Comparative Strategy

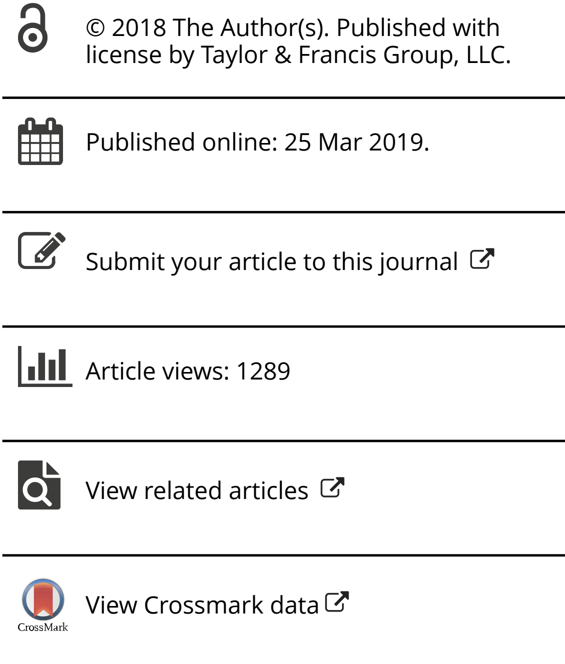
ISSN: 0149-5933 (Print) 1521-0448 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ucst20

Constructing war in West Africa (and beyond)

Ilmari Käihkö

To cite this article: Ilmari Käihkö (2018) Constructing war in West Africa (and beyond), Comparative Strategy, 37:5, 485-501, DOI: 10.1080/01495933.2018.1526587

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2018.1526587



© 2018 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.

Published online: 25 Mar 2019.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 1289

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=ucst20

COMPARATIVE STRATEGY
2018, VOL. 37, NO. 5, 485–501
https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2018.1526587

Constructing war in West Africa (and beyond)

Ilmari Käihkö

Department of Sociology, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the variation of the conduct of war in three Mano River countries in West Africa – Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone. A theoretical framework that views war as an institution is provided to explain this variation. While an existing idea in social sciences, to date it has largely been used to understand historical case. This article extends its scope to encompass non-state actors and the modern era through an account of how war was constructed in the Mano River region. The idea of war as an institution highlights the value of cultural sociological investigations of war. As institutions structure action, the framework offered carries immediate consequences for strategic thought.

Introduction

According to Danny Hoffman, the series of wars waged between 1989 and 2003 in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone formed a single Mano River War. As he notes, this helps to understand "the seminal role that border crossing and movement… of personnel, war materiel, financing, plunder, refugees, the infrastructure of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), tactics, and ideas" played in this conflict.[1] This characterization is indeed useful in emphasizing the interconnectedness of this vast conflict complex, in which Liberia and its warlord-cum-president Charles Taylor stood at the epicenter of. Nevertheless, empirical evidence from the Mano River region suggests a different picture, which emphasizes not similarities but differences.

More specifically, there are two inherent problems with the argument regarding a single regional war. First, this understanding excludes the fourth member of the Mano River Union, Côte d'Ivoire, which played an important role in this war from the moment the rebels led by Taylor invaded Liberia on Christmas Eve of 1989 until he was toppled by rebels supported by Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone (who in turn were assisted by Western powers) in August 2003. Even further, from the perspective of many supporters of the former Ivorian president Laurent Gbagbo, the war that began in September 2002 with the Taylor-supported rebellion is still ongoing at the time of writing. Secondly, while Hoffman is certainly correct in emphasizing the fluidity of fighters and their ideas that crossed international borders with ease, the nature of these ideas questions the existence of a single conflict complex. While the fighters drew their inspiration about war largely from the sources and crossed borders with ease, their ideas of what war was about nevertheless varied. Different ideas of war thus meant that they were, strictly speaking, not fighting the same war even when joining forces.

Based on long-term ethnographic study in Liberia that focused on Liberian former combatants but even Sierra Leoneans and Ivoirians who fought in these three countries, this article

CONTACT Ilmari Käihkö ilmari.kaihko@fhs.se @kaihko

© 2018 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

investigates this empirical puzzle presented by the different ideas of war. Why did the views of war differ? A two-pronged approach is made to answer this question. The first part of the paper engages the question theoretically from the perspective of cultural sociology, and combining literature on war and anthropology. While anthropology has studied war and war studies has acknowledged the importance of culture, there is much room for exchange of ideas between these literatures. As Antulio Echevarria has noted, in war studies investigations of culture have typically been pinned down on ubiquitous and elusive concepts.[2] And whereas culture remains the most central concept in anthropology, Anna Simons has argued that "anthropologists have barely studied modern wars, and when modern war is treated as a subject, it is the why behind the fighting and the aftermath of it - not the how or the process - that receives most attention."[3] Bringing these literatures closer together thus offers great promise for increasing our understanding about war and strategy. The second part of the paper traces how war was constructed in these three Mano River countries. The weak institutionalization of war in the Mano River region both necessitated but also left more freedom to determine what war was and what one should do in it. While drawing on common influences, these processes nevertheless resulted in different understandings of war and warfare.

Ultimately, the contribution of this article is a theoretical framework which can be used to investigate how war is constructed by its participants. While the idea of war as an institution on which this framework relies on is not new, the bulk of the literature assumes this to be the case with historical cases. This article illustrates the relevance of this argument to three contemporary cases, hence suggesting that the framework is relevant even in modern conflicts. Viewing war as an institution allows perspectives that differ from the legalistic Western one, which results in narrow and often ill-fitting frames for most contemporary armed conflicts.[4] Drawing its evidence from the narratives on and practices in war in the Mano River region, the article also argues that war in the borderland between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire was understood primarily as extraction and "hustle", where extraction displaced violence as the main ingredient of war. This part of the article also constitutes an empirical contribution to existing understanding of this particular conflict.

The way war is understood potentially influences all matters pertaining to it, including how and when violence is used, by who and against which targets.[5] Ending war, whether through violent or nonviolent strategies, becomes more complicated if belligerents' understanding of war is not fathomed. The most obvious example of this is of course the way war in the Mano River region has often escaped reason when subjected to our standards of war, and qualifies as little more than barbarism.[6] All these considerations are essential for strategic thought.

Methods

The rationale of investigating armed groups in non-Western contexts is that such investigations almost inevitably touch fundamental understandings of war and comparative strategy. This research is founded on evidence collected during four trips and a total of 15 months of what the author calls conflict ethnography conducted between March 2012 and April 2017 in seven of the fifteen counties of Liberia.[7] This work focused on former combatants, who were investigated through participant observation – including living together with them – as well as informal and semi-structured interviews and several unplanned focus group discussions. Because of the interconnectedness of these wars, forays into Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone have been unavoidable in the process. Not only did many Liberians fight in the two neighboring countries investigated here, but they also witnessed many of their neighbors fighting both alongside and against them in their own. More importantly for alleviating potential Liberian biases about foreigners, the research has also included smaller numbers of Sierra Leoneans and Ivorians, mostly but not exclusively former combatants, residing in Liberia. Whereas many of the former arrived in

Liberia with rebels in the early 2000's, most of the latter sought refuge after the violence that followed the Ivorian presidential elections in 2010-2011. All nevertheless possess personal experience of war in the region.

The disparity resulting from the lower numbers of Sierra Leoneans and Ivorians – a dozen and two dozen informants, respectively – in comparison to the over 300 Liberian former fighters consulted in this research is alleviated by three factors. First, and as already mentioned, many of the Liberian former combatants have intimate experience of war in not only their own country, but in the wider region, and have brought their own reflections into the differences of war within each one of them. Several of the informants have lived their lives in more than one country, thus allowing them to make comparisons across national borders and within the region. Secondly, the ethnographic work with former combatants has resulted in long-term relationships that have made it possible to investigate difficult topics through establishing trust and familiarity between the author and the informants. The author has employed a snowballing method of finding informants, with new referrals by old informants to find information about specific new topics. These independents chains of referral have repeatedly led to unexpected directions, such as to a group of Sierra Leonean former combatants residing in Monrovia in 2015, whom the author then met again in 2017. Contact with Ivorian informants was established already in 2012, with the bulk of the research with them conducted in March-April 2017. With refugees increasingly repatriating those remaining in Liberia felt the need to justify their choice to stay by referring to their status as former combatants, thus offering an unprecedented opportunity to explore wartime events. Thirdly, these relationships have allowed testing of ideas from existing literature throughout the years of study. More recently, improved internet access has allowed continued testing of the argument from afar. As can be expected, the more limited primary material on these two cases however requires a heavier emphasis on the existing secondary material. While it is likely that Guinea would offer a case more comparable to Côte d'Ivoire than the other two countries and support the overall argument in this paper, it is left out of the analysis due to limited primary source material.

War as an institution

Describing the majority of wars waged after 1945, Kalevi Holsti saw that they displayed "few characteristics associated with patterns of social action," leading to wars that "have broken out almost randomly" and where "strategy and tactics follow few rules and resemble opportunism of an extreme kind." In the end, Holsti saw that "Ideas play little or no role in these wars."[8] Considering that the vast majority of wars during this period have been internal conflicts, it is thus suggested that wars that differ from those fought between states are chaotic and unorganized – if wars at all.

While Holsti's pessimistic view regarding contemporary war is rather common, putting his views in context offers a way out from this rather unhelpful situation. After all, if most contemporary wars are irrational, they are hardly based on strategic thinking. By corollary, devising strategies to end these wars becomes a very difficult undertaking. Holsti's argument builds on that of Hedley Bull, who in his seminal study of international order investigated institutions – defined above everything else as mechanisms of order and common sets of "rules of the game".[9] According to Bull, war is "a settled pattern of behaviour, shaped towards the promotion of common goals, there cannot be any doubt that it has been in the past such an institution, and remains one."[10] Just like Holsti later, even Bull focused on war between sovereign states, which he described "legitimate". Nevertheless, Bull believed that rules of war were always different from those of peace, and that "In any actual hostilities to which we can give the name 'war', norms or rules, whether legal or otherwise, invariably play a part."[11]

Going to some extent against Bull's more somber views regarding the history of European warfare, Holsti professed a clear nostalgy for the recent past. Drawing inspiration from the Prussian general and military philosopher Carl von Clausewitz, Holsti argued that the institutionalization of war "comes from the norms, rules, and etiquette that were associated with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century wars in Europe." These norms build on four distinctions: that between combatants and civilians, between combatants and neutrals, between government and military, and between war and peace.

> All of these distinctions incorporated norms about the limits of human behavior in war. They assigned specific roles, responsibilities, status, and rights to the main actors involved in war. They defined both the permissible and at least implicitly, the impermissible. War is then no longer a random, anarchic activity, but a highly regulated domain with a normative core.[12]

As most post-1945 wars fared poorly against these four norms, he nevertheless witnessed the de-institutionalization of war. For Holsti, war appeared little more than anarchy.

Holsti's views regarding the coming anarchy however do not withstand closer scrutiny. The immediate problem with the idea of de-institutionalization is that the yardstick used by Holsti was Eurocentric. It is not surprising that non-Western cases fail to reach Holsti's four criteria of distinction, which derive from European interstate war. As these norms have never existed in most cases of recent wars, it is difficult to take their absence as evidence for overall de-institutionalization of war.

While the term war has been used to describe diverse and historically specific forms of events, they all have one thing in common: organized violence between groups.[13] As organized activity, war can neither be anarchy, nor exist without patterns of social action. These patterns in turn need to possess some kind of rationality and reason, instead of randomness and opportunism alone. In the end, both Bull and Holsti betray a Eurocentric bias, as the patterns they focus on are closely connected to the idea of war waged by sovereign states against each other.[14] This rather common view that relegates most contemporary wars into a category characterized by messiness is nonetheless unhelpful in suggesting ways to understand most contemporary wars.

As suggested by Bull, institutionalization nevertheless concerns all wars, including those waged by other groupings than the state. This should hardly be surprising, considering that human existence takes place within social order, formed by human activity. This order is the result of economy of effort, which leads to habitualization of action. When such action becomes reciprocal, it and the actors involved become typified into institutions.[15] As noted in anthropological studies of war,[16] this is the case even in places which have been limitedly exposed to influence from sovereign states, both during times of calm and violent strife. While recognized but not explored by Bull, what is often thought as unconventional war is simply based on different conventions. This was also pointed out by Bronislaw Malinowski decades earlier, when he argued that institutionalization of violence took place long before states emerged. According to Malinowski, individual acts of violence and collective feuds need to be distinguished from wars. Feuds are intracommunal and fought within an institution built on shared norms, which ensured that conflicts could be regulated and resolved by authority figures. War in turn is a late development in human history. While Malinowski views war as intercommunal and political,[17] he can be understood to suggest that in the absence of shared institutions these wars can only be curtailed by limiting sovereignty of these communities – as international institutions such as the United Nations have attempted to do. While on the whole bearing considerable similarities with the views of Bull and Holsti, Malinowski nevertheless possessed a broader perspective that included groups below the state level. This view was narrowed upwards towards sovereign states in subsequent literature.

While anthropology and cultural studies have rarely engaged military strategy, it would be risky for military strategy to ignore the important insights about violence within these literatures. The importance of culturally grounded views is apparent in the way Holsti reaches his conclusions. While he correctly believed the three criteria of institutions to consist of patterned actions,

ideas, and norms, rules, and etiquette,[18] his definition of the criteria made him unable to see the forest for the trees: unable to witness Eurocentric patterns or ideas, he saw none. A very different view of war emerges from Margaret Mead. Warranting that she mixes war as an institution and warfare as use of organized violence, she argued already in 1940 that "warfare, by which I mean recognized conflict between two groups as groups, … is an invention like any other of the inventions in terms of which we order our lives, such as writing, marriage, cooking our food instead of eating it raw, trial by jury or burial of the dead, and so on".[19] Even further, Mead also notes that once war is known, it will be waged. In fact, as Mead recognizes violence as the core of war, war is in effect forced upon people. As implied by Clausewitz' famous metaphor of belligerents as a pair of wrestlers,[20] Mead too sees that those attacked need to either defend themselves through war or to submit. In other words, and like many other institutions such as the state, war is contagious. Once such an invention is found useful, it tends to persevere.[21]

The recognition that war is an institution that can be understood in different ways offers a framework for grasping and devising strategies in all conflicts. The need for this framework is also illustrated by the recent prefixes attached to war, such as asymmetric and hybrid. These prefixes suggest the existence of some kind of ideal type of war, and the desperation where expectations deviate from experienced reality. This was for instance the case in Afghanistan, where Emile Simpson observed that "this 'war' is really not what war is typically understood to be."[22] War and warfare are nevertheless typically taken as given as regulated affairs between states. Tellingly, neither war nor its conduct were counted among one list of "core issues and theory of military sociology".[23] Ways to construct war forms one of the most important areas where cultural sociology can contribute to the study of war.

Analytically the benefit of the framework which sees war as an institution is the way it assists in assessing how organized violence is understood by different actors. According to John R. Searle, "An institution is a system of constitutive rules, and such a system automatically creates the possibility of institutional facts", which "exist within systems of constitutive rules."[24] Searle sees that a noun counts as an institution when it possesses deontic powers, which "carry rights, duties, obligations, requirements, permissions, authorizations, entitlements, and so on."[25] All societies need to limit violence within them, which is what a clear separation between peace and war attempts to do. War carries important duties, obligations and rights, all which become actual as soon as a polity declares war. Declaration of war plays an important role in defining the rights and responsibilities assigned to different actors – including combatants and noncombatants on both sides as well as neutral parties – during times of war. Yet before war can be declared, or organizations dedicated to wage it formed, war needs to be invented.[26]

As institutions structure action, understanding the logic of these actors is helpful in devising strategy. As argued by W. Richard Scott in a manner that goes squarely against the opportunism observed by Holsti, yet employs language familiar from strategic thought,

> Rational action is always grounded in social context that specifies appropriate means to particular ends; action acquires its very reasonableness in terms of these social rules and guidelines for behavior. Here choices are structured by socially mediated values and normative frameworks. Actors conform not because it serves their individual interests, narrowly defined, but because it is expected of them; they are obliged to do so.[27]

Norms and obligation are of course intimately linked to obedience, which in turn connects with power. Inherent in institutions is legitimacy, which suggests something more than mere coercion, and at minimum something that can be used to justify coercion.[28]

This kind of institutionalization has admittedly served to limit war in the West,[29] best evident in the way the dedicated organizations tasked to wage war in the West have increasingly become isomorphic through gradual adoption of shared vocabulary and norms regarding warfare. These norms have increasingly become codified into international law to the point that the Western construction of war to the point that, as David Kennedy argues, war has primarily become a legal

institution.[30] As Holsti too notes, "By the late nineteenth century, the laws and regulations of war … was one of the most fully elaborated areas of international law."[31]

War as a (largely Western) legal institution is far from universally accepted, as illustrated by internal conflicts where belligerents are still criminalized by state actors.[32] The upshot is that there are other ways to institutionalize war to make sense of organized violence which does not follow these Western norms. Institutionalization is necessary in all wars – hardly those between states alone – not only because of economy of effort, but also because of the meaning-making function of institutions.[33] Large-scale violence requires ideological justification,[34] which also provides the grounds for "social substitution" where anyone from the opposing group becomes a legitimate target.[35] As Jesse Glenn Gray argued, "The basic aim of a nation at war … is to distinguish as sharply as possible the act of killing from the act of murder by making the former into one deserving of all honor and praise." Because of the overall tendency to limit violence, its organized use requires legitimization in order to overcome the "discontinuity between the morality of war and peace".[36] Just as importantly, Andreas Herberg-Rothe has argued that adherence to the norms provided by the institution provide meaning to violent actions, as well as a shared understanding to the joint violent endeavor. From this perspective institutionalization of war is necessary for Clausewitz's famous understanding of war as a political instrument.[37] Holsti is correct in arguing that without a grammar offered by an institution war is indeed just senseless violence. Yet as scholars like Stephen Neff and Jan Willem Honig have convincingly illustrated, ideas of war are historically contingent even in Europe, and that understanding strategic logic requires the integration of contextual factors.[38] Lacking the context Holsti witnessed "little or no role" for ideas in these wars. Although the proposed institutional framework is admittedly largely descriptive and builds on the narratives and conduct of those involved in war, it nevertheless provides this necessary sensitivity to context and allows the consideration of deep historical, social and cultural factors necessary to analyze how war is understood. The second part of the paper applies this framework to form a thick description of the recent conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Liberia. Not only were there ideas of war in these countries, but it will be shown how they were constructed, as well as how they clashed.

War in the Mano River region

It is often said that we are slaves to our own experience, and tend to fight wars the same way we fought the last one. The Mano River region offers a context where none of the countries had fought a largescale war before, and where the past experience of armed conflict came from using force against restless – if not revolting – populations rather than strictly combatants.[39] As a result, war needed to be constructed,[40] which allows an excellent opportunity to investigate institutionalization of war. While many of the rebels who entered Liberia in 1989 and later Sierra Leone had received military training in Libya and their adversaries in Britain, Israel and the United States, state militaries played a limited role during the years of war that followed. This underlines inherent state weakness, but also the fact that it was the armed groups which especially in Liberia became the main organized political actors during war. As the fact that the vast majority of belligerents in the region lacked any formal military training illustrates, there was not as neat division between the civilian and the military as contemporary Western states are used to. Even more importantly, at the outset of war it was much less rationalized than Clausewitz's view of war as violence which focused on the sole purpose of destroying the opponent's armed forces, or means of resistance. The benefits of rationalizing war as violence are obvious: it allows the establishment of a rationalized state bureaucracy unencumbered by complex social relations and politics, whose sole responsibility is to mete out death and destruction on behalf of a sovereign.[41] As long as opponents shared the same understanding of war the military professionals could ignore cumbersome politics and other complex social relations and concentrate on violence and

violence alone. This is however clearly not how war was understood in the Mano River region when the war broke out in the last days of 1989, where the weak institutionalization of war allowed different ideas to emerge and flourish. That understandings of war evolved during the war serves as proof that there was more freedom to determine what war was and what one should do in it.

It was this mutability of ideas what war amounted to that necessitated its institutionalization. Connected to the want of a dedicated bureaucracy of military professionals with a ready idea of what war was about, football analogies helped in organization of force[42] while popular culture – especially action movies but even coverage of other armed conflicts – became the primary source of inspiration for use of force in the early 1990s.[43] As Joanna Bourke's discussion of combat literature and films in the West shows, this was comparatively nothing new, and had been embraced by military establishments as a way to foment useful "imaginary structures".[44] In the absence of similar training regimes in the Mano River region that would disseminate norms and practices, movies were utilized by both individuals and organizations engaged in the war. As one Sierra Leonean man told Paul Richards, movies were used as a source of "ideas about wars and skills for fighting."[45] Those forced to confront war thus sought to discover what they were supposed to do in war through whatever means available. Yet it is telling that the movies used typically portrayed violence as individual, instead of collective action.

Armed groups in turn attempted to form coercive mechanisms that would enable them to assert some control over war, which even here threatened to escape anyone's control. Belligerents thus depended on institutionalizing war. Yet while the inspiration for this institutionalization – previous military training when it existed and action movies when it did not – were the same, these processes of construction nevertheless led to different outcomes in Liberia and Sierra Leone. For instance, there were countless of individuals who called themselves *Rambo* throughout the region, and in Liberia alone a number of units received their name from movies such as *Delta force* and *Wild geese*. This proves that it was largely the same repertoire from which lessons were drawn from. Yet as portrayed by the different behavior discussed in the following two sections, these lessons were hardly the same. Finally, combatants themselves also recognized the importance of national borders, and hence to an extent subscribed to a national framework. For instance, Sierra Leonean fighters believed that the rituals that made them bulletproof but which also regulated their behavior through taboos did not apply abroad, as they were too far from the sources of these mystic powers. As a result, they could do things abroad that they would not have done at home.[46] It remains curious that none of my informants ever mentioned more local understandings of war, although these almost certainly contribute into national differences.[47]

An alternative explanation to the views that people from different countries conducted war in different ways is that referrals to outlandish practices could be instrumentally used to negate political claims posited by foreigners. As noted by Thomas Abler, "cries of atrocity and accusations of 'barbaric' activity" are common, as "typically enemy violations of a common code will receive wide publicity while the violations made by one's own forces will be denied or excused and justified as 'retaliation.'"[48] While this is plausible in theory, the problem with this explanation in practice is that in Liberia these views were not predominantly directed at enemies, but those fighting on the same side. Adopting a national framework to delegitimize contenders is certainly a plausible explanation for the narratives that emphasize foreignness, but only up to a point as this fails to explain variation in the first part of 1990s. Equally, this explanation fails to clarify the existing evidence in the more mundane cases without obvious power struggle, but where conduct of foreign fighters on one's own side was nevertheless considered outlandish and illegitimate. Similar problem exists with the view that explains national differences as a way to uphold semblance of legitimacy through assigning responsibility for atrocities to foreigners. The fact that these atrocities happened in the first place and resulted in adverse political effects suggests that they were acting outside the prevailing understanding of war in the local context.

It is important to note that ideas of violence hardly remained static during the years of war in the Mano River region. Even distant societies find that "battlefield … can become an arena of cultural change" due to the reciprocal dynamic of war, as practices are adapted, adopted and rejected.[49] Beyond the battlefields, Hoffman has demonstrated how increasing awareness of human rights norms in the region for instance influenced what counted as legitimate use of violence and against whom.[50] Similarly, interviews with people who could be called strategists in these wars show that violence was situationally contingent, best evident with atrocities. Atrocities were often resorted to by underdogs in order to scare opponents, as well as to threaten population the opponent was expected to protect as a way of deterrence. Perhaps most importantly, atrocities were perceived as a way to force the international community to deploy peacekeepers, who would freeze the situation, thus saving the losing side. Paradoxically atrocities were also associated with failure of discipline, which suggests that they could also lack immediate strategic meaning altogether. While Kieran Mitton has well illustrated these different but often compatible dimensions of violence,[51] here the focus remains on the specific understandings of war, which evolved during the conflicts. The next two sections focus on illustrating that important differences regarding ideas of war and violence remained, both between Liberia and Sierra Leone, and especially in comparison with Côte d'Ivoire.

Liberia and Sierra Leone

Spelling end to what is called the "normal times" in contemporary Liberia, war arrived in the Mano River region with Charles Taylor on Christmas Eve 1989. The self-proclaimed "freedom fighters" targeted government officials, as well as the two ethnic groups perceived to have sided with the government – the Krahn and the (predominantly Muslim) Mandingo. Local conflicts, not least over land, certainly influenced the choice of the victims of violence.[52] Yet looming large above these was the increasingly ethnified political landscape, which resulted in amalgamation of the Gio and Krahn ethnic groups through polarization between them.[53] The first recent violence between the groups came in the form of the so-called Nimba raid in 1983. Polarization increased after the coup maker Samuel K. Doe – a Krahn – stole victory from the former minister of education Jackson Doe (not related) in 1985 presidential elections and a subsequent failed coup executed on November 12th. This led to further punishment raids in Nimba County, where Jackson Doe hailed from, and where the majority of inhabitants were from Gio and Mano groups. Hundreds, if not thousands, of civilians, including political prisoners, were killed by government forces. Similar targeting of civilians was repeated as soon as Taylor invaded Nimba on Christmas Eve, 1989.[54] Because Krahn were perceived to side with President Doe, this polarization was between not only Krahn and Gio, but also gained broader political meaning. Violence strengthened and cemented this polarization.

In what became a pattern in the wars in the region, many sought refuge across international borders. In 1990 this included an infantry battalion of the Armed forces of Liberia (AFL), which crossed over to Sierra Leone. As that country provided airfields for West African peacekeepers who bombed Taylor's forces, he vowed revenge. Taylor soon began to support the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in Sierra Leone, which in turn prompted the Sierra Leonean government to mobilize the infantry battalion and other Liberian refugees as a pro-government militia. This militia turned into a rebel movement - United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO) – as it crossed back to Liberia to fight Taylor's forces,[55] and occasionally everyone else. Yet it also brought with it a new pattern of violence in the form of operations that focused on burning of houses and whole communities. These new tactics have been described as revenge attacks after targeting of certain ethic groups and denial of support from the population deemed to have sided with the enemy because it had not fled.[56] Several Liberian informants connected these tactics to Sierra Leone and the presence of Sierra Leoneans among the rebels.

While it is unfair to blame them for this destruction, the informants nevertheless suggest that the ideas behind the escalation originated from across the border in Sierra Leone.

While atrocities certainly took place even in Liberia, better known cases were recorded in Sierra Leone. Many Liberian combatants draw a stark difference between the forms of violence used in these two countries. For instance, there are no narratives in Liberia where fighters held raffles with various punishments inflicted on those unlucky,[57] nor systematic targeting of body parts like in Sierra Leone.[58] These narratives suggest that violence has a culturally constructed meaning. After all, in interviews the targeting of body parts was typically understood to be connected to politics:[59] cutting hands and fingers was connected to voting and hand signs, burning hands in oil with washing hands for the president Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, and cutting lips laughing at him. This emphasizes the explicit political dimension of the civil war in Sierra Leone, as well its more implicit forms in Liberia, where such atrocities were also associated with mental disorders and anything but rational means deemed appropriate in war. This difference in interpretation suggests radical deviance from existing institutions.[60] In other words, understanding these kinds of violent acts requires an institution where they make sense (as they apparently do not for most of the Western audience, nor Liberians). This underlines the fact that violence alone can never be removed from its social context. While for long recognized in anthropology, the recent experiences with counterinsurgency prove that this point comes with immediate consequences for strategy.[61] In a similar manner, the ways war was constructed in Liberia and Sierra Leone differed, which then led to different tactical action and strategic calculus.

This said, some researchers have assigned blame of especially the initial atrocities in Sierra Leone to Liberians, who commanded RUF rebels. Mitton narrates how Liberians brought their ethnic conflict to Sierra Leone through the targeting of Muslims (presumably as a continuation of their targeting of the Mandingo), and notes how these Liberian "Special Forces" formed the core of the initial RUF attack.[62] By mid-1992 Sierra Leoneans had become so fed up with their violence that they forced the Liberians to leave.[63] These ideas of violence nevertheless clearly took root, as they continued to be put in practice by Sierra Leoneans for over a decade, first in Sierra Leone and later in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Liberia – where these acts as noted were considered inexplicable.

By the start of the second war (1999-2003) in Liberia understandings of war had clearly evolved. The first change came in the perception of who were performing best in warfighting, and could legitimately claim positions of power. The Rambo-inspired commandoes thus gave way for soldiers with professional identities and training.[64] This may well be connected to the second change, or the spread of ideas of opposition to government and rebel abuses as well as a human rights discourse.[65] This concerned especially the rebels, who sought to occupy moral high ground and the support of the international community yet needed to establish more control over the war to do so in practice. Different understandings reigned not only between the rebels and the government forces, but especially between Liberians and Sierra Leoneans. After the waning of the war in Sierra Leone in 2001-2002, many fighters joined Charles Taylor's militia umbrella and the rebels of Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). In there they were again accused of behaving in ways considered inappropriate to the local context by both the LURD rebels,[66] as well as the government militias.[67]

Whereas war in Liberia and Sierra Leone portrayed some similarities, the war in Liberia is often described as a "tribal conflict" (in Liberian English ethnic groups are colloquially called "tribes") by Liberian civilians and former fighters alike, whereas the one in Sierra Leone is more often connected to atrocities. From the perspective of military professionals the war in Liberia was often described as a rebel war, signifying a qualitative difference from the war they were trained and equipped to fight.[68] In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that the Liberian military was unable to do much against the initial rebel onslaught in 1989, and was soon side-lined to barracks, whereas governments increasingly employed paramilitary forces and militias – many of

them organized by communities for self-defense – to fight their wars. The rise of self-defense forces is in turn connected to how rebels and their war was perceived. As Hoffman has argued, in the region rebels were understood to first and foremost inflict violence on civilians, rather than enemy combatants.[69]

With Taylor extending the war to Côte d'Ivoire in late 2002 both Liberian and Sierra Leoneans featured prominently among the rebels. Liberians assumed command roles on front-lines, whereas the former RUF commander Sam "Maskita" Bockarie became second-in-command of the operation. Yet both Liberians and especially Sierra Leoneans were soon accused of going against the purpose of liberating Ivorians through their use of excessive violence and looting. As one Liberian fighter who participated in the operation noted, "Sam Bockarie people[s'] mistake spoil that mission! Because they used to kill just like water." Foreign fighters preying on civilians naturally made it untenable for the Ivoirian rebel leaders to portray themselves as liberators. Yet even Liberian fighters saw that this kind of "hustling" was an intrinsic part of war. Even further, Liberians threatened to extend the old Gio-Krahn ethnic polarization to Côte d'Ivoire, where it had previously not existed. After Bockarie killed Philip "Andre" Doe, the Ivorian head of the mission, over these disagreements the whole affair collapsed. Perhaps the different amalgams among the rebels simply had incompatible goals, but it is also likely that they furthermore possessed different ideas of war. The combination of incompatible goals and ideas led the Sierra Leoneans to cause "embarrassment" to their Liberian patrons, and especially the Ivorian rebels. Bockarie and his family were in turn soon murdered at the orders of Taylor.[70] The next section turns to investigate Côte d'Ivoire in more detail, starting with the side of Laurent Gbagbo's government.

Côte d'Ivoire

The way Gbagbo fought against the rebels in 2002-3 offers a stark difference to his opponents. Heading a comparatively well established state, Gbagbo had nevertheless failed to give much attention to his security forces. Several informants described how the neglected and politically unreliable Ivorian army, *Forces Republicaines de Côte d'Ivoire* (FANCI) had little idea how to fight war, or even how to find their opponents. Many fled, leaving their arms and uniforms to their opponents. Some connived with them, or joined the rebel ranks. As a result, Gbagbo had to rely on other means to defend himself. Yet in what can be understood as a way to uphold a difference between civilians and the military, he declined to arm the population. Just like in Sierra Leone and Guinea in the past, Liberian refugees offered one available alternative. Another was hiring foreign mercenaries who assumed command and specialist roles, and who for instance operating tracked armored vehicles and combat helicopters, which rebels could do little against. The Liberians were organized into the pro-government LIMA militia. They were provided Ivorian uniforms to separate them from rebels, but even from civilians, which furthermore provided them with some legal legitimacy.[71]

A clear qualitative difference between the war in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia and Sierra Leone can be observed in the way Gbagbo perceived war in ways that were more akin to those advocated by Holsti. Not only did Gbagbo employ more advanced technology which gave him a military edge, but more importantly sought to uphold the civil-military divide even after the initial collapse of FANCI. This difference contributed to his control of force especially with regards to the Liberian militias. They remained dependent on Ivorian logistics, and could conveniently be sent to Liberia to exert revenge against Charles Taylor after the fighting ceased in Côte d'Ivoire. In comparison, in both Liberia and Sierra Leone the unclear civil-military division and proliferation of small arms combined with inability to curb armed groups led to prolonged war, as Holsti envisaged.

While the French forces can be accused of freezing the situation in Côte d'Ivoire in 2003, they should also be credited for resolving the second conflict that followed the presidential elections in

2010-2011. More immediately, the differences between the cases can be explained by differences in state capacity. The strength of the Ivorian state apparatus allowed it to possess resources that it could now put to use in order to enforce its more "conventional" understanding of war. As Gbagbo's gerrymandering in identity politics and redefinition of who counts as Ivorian illustrate,[72] the Ivorian state was much more powerful than its western neighbors. Yet even if this power translated even to greater capacity of coercion, it did not transform into large-scale violence. Rather, this coercive capacity helped to contain it. While the Liberian "tribal conflict" threatened to spread to Côte d'Ivoire as it initially did to Sierra Leone in the early 1990s, even staunch Gbagbo supporters thank the French intervention of putting stop to ethnic killing in 2011 (and perhaps in 2003). Yet in addition to this external intervention, in Côte d'Ivoire the frame of reference was national, rather than ethnic – although the two increasingly converged with Gbagbo's ideology of *Ivoirité*.

As illustrated by the behavior of Ivorian rebels, this national perspective has major influence on how war was understood and waged. For instance, both Ivorian and Liberian informants witnessed that there was less destruction and looting of property in Côte d'Ivoire than in Liberia. This was uniformly explained by the existence of nationalist feelings: whereas "Ivorians love their country," Liberians looted, killed and destroyed disproportionally. Another explanation may however come from the way political legitimacy was understood: even the Ivorian leader of the 2002-3 rebellion against Gbagbo understood that he needed legitimacy if he was to rule after the war. In 2010-11 both Gbagbo and later his rival Alassane Ouattara acted as president elects, and hence built their legitimacy on popular support. This would inevitably suffer if their forces engaged in mass killings, such as the revenge attacks witnessed in Liberia. As a result, most of the violence targeted political opponents, and while armed "hustling" certainly occurred, it was a much more limited phenomenon than in Liberia and Sierra Leone. As one former top-level Liberian rebel commander explained the difference, the war in Côte d'Ivoire was an "intelligent war, fought in intelligent way" in comparison to the Liberian war "fought [in] stupid way": because in the former the fight was against the leader, the war should finish when the leader finishes. But if one starts killing civilians because of their ethnicity – as happened in Liberia – this only results in another war. As a result (yet in both analytically and factually oversimplified manner) he saw that the Liberian war was not political as in Côte d'Ivoire, but a "tribal" war. This difference can be explained by Weber's ideas of the iron cage, which with rationalization domesticated individual action.[73] In Côte d'Ivoire war was hence institutionalized in a way that more closely aligned with a more limiting national framework.

These kinds of comparative narratives illustrate important aspects of the war in Liberia, exported to the neighboring countries through Charles Taylor's expansionist politics. While Liberians were deemed experts of warfare, it was a warfare of a certain kind, as illustrated by the clash between different kinds of understanding of war. Just like in neighboring Sierra Leone where the intervention by the South African company Executive Outcomes helped to pave a way to a ceasefire in February 1996,[74] Gbagbo's Liberian opponents considered his use of helicopter gunships as a game changer in Côte d'Ivoire. Traveling on open roads and lacking means to combat the threat from above, the chopper would have required the rebels to return to a much slower paced guerrilla warfare, thus obstructing the initial plans of a quick takeover of the capital. This said, airpower mainly features in the narratives of those who fought against the Gbagbo government, suggesting that interoperability remained a problem. There is little evidence of attempts to integrate the use of airpower with Liberian pro-government militias, who were left alone to fight the war in the way they had done in Liberia before.

It is possible to claim that better technology simply led to battlefield success in the Mano River region. While plausible, this claim is not altogether supported by evidence. First, the first contractors that fought in Sierra Leone against the RUF were anything but successful: they withdrew after suffering several casualties during their first major operation.[75] Secondly, while

Liberian rebels despaired over the helicopter in Côte d'Ivoire, they were more worried about the disparity between ideas of war and the role of violence in it. Several Liberian fighters compared the destructive power of what they called "Western war" to war in the Mano River region and were grateful about the absence of that kind of firepower, as this would have resulted in what they considered disproportional death and destruction. The crux here is that this kind of reasoning turns the notions of barbaric warfare in West Africa on their head, as it portrays a belief that the war waged in the Mano River region was more humane than that waged by Westerners elsewhere. More immediately and importantly for the argument forwarded here, from this perspective Gbagbo's helicopter – and to a lesser extent armored vehicles – broke the norms of warfare. Yet the Liberians fighting against Gbagbo also saw that their own ideas of war were beneficial across the border. Already in 2002 it was clear that Liberians were considered to possess not only superior knowledge of a certain kind of war but equally unsurpassed bravery, which made them ideal commanders of troops consisting of other nationalities. This advantage however existed only as long as the Liberian rebels were fighting against Ivorians. After Gbagbo mobilized Liberian refugees, this advantage disappeared. As one Liberian fighting against Gbagbo explained in a way that conflated Krahn refugees with the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) rebel movement that did not yet exist at the time, "the MODEL boys there, Gbagbo order[ed] them to fight for them. And pay them. So that's how, the war [became] hard now. The MODEL men, they know the system I fight. I know the system they fight." Those captured were immediately killed. Some were tortured before. "It was desperate, man. That was what [was] happening." Realizing this war was Ivorian and hence nothing he should die for, the rebel soon returned to Liberia, where he continued to fight against Taylor's domestic enemies.

While the Liberians who fought against Gbagbo in 2002-2003 initially gained an advantage when they acted outside the prevailing Ivorian norms, this also led to escalation of violence. If this escalation of violence had resulted in victory, it may have been a pyrrhic one. It is likely that their incomprehensible deeds would have in any case lost the war politically. Acting outside the institution may thus bring tactical benefits, but as incomprehensible are often difficult to translate into strategic gains. Here the idea of institutions as a way to make violent meaningful becomes important. As argued by Herberg-Rothe, different ideas of what war was made violent acts lose their intended meaning. This also tested (and in this case of Andre's rebels, broke) cohesion among the armed groups.

War as a hustle

The 2002-2003 war in Côte d'Ivoire ended up in a stalemate that left Gbagbo to power, but which also kept the country effectively divided until 2011. Yet the Liberian participation in the conflicts in this country offers the final piece of evidence for the argument advanced in this paper. This comes in the form of "hustling" mentioned earlier. In contemporary Liberia, hustling is the opportunistic opposite of having a job and steady income. While clearly an inferior undertaking, hustling is nevertheless the norm in uncertain surroundings, and hence not perceived as negatively as the word itself suggests. While hustling derives from the broader view of politics as mere extraction, [76] opportunities to hustle are welcome and necessary especially during wartime.[77]

This last section suggests the possibility that the emphasis of Clausewitz' maxim of war as a continuation of politics by violent means can shift from violence to politics. In other words, in Liberian narratives it is rather extraction in the form of hustling than violence that forms the basic ingredient of what war is about, as illustrated by a foray into the more recent fighting in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010 and after.

In Côte d'Ivoire hustling became a common practice already in 2002-2003 when the for long impoverished Liberian refugees mobilized to fight on behalf of the Gbagbo government began to man checkpoints in order to control movement of people and goods, especially abandoned farm

produce in uncontrolled areas. Yet the closer the prospect of crossing back to Liberia to fight against Taylor came, the more the Liberian leadership opposed to Taylor realized that it had to impose another view of war on the militias. As a result, even as the militias were crossing over to Liberia, they stopped to "disrobe" and unarm those who would not follow them, effectively denying the benefit of hustling from those who were less keen to fight. Nevertheless, control over spoils remained the main source of tension throughout the war.

Danny Hoffman is certainly correct when he notes that the language used to describe war in West Africa is frequently one of labor. From this perspective, his equation of violence with "hard work" can be taken as support for the centrality of hustling.[78] Yet like Clausewitz' idea of war as violence, even the idea of war as work is a broom that simplifies as it sweeps. If taken far enough, both lead to neglect of the conventions and social norms that constrain and facilitate action, not least the use of violence. As discussed earlier, all societies need to control violence within them. A central way of achieving this is meaning-making: depending on the situation and observer, the same violent act can simultaneously be both illegitimate murder and a legitimate heroic act.

Whereas Clausewitz wrote from the vantage point of a military professional whose duty was to execute violence on behalf of a sovereign, Hoffman's characterization normalizes violence in all situations. This is empirically problematic, as this would suggest violence to be an everyday occurrence in West Africa. To give only one example, the way an unsolved killing committed in 2012 in one borderland Liberian town continued to disturb people in the region five years later can only be taken as proof of how abnormal homicide is. One plausible solution to this contradiction is the argument of constructing war made above, where violence in war becomes normalized, just as it is expected to become in all war. Yet there is a further explanation to this discrepancy. While both Clausewitz and Hoffman assume the essence of war to have consisted of violence, Hoffman's account makes much more sense if this essence in the Mano River region was hustling. In other words, war was about hustling instead of killing, and hustling of course is work.

One Krahn rebel commander believed that "war is the biggest sport and business in the whole world." He saw war as a game, where "players" want to "go and play" as the only way to make money. This mixing of metaphors of sporting and extraction that suggested that war is ultimately a hustle was not a temporary fad. Its stable presence in narratives suggests that it stands at the core of the understanding of war. This is also evident from the wave of youth who mobilized into Côte d'Ivoire in 2010-11, when violence flared between the rivaling candidates Gbagbo and Ouattara. This violence saw many Liberians (and according to at least one former Kamajor militia commander, a number of Sierra Leoneans) joining the fight. Once again national differences became apparent. Several Liberians were named commanders of mobilized groups of Ivorian militias during the post-election violence. Others simply saw an opportunity to loot, and acted accordingly. After Ouattara was declared winner and Gbagbo captured, Ivorian exiles who mobilized to conduct cross-border attacks again sought Liberians to lead them. Yet after one such Liberian-led group killed seven United Nations peacekeepers in Côte d'Ivoire the governments of Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia were forced to act. Within a year the small uprising was over due to arrests, a few deaths and, perhaps most importantly, lack of foreign support. The Liberian commander who led the group that killed the peacekeepers – known by the revealing *nom due guerre*" General Kill-and-go" – was later accused by Ivorian pro-Gbagbo fighters as the one who spoiled the plan to topple Ouattara. Just like decade earlier, even this time different idea of war resulted in adverse strategic effects.

Extraction was obviously one – and for many the main – reason for many Liberians to expose themselves to the dangers across the border. It is important to note that mobilizing to Côte d'Ivoire was never an entirely scruple free activity in the manner Hoffman can be interpreted to suggest. In the end, few people from Liberia joined the war in 2010-11 when Gbagbo was still a president, and even fewer after he was toppled. In fact, the latter conflict saw the almost exclusive

mobilization of Liberians with long-term roots across the border, suggesting that social obligations continued to influence the decision to participate. This said and emphasizing the material dimension of war, several people in Grand Gedeh county – the area where the Krahn who fought for Gbagbo in 2010-13 originated from – answered the question of what war is by saying that "war makes poor rich and rich poor." Hustling must be understood to reflect a particular understanding of war and what one should do in it. Such acts committed collectively by a collective suggest nothing less than a different rationality behind behavior in war. That such hustling does not take place during peace suggests that difference is drawn between the two periods, and the behavior in them. Hustling nevertheless forms a central idea of what war is to the point of replacing violence as its main activity. This questions many deeply held notions about the phenomena, as well as suggests an altogether different strategic rationale in it.[79] For the sake of broader theory, the idea of hustling supports the need to probe the different ways war is constructed and understood, in West Africa and beyond.

Conclusions

This article has sought to find an answer to the question why despite shared sources of ideas, understandings of war varied in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone. In order to explain this variation, a cultural sociological theoretical framework that can be used to investigate how war is constructed by its participants has been offered. As the investigation of the three Mano River countries suggests, war is an institution formed by its participants. While the idea of war as an institution is not new, most scholarship nevertheless continues to understand war in simplistic way as violent conduct between sovereign states in a manner that relegates the importance of culture for understanding war. This article has illustrated the process how war was constructed in the three countries of the Mano River region. While violence exacted a heavy toll in each of these countries, war was nevertheless conducted differently in each one of them. At the outset of the armed conflict in the Mano River region, there were few preexisting ideas or experience of war was about. Despite common influences, attempts to institutionalize war resulted in different outcomes, and hence different conceptualizations of war. In the end, it has been suggested that it was extraction, not violence, which stood at the core of the understanding of war in a peripheral area between Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. The presence of such variation carries immediate consequences for strategic theory, and necessitates the analysis of contextual factors.

In comparative terms the investigation of the Mano River region is interesting because there was no clear division between civilian and military, nor as rationalized understanding of war as in the West and in many other places. Simply put, many of the conventions and norms taken for granted elsewhere – many of which are furthermore codified into international law – were not present in this context. In the end the ideas of war remained weakly institutionalized in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The lack of military training in turn made it more difficult to disseminate norms and indoctrinate combatants with a uniform kind of ideas about war to the same extent this has been done in Europe from the mid- 18th century onwards. Because of this weak institutionalization, there was more freedom to determine what war was and what one should do in it.

While one could argue teleologically that war will inevitably become just as rationalized as in the West, the Liberian example of hustling alone suggest that this does not need to be the case. One can also look at the post-conflict reforms of the Armed Forces of Liberia as an example of how military professionalism – which one would assume to revolve around an understanding of war –can be understood in very different ways.[80] In the end, it might be wise not to settle for simply analyzing how war is constructed in West Africa, but to go beyond. Considering Honig's argument that our understanding of war as violence has hardly fared well in the recent conflicts where opponents have held on to different kinds of ideas of war,[81] it might be wise to even scrutinize some of our own understandings of war.

Notes

1. Danny Hoffman, *The War Machines: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 27.
2. Antulio Echevarria, "Strategic Culture Is Not a Silver Bullet," *Naval War College Review* 70, no. 4 (2017): 121–24. The broader argument can be found in Antulio Echevarria, *Reconsidering the American Way of War: US Military Practice from the Revolution to Afghanistan* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2014).
3. Anna Simons, "War: Back to the Future," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 28 (1999): 75.
4. These Western understandings of war are the focus of the companion piece to this article: Ilmari Käihkö, "War as Nothing but a Duel: War as an institution and the construction of the Western military profession," Journal of Military Studies, Online First (2018): https://doi.org/10.2478/jms-2018-0003.
5. Martin Van Creveld, *The Culture of War* (Brimscombe Port: Spellmount, 2009), 129–48.
6. The best criticism of this is still found in Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth & Resources in Sierra Leone* (London, UK: International African Institute, 1996), xii–xxv.
7. For a more detailed discussion of the methods used in this investigation, see Ilmari Käihkö, "Bush Generals and Small Boy Battalions: Military Cohesion in Liberia and Beyond" (PhD dissertation, Uppsala University, 2016).
8. Kalevi Holsti, *Taming the Sovereigns: Institutional Change in International Politics*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 287.
9. Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 52.
10. Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 178.
11. *ibid.*, 179.
12. Holsti, *Taming the Sovereigns*, 281.
13. R. Brian Ferguson, ed., *Warfare, Culture and Environment* (Orlando, FL: Academic, 1984); Siniša Malešević, *The Rise of Organised Brutality: A Historical Sociology of Violence* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 144–5.
14. As Michael Mann has persuasively argued, conflicts in the global South have been disregarded in much of recent scholarship in the 19th century manner. Mann, Michael, "Have Wars and Violence Declined?" *Theory and Society,* 2018, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-018-9305-y. On Eurocentrism in war studies, see Tarak Barkawi, "Decolonising War," *European Journal of International Security* 1, no. 2 (2016): 199–214.
15. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1991), 69–72.
16. For some useful overviews, see Simons, "War"; Johan M. G. van der Dennen, "Peace and War in Nonstate Societies," *Common Knowledge* 20, no. 3 (2014): 419–89.
17. Bronislaw Malinowski, "An Anthropological Analysis of War", *American Journal of Sociology* 46, no. 4 (1941): 521–50.
18. Holsti, *Taming the Sovereigns*, 287.
19. Margaret Mead, "Warfare Is Only an Invention: Not a Biological Necessity," *Asia* 40 (1940): 402–5.
20. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (New York: Barnes and Nobles, 2004), 1.
21. Mead, "Warfare".
22. Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground up: Twenty-First Century Combat as Politics* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2.
23. Guy Siebold, "Core Issues and Theory in Military Sociology," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 29 (2001): 140–59.
24. John R. Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10–11.
25. Searle, *Making the Social World*, 8–9.
26. Berger & Luckmann, *The Social Construction*, 85.
27. W. Richard Scott, *Institutions and Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 38.
28. Peter Haldén, "Organized Armed Groups as Ruling Organizations," *Armed Forces & Society* (2018), https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X17752908; Ian Hurd, "Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics, " *International Organization* 53, no. 2 (1999): 379–408.
29. Jan Willem Honig, "Uncomfortable Visions: The Rise and Decline of the Idea of Limited War," in *The Art of Creating Power: Freedman on Strategy*, edited by Benedict Wilkinson and James Gow (London: Hurst, 2017), 29–48.
30. David Kennedy, *Of War and Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
31. Holsti, *Taming the Sovereigns*, 282.
32. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan: A Commentary/Remark on the Concept of the Political* (Michigan State University, 2004).

33. Scott, *Institutions and Organizations*, 57.
34. Malešević, *The Rise.*
35. Raymond C. Kelly, "The Evolution of Lethal Intergroup Violence," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* vol. 102, no. 43 (2005): 15294–98.
36. J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 131–2.
37. Andreas Herberg-Rothe, "The State and the Existential View of War." in *Clausewitz: The State and War*, ed. Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Jan Willem Honig, and Daniel Moran, 71–86 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011).
38. Jan Willem Honig, "Reappraising Late Medieval Strategy: The Example of the 1415 Agincourt Campaign," *War in History* 19, no. 2 (2012): 123–51; Stephen Neff, *War and the Law of Nations: A General History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
39. Jeremy Levitt, *The Evolution of Deadly Conflict in Liberia: From "Paternaltarianism" to State Collapse* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2004).
40. Joanna Bourke argues that in comparison men are "brutalized" – socialized into war – in Western societies long before they don uniforms. Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 367–8.
41. Honig, "Uncomfortable Visions".
42. The author is grateful to Mats Utas for making this point.
43. Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, 103–11.
44. Bourke, *An Intimate History*, 16–30. See even Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), 220–2.
45. Quoted in Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, 110.
46. According to Peters, this was the case with the Revolutionary United Front even inside Sierra Leone. Krijn Peters, *War and the Crisis of Youth in Sierra Leone* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 162–4.
47. In the strictest of interpretations, "war" naturally only exists in English-speaking contexts.
48. Thomas S. Abler, "Scalping, Torture, Cannibalism and Rape: An Ethnohistorical Analysis of Conflicting Cultural Values in War," *Anthropologica* 34, no. 1 (1992): 4.
49. Abler, "Scalping, Torture, Cannibalism," 5–6.
50. Danny Hoffman, "The Civilian Target in Sierra Leone and Liberia: Political Power, Military Strategy, and Humanitarian Intervention," *African Affairs* 103, no. 411 (2004): 211–26.
51. Kieran Mitton, *Rebels in a Rotten State: Understanding Atrocity in the Sierra Leone Civil War* (London: Hurst, 2015).
52. Danny Hoffman, "The Meaning of a Militia: Understanding the Civil Defence Forces of Sierra Leone," *African Affairs* 106, no. 425 (2007): 647–8.
53. Considering that the very people who were deemed to be "Krahn" did not identify themselves as belonging to the group in late 1970's it feels safe to assume that this conflict is of recent vintage and not a historical "fact". David Brown, *Domination and Personal Legitimacy in a District of Eastern Liberia* (PhD dissertation, University of Manchester, 1979), 266–9.
54. Emmanuel Dolo, *Ethnic Tensions in Liberia's National Identity Crisis: Problems and Possibilities* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Africana Homestead Legacy Publishers, 2007), 41–4.
55. Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African civil war* (London, UK: Hurst, 2007), 93–5.
56. Hence supporting Kalyvas' ideas of contested areas as the most violent ones in civil wars. Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
57. For instance, see Mitton *Rebels in a Rotten State*, 71.
58. Mitton, *Rebels in a Rotten State*, 169.
59. *ibid.*, 62.
60. Berger & Luckmann, *The Social Construction*, 83.
61. David Ucko, "Whither Counterinsurgency: The Rise and Fall of a Divisive Concept." In *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*, ed. Paul B. Rich and Isebelle Duyvesteyn (London: Routledge, 2012), 67–79.
62. Mitton, *Rebels in a Rotten State*, 82–4, 229. See also Peters, *War and the Crisis of Youth*, 142–6.
63. Peters, *War and the Crisis of Youth*, 142–6; Mitton *Rebels in a Rotten State*, 229–30.
64. Ilmari Käihkö, "Mystical and Modern Transformations in the Liberian Civil War." in *Creating Warriors: The Ritual Organization of Military Force*, edited by Peter Haldén and Peter Jackson, 126–43 (London/ New York: Routledge, 2016).
65. Hoffman, "The Civilian Target."
66. Ilmari Käihkö, "'Taylor Must Go' – the Strategy of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 26, no. 2 (2015): 248–70, 267.

67. Ilmari Käihkö, “Liberia Incorporated: Military Contracting, Cohesion and Inclusion in Charles Taylor’s Liberia,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 17, no. 1 (2017): 53–72, 64.
68. Käihkö, “Mystical and Modern.”
69. Daniel Hoffman, “Violence, Just in Time: War and Work in Contemporary West Africa,” *Cultural Anthropology* 26, no. 1 (2011): 38.
70. For instance, see Special Court of Sierra Leone, “Case No. SCSL-2003-01-T. Thursday, 6 November 2008”, 19972–5, https://www.rscsl.org/Documents/Transcripts/Taylor/6November2008.pdf (accessed February 2, 2018).
71. Ilmari Käihkö, “The MODEL Social Structure of an Armed Group: From Liberian Refugees to Heroes of Côte d’Ivoire and Liberators of the Homeland,” Small Wars & Insurgencies 29, no. 4 (2018): 776–800.
72. Mike McGovern, *Making War in Côte d’Ivoire* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).
73. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London, UK: Routledge, 2005 [1930]), 123–4.
74. Herbert Howe, “Private security forces and African stability: the case of Executive Outcomes,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 36 (1998): 307–31. In both cases the use of contractors highlights state weakness, where coercive power was traded for money, or in the case of Sierra Leone future concessions. In neither case did the use of contractors lead to attaining political goals.
75. Peters, *War and the Crisis of Youth,* 69.
76. Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (London, UK: International African Institute in Assoc. with James Currey, Indiana University Press, 1999); Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” in *Bringing the State Back in*, ed. Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 169–87.
77. Käihkö, “Liberia Incorporated,” 61.
78. Hoffman, *The War Machines;* Hoffman, “Violence, Just in Time”.
79. While some authors have described contemporary conflicts by non-state groups as nothing less than opportunistic organized crime, this view has been criticized by researchers who perceive it worthwhile to understand each and every conflict in its own context. See David Keen, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” *International Affairs* 88, no. 4 (2012): 757–77.
80. Colin Robinson, “How might Democratisation Affect Military Professionalism in Africa? Reviewing the Literature,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 28, no. 2 (2017): 385–400.
81. Honig, “Uncomfortable Visions”.

Notes on contributor

Ilmari Käihkö (ilmari.kaihko@fhs.se) is an assistant professor at the Department of Security, Strategy and Leadership, Swedish Defence University, and at the time of writing a post-doctoral researcher at the Department of Sociology, Uppsala University, and a visiting fellow at the Department of Anthropology, Yale University, supported by the Ryoichi Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund (SYLFF). A veteran of the Finnish Defence Forces, he has spent two and a half years in the fields of development cooperation, military and research in West, Central and East Africa and Ukraine. He is interested in cultural sociology of war and conflict ethnography, or the ethnographic methods that contribute to the investigation of these issues.