

Preliminary draft: do not quote

SOCIAL CAPITAL, SURVIVAL STRATEGIES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR
POST-CONFLICT GOVERNANCE IN LIBERIA

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Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis
Indiana University

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3rd Workshop on the Workshop Conference, July 2 – 6 2004, Indiana University,
Bloomington, IN 40408.

I

Introduction

Hernando de Soto (2000) has reminded us that poor people are poor not because they lack assets but because they are not always able to transform their assets into productive capital and to optimally use such capital. Understanding how social capital is created and utilized in society is of critical importance in assessing capacity for self-reliant development. E. Ostrom's (1990) argument that understanding how people craft or adapt institutions of collective action provides clues regarding their possibilities for self-governance can be extended to embrace situations of governance failure and violent conflict where survival is at stake. This paper investigates how people created, adapted and used social capital for survival and conflict resolution during more than a decade of violent conflict in Liberia and the potential of such capital to contribute to post-conflict peacebuilding and self-governance.

Studies of how local people survive in situations of violent conflicts focus typically on how behavior of belligerent parties affecting local people are constrained by the intervention of national and external actors. Creation of "zones of peace" and demarcation of "security corridors" for the delivery of emergency assistance by international humanitarian organizations are among strategies often analyzed. Conflict resolution strategies are also typically analyzed with respect to the initiatives of third-party mediation and facilitation (Hartzell, 1999; Walter, 1999). Important as these external interventions are, they do not exhaust the efforts that enable local people to survive amid such hostilities and resolve conflicts among themselves. This paper asserts that even in their deepest crises, local people are never without agency; they do use their creative potentials to survive. External intervention alone cannot provide lasting solutions to security and governance dilemmas within a society, thus, understanding social capital among local people may offer insights for building institutions from the bottom up. How do local people survive amid plunder, pillage and carnage that are characteristic of internal wars within African countries? How do they constitute or adapt mechanisms for the resolution of conflicts among themselves? What potentials do these forms of social capital have for post-conflict reconstruction? This paper explores these questions in the case of the Liberian experience.

There are six parts to this paper. Following this introduction, part two provides a brief discussion of the background, nature and magnitude of Liberia's violent conflict. Part three provides an analytic perspective on the creation and use of social capital for self-governance as a basis for deepening our appreciation of the nature of local collective action as strategies for survival in violent conflicts. Part four discusses the nature of the international humanitarian interventions and describes a variety of collective action situations for survival. Their potential and implications for post-conflict governance

reforms in Liberia are discussed in part five. In the conclusion, I briefly discuss the need for deeper understanding of the processes of social capital formation and processes of community self-governance in order to better understand potential foundations of self-governance in Liberia.

II

Pathway to State Collapse and the Nature of Violent Conflict

A Legacy of Overcentralization and Predation

Liberia's political order emerged as an over-centralized and predatory order that turned increasingly repressive as pressures for inclusion intensified over the years. It ultimately collapsed under such pressures as external support declined with the ending of the Cold War. Liberia was an outgrowth of the American antebellum initiative designed to resolve the predicaments of slavery through colonization. It declared its independence in 1847 and established a system of government at the core of which was a settler-dominated oligarchy that functioned as a patrimonial order with an expanding clientelist network that, over years of state building, ran deep into surrounding indigenous African communities. The major instruments of state power were an expansive bureaucracy that ruled indigenous communities and a military force that ensured order. With both under the direct control of the president, Liberia's political order evolved for a century with powers concentrated in the hands of the president, despite formal laws that established a legislature and a judiciary as independent and co-equal bodies. Ports of entry levies, head and hut taxes and other exactions including extensive labor recruitments were both sources of revenue as well as instrumentalities of control established by the government and used by the president. By the end of the Second World War, under Tubman, presidential prerogatives were further boosted by increased revenue accrued to the government and controlled largely by the president as a result of natural resource concession agreements that ceded property rights in rubber, iron ore and timber mainly to foreign corporations.

Social development especially in the areas of education, health and road construction made possible by increased public resources outpaced progress in the area of democratization and political inclusion. Government responded haltingly to pressures for inclusions as ethnic and other communities both mounted pressure as well as sought recourse from state predation in various forms of local collective action, many of which were to serve local people well as the government collapsed in the last decade of the 20th century. For example, Mano people of Nimba County organized themselves to provide schools, clinics and roads when neglected by the government in 1985 as a result of internal purges in the ranks of the elite military/political elite that had ascended to power in 1980. During earlier periods, various groups of people had responded to marginalization and predation from the center by mobilizing their own capabilities.¹ Many parts of the country were largely inaccessible due to lack of all-weather roads and,

as such, depended on their own resourcefulness and the help of missionaries, many of whom lived in these areas for decades. This resourcefulness was to serve these communities during the onslaught of armed bands.

Settler-dominated oligarchic rule established in 1847 ended in 1980 when a group of semiliterate noncommissioned officers of the Liberian military toppled the government of president Tolbert and established a military government that rapidly degenerated into a brutal dictatorship. Within a year after the military takeover, Samuel Doe, the military leader, was able to purge the military of all his rivals and its trained officers and rely upon an undisciplined core recruited largely from his Krahn ethnic group. In addition to pilfering the public treasury and ravaging rural Liberia, Doe fostered an effort to transform the patterns of lineage-based order in rural Liberia so as to impose leaders supportive of his rule. For close to a decade he tried to establish a new oligarchy dominated by an ethnic core from his Krahn ethnic group. In a sense, Doe's mode of control of Liberia came close to classic warlord rule as seen in imperial China (Sheridan 1966; Pye 1971). Rigged elections in 1985 and an attempted coup led by one of Doe's former collaborators who had become a feared competitor, triggered a new round of violent purges which in turn created the conditions for what turned out to be a protracted violent conflict that engulfed the entire country. Led by Charles Taylor, the 15-year conflict transformed Liberia into the epicenter of a wider system of violent conflicts in the Mano basin area of Liberia, Sierra Leone and the forest region of Guinea.

Nature and Magnitude of Conflict

In efforts to deepen understanding of internal conflicts scholars have typically identified several types of such conflicts; these include identity conflicts which driven by differences over issues of religion, ethnicity and space, among others (Gurr 2000); resource conflicts (Collier, 2000, 2003), conflicts linked to superpower rivalry and its aftermath (Copson, 1991; Hampson 1996) and conflicts associated more broadly with governance failure (Zartman, 1995). Although such classification is important as an analytic tool, much deeper studies of specific conflicts are necessary if we are to understand the true nature of conflicts and their morphic processes. In the case of Liberia, a legacy of over-centralized and predatory government, sustained marginalization of large segments of the population and increasing repression constituted the underlying or structural causes of violent conflict (Berkeley 2001); a changed regional and international order made possible by the ending of the Cold War provided a conducive context; and the perverse entrepreneurship of Charles Taylor, leader of the rebel group that invaded Liberia in December 1989, was the match that ignited the conflict (Sawyer 2004). In 14 years of violence, more about 200,000 or six percent of Liberia's population was killed; about a million Liberians sought refuge abroad at one time or another, mainly in neighboring countries and an equal number was internally displaced and villages, towns and cities in all parts of the country. Millions of dollars of property was destroyed or stolen. Thus, the Liberian conflict was essentially a violent struggle for control of the levers of power in an over-centralized state which functioned as a monopolistic state with control over the natural resources of the country. In this struggle, ethnic sentiments,

ideology and religion, among others were mobilized and used as instruments of conflict by antagonistic individuals and groups.

Many of the antagonists were able to mobilize external support. In some cases such support included fighters provided by the leaders of neighboring countries.² For example, the command structure of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), the original and largest armed group, included fighters from Sierra Leone and The Gambia who were recruited with the promise of reciprocal support after the Liberian campaign. External support was also obtained through illicit trade in natural resources mainly by the leadership of the NPFL. In early 1991 the NPFL launched an invasion of Sierra Leone, thereby transforming the Liberian conflict into a trans-boundary network of conflicts with multiple flashpoints. By mid-decade, Sierra Leonean mineral resources were being plundered by armed groups and on the international market through rebel forces in Liberia. The violent conflict ramified such that by 1999, new theatres of conflict were opened in the forest region of Guinea and links, including trade in plundered goods, between theatres of conflict in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea grew robust. Most of these inter-connected cross-border flashpoints were catchment areas of trade and social transactions that predated colonial intervention in the Mano basin area.

In 1997, despite continued violence, the international community led by the United Nations, the United States and the Economic Commission of West Africa States (ECOWAS) concluded that it was time to hold elections in Liberia. As to be expected, Charles Taylor, the leader of the largest armed group won the elections and became president. After a brief lull, fighting resumed as Taylor began a project of witch-hunting. By 2003, his forces had been overcome in many parts of the country by two rebel groups and Monrovia had come under siege. In August, a peace agreement was reached and Taylor was pressured to leave the country for exile in Nigeria.

Thus, what began as a violent conflict in Liberia became a subregional conflict system and a nexus for illicit international trade as armed bands murdered and maimed thousands of people in Sierra Leone, Liberia and certain parts of the forest region of Guinea, plundered the resources of these countries and sold them on international markets, turned young children into fighters, young girls into “war wives” and killed and demeaned elders, thereby destroying or perverted the social institutions that give the societies of this subregion cohesion. In such circumstances, ordinary people who stood vulnerable to the assault of such predators were left to rely upon external humanitarian assistance where available and their own resourcefulness. Understanding what kinds of survival strategies were available to local people require an understanding of how social capital enables collective action.

III

Perspective on Social Capital as Strategies for Survival

Social Capital and Collective Action

There is hardly a more auspicious opportunity to observe how people build and use social capital than that which is offered in circumstances where people are confronted with grave insecurities and uncertainties. Social capital consists of individual values, especially values of trustworthiness and the predisposition to form trusting relationships with others, and the networks and institutions organized by individuals in pursuit of specific outcomes. Elinor Ostrom (1999) has expounded on the types, uses and consequences of the use of social capital. She categorizes social capital as one of three forms of human-made capital, the others being human capital—the values and knowledge gained by human beings, and physical capital—the physical infrastructures such as bridges and buildings created by people; and juxtaposes them to natural capital—the endowments of our ecological system to account for the stock of resources available for various types of collective action. She underscores the importance of social capital by emphasizing its relationship to other forms of capital. Physical capital cannot be productively used without human and social capital; neither can human and social capital together yield constructive outcomes if not appropriately linked to each other (Ostrom and Ahn, 2003). Thus, social capital, as values and rules of social organization, is at the core of human creativity and collective action.

Understanding how networks and institutions are organized, the outcomes they pursue and the consequences of such outcomes are fundamentally important in understanding social capital as used for collective action. Human beings typically undertake collective action to meet perceived needs and seize or create opportunities. This involves crafting and implementing rules. Even the loosest networks of individuals are underpinned by rules. Understanding how such networks are put together enhances understanding of how entrepreneurship is exercised, rules made and monitored, sanctions levied and implemented and outcomes realized and evaluated.³ In a situation of violent conflicts when people take advantage of lull between firefights to find food and other goods, an enterprising young man may identify an opportunity to organize a group using wheelbarrows to provide a service transporting goods for local people where, due to shortage of gasoline and commandeering of vehicles by armed groups, automobiles are unavailable or in short supply. Entrepreneurial skills, establishing trusting relationships beyond one's immediate family and associates and crafting and effectively implementing appropriate rules are all important elements in building this form of social capital. While this article does not help us to fully understand how social capital is built, it provides insights as to how communities find instrumentalities in a variety of networks and institutions beyond those established by the state.

Students of social capital also remind us that social capital can be used for good purposes and for harmful purposes. For example, networks of armed individuals may constitute marauding gangs and harm others; yet other networks of armed individuals may rescue individuals who are being victimized by marauders. The use of social capital may well have harmful externalities for some and constructive outcomes for others. That is why understanding externalities and developing the ability to internalize negative externalities are crucial in using social capital for collective action. When amid violent conflicts a

timber harvesting company with the support of armed groups or a predatory government seeks to maximize its use of forest resources thereby bringing the forest to the brink of degradation, communities of forest users may be constrained to organize responses to prevent or reduce such exploitative use of the resource and associated externalities. Such responses are more likely to be grounded in their own local capabilities and may well call upon the cooperation of others and may likely include measures harmful to those who seek to degrade the forest.

Social Capital and Survival Strategies

In situations of violent conflict when the rule of law breaks down, people are left largely to find recourse in norms, relationships and institutional arrangements which they create themselves or have inherited over the years through customs and traditions. People who live under highly centralized and predatory regimes as described above, are often more vulnerable when the rule of law breaks down because such system of government typically lack resilience due to its character with power residing in a single source. Once that source is impaired, the system breaks down. Moreover, such unitary system of command and control is designed to typically perceive and treat citizens as subjects and not as citizens. When run effectively, such system can smother the creativity and efficacy of individuals and groups and promote dependency. However, this tendency to seek total control is frequently hampered by ineffective enforcement of laws by the state and by the fact that individuals and communities are often capable of adopting appropriate responses such that, in spite of state predation, they are able to build and use appropriate social capital to provide for themselves many of the essential goods and services they need. Thus, understanding how, in situations of state collapse, people are able to provide for themselves collective goods and services tell us much about the nature of their potentials for self-governance. The Liberian experience shows how a combination of international humanitarian assistance and the use of local networks and institutions became the instrumentalities for surviving the onslaught of armed bands.

IV

Survival Strategies as Social Capital in Use

The Availability of International Humanitarian Assistance

Hundreds of thousands of people, victims of the decade and a half of conflict, owe their survival to the humanitarian assistance provided by the international community. In 1990, West African peacekeepers who arrived in Monrovia met a society so desperate for food that soldiers had to share their rations with local people. Farming cycles were constantly disrupted by fighters who roamed the countryside. Farmers were often forced to leave their fields unharvested as marauding bands plundered crops. Although there are

no comprehensive estimates of humanitarian assistance to Liberia, anecdotal estimates run high. For example, between 1990 and 1995, the United State is said to have provided \$381 million in humanitarian assistance. In 1997, the World Food Program targeted its food assistance program to 1.05 million people, three-quarters of whom were internally displaced.

Numerous international humanitarian organizations contributed emergency relief during the period of violent conflict. And yet all those needing assistance could not receive assistance or could not survive solely on the assistance received. Several challenges confronted the dispensing of humanitarian assistance. In some cases, logistical difficulties reduced access to humanitarian assistance. This was frequently the case in the rainy season when roads became impassible and bridges were swept away. In other cases, armed bands held groups of people hostage as a means of seizing humanitarian rations provided vulnerable groups. In 1996, for example, more than 150 malnourished people were held against their will by rebel forces in Suehn in northwestern Liberia. There were other situations in which limited assistance would be provided after long intervals, clearly leaving local people to their own devices. There were still numerous communities that could not be reached at all. In 1997, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA) reported that several areas in Liberia had not been accessed by international relief agencies in seven years. Thus, while international relief organizations were able to assist hundreds of thousands of people, there remained a significant gap between the survival needs of local people and the humanitarian assistance delivered to them. Large numbers of local people still had to rely partially or wholly on their own resourcefulness. Understanding how local people fill that gap is an important step in understanding how social capital is built and used to enhance the prospects for survival in such situations of conflict. This understanding provides us clues as to the nature of local entrepreneurial capabilities and their potential to become foundations for self-governance and self-reliant development. The next section describes how under circumstances of violent assault by armed bands, local communities struggled to provide for their security, resolve community-based conflicts and create or use economic opportunities.

Coping with Insecurity

The question of how authority relations at township and community levels were affected by state collapse and sustained destructive conflict in Liberia is yet to be fully investigated.⁴ As briefly discussed above, domination of local communities by the central state has been a defining feature and most enduring characteristic of autocracy in Liberia as is the case elsewhere in Africa (Wunsch and Oluwo, 1990). Control by the presidency over the process of selecting chiefs and local leaders and their manipulation by that office is a strategy of domination and predation inherent in the nature of autocratic rule in Liberia (Liebenow, 1969; Dunn and Tarr, 1988; Sawyer [1988] 1993; 1990). Since the founding of the Liberian state, state-sponsored violence has always been one of the instruments that ensured such control. However, during the years of military rule, such violence became the main instrument of control.⁵ Local officials were

routinely harassed, violently intimidated, and capriciously hired and dismissed. Such practices were intensified when the civil war broke out in 1989. What institutional strategies have local communities adopted to cope with state collapse and its attendant violence?

For most of the period of violent conflict, every town and village in Liberia was not only affected by violence but also ruled by an armed commander or an individual associated with an armed group. This pattern did not change throughout the period of Charles Taylor's presidency. Young ex-combatants and their associates constituted the largest number of village and township heads.⁶ Although responses of villagers and townspeople to their new rulers varied, in almost every case, local communities sought recourse in traditional institutions in order to cope with this new situation. Examples from northwestern and southeastern Liberia reveal variability in forms of community responses to domination by armed groups.

Poros Authority and Armed Rule at the Village Level

In many parts of northern and northwestern Liberia, villagers deepened their resilience and adapted to the rule of their new armed leaders through *Poros* solidarity. *Poros* has been the foundation pan-ethnic social institution embracing the collective social and historical experiences of most Mel and Mande-speaking groups in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. It is considered to be of a deeper order of legitimacy than any group of secular rulers and commands a wider pool of resources than those available to any single ethnic community. It has exercised authority that is considered "sacred and secret." It has been the protector of values and provided a source of sanctions that transcended the prerogatives of secular authority. With deep roots in vast sections of the rain forest, *Poros* institutions have been embedded in social organization from the level of the village to higher levels of authority. With hierarchical and gerontocratic principles central to its operations, *Poros* was a source of stability in the rain forest prior to spread of Islam or the establishment of European colonial control (Little, 1966). Despite commitment to these principles, *Poros* organization has seemed flexible when necessary and provided scope to accommodate opportunistic behavior in adapting to change (d'Azevedo, 1962).⁷

Thus, although the new armed leaders were obeyed, efforts were made to co-opt them. In several towns in Lofa County, *poros* authority was said to have constituted a parallel but unobtrusive authority structure that supported some of the actions of the new armed leaders where considered appropriate while artfully and quietly organizing resistance where necessary and feasible to protect the interest of local people. In some towns in Fuamah district in Lower Bong, for example, local people clothed their "armed chiefs" with the traditional chieftain authority and quickly constituted advisory councils in accordance with traditional practices.⁸ These councils sought to constrain the actions of armed fighter-chiefs. Historically, the dynamics of co-optation between central government and *poros* has worked both ways: Liberian government officials have often co-opted *poros* symbols and *poros* authority has often adapted opportunistic behavior vis-à-vis the government. More widely understood is how the president and his senior officials

have over the years attempted to influence *poro* authority.⁹ What has now becoming evident is how in recent times, *poro* authority and local communities have also adopted strategies of manipulation and accommodation to ensure their survival.¹⁰ Thus, by co-opting the new leaders, *poro* authorities of villages and towns sought to restrain the actions and behaviors of armed men who operated with hardly any supervision and whose loyalty was only to a leader in Monrovia.

Community Retreat and the formation of Auxiliary Forces

In southeastern Liberia where the *poro* does not exist and where communities are acephalous, some communities tended to respond to the imposition of the rule of armed bands by retreating from their towns and villages to smaller hamlets located deeper in the rainforest. Typically, households retreated as a unit. Villages and towns are typically smaller in the southeast than those found elsewhere in the country. Seeking sanctuary in the forest has been a security strategy used by all forest communities; however, since violence erupted more frequently in the southeast between 1990 and 1998, southeasterners were on the run more frequently and constrained to abandon their towns and villages for longer periods of time.¹¹ In other parts of Liberia, villagers were either forced to flee their communities and seek sanctuary in the forest or become refugees in neighboring countries; however, the majority of such people usually returned to their homes as soon as fighting ends or at long intervals between fights. By contrast, in southeastern Liberia, villages remained sparsely populated for years after fighting ceased. There are two reasons for this situation: first, the isolation of the southeast from other parts of the country and the small size of towns provided ideal settings for armed rulers to operate with greater levels of impunity. Second, there is an absence in southeastern Liberia of strong pan-ethnic institutions capable of imposing sanctions across clan and ethnic groups. Thus, unrestrained by local sanctions and well connected to the leadership in Monrovia, the armed rulers in the southeast operated with impunity against local people who lived in sparsely populated villages scattered over the landscape and separated from one another by long distances. In some parts of the southeast roads remained impassable up to the end of the conflict in 2003-2004; towns that once bustled with trade remained deserted and local people had been forced to develop stronger relationships with communities in Ivory Coast. *Kwee* is a social institution that exists across many clans and in many ethnic groups of southeastern Liberia. However, unlike *poro*, its authority is circumscribed and its scope of operation limited. There is no pan-ethnic authority with jurisdiction over most of southeastern Liberia as is the *poro* in northern and northwestern Liberia.

A common strategy used widely in the southeast and sparingly in the northwest was the mobilization of local men in age-set units for defense of local communities. These units operated in association with the occupying armed group. Local elders negotiated with the occupying armed group to have such local militia units accepted as part of the occupying armed group. In this way, local communities were often tentatively spared the ravages of armed bands. However, violence always flared up when another

armed group sought to dislodge an occupying band. Suspicions ran high between local forces and occupying groups and arrangements of cooperation often broke down.

In some urban centers in the southeast, rival groups of local elites developed competitive strategies to co-opt or win the favor of their new local rulers. Using connections in their ethnic communities in Monrovia, rival groups sought to enhance their local standing vis-à-vis the new local authority. These rivalries were debilitating to local communities and left both local elites and their communities powerless and more vulnerable in the face of repressive armed rulers. This powerlessness was substantially manifested in their approach to conflict resolution, a subject to which I will turn after briefly discussing how urban dwellers struggled to cope with challenges of insecurity at the hands of armed young men.

Urban Dwellers' Response to Armed Insecurity

People of urban communities faced a difficult challenge where there was no recourse when members of state security forces behaved like criminal gangs. Local people were constrained to develop a range of security strategies. A common strategy was to observe a self-imposed curfew so that by dusk people hurried home and stayed indoors. Neighborhood watches also became a typical community response against burglary and related crimes but such arrangements often proved inadequate against well-armed gangs associated with state security units. Faced with such situation, urban families took to reinforce doors and windows of homes and organizing make-shift alarms to alert each other when under assault. In certain urban ethnic enclave-communities such as New Kru Town in Monrovia, such alarms typically brought out scores of screaming people armed with machetes and other weapons. Seeking out interlocutors and paying protection fees were strategies also tried, often unsuccessfully, to deter armed gangs.

Thus, what we see are patterns of responses to security threats rooted largely in the nature of indigenous social organization extant in the area. *Poro* as the foundation of social organization and authority relations in northwestern Liberia and trans-boundary communities in Sierra Leone and Guinea provided the institutional framework for responding to the onslaught of the new armed rulers. Even though community responses might have differed tactically, *poro* hierarchies remained the dominant actors in providing institutional responses to armed assault in most communities of the northwestern Liberia. A different pattern obtained in southeastern Liberia where communities are mainly acephalous. Communities formed smaller clusters of families and sought refuge deep within the rainforest or sought the intervention of kinsfolks who lived in Monrovia. The mobilization of local forces as auxiliaries to armed bands proved effective in some situations. In all cases, local people found recourse in indigenous and local institutions to cope with their security dilemma.

Local Institutions and Conflict Resolution

Poros Authority and Inter-Ethnic Conflict Resolution in Northwestern Liberia

Poros authority has also been a force for ending violence and managing and resolving inter-ethnic conflicts. The case of violent clashes between Mandingo and Loma communities in Zorzor is illustrative and deserves discussion. Mandingo and Loma have lived together in the same villages and towns in the area of Zorzor district on the border of Guinea since before the founding of Liberia.¹² Most towns in the area are predominantly Loma; a few such as Bakedu are predominantly Mandingo. Both local communities are part of larger ethnic communities that extend into Guinea. Mandingo are largely Moslems while Loma are Christians, Moslems and adherents to forms of traditional worship. *Poros* is an important institution in Loma society but not in Mandingo; nonetheless, Mandingo have always demonstrated respect for *Poros* authority. The two ethnic communities have been closely linked through inter-marriage (more often Loma women to Mandingo men), shared myths and history. In their shared mythology, the Loma are recognized as uncles of the Mandingo. The “uncle-nephew” bond imposes duties and privileges. The Loma have the duty to protect the Mandingo and ensure their well-being and, in turn, the Mandingo have a duty to respect Loma institutions, and support Loma undertakings. These bonds were said to have been sealed by rituals involving joint sacrifices and ancestral oaths committing the two communities to a permanent relationship of peace, friendship and cooperation free of deceit, hypocrisy and treachery.¹³

Joint mechanisms of conflict resolution evolved between the two communities typically, at the level of the village or town, include structures through which elders of the various *quarters* constitute a court with decisions sanctioned by the chief and council and enforcement ultimately backed by *poros* authority in the case of the Loma and Quranic authority in the case of the Mandingo. Since the consolidation of the Liberian state, state-based conflict resolution processes intervened and imposed a higher level of authority through the interior bureaucracy (district commissioner, county superintendent and the office of the minister of internal affairs) and a judiciary (courts of justices of the peace, magistrates, and circuit judges).

Under strains of war, in recent times, Mandingo accused the Loma of not only abandoning the commitment to protect them but of joining the onslaught against them. They accused Loma youth of torching mosques and demeaning Mandingo elders. The Loma, in turn, accused the Mandingo of ethnic targeting in the latter’s retaliatory strikes and of desecrating Loma *Poros* groves. They accused Mandingo youth of defacing Loma *Poros* objects and absconding into Guinea with them. Both sides accused each other of breaking the age-old covenant that had bonded them. Early in the conflict, Mandingo, were first forced to flee into Guinea; later, Loma were forced to flee the retaliatory attacks of the Mandingo. Both communities have been seething with bitterness and suspicion against each other.

Reconciliation between the two groups has become one of the most important post-conflict challenges. Government’s mediation initiatives were superficial, confined largely to mass meetings presided over by central government functionaries and targeted

more to winning the support of both communities than bridging the divide between them. Moreover, actions of central government's security operatives also tended to exacerbate the problem (Sawyer, Wesseh, Ajavon, 2000). Non-governmental organizations serving as facilitators were better able to get both sides to begin a dialogue.¹⁴ As dialogue progressed, *poro* leaders from Loma communities in Guinea were said to have been indispensable in initiating a process of re-covenanting. Pan-poro solidarity provided a context for security and a framework for problem-solving among the Loma. Loma *poro* objects were retrieved through pan-poro channels that involved the intervention of Guinean Loma communities with their Mandingo compatriots. Appropriate rites of restoration were performed and with due respect accorded by the Mandingo, the basis for reconciliation was established. The Mandingo received assistance from Loma communities in the construction or renovation of mosques and both communities were subsequently engaged in establishing joint structures for early warning and for dispute settlement. Such structures operated with the endorsement of both *poro* and Quranic authority.¹⁵ As a result of the impact of such local conflict resolution processes, continued violent conflicts in the region between central government forces and dissident groups have not further strained the relation between Loma and Mandingo, as was the case earlier in the conflict.¹⁶ Thus, the *poro* seems to have partially provided a nested arrangement for local mechanisms of conflict resolution as the Taylor government itself became more deeply involved as a party to armed conflict.

Resolving Conflicts over Property Rights in Northern Liberia

Post-war conflict resolution among the Mano, Gio and Mandingo of northern Liberia has taken a different pattern from that seen among the Loma and Mandingo of Zorzor district, Lofa County. Unlike their ethnic kinsfolks of the northwest, the Mandingo of northern Liberia are relatively newcomers to the area. Most were traders from Guinea who settled in Mano and Gio country and married local women. While many Gio embraced Islam, the Mano remained a *poro* community.¹⁷ Mainly agriculturists, Mano and Gio reached an accommodation with Mandingo traders for whom land ownership was not a critical concern once use rights were granted.¹⁸ With such rights, Mandingo traders exploited streams, creeks and riverbeds prospecting for alluvial gold and diamonds. They also dominated land transport and the housing market in northern Liberia.

As a minority group perceived as "strangers," the Mandingo always felt vulnerable in Nimba, despite intermarriage and years of good relations with other groups. They ultimately relied on the central state for their protection and, as a result, they were often viewed as allies of the settler oligarchy and later, when Doe took over, of the Krahn. After the 1980 coup, growing enmity between the Mano and Gio on one hand and the Krahn on the other held serious consequences for the Mandingo, especially those from Nimba County in northern Liberia. Relationship between them and the Mano/Gio ruptured during the war. Mano and Gio constituted the largest group within the dominant rebel group during the violent conflict and Krahn and Mandingo became their prime targets. Most Mandingo of Nimba fled to Monrovia or neighboring Guinea.¹⁹

Property rights in land have become the critical issue in post-conflict relations between the two groups. Many Mano and Gio communities are said to have revoked land use rights granted Mandingo. The Mandingo, on the other hand, have demanded the restoration of property rights said to be granted by central state through licenses and mining claims. Community-based approaches to the settlement of land disputes have had some success. Ethnic leaders of Mano and Gio and Mandingo elders seemed to have agreed that all lands sold or otherwise given to Mandingo in urban areas should be returned to Mandingo owners. Thus, Mandingo-owned real property seemed to have been reinstated. With respect to settlement of mining claims, by 2000, Mano and Gio leaders working through county branch office of the Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy were able to establish a “rolling registration” scheme such that Mandingo claims were considered on a case-by-case basis and honored interchangeably and periodically with Mano/Gio claims. The Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy granted tacit approval to such arrangement and up to the end of hostilities, most Mandingo leaders seem prepared to live with it.

Consanguineous ties have been critical in the process of inter-ethnic conflict resolution among the Mano/Gio and Mandingo of Nimba. Individuals of mixed ethnic backgrounds, especially men whose fathers are Mandingo and mothers Mano or Gio have been able to shuttle between both communities and this has helped promote a sympathetic understanding on both sides. Mano/Gio elders have become more appreciative of Mandingo predicament as Mandingo elders have become better informed about the concerns of Mano and Gio community leaders. In addition to the role played by ethnic elders as solvers of ethnic-based problems, younger and more educated individuals from both communities resident in Monrovia also played significant roles in conflict resolution. Their ability to hold discussions in Monrovia away from the emotionally charged environment of the home county, in some cases, accelerated the process of conflict resolution.²⁰

‘External Elite’ as Conflict Resolution Catalysts in Southeastern Liberia

In southeastern Liberia, reconciliation among ethnic groups proceeded differently. Organized on principles associated with acephalous societies, there is hardly a single indigenous institution whose legitimacy cuts across all ethnic communities. As a result, Kru and Sapo elite living in Monrovia have been the prime initiators of reconciliation activities between the two groups. In such situation, local people have relied on the lead and advice of their educated sons in Monrovia. Thus, Kru and Sapo development organizations located in Monrovia have not only been active in mobilizing resources to assist reconstruction of Kru and Sapo communities in the southeast but also in organizing inter-ethnic discussions about matters that divide their kinsfolk in the towns and villages of Sinoe and other parts of the Southeast.²¹

Such “externally-driven” approach to conflict resolution has not been without noticeable consequences. Firstly, up to the ending of hostilities generally in 2003, rifts between communities did not seem to be healing as fast enough as they appeared to be in

northern and northwestern Liberia, among the Loma and Mandingo, for example. Secondly, these processes of reconciliation, based as they are in Monrovia and not within local communities themselves were more easily manipulated by Charles Taylor up to his downfall and expulsion. Rival Monrovia-based elites could hardly avoid the temptation of turning to the Ministry of Internal Affairs for some form of intervention. Thirdly, solutions evolved from such government-tempered reconciliation processes seemed designed more to redress perceived ethnic-based imbalances in appointments to county-level positions in the government than to heal wounds between people who have committed egregious breaches against each other. As a result, when differences among such elites about job placements proved irreconcilable, demands for the creation of new political jurisdictions such as new statutory districts or townships have been heightened.²²

The case of ethnic conflict between the Krahn and Grebo also of the southeast was even more illuminating with respect to the creation of new political jurisdiction as a strategy for the resolution of ethnic-based conflict. The military takeover of 1980 catapulted the Krahn to national leadership as well as local leadership in their southeastern home county of Grand Gedeh which they shared with the Grebo. Until then, Grebo dominance in local government and professional positions was due largely to their superior educational achievements.²³ Krahn and Grebo elders and elites were unable to arrive at a common understanding of their differences and an approach to their resolution. Massive Grebo support for anti-government Doe forces during the early years of the conflict was attributed in part to their desire to end Krahn domination and control of their jointly shared home-county. Ending such control meant redressing imbalances in appointments to local government positions. This opened both sides to manipulation by central government authorities. Reconciliation between the two groups has been difficult due to excessive central government manipulation of grievances of both sides through the powers of presidential appointment. Becoming more dominant in Charles Taylor's government, Grebo leaders used their newfound influence to press for the carving out a new county from what was Grand Gedeh County. The creation of Grebo dominated River Gee County has ended the competition for central government-allocated positions which has been a major bone of contention between Grebo and Krahn elites over the years.

Thus, what we have seen is that, deeply affected by state collapse and violent disruptions, local communities found recourse as much as possible in their own indigenous patterns where such institutions are available and appropriate. Operating unobtrusively, *poro* authority has interacted with Quranic authority to provide a basis for co-existence and gradual cooperation between the Loma and Mandingo of northwestern Liberia. A more segmental approach to conflict resolution seemed to be taking place in Nimba in northern Liberia between the Mano and Gio on one hand and the Mandingo on the other. Personal predispositions and consanguineous relationships at the level of the town seem to be a critical factor in conflict resolution in that area. In southeastern Liberia, among the Kru and Sapo, the role of elites of the two ethnic communities resident in Monrovia seemed pronounced and where reconciliation has proved to be more difficult due to lack of appropriate institutions, as is also the case between the Grebo and Krahn, local elites have opted for the creation of new political jurisdictions. Thus, the nature of community social organization has played a major role in determining

prevailing responses to conflict. It is important to understand that all of these relationships were constantly pressured by continuing violence and may well be in various states of adaptation until all armed groups are effectively disarmed and disbanded.

Collective Action and Associational Life

Ake (1996) has correctly noted that although extensive in its reach, the state's penetration of African society has been rather weak and more extractive in nature than catalytic of community self-development. This essentially underscores the predatory character of the African state (Fatton, 1992). In some instances, society's resilience can be observed in the nature and quality of associational life that has made survival possible in spite of state predation and collapse. By associational life, I refer to the full array of collective action situations organized by individuals and communities in pursuit of a full range of desired outcomes. These include formal and informal groups, networks and associations established on the basis of a variety of boundary rules for collective action for the provision, production and use of collective goods (E. Ostrom, 1990; 1992).²⁴ Also considered here are market-based activities derived and operated as a result of individual and group initiatives rather than by the state.²⁵ The crucial point here is a consideration of non-state institutional arrangements, rooted in the initiatives of local people that have been the source of their resilience to predation and violence.²⁶ Illustrative listings of these organizations and networks are given as an appendix to this paper. Many of these organizations and networks have external linkages with members who live outside Liberia.

Clan-Based Institutions of Collective Action

The most enduring form of collective action that ensured community survival despite violent conflicts was undertaken by networks and organizations whose membership is based on clan-related identity. These are genuinely self-reliant and demand-driven groups. Typically, numerous voluntary associations are nested within them and they are referred to as "development" associations. Organizations such as the development associations of Bopolu in Gbarpolu, Palipo in River Gee and Dugbe River Union in Sinoe counties are well known for their multiple roles as safety nets, conflict resolution mechanisms and for the social and physical infrastructure development activities they undertake independent of the state and often, despite state predation. In northern Liberia, among the Mano and Gio, the accomplishments of clan-based organizations have been indispensable to the survival of local communities. *Seletorwaa*, the development association of Mensonnoh Clan and Zao Development Association of the Zao, for example, have been extraordinary in their development initiatives. They have built schools, clinics and roads and have organized scholarship schemes to assist promising young men and women to go to college. *Seletorwaa* began in the early 1980s by members of the Mehnsonnoh clan resident in Monrovia. It was a response to the military takeover and its consequences on Nimba County. Among the numerous projects it has undertaken over the years is a clinic built in Guotowin and several scholarships to the

young people of the clan to pursue studies at technical schools and institutions of higher learning in Liberia. *Selezoway*, the Yarwin-Mehnsnonnoh District development association of which *Seletowaa* is a member has, over the years, transformed the district, building roads, market sheds, community halls and other public facilities.²⁷ Women's clubs within the development association have catered to the needs of sick and disabled, and have often organized for increased production of food to ensure food security. Male members of the clan have had responsibility to maintain roads within the clan.

As self-reliant entities, clan development associations are largely supported by the resources of their individual and constituent community members, through labor quotas and through taxation of individual production. The role of clan members in Monrovia and abroad is critical in resource mobilization. Many such organizations receive regular contributions from members now resident in the United States. More recently, members of *Seletowaa* in the United States have been providing equipment and supplies for elementary schools in the clan. Members of various Nimba county clan-based associations living in the United States have organized a county-wide organization, the United Nimba Citizens Council of North America and are engaged in substantial initiatives designed to rehabilitate and equip schools and clinics in Nimba County.²⁸ Clan-based development associations are often able to tap into external resources mobilized through intergovernmental entities such as those of the country offices of organizations of the United Nations system, the European Union and international and local non-governmental organizations.

International entities such as the country office of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Lutheran World Service and World Federation have offered useful assistance in capacity building of clan-based organizations and in this way have contributed to the sustainability of clan-based undertakings. Provisions of agricultural tools to farm families in the southeast (Maryland and Grand Kru), assistance in the establishment of seed multiplication facilities in Bomi and Nimba and the provision of extension services to farming groups in several communities—all through the institutions of clan-based organization have enabled local communities to improve survival prospects and enhance sustainability in the face of continuously difficult circumstances.²⁹

Clan-based organizations become more prominent as communities become marginalized or repressed by central state authority. The case of Nimba is well known. Self-help became the strategy for development during the 1980s when as a result of Mano/Gio targeting by the Doe regime, the people of Nimba found recourse in their local institutions. Amid intermittent violence, Mano and Gio communities of Nimba County were rehabilitating clinics, schools and roads even in remote parts of the county. Communities in the southeastern counties of Sinoe, Maryland, Grand Gedeh and River Gee, for example, were left stranded as their forest resources were consigned through concession agreements to government-designated logging companies that have had no legal obligations to such communities. Some communities have tried to negotiate with such logging companies for access to forest resources. Needless to say, such negotiations are weighted heavily against local communities. Deprived of access to their forest

resources, all such communities have been left to their own devices to survive and clan-based organizations have been a critical survival resource.

Community-Based Organizations

The dominant manifestation of associational life in urban and peri-urban areas is community-based organizations (CBOs). These are constituted largely on the basis of a variety of overlapping boundary rules ranging from those based on ethnic and communal identity to spatial and geographic location (uptown/downtown, right bank/left bank or north/south) distinctions to a sense of common social history (as Togolese descendants organization). Like clan-based organizations in rural Liberia, they have been the fulcrums of development in urban and some peri-urban communities. In Monrovia, for example, the Slipway Community Association and the Soniwein Development Association have been known for initiatives in building latrines and repairing roadways. In upriver communities, community-based organizations have had extensive track record in building and maintaining community centers and roadways.³⁰

Outside Monrovia, community-based organizations are active in roadwork and sanitation projects, in construction of irrigation canals, market shelters, schools and bridges and sinking community wells in various parts of Liberia. Most of these initiatives are typically supported by inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations. World Vision, Catholic Relief Service, International Rescue Committee, Action Aid, Save the Children Fund of UK and Lutheran World Service and World Federation are among the more prominent cooperation partners of community-based organizations.

Community-based organizations are distinct from government-established local jurisdictions and relations between the two are not always cordial. Leaders of township government are typically appointed by and responsible to the minister of internal affairs; their recruitment is largely on the basis of partisan affiliation or other political or familial connections. Leaders of community-based organizations are typically public entrepreneurs given to taking initiatives in community matters. Most are civic-minded individuals not necessarily driven by partisan politics. Initiation of collective action and the exercise of control over local resources can become sources of conflict between community-based organizations and local government authorities, often, to the disadvantage of local communities.³¹

In summary, despite state predation, and in the face of repression of armed groups, community-based organizations can constitute a basis for community survival and need to be seen as significant local capabilities for the reconstitution of post-conflict governing order in Liberia. Because they are typically driven by community demands and rely on the support of their membership, they can be self-sustaining. Demand for clean and safe drinking water, latrines, passable roadways and community meeting facilities can provide a sufficiently strong incentive to motivate social entrepreneur within the community to initiate steps leading to collective action. Countless numbers of community

watch organizations, school projects and literacy clubs have been organized as projects of or associated with community-based organizations.

Liberian Communities Abroad

Liberians abroad and the networks and organizations they for are a significant part of the capital available for reconstituting order in Liberia. Liberians in the United States, for example, are among the most highly trained and proportionately more wealthy than their compatriots anywhere else in the Liberian diaspora. Although exact figures have not been calculated, they are known to remit hundreds of thousands of dollars monthly in cash and kind to relatives and causes in Liberia. Almost all community-related organizations extant in Liberia have branch extensions or affiliated networks in the United States. There are scores of township, clan, district and county organizations, alumni associations, professional groups and religious bodies organized to advance the welfare of their members in the United States and to support parent or related communities in Liberia.

The Union of Liberian Community Associations in the Americas has seventeen chapters around the United States some of which provided humanitarian support for Liberians at home during the violent conflict. County associations such as the Grand Gedeh Associations in the Americas and the National Association of Bong County Citizens are known to be supplying educational materials, medical supplies and other welfare relief to counterpart or parent organizations in Liberia. Alumni associations are involved in renovating school buildings, paying teachers' salaries and sending books and educational supplies to their alma maters. An organization of Liberian physicians in the United States currently boasts of a membership of more than 125 physicians and dentists and is currently working to restore the standards of the medical school of the University of Liberia.

Smaller communities of Liberians in Europe and less-well-off groups in other West African countries also make transfers. Many of the Liberian communities found in West African countries, including those categorized as refugee camps have developed amazing capabilities over the last 15 years. One of the more vibrant of such communities is the Liberian community at Buduburam, Ghana. With the support of the Media Foundation of West Africa, it publishes a bi-monthly newsletter called *Exile News*, and undertakes several community development initiatives, including HIV/AIDS screening and the provision of water and electricity through arrangements with the appropriate Ghanaian utilities authorities.

Using Social Capital to Transcend Survival

While it is true that in many cases, in the face of violent conflict, the imperative to survive may well demand building forms of social capital that may not ordinarily be contemplated or attempted during times of peace, the values and institutional underpinnings of collective action in both circumstances of violent conflict and in more normal times might well be similar. The cultivation of values of trust and solidarity and the ability to build networks and institutions for collective action are important no matter the circumstance. As these capabilities have served as instruments for survival in times of violent conflicts, they can also serve as building blocks for a new post-conflict order. A fundamental mistake in the approach to post-conflict reconstruction is the tendency to begin the process of reconstruction by doing assessments of local needs without doing similar assessments of local capabilities. Even where local capabilities are assessed, the true values and strengths of local institutions are frequently ignored. The case of the *poro* is a good example. Despite its pan-ethnic character and the fact that *poro zoes* and Moslem imams were prominent in the resolution of inter-ethnic, trans-boundary conflicts, the *poro* has never been seen by state and international entities who formulate the agenda for reconstruction of Liberia as an institution worthy of a role to play in post-conflict peacebuilding and governance. And yet, to more than a million people who live in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, *poro* is accorded a higher level of legitimacy than any system of state-based courts and tribunals. Let alone the fact that there is much to be learned from values of solidarity and discipline promoted by *poro*.

The defense capabilities shown by many local communities demonstrate that local people can play a role in the provision of local security as part of an overall national or regional security arrangement. This is especially important in view of the fact that the search for hidden weapons is unlikely to ensure a weapons-free society for many years to come. Community militia forces can become the first line of defense for local people; linked horizontally, they can become a substantial deterrent to armed bands that may seek to roam the countryside in the aftermath of a disarmament and demobilization exercise.

Besides ignoring local capabilities in security and conflict resolution, the failure to assess capabilities while assess needs also leads to a false assessment of needs in such important areas as health, education and community development. The *Joint Needs Assessment* undertaken by the Liberia government, the World Bank and UNDP has ignored completely the fact that even before the collapse of the state, Liberians abroad, operating through local clan-based associations and alumni associations were the prime supporters of schools and road repair projects in several parts of Liberia.³² By ignoring the capabilities of local people and their extensions abroad, needs assessment surveys have the potential of reorganizing local communities for dependency and not for sustainable development.

Social Capital as Potentials for Polycentric Governance

The variability of local institutions as discussed in this paper signifies the existence of potentials for the establishment of a polycentric system of governance in Liberia. The fact that local people in different parts of the country adopted different survival strategies underscores the existence of a variety of patterns that can be brought together in a coordinated system of governance in which local patterns can be utilized within local contexts and horizontal and vertical institutional linkages developed across patterns such that there can be several centers of authority instead of a single source of power. It is in such polycentric system of governance that the potentials of individuals and communities can truly be unlocked (V. Ostrom, 1999). For Liberia, unlocking human potentials in this manner has far reaching implications for the nature of the post-conflict political order that can be constituted. It provides possibilities of departing from a system of unitary government which demands uniformity and turns into personal rule that grows repressive when challenged. It opens up prospects toward establishing a system of democratic self-governance.

More specifically, by building a system of governance rooted in the variety of local patterns, Liberians would be able to appreciate their diversity. Heterogeneity becomes an asset. Principles underpinning hierarchical hetarchical and segmental patterns can all be constitutive of a polycentric order. There can be a variety of patterns of local governance appropriate for specific local contexts. In the context of northwestern Liberia where hierarchical and hetarchical principles underpin social patterns and where *poro* institutions are strong, local institutions of governance can reflect the hetarchical patterns of society as mitigated by the fact that education and other factors have impacted and continue to temper social ordering, thereby providing opportunities for mobility to all. In southeastern Liberia with its acephalous societies, the imposition of a rigid system of chieftaincies has been an enduring source of local conflicts. Local patterns that recognize age-set relationships in social ordering and the recognition of individual achievements can be given full expression, again, as tempered by the development of certain hierarchies in response to external demands.

VI

Conclusion

What all of this means is that by empowering local institutions through a new constitutional order, Liberia's system of over-centralized and predatory government would be transformed in ways that would unlock the potentials of individuals and local communities. However, in order to ensure that a constitutional arrangement founded in what appears to be the self-organizing capabilities of local people can yield democracy, a good deal of effort should be put into advancing an understanding local patterns of collective action. Studies of patterns of decentralization have helped to advance understanding of the challenges of local government and the need to deepen decentralization to attain democratic governance (Olowu and Wunsch, 2004; Ribot, 2003; Wunsch, 2000). Yet, there is a need to better understand local self-organization and collective action. We need to know more about how entrepreneurship is generated in

local communities, how do people organize to solve problems or take advantage of opportunities, how do they build linkages with others, how do they organize to relate to government and external actors, what makes for successful collective action? In short, how do people build social capital for self-governance? Until we can better understand how self-organization begins and goes on successfully, our efforts to build systems of democratic governance on foundations of local institutions of self-governance will remain work-in-progress.

¹ Kru communities had similar experience in the 1930s and 1940s when the Kru intelligentsia mounted electoral challenges to the settler oligarchy.

² President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso has admitted sending contingents of Burkinabe soldiers to fight on the side of Charles Taylor in 1990. This type of intervention is not to be confused with the peacekeeping force called ECOMOG that was deployed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

³ The design principles identified by E. Ostrom (1992) with respect to irrigation systems has wider application to other forms of collective action.

⁴ Although there are brief analyses of the impact of military violence and government-sponsored or government-allowed banditry on rural communities, the question of how, in the face of the collapse of the central state, individuals and communities organize survival strategies to cope with security predicaments have not yet become the central concern of scholarly research on contemporary Liberia. D'Azevedo's (1969-1971) seminal work provides an excellent analysis of Gola strategies in response to the penetration of the Liberian state; others such as Holsoe (1971, 1974) have provided similar analyses with respect to other political communities vis-à-vis the imposition of Liberian state. However, since the military takeover of 1980, there has not been many studies investigating how local communities have responded to increasing state-sponsored violence and state collapse. My *Effective Immediately* (1987) provides a passing glance at the impact of military rule on rural life.

⁵ The period of military rule in Liberia began with the military takeover of 1980. Although in 1986, the military leader Samuel Doe was elected in rigged elections, the pattern of post-elections rule did not differ substantially from the preceding five years. Threat and use of military force, decrees, and strongman arbitrariness were as much the dominant features of post-elections rule as they were earlier. Thus, except where otherwise stated, the entire period of control by Doe (1980 to 1989) is referred to as the period of military rule.

⁶ Domination of villages and towns by military men was a feature of the military takeover of 1980. What was different in the conflict that began in 1989 and ended in 2003 is that the new armed local leaders were almost always not members of the officially organized state military force. As ex-combatants of a rebel force, all owed loyalty to Charles Taylor but were not always systematically organized in a publicly known command structure.

⁷ It is not known when *Poro* began; however, its activities have been noted since the 16th century (d'Azevedo, *ibid*).

⁸ Author's interview with informant.

⁹ We must remember that both Doe and Taylor imposed themselves on the *Poro* as its highest authority.

¹⁰ D'Azevedo (1969-1971 *op cit*; 1970) saw the offer of Gola girls as wives to settler leaders and government officials as elements of Gola strategy for accommodation with the Liberian state.

¹¹ With violence breaking out between LURD and the Taylor government in 1999, this pattern was changed somewhat in the last four years of the conflict.

¹² See Benjamin Anderson (1971)

¹³ See Sawyer, Wesseh, Ajavon, 2000.

¹⁴ The Center for Democratic Empowerment, the Catholic Peace and Justice Commission and the Lutheran World Federation are among the non-governmental organizations that have played facilitation roles.

¹⁵ There is no sense of *Sharia* legal application in these matters. Mandingo Islamic clerics operate in conjunction with Mandingo elders, many of who are of mixed parentage.

¹⁶ The use of indigenous institutions as mechanisms for conflict resolution is an important strategy currently employed in Rwanda. The *Gacaca* is an indigenous institution considered legitimate by both Hutu and Tutsi for the settlement of disputes. It is now playing a role in resolving certain conflicts connected with the genocide of 1994. See Neuffer (2000); New York Times October 7, 2001.

¹⁷ Chief Tuazama of the Gio town of Bahn is said to have been a convert to Islam and to have given many Gio girls in marriage to Mandingo men.

¹⁸ To the Mano and Gio and to all other ethnic groups in Liberia, ownership of land is inalienable. Most land is communal property charged to the custody of the elders of the community who serve as “owners of the land.” Use rights can be granted but ownership can only be attained through community sale. See Sawyer (1992), especially Chapter 10.

¹⁹ Until a process of reconciliation was commenced between the Loma and Mandingo in northwestern Liberia, the already difficult relationship between the Mano and Mandingo in Nimba also suffered the effects of pan-Poro solidarity between the Mano and Loma. See Sawyer, Wesseh and Ajavon (op. cit.)

²⁰ A few young men of mixed background have played an entrepreneurial role organizing meetings among the intelligentsia of both communities resident in Monrovia, evolving proposals from such meetings and strategizing as to how to get them accepted by elders of all communities in Nimba.

²¹ See Sawyer, Wesseh, Pantan and Tiswen, 2000.

²² The creation of the statutory district of Tarjaurzon out of Juarzon is a more recent example.

²³ Grebo communities extend from the Atlantic coast into the interior; as such they were among the first ethnic groups to have access to schools first established along the coast by missionaries and later, the Liberian state. Located entirely inland, the Krahn lived largely in hunting and gathering communities well into the early decades of the twentieth century. See Schroder and Seibel (1974).

²⁴ Boundary rules are membership rules, determining who has rights and who is excluded. Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues have demonstrated that an extraordinarily large number of collective action situations are possible in view of the correspondingly large number of membership rules that can be generated. See Elinor Ostrom (forthcoming, especially chapter 6).

²⁵ Discussion about associational life in Africa frequently becomes central to the debate about what constitutes civil society in Africa. That debate largely centers on the potential of civil society to advance democracy in Africa. See Barkan, et al. (1991); Harbeson et al. (1994); Hutchful (1997); Kasfir (1998); Orvis, (2001). Although critical, this debate is not my central concern in this chapter. My focus in this chapter is on how individuals and communities organize themselves for collective action to meet the variety of dilemmas they confront in the circumstance of state predation, collapse and violence. That some of these collective action arrangements are “undemocratic” or potentially so is not of immediate relevance to this discussion.

²⁶ In a technical sense, this discussion revolves around the boundary rules and provision of goods by groups. It is more a snapshot of the landscape than an analysis of specific collective action situations. Even in sketching the landscape, it falls short of a substantial discussion about the sustainability of collective action situations identified. However, the fact that groups discussed have survived state collapse and destructive violence and continue to operate with observable success seems indicative of their potential sustainability.

²⁷ Interviews with members of *Seletorwaa*.

²⁸ The amalgamated initiatives of clan-based organizations that sustain inter-clan development projects must not be confused with such countywide development associations that are organized by the central state through the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The former are the result of local initiatives; the later are top-down government-driven structures that seem to become very active on special occasions such as a pending visit of the president. A ministry of internal affairs local officer called the assistant superintendent for development coordinates county development association. The district development council is its basic unit of operation. The minister of internal affairs ultimately directs its activities on behalf of the president.

²⁹ See *Fourth Quarter Report, Liberia Programme*, The Lutheran World Federation, October-December, 1999. Not all international cooperation entities are prepared to work through already existing local

institutions such as clan-based organizations. Some prefer to create new entities. Such strategy has a way of creating a dependency relationship. Sustainability in the absence of donor funding becomes impossible. This issue is further discussed below.

³⁰ Upriver communities are settler-established communities located along the banks of Liberia's major rivers. Most of these communities are within 20 miles of the major coastal cities of Liberia.

³¹ A typical example is the conflict between the commissioner of the township of Brewerville, located on the outskirts of Monrovia and the Lower Brewerville Community Association. Affected by a shortage of water since the only community well is located several miles away from the Lower Brewerville area, members of this organization decided to sink a well within their area and, therefore, sought technical assistance from UNICEF. The commissioner of the township ordered the termination of the project as soon as it got underway, claiming that the association had no authority to sink a well in the township. She threatened to disband the organization if work continued on the well project. The prospects of unfavorable publicity in view of Brewerville's location within the orbit of greater Monrovia and pressure exerted through the Ministry of Internal Affairs, led the commissioner to back down. Had this incident occurred in a community far from Monrovia, the commissioner could have terminated the well digging project. Author's notes. Conversations with Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs and members of Lower Brewerville Community Association.

³² See *Liberia: Joint Needs Assessment* National Transitional Government of Liberia, the United Nations and the World Bank, February 2004.

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