 73.

of the promises made during the war were not kept after the hostilities ended. This, connected to the organization's attempts to ban distracting economic activities such as mining during the war, suggests that it is not only immediate rewards, but also long-term prospects that can lead to unity. Whereas the LURD was able to form enough cohesion to rid Liberia of Taylor, it remained a decentralized movement characterized by loose cohesion. With the political goal of ridding Taylor achieved and expectations formed by promises made by leaders during the war turned to naught, the organization had little offer to its members, who left. Since the formation of cohesion is a core task of any military organization, the LURD's disintegration emphasizes how crucial cohesion is to similar decentralized movements.

Essay II: "No die no rest"? Coercive discipline in Liberian military organizations

The second essay establishes the Liberian warring factions as cases of the broader category of military organizations, albeit weakly formalized ones. This justifies investigating typical strategies of fostering discipline employed by military organizations around the world in the Liberian context. As the study of European military experiences illustrates, discipline is closely connected to organization and the ways in which wars are fought. For instance, when European military formations dispersed following improvements in firepower, the mechanistic view of discipline became obsolete due to the difficulty of supervising soldiers. The same applied for the guerrilla warfare fought in Liberia. Comparisons with Europe also suggest that Liberian rebels were to some extent comparable with citizen-soldiers of the early 20th century when it came to their disapproval of extreme coercion, such as corporal punishment. These comparisons thus criticize the portrayals (such as those that began this dissertation) of African civil wars as particularly bizarre, chaotic or uncivil, as well as the stereotype that African rebels use indiscriminate violence to control their (often abducted and underage) fighters. Curiously, while a "no die no rest" attitude to discipline existed in Liberia, narratives from rebels contained very few examples of such extreme coercion. While executions certainly took place, less severe coercion common in all military organizations was more important. Any widespread use of extreme coercion would have caused organizations with weak cohesion to disintegrate. The fact that commanders were afraid to employ executions suggests that rebel organizations simply lacked the strength and legitimacy to begin executing their members on a broad scale. Instead, other kinds of coercive measures were used. These included the imposition of hierarchies and rules and regulations, the creation

of in-groups and out-groups, attempts to keep fighters on frontlines where they had little choice but to fight, and disseminating norms. In regards to these norms, violence was increasingly justified towards those identified as “soldiers”. This suggests that identities resulted in decreased need for the rebel movements to enforce discipline. This was the result of self-control, but also peer pressure resulting from soldiers internalising military norms. That violence could be used against norm-breakers nuances the often romantic idea of military comradery. This latter point is especially pertinent in considering those who fought on the government side against the rebels. The subsequent essay investigates these forces, as summarised below.

Essay III: Contracting war in West Africa: Cohesion and the business of war in Charles Taylor’s Liberia

An earlier version of the third essay was presented at the conference “The Origins of Military Cohesion: Broadening the Perspective” at the Swedish Defence University on December 4th, 2015. It explores compensation, a source of cohesion often deemed insufficient. Employing the case of the militias to whom Charles Taylor subcontracted the war during his presidency, this essay makes three claims. The first concerns the militia organization, which was much looser and at least initially more voluntarily based than the literature suggests. While military patrimonialism existed, it gives a too static view of the much more fluid realities experienced by Taylor’s “contractors”. This also meant that the mostly untrained militias typically operated in irregular formations that prevented the establishment of strong primary groups. The second claim concerns the sources of cohesion among the militias, which was not based on any familiar ideology (such as nationalism, or ethnic identity). This further questions the stereotype of African warfare as “ancient hatred” between ethnic groups. Instead, the more corporate Taylor sought to unite the militias through compensation, thus making it possible to mobilize fighters from the various ethnic groups in the region. The third claim concerns the remaining source of cohesion, compensation. It would be too easy to equate this to immediate material rewards. Instead, I argue that the militia members’ main motivations were their hopes for inclusion into the state patrimony. Compensation proved a problematic foundation for unity, however. For example, Taylor’s elite Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU) was unwilling to fight the war against the rebels, illustrating that too much compensation could render forces unavailable. Yet too little was not good either, as shown by the militias: when members realised that it would be impossible to reward all of them after the war, compensation worked to increase competition instead of cooperation. With dwindling resources, this problem only worsened with time. Nevertheless,

compensation clearly played an important role in the formation of cohesion, both among the militias and the rebels. This questions some of the prevailing normative understandings regarding its importance.

The focus of this essay then shifts to the context. I continue the discussion of military organizations in Liberia that began in Essay II, and argue that organisations operated in a context that lacked a strong central state (or Hobbes' "leviathan") that was capable of compelling others to follow. Even further, the fragmented social organization in Liberia offered limited possibilities to mobilize entire ethnic groups for war. The importance of logistics and the presence of Taylor's feared representatives rendered any notion of outright anarchy impossible.

Essay IV: Mystical and modern transformations in the Liberian Civil War

The fourth essay approaches the issue of constructs – in this case identities – from a different angle than was done in Essay II. Here the focus is broader, and encompasses participants in both Liberian civil wars, including thousands in the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) who may have never fought in the first place. It is argued that when it comes to cohesion the most important difference between all those who participated in the war can be captured in two ideal types of former fighters: the larger group of combatants who never received formal training, and the smaller group of soldiers who received formal training from the AFL (or, as becomes clear in Essay III, Taylor's ATU). It is argued that whereas the former group never managed to form much unity among itself, the latter group has remained a somewhat cohesive whole to this day. This is because of the durability of the soldier identity, which in turn depended on two factors: social status and institutional backing. When it comes to social status, while soldiers have often had a negative reputation in Liberian history and the role of the army was insignificant – especially in the second war – soldiers were able to justify their authority through referring to their formal military training. Over a decade after the war, the soldiers today enjoy a surprisingly good reputation in the minds of many Liberians. Relevance of the soldier identity is also maintained by institutional backing: soldiers enjoy a meagre monthly pension which too has kept the identity relevant in the post-conflict era. Compared to the one-time Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration project that targeted former combatants, soldiers continue to reap benefits from their service to this day. These kinds of professional identities are arguably important for cohesion. What this essay underlines, however, is that identities need to be maintained as relevant in changing contexts. This is well-illustrated by how the one-time payment for combatants helped to make

that identity irrelevant, whereas the continued institutional backing for soldiers maintains this identity. Identities therefore do not exist in a void, but require cultivation. Without the Liberian state and its institutional arrangements, it is far from clear that (former) soldiers would feel as strongly about their military backgrounds as they do.

Conclusions

While the essays in this dissertation were written as separate studies, they collectively exemplify how non-Western, non-state military organizations build cohesion by drawing from three sources – coercion, compensation and constructs. By focusing on how organizations foster cohesion, this dissertation underlines the need to broaden the perspective, and to investigate cohesion in a more comprehensive way than has been previously done. This section will first specify the five distinct contributions made by the dissertation, followed by a discussion regarding the implications for future research.

The first contribution of this dissertation concerns the concept of cohesion itself. While its importance has been recognized in several disciplines, this dissertation has illustrated that it is inadequate to see cohesion simply as micro-level solidarity within primary groups, or as tactical-level combat efficiency. When it comes to primary groups in the military, they have been misunderstood as family-like at the cost of their fundamentally functional purpose. Military primary groups such as units do not materialize from thin air but need to be created and maintained – just like the military organizations they are parts of. As the investigation of the Liberian government militias in Essay III showed, their organizing principles differed significantly from the Western conceptions of family-like *Gemeinschaft* and more bureaucratic *Gesellschaft*. As a result, many “contractors” never fought in stable groups that could be characterised as primary groups in the first place; the fact that they still fought for several years is difficult to explain by primary group bonds alone. Narratives of coercion from militias also emphasize the finding regarding the dark side of comradery in Essay II. It is difficult to see how questions regarding coercion used by peers work alongside ideas of solidarity and trust.

Equating cohesion with tactical-level combat efficiency is in turn blatantly monocausal. Doing so disregards other factors, such as equipment and numbers, which influence combat efficiency. Such conceptualization also sits uneasily with ideas of interpersonal primary group cohesion. For instance, it has been established that small group cohesion can have a

negative influence on combat efficiency, but furthermore be outright harmful for achieving the goals of the overall organization.²¹⁹ For these reasons alone cohesion cannot be equated with combat efficiency, making a different conceptualization of cohesion necessary: cohesion concerns unity in an organization. This is not to say that training – organizations’ attempts to improve military efficiency – is unimportant. However, from a cohesion perspective evidence suggests that it may be even more crucial how training influences identities and norms. This was brought up in Essay IV, where soldier identity was found to be the most lasting group identity of the civil wars. The importance of identity has come up in each of the four essays.

Second, this dissertation investigates the applicability of classical theories of cohesion in an empirical context not previously investigated from this perspective. While these theories are typically studied with regards to Western state militaries, this dissertation probes the utility of these theories for understanding other contexts, namely, state and non-state militaries functioning in areas which lack a strong central state and which have a society characterized by fragmentation. Doing so helps to speak to the scope conditions – the qualifying conditions – of extant theories of military cohesion. The previous focus on the micro-level of Western state militaries has meant that the importance of underlying macro-level factors have been taken for granted. In practice this has meant that higher-level explanations have received much less attention than they deserve. For instance, it is hardly enough to form cohesive primary groups when they need to risk their destruction on behalf of other groups: it should not be taken for granted why a squad would risk any of its members for a company, army, government, or nation. That these kinds of considerations are assumed underlies the importance of studying non-Western and non-state military cohesion.

This does not necessarily mean that micro-level explanations of cohesion are wrong. What this does however mean is that insufficient attention has been paid to other levels of analysis that these explanations depend on: previous literature has often disregarded the agency of military organizations in the formation of cohesion, but also the existence of specific contexts with established and legitimate formal state structures and strong social organizations. All these three play crucial roles in the formation of military cohesion through influencing groups’ capacity to foster cohesion. In the Liberian case the combination of a weak state and a fragmented society obstructed attempts to foster cohesion. While even in the West, the military served as the school for the nation, in the sense that it fostered nationalism

²¹⁹ As best exemplified by discussions of individuals and groups within an organization turning against the higher-level goals. For a good examination of this phenomenon of “hell, no: we won’t go,” see Holmes 2004, pp. 316-330.

(rather than the other way around),²²⁰ conscription was a process that required not only an ideology with some legitimacy, but also the institutions that would do the schooling. Similar limitations concerned the use of coercion, as discussed in Essay II. The fact that modern Western states do not need to use violence today means that they have more coercive power than ever before. If anything, the opposite is true of the rebel movements in Liberia. While violence was certainly used for the purpose of subjugating defiance to the organizations' wishes, doing this systematically remained risky. Deemed illegitimate, widespread use of coercion would likely have led to the disintegration of these movements. In comparison, the use of coercion in Western societies and their militaries is more subtle and legitimate, to the point that it is often not perceived as such in the first place. As suggested in Essay III (and to a lesser extent even in the other three essays), the absence of other sources of cohesion meant that much had to be built around compensation. Again, state resources played a significant role. While Taylor's Government of Liberia was able to subcontract its war effort to militias, it was the rebels who ultimately won by squeezing out Taylor's resource base and sources of arms and ammunition, while retaining their own in neighbouring countries. This said, equating compensation with mere mercenarism misses the point that everyone fighting the war wished inclusion in the political project that would have guaranteed them future safety and security. This is not fundamentally different from what many Western soldiers (and academics) hope their careers (and political participation, no matter how limited) will ensure.

That weak state and a fragmented society played a role in Liberian military organizations' attempts to foster cohesion is visible in the degrees of cohesion achieved between them. While they were all characterized by loose cohesion, Taylor managed to centralize his ethnically diverse forces around himself through relying on compensation. The LURD remained much more decentralized, and suffered from inter-ethnic strife that a power-sharing agreement on which its organization was built helped to alleviate. Ethnicity played a more positive role in the MODEL, the smaller of the rebel movements. Its hierarchy was dominated by the interrelated Krahn and Sarpo ethnic groups, which both originate in Southeastern Liberia, where the movement mostly operated. In all three cases, factors such as the lack of state structure and fragmented social organization narrowed the groups' capacity to foster cohesion in ways not necessarily obvious in Western state militaries.

Hence, this dissertation argues that investigation of military cohesion cannot be contained in the investigation of micro-level factors alone. The perspective needs to be broadened to encompass not only mezzo-level

²²⁰ Lachmann 2013, p. 48.

explanations which include what organizations do, but since these organizations also operate in a broader context, even macro-level considerations.

Third, the dissertation derives new theoretical insights, which extend traditional theories of cohesion. In particular, this dissertation finds that the three classical sources of cohesion suggested by previous literature – coercion, compensation and constructs (such as identity and ideology) – cannot be studied in isolation from each other. The investigation of Liberian organizations shows, for instance, that when compensation (salaries and other material benefits) is needed for survival, it can coerce people into fighting as a part of an armed group. This is a point discussed in Essay III, where many believed that the structural uncertainty worsened by war could best be minimized by inclusion into the patrimonial state. Fighting in the militias – or joining the rebels – became the only way to do this. Another example of the way coercion, compensation and constructs interact comes in Essay II: employing coercion proved difficult when it was deemed illegitimate even by those agents who were supposed to employ it. Nevertheless it became expected after it became connected to the soldier identity: “the duty of a soldier is to fight and follow orders.” Compensation in the form of positive incentives was in turn also linked to adherence to group norms. In all movements some “hustling” with guns was accepted as inevitable (if not necessary), but those bearing arms were still expected to fulfil their military duties when requested to do so. While the importance of constructs should hence not be underestimated for legitimizing – if not requiring (Essay II) and deserving (Essay III) – action, Essay IV found these constructs were situational. The fact that most of the combatants with informal, if any, military training went forward with their lives in the post-conflict era, whereas soldiers with formal military training still await their reward, suggests that institutional backing can help to make and keep identities relevant in changing situations through the use of coercion and compensation. Even violence can be used in the same way, for instance when certain groups are targeted. Coercion can thus force a certain identity even on others (Essay II). These interactions suggest that classical theories of cohesion should not be examined in isolation, but rather in unison. Ultimately, these classical theories all concern different kinds of power used to unite organizations.

Fourth, the dissertation contributes to improving understanding of the internal dynamics of the three Liberian military organizations that fought in the Second Liberian Civil War, and especially how they fostered cohesion. This is not least the case with Essay I, which provided an insider account of the strategy used by the rebel movement that forced Taylor from power. Whereas much literature assumes that only centralized and unitary actors – often equated with states – can be strategic, this essay argued that ultimately,

even the LURD was able to foster sufficient cohesion to implement strategy. This kind of contextualization of non-Western, non-state military organizations fighting war can thus question many normative assumptions regarding warfare in Africa and elsewhere. This dissertation has also generated new empirics regarding the conflict, thus offering possibilities for comparison with other conflicts, as well as improving empirical understanding of recent history in Liberia and West Africa.

Fifth, in policy terms, this new empirical data may help to improve historical awareness in Liberia, and thus, in the long term, contribute to bridging existing cleavages through the creation of a shared historical narrative that is presently missing. Despite the effort to craft such narrative by the post-war internationally supported Truth and Reconciliation Committee, I argue that this account lacked truth and contributed little to reconciliation. As a concrete evidence of its limited local impact, its recommendations were ignored by Liberian politicians, many of whom – including the President – would have been barred from holding political office had the recommendations been followed. Like many – if not all – countries that have experienced civil war, Liberia too remains a divided country. A better and more impartial understanding of shared past will hopefully help to foster cohesion and cooperation, and thus improve the lives of future generations.

Implications for future research

No ethnography can legitimately claim to completely cover its topic. As the discussion of the results of presenting research to my informants concretely proves, this is even the case with this dissertation. While it has improved our knowledge on how cohesion was built by Liberian military organizations, its use of these organizations as cases has also raised new questions about cohesion itself. As the essays show, fostering military cohesion during the war in Liberia was challenging. However, this observation is not limited to this particular country or war. Unable to build on existing structures like state and unified society,²²¹ non-state military organizations everywhere often begin from a difficult position. Yet as Marie Lecomte-Tilouine shows in her analysis of the Maoist rebels in Nepal, this feat may be difficult, but it is not impossible. Expanding from around sixty individuals to perhaps

²²¹ The fragmentation of society might be taken as a possibility for rebels to mobilize certain groups against others. While this is possible, a word of caution is in order: the fragmented social organization in Liberia also extends to the various ethnic groups. For instance, while the Krahn ethnic group of the former President Samuel Kanyon Doe is usually discussed as an entity, it consists of around a dozen groups that speak different dialects, spread in three administrative districts and a larger number of chiefdoms. These groups also carry much historical baggage in the form of previous conflicts and disagreements.

20,000 within a decade, the Maoists created what Lecomte-Tilouine calls a mystical and utopian “moral community” to which rebels were reborn into. This severed their ties to their previous communities, and thus gave them new identities.²²² While it has been argued that the wars in Liberia actually contributed to state-building, and at least to some extent even the building of the Liberian nation,²²³ the achievements in cohesion of the Liberian military organizations were modest in comparison to the Nepalese Communists. While it is conceivable that these differing outcomes can be explained by differences in existing social organizations, there may be other factors involved. Some African military organizations, such as the liberation movements that prevailed and became long-standing political parties, might offer more comparable cases where attempts to build cohesion were more successful.

Underlining the importance of macro-level factors also raises a vital question on levels of analysis. While this dissertation has investigated mezzo-level military organizations and the ways they seek to form cohesion, it seems clear that neither micro-level primary group dynamics nor macro-level factors can be ignored. This suggests that any future theorizing regarding cohesion should aim to include, if not integrate, these three levels of analysis. This would, for instance, help to explain the Vietnam trauma where individual and primary group goals were not always the same as those of the military, and where the military methods and objectives were not necessarily aligned with the norms, values and wishes of the American society back home. As Simon Wessely explains, “as war weariness developed and public support ebbed, group cohesion in theatre began to foster dissent rather than conformity with the goals of the military.”²²⁴ Without this kind of differentiation of levels of analysis, it becomes difficult to explain incidents like fragging, where soldiers turn against their commanders, who may be trying to advance the goals of the organizations they are representing. Conceivably, these three levels then need to be harmonized for strong cohesion to emerge. While Western nation-states have seemingly repeatedly succeeded in this in the past, it is not altogether clear how this happened. Neither should it be taken for granted that this would happen again in the same manner. As Howard has argued, the threat of war does not provide a cohesive force to the extent it once did in Europe, nor is

²²² Lecomte-Tilouine, Marie. 2015. “Rapture in the Nepal’s People’s War (1996-2006).” A paper presented at the conference “The Origins of Military Cohesion: Broadening the Perspective”, Swedish Defence University, December 3rd, 2015.

²²³ Gerdes, Felix. 2013. *Civil War and State Formation - The Political Economy of War and Peace in Liberia*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag. Following the unfulfilled hopes of state- and nation-building in Afghanistan and Iraq and security sector reform in general, these important processes have received much less attention.

²²⁴ Wessely 2006, p. 281.

death seen as a part of the social contract any longer.²²⁵ As a result, fighting and the risks of dying have been delegated to one professional group. While this may solve some problems with cohesion in the contemporary limited wars, it also raises questions of how Western states would form cohesion in total ones.

On the empirical side there are still many unanswered questions regarding the wars in Liberia, as well as the military organizations that fought there. As investigation of such poorly documented cases almost entirely rely on fieldwork, answering these questions will likely continue to prove challenging. Neither is the situation helped by the fact that especially the government forces' participation in the war remains a politicized topic due to the sentencing of Charles Taylor for war crimes, and the continuing rumours regarding a future war crime court. Several key actors have already died, which further limits possibilities for investigation. Important questions remain, especially concerning the origins of the MODEL, the reasons Taylor's Government of Liberia failed to unite the country and bring peace after he won the presidential elections in 1997, and whether war contributed to uniting Liberia (as happened in Europe during the early 20th century).²²⁶ Essays II and III have also nuanced some of the existing understandings of military organization in Liberia, which also carries implications for research regarding these wartime structures and the situation of former combatants in the post-conflict era.²²⁷ Finally, the essays in this dissertation have also repeatedly raised questions regarding the local understandings of war and the role violence plays in it. As Honig has illustrated in a very different context, strategy is not always guided by universal (rationalist) logic and principles. Instead, different logic and different principles may structure conventions of communication, and help to create more predictable patterns of warfare.²²⁸ While these kinds of questions are central for comprehending conflict – and hence cohesion – in all contexts, their potential usefulness in understanding African warfare seems indisputable. As the opening quotes of this dissertation well illustrate, warfare on this continent is often seen as nothing less than bizarre. Could the explanation behind these views simply be that the logic and principles of warfare are different from those deemed universal in the West?

²²⁵ Howard, Michael. 2001b. *The Invention of Peace: Reflections on War and International Order*. London: Profile, p. 100.

²²⁶ Mann 2013.

²²⁷ For some reflections, see Kähkö, Ilmari. 2014. "Once a Combatant, Always a Combatant?" <http://matsutas.wordpress.com/2014/01/07/once-a-combatant-always-a-combatant-by-ilmari-kaihko/>.

²²⁸ Honig, Jan Willem. 2012. "Reappraising Late Medieval Strategy: The Example of the 1415 Agincourt Campaign." *War in History* 19 (2): 123–51.

Ultimately, cohesion remains a practical problem to be solved for military practitioners around the world, and a central conundrum to be understood by researchers studying organized violence. It is my hope that this dissertation has contributed to broadening the perspective on cohesion, and thus paved the way for a theoretical debate that appears to have stalled for the previous decade, if not longer.

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