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To cite this article: Jeremy Allouche & Paul Jackson (2019) Zones of peace and local peace processes in Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, *Peacebuilding*, 7:1, 71-87, DOI: [10.1080/21647259.2018.1491276](https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2018.1491276)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2018.1491276>



Published online: 18 Jul 2018.



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Zones of peace and local peace processes in Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the issue of peace and restraint within ongoing conflicts. While the vast majority of the literature on civil wars in Africa concentrates on drivers of conflict and instances of violence, there are zones of peace where locally peace processes have developed despite conflicts around them. These spaces have been neglected in both the academic literature and the major data sets on conflict and war, which mostly focuses on the belligerent, or sometimes the victims. The literature that does exist is concentrated in Latin America (especially Colombia) rather than Africa. This paper records six different episodes in Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone and seeks to understand the reasons why these spaces were able to maintain some level of peace. The paper discusses the practicalities of exercising peace on the ground and the implications for subsequent peacebuilding, along with drawing conclusions about differences in the nature of warfare regionally.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 15 December 2017
Accepted 30 May 2018

KEYWORDS

Peace; conflict resolution; restraint; conflict; civil society; Côte d'Ivoire; Sierra Leone; West Africa

Introduction

Research on conflict resolution has mainly focused on war prevention or post-conflict reconciliation. Nevertheless, there has been an increase in literature on so-called zones of peace: territories in which communities aim to reduce the negative impact of armed conflict through non-violent means.¹ However, this logic of non-violence during conflict is scarcely covered in the African academic literature, and yet across two very different conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, we can observe the same phenomenon of localised grassroots peace initiatives and activities during conflict. Local communities are not passive within wars and make choices between violence and peace depending on their own perceptions of risks and returns. However, contemporary data sets document significant instances of violence against civilians (the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone documents more than 40,000) but none document instances of peace. Our knowledge on how civilians manage to contain violence or contribute to non-violence in conflict-affected environments is very limited.

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¹Hancock, L. and Mitchell, C. (eds), *Zones of Peace* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2007); Mitchell, C and Hancock, L *Local Peacebuilding and National Peace: Interaction Between Grassroots and Elite Processes* (New York: Continuum, 2012).

A literature on civilian-led peace movements and community self-protection does exist showing civilians promoting norms of peace, nonviolence and 'cultures of peace'.² African scholarship on communal violence has emphasised the role of civilian agency in perpetrating violence, and the role of leadership in violence and violence prevention, but this literature does not show how leadership prevents or stops violence.³ At the same time, evidence from Nigeria also implies that the incorporation of these 'middle range' actors could be instrumental in facilitating peacebuilding.⁴

Hancock and Mitchell define zones of peace as being a social sanctuary which is viewed either as a geographical or social space where individuals are protected against personal violability based on agreed rules of public order.⁵ A zone of peace also offers flexibility that allows local communities to ensure that armed actors abide by certain rules to limit the costs of armed conflict through reducing violence. Communities within these zones engage in civil resistance to armed actors by applying unarmed power and non-violent methods including strikes, boycotts and demonstrations, or just non-compliance.⁶ This article takes six examples where local agreements have resulted in localised peace across Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire and then examines how far they conform to the logic of zones of peace literature.

This paper makes two important contributions to the literature on peacebuilding in general, and peace zones specifically. First, it is also important to note that despite the proximity and similarity between the various West African wars, there has not been much comparative work between them.⁷ The causes of the war for both Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire have been very much debated, and there is a large volume of evidence on the wars.⁸ Despite this, the only comparative article is Chauveau and Richards focussing on agrarian change, showing how violence offers scope for adjustment to pressure when other means fail.⁹ Their comparison contrasts different trajectories of agrarian social change, making the point that Côte d'Ivoire was a conflict to uphold a lineage-based social order, while this was the opposite for Sierra Leone.

Second, the literature on zones of peace is primarily concerned with Latin America, particularly Colombia, with other examples drawn from the Philippines. Whilst there is some short discussion on examples as wide ranging as Northern Ireland, South Africa

²García Durán, M., *Movimiento por La Paz en Colombia 1978–2003* (Bogotá: CINEP, 2006); Kaplan, O. 'Nudging Armed Groups: How Civilians Transmit Norms of Protection', *Stability*, 2, no.2 (2013): 1–8; Annette Idler, María Belén Garrido & Cécile Mouly, 'Peace Territories In Colombia: Comparing Civil Resistance In Two War-Torn Communities', *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 10, no.3 (2015): 1–15; García, E., 'Filipino Zones of Peace', in *Peace Review* 9, no.2 (1997): 221–224; Arviola, Jr, S. 'Community-Based Peace Building Program: The Case of Bual Zone of Peace, Philippines', in *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review* 8, no.2 (2008): 51–59.

³Krause, J., 'Non-violence and civilian agency in communal war: Evidence from Jos, Nigeria', *African Affairs*, 116, no.463 (2017): 261–283.

⁴Krause, 'Non-violence and civilian agency'.

⁵Hancock and Mitchell, *Zones of peace*.

⁶Idler et al, 'Peace territories in Colombia'.

⁷Hoffman, D., *The War Machines: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2011); Allouche, J., Benson M. and McCormack, F., 'The End of the Mano River War(s)', *IDS Evidence Report*, 188 (2016).

⁸Banegas, R., 'Briefing: Post-Election Crisis in Côte d'Ivoire: The Gbonhi War', *African Affairs* 110, no.440 (2011): 457–68; McGovern, M. *Making War in Côte d'Ivoire* (London: C. Hurst Publishers, 2011); Richards, P., *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone* (Oxford: James Currey, 1996); Jackson, P. and Albrecht, P., *Security Transformation in Sierra Leone 1997–2007* (GFN-SSR and DFID, 2009); Jackson, P. and Albrecht, P., *Reconstruction Security After Conflict. Security Sector Reform in Sierra Leone* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011).

⁹Chauveau, J.P. and Richards, P., 'West African Insurgencies in Agrarian Perspective: Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone Compared', *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8, no.4 (2008): 515–552.

and the Caucasus, the literature in these areas is sparse. For Africa, a continent blighted by conflict, there is surprisingly little literature on zones of peace and almost none on the Mano River Region. This article therefore makes an important contribution to the overall literature by adding new examples in an under-researched field and in a new geographical area not currently addressed by the literature.

This paper uses an inductive approach to draw out lessons that can be used to explain localised peace processes, or ‘zones of peace’. It takes a retrospective view of two conflicts known to the authors and documents six specific cases of localised peace processes within conflicts. The primary data for our analysis are based on interviews for both of our case studies, most notably with former combatants, Young Patriots members, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), Community Defence Forces (CDF), civil servants and local government officials, traditional leaders and representatives of the religious community, and citizens. The authors have long histories of working in these countries, including fieldwork in Sierra Leone between 2002 and 2005 on decentralisation and Chiefdom systems, 2007, 2009 and 2013 on security sector reforms, and in Côte d’Ivoire between 2011 and 2013 on the civil war and 2014 and 2017 on large-scale investments and peacebuilding.

This article starts by examining the current literature on this subject and focuses and develops this idea of zones of peace. It will analyse three examples in both Côte d’Ivoire and Sierra Leone, defining these communities and their relationship with armed groups, and understanding the extent to which this peace process is externally influenced or internally driven. It will particularly focus on the creation of these peace zones, rather than the implementation of peace. Through these micro-case studies, the authors will question the current literature emphasis on peace and armed forces and the particularity of the West African setting in terms of leadership and agency.

What governs zones of peace?

In seeking to understand the logic of violence, Kalyvas uses the example of two very similar and contiguous Greek villages in the peninsula of the Peloponnese that faced two different trajectories: one resulted in a general massacre while the other prevented this type of violence.¹⁰ He concludes that territorial contestation is a key variable to explain both the prevalence of violence and its absence but importantly also concludes that the outcomes are linked to different alliances within networks that link the local and national. This opens up the potential of analysing the dynamics that lead to peace rather than conflict and what Strauss calls the dynamics of restraint. Strauss defines factors of restraint as ideas, interactions and institutions that provide incentives for leaders and/or citizens to abstain from, or moderate, extensive violence in the way that, for example, Williams documents in India.¹¹ Williams’ emphasis on ‘understanding the persistence of everyday harmony’ shifts the emphasis from understanding the dynamics of conflict to understanding and researching the dynamics of peace.¹²

¹⁰Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence*.

¹¹Williams, P., ‘Hindu-Muslim brotherhood: exploring the dynamics of communal relations in Varanasi, North India’, *Journal of South Asian Development* 2, no.2 (2007): 153–176; Straus, S., ‘Retreating from the Brink: Theorizing Mass Violence and the Dynamics of Restraint’, *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no.343–62 (2012): 344.

¹²Williams, ‘Hindu-Muslim’, 154.

Hancock and Mitchell draw on empirical evidence primarily from Colombia but also from the Philippines, in establishing eight factors for successful peace zones, and make it more likely that a community will convince armed actors to comply with rules that allow a reduction of violence¹³: (1) strong internal cohesion and leadership and efforts to expand the functions of the sanctuary beyond protection; (2) declared neutrality and impartial behaviour of the people residing in the territory, (3) presence of credible sanctions for violation, (4) absence of perceivable threats to outside interests, (5) a framework of accepted rules and norms regarding rights and obligations of both the community and external actors, (6) limited incentives for community members and armed actors to violate this framework, (7) strong patron interest in the preservation of sanctuary and leverage on potential violators and (8) clear markers on the territorial boundaries of the zone. Idler et al. further simplify these eight factors in to three groups 'for the purpose of analytical clarity' and it is these three groups that we will use to frame our analysis¹⁴: the characteristics of the civil resistance movement in the peace territory, (1); the relationship of the community with armed actors, (2)–(6); and the role of external actors, (7) and (8).

The characteristics of the civil resistance movement

Kaplan identifies social cohesion as a critical element of civil society movements that seek to engage with armed actors.¹⁵ Social cohesion allows institutional solutions to avoid participation in conflict, manage internal community in order to limit the ability of armed groups to infiltrate local communities and also to demand accountability from those groups. This is similar to Varshney and Krause's analysis of ethnic conflict in India and Nigeria, respectively, further that takes social cohesion and civilians as key agents within these networks, again emphasising processes over variables.¹⁶ Widespread participation of community members in local peacebuilding activities helps to enforce and encourage social cohesion but also the resulting collective action serves to enhance domestic protection within that community and strengthen the hand of any community negotiating with an armed actor.¹⁷ The literature further develops this by stressing the importance of collective leadership, specifically leadership that does not rely on one individual, but where the entire community participates, or at least supports the initiative.¹⁸

In Africa, the idea of including different actors is very much present in peacebuilding debates but has been associated with the inclusion of civil society voices into the political settlement.¹⁹ Several studies show the strong correlation between civil society

¹³Hancock and Mitchell, *Zones of Peace*.

¹⁴Idler et al, 'Peace territories in Colombia', p.2.

¹⁵Kaplan, O., 'Protecting Civilians in Civil War: The Institution of the ATCC in Colombia' in *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no.3 (2013): 351–367.

¹⁶Varshney, A, *Civic life and ethnic conflict: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Krause, 'Non-Violence and Civilian Agency'.

¹⁷Arjona, A, 'Civilian Resistance to Rebel Governance', *HiCN Working Paper 170, Households in Conflict Network, Institute of Development Studies* (Brighton: University of Sussex, 2014); Kaplan, 'Protecting Civilians'.

¹⁸See Hancock and Mitchell, *Zones of Peace* (p. 212), for a detailed discussion on this.

¹⁹Tadros, M and J. Allouche, 'Political settlements as a violent process: deconstructing the relationship between political settlements and intrinsic, instrumental and resultant forms of violence', *Conflict, Security and Development* 17, no.3 (2017): 187–204.

participation and sustained peace and, whilst democracy has been seen as the main expression of inclusion, this ignores local social and political dynamics and the actual construction of legitimacy at the local level.²⁰ In addition, the incorporation of civilian agency is a critical aspect of this, particularly as supporters or as opposition to violent groups. In Sierra Leone, for example, local populations established *kamajor* militias as CDF to fight the RUF, drawing from a variety of local institutions including secret societies, hunter militias and village groups. In Côte d'Ivoire, local militias were also created to fight against mostly Liberian mercenaries that were causing instability in the Western region following the armed conflict in 2002. The local community is therefore, in many ways, an extremely pluralistic one with multiple groups that have been difficult to form into a coherent voice. Research on West Africa in particular, though not exclusively, emphasises the role of dense networks of institutions at the local level that provide the sinews of sociopolitical networks.²¹ These networks comprise a multitude of overlapping institutions, both formal and informal, seen and unseen, underpinned by what James Scott refers to as 'infrapolitics'.²²

This is further complicated by the issue of collective leadership in a context where leadership has been dominated by the idea of what Utas calls 'Bigmanity'.²³ Bigmanity exists within frameworks of warfare in parts of Africa that exhibit some of the key characteristics of Duffield's networked warfare whereby wars do not follow the traditional state-based patterns of warfare but multiple actors each pursuing different aims.²⁴ Critically, wartime networks in West Africa consisted of a multitude of actors incorporating politicians, military, financial, trading, international, smugglers, international NGOs, religious leaders, warlords and local leaders like chiefs. Each of these networks also exists at different levels of society from the international to the village. This conceptualisation of conflict undermines traditional ways of looking at conflict as defined by clear categories including religion or ethnicity, but more particularly there are very few clear boundaries between groups, whether peaceful or not. However, it does allow for the positive use of Bigmanity to change the shape of social networks for peace as well as conflict if the incentives are right.

The community and armed actors

The second major group is the relationship of the community with the armed actors. Certainly in long-established movements like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, it is very likely that there will be very close relationships between the

²⁰ John, A. W. S., and Kew, D, 'Civil society and peace negotiations: Confronting exclusion', *International Negotiation* 13, no.1 (2008): 11–36; Nilsson, D, 'Anchoring the peace: Civil society actors in peace accords and durable peace', *International Interactions* 38, no.2 (2012): 243–266.

²¹ Fanthorpe, R, 'Neither Citizen nor Subject? "Lumpen" agency and the legacy of native administration in Sierra Leone', *African Affairs* 100 (2001): 363–86; Ferme, M, *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday in Sierra Leone* (University of California Press, 2001); Moran *Ethnography of Political Violence*.

²² These are sometimes referred to as 'hidden' politics, although this is something of a misnomer since they are not hidden to local people. See Scott, J, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

²³ Utas, M, *African Conflicts and Informal Power: Big men and networks* (London: Zed Books, 2012).

²⁴ Duffield, M, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The merging of development and security* (London: Zed Books, 2001); Duffield, M, 'War as a network enterprise: the new security terrain and its implications', *Journal for Cultural Research* 6 (2002): 153–65.

armed groups and the community and, as Idler et al. identify, several communities have friends and relatives as part of armed groups. These armed groups are therefore both a threat and also embedded within local communities. Whilst it may be the case that this could make it easier to negotiate with armed groups, it does not seem to be clear cut within the literature. Links may act as conduits through which negotiation may happen, but that does not mean that peace zones are necessarily the clear outcome of those negotiations, suggesting that the linkages between communities and armed groups are more complex than first conceptualised, particularly in terms of defining boundaries.

This may lead to trust difficulties. Negotiation requires direct and trusted channels based on relationships, which may exist between family and are common in other conflicts, but trust can be extremely sensitive to context. Without interpersonal trust within the community, for example, direct negotiating channels and relationships between groups can be exploited for personal gain, sometimes against other members of the community, or used as a form of power, particularly when access to information is exploited by gatekeepers.²⁵ Mistrust within the local community attacks the very core of a peace zone, which relies on cohesion to act collectively against the violent actor, and community members may begin to follow guerrilla set rules rather than community ones. In Colombia, Idler et al. found that as long as everyone follows the rules, the guerrillas respect the community.²⁶ This may be significantly complicated by the presence of multiple violent groups; however, each of which may or may not have their own rules. As Hancock and Mitchell point out, one of the most difficult environments for peace zones is where the control of a previous actor is disrupted by a rival attempting to take control of a territory.

A critical element of the overall relationship, however, is the role of incentives to maintain or undermine the peace itself. As Hancock and Mitchell identify, there has to be limited incentives to violate the framework and this can be extremely difficult to establish. This speaks directly to the underlying causes of conflict itself and the aims of the different actors within peace processes. What motivates each party and what was the origin of the conflict in the first place are usually influential in the nature of the resulting peace. What much of the literature around zones of peace tends to emphasise is the positive peace: zones are about bottom-up, community based and negotiated peace, whereas the underlying causes of the conflict may lead to different outcomes based on those underlying drivers. This may, of course, lead to positive peace outcomes of democratic and community-based peace as an expression of the importance of voice, or it could lead to what effectively amounts to short-term business transactions if economics is the underlying driver.

The role of external actors

There are also tensions between local communities and external actors. Certainly, there are significant external actors involved in most conflict areas, particularly NGOs. Much of the scholarship on zones of peace so far has examined grassroots initiatives that were partly established and driven by communities but with significant external support. For

²⁵Kaplan, 'Protecting Civilians' also points out that information can be distorted in some of these relationships.

²⁶Idler et al, 'Peace Territories'.

example, Idler et al. discuss the role of REDEPAZ in Colombia as an external actor that advised local leaders to establish a peace zone as part of a bigger 'One Hundred Municipalities of Peace in Colombia' project.²⁷ At the same time, much of the literature on zones of peace is concerned with how to establish them and what is required for one to work and contains several discussions of the role of NGOs in supporting the deliberate establishment of zones of peace.²⁸

In general, the literature on the role of external actors tends to mirror broader literature on the tensions between bottom-up and top-down approaches to activity.²⁹ External support mechanisms for expertise, finance, legal and strategic support can be extremely welcome for community organisations, along with links beyond the community to other likeminded communities.³⁰ However, such initiatives may also crowd out rather than support local activities and there is a fine line between providing support and imposing an externally driven agenda. Whilst Hancock and Mitchell identify strong patron support within a clear territorial zone as critical elements of a successful zone of peace, this may also have its costs in the form of genuine bottom-up approaches when that patron, for example a NGO, has its own strong agenda.

Cote d'Ivoire

It is important to understand the history and the nature of violence in Côte d'Ivoire to better understand how these communities in zones of peace look like. The civil war started on 19 September 2002. The government of Laurent Gbagbo, in power since 2000, was threatened by a rebellion in the North and the West and the country became divided into three areas. A reconciliation process under international auspices was started in 2003 and a government of national unity was formed in 2005. Elections were finally organised in November 2010. The disputed result led into a full-scale military conflict between forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo and supporters of the internationally recognised president-elect Alassane Ouattara. In terms of violence intensity, the situation was critical in 2002 and in 2011. In-between, it was very much a no peace, no war situation. One could distinguish two main forms of violence, an urban one that mostly involved militias and a rural one ('sons of soil'), which occurred in the Western part of the country. The distinction between urban and rural forms of violence is important as rural violence was continuous and mostly between civilians while urban violence was more linked to key political events (especially in 2002 and 2011).

We will show various type of local peacebuilding initiatives in the most violent zones in Cote d'Ivoire, which is the Western region along the Liberian border. They were five pro-government militias in the region: the *Alliance Patriotique Wê* (AP-Wê), the *Forces de Libération Du Grand Ouest*, the *Mouvement Ivoirien pour La Libération de l'Ouest de La Côte d'Ivoire*, the *Union Des Patriotes pour La Résistance Du Grand Ouest* (UPRGO) and the Liberian-backed LIMA forces. In terms of anti-government forces, the initial

²⁷Idler et al, 'Peace Territories'.

²⁸See Hancock & Mitchell (eds), *Zones of Peace*, and Mitchell and Hancock, *Local Peacebuilding* for good examples of this, particularly the chapter by Warfield and Jennings in *Local Peacebuilding*. The literature tends to be dominated by people who have been active in this area, and so, there is a practicality about their approaches.

²⁹Mitchell and Hancock, *Local Peacebuilding*, even ends with a call for complementarity.

³⁰Gray, V., 'Nonviolence and Sustainable Resource Use with External Support: A Survival Strategy in Rural Colombia' in *Latin American Perspectives* 39, no.1 (2012): 43–114.

three militias, *Mouvement Patriotique pour La Côte d'Ivoire*, *Mouvement Populaire Ivoirien Du Grand Ouest* and the *Mouvement pour La Justice et La Paix*, merged into one force in February 2003, called Forces Nouvelles (FN). The Dozos, a traditional hunter's society, were also a key ally to the FN.

These zones of peace consist of different types of communities. Let us first focus on rural communities. It is important to understand that the land issue became politicised before the war started. Confronted with unemployment in Abidjan and other major cities, the youth returned to the West to discover that their families' land had been leased or sold, creating many tensions between the *autochthones* and the migrants. The temptation by this group to regain control of what they saw as their land created many conflicts with the migrants (see Allouche & Zadi, 2013).

Some rural communities realised the potential of land-related violence as soon as the war started in 2002 and putting in place clear and consensual mechanisms for the usage of land. This was the case of the village of Yacoli Dabouo, a large village of 7000 inhabitants located in the department of Soubré. A village council, representing the different communities, was put in place, to sensitise about the illegal nature of selling land. All the land-to-land management and tenure transactions were administered and recorded by the management committee and then sent to the sub-prefect office for registration. This means that any point of discords happening after these transactions can be arbitrated by the sub-prefect office in a more transparent and neutral way.

The village went even further as the problem was not just about land tenure but also youth employment. Since their elders had sold land to incomers, the village council negotiated an agreement with the incomers whereby one-third of the land was given back to the youth. All the parties, whether the youth or the incomers, benefited from the NGO OUYINE (which was created by Zadi Kessy Marcel, the current president of the Economic and Social Council in Côte d'Ivoire, who was originally from this village), which distributed hevea plans to everybody and a new rubber treatment factory was installed by Zadi Kessy Marcel, to thank the community for the agreement (Zadi & Sohoun, forthcoming). As a result, since 2010, there has been no reported incident in this community, whether between the youth groups of the different ethnic communities or when the armed forces of Ouatarra were marching down towards Abidjan.

Other rural communities were more reactive. Forms of violence occurred but quick resolution mechanisms were put into place to facilitate the return of expelled communities. This is what happened in Guidoubai. In December 2002, many land labourers, who had migrated to the area for decades, were expelled. A meeting was organised in February 2003 with all the traditional chiefs and representatives of the various ethnic groups at Guidoubai. The sacrifice killing of a beef was an important symbolic moment in containing the tensions as this sacrifice was sending an important message in the Wè culture and traditions. Following the meeting, many of the Baoulé that had run away came back to their plantations.³¹ The situation remained stable even during the 2011 crisis. Like in Yacoli Dabouo, the resolution was made possible through the contribution and leadership of an influential man who was coming from this village.

Another similar initiative was organised by Yahi Octave through his NGO, Nouvelle Famille, in the villages of Sokoura and camps in Japon and other villages located in the

³¹Interview with Yahi Octave, 18 December 2015, at San Pedro, Cote d'Ivoire.

protected forest of Gouindebe Zagné³² to facilitate repatriation. In the village of Sokoura (in the protected forest of Sio, next to Bedi Gouazon), the security was ensured by local 'rebels' and the overall security depended on the gendarmes of Man (controlled by rebels at that time) rather than those of Guiglo even though it was under Guiglo's jurisdiction. The chief of the Burkinabe community in Guiglo, Ki Jacques, helped to organise the visit in 2009. Celebrations including the killing of a beef was organised to receive Yahi Octave with his delegations. In this village, it was the opposite; it was the autochthones which had been expelled in 2003. These various local peacebuilding rural initiatives around Guiglo and Tai were not the sole activity of one person, but the name of Yahi Octave was repeated several times in interviews.³³

In urban areas, the peace-led initiatives had a different dynamic. Religious communities were the most active. In Abidjan, three days of fast and one day inter-faith meeting was organised at the central stadium in January 2003, which was also attended by the president Gbagbo. Many other events were organised just after violent clashes, followed by joint declarations by the leader of the catholic and Muslim community, the archbishop Bernard Agre and the Iman Idriss Koudouss. With the national reconciliation underway from 2005 onwards, the Catholic Church and Islamic institution were even more active, especially with the Catholic Church's Justice and Peace commission, which organised many campaigns for peace and reconciliation. For the 2010 presidential electoral campaign, Catholic Church and Islamic leaders created the *collectifs Des religieux pour Des élections apaisées*. In urban settings, these national initiatives took the form of visits by Christians in mosques or the opposite, or football matches between priests and imams.

There were many locally driven initiatives. On the 26 February 2005, a local Christian Islamic committee was created in the town of Man, which was a very active committee with many joint activities around social cohesion, peace prayers and condolence visits (Miran-Guyon, 2015: 121). Another similar local committee was created in the Bandama region under the auspices of Monseigneur Simeon Ahouna (Miran-Guyon, 2015: 130). In Duékoué, where the tensions were very high, the apostle Georges Kohikan Gbeno of the Pentecost church started dialoguing with Muslim leaders from 2007 onwards to preach disarmament and peace. This last example is particularly interesting as the evangelist church was linked to the Gbagbo regime and was not known for its moderate positions (although of course there are many different types of churches under evangelism). Besides, religious figures were involved in social cohesion programmes and peace committee funded by donor programmes. Iman Dosso Mamadou, the Iman of the Cite mosque based in Sogefia in San Pedro, was a member of the GTZ peace and development committee and was very active in his community. During the post-electoral crisis in 2011, he realised how explosive the situation could become as most of the youth were armed following the departure of the security forces. He created his own disarmament programme by asking all the youngsters to deliver their arms to his house.

The town of Gagnoa is an interesting example in both showing how members of the community were active in creating an island of peace but at the same time showing how

³²Interview with Yahi Octave, op. cit.

³³Interview with Ki Jacques, 10/02/2012 and Nemaigny Glacel and Kamandé Hervé, Youth leaders in Guiglo, 11/02/2012.

fortunate circumstances helped this zone to exist. Mr Gauze Emmanuel Desire, the former Sub Governor of Gagnoa, intervened following a major incident in town during the post-electoral crisis in 2011. A young Baoule peasant was burnt by the Young Patriots. Following his intervention, the Sub Governor managed to find a negotiated solution between the different communities (Allouche & Zadi, 2013). The situation became even more explosive situation as the security forces had deserted their barracks and the youth from both political wings had stolen all the arms. What happened was that robbery in the major shop of the town became more attractive for both youth groups and acted as a factor for peace. The situation could have easily degenerated but both groups were together in the shop and all became young individuals interested in immediate material gain rather than political confrontation.

The situation overall in urban settings were more complex and volatile. While violence was more prone in rural settings, the issue was largely with respect to land tenure agreements and conflict resolution mechanisms. In urban settings, the influence of national politics and networks made it more unstable. The case of the town of Duékoué is an interesting case to point out. Religious institutions were quite active as highlighted above. But they were other types of spiritual conflict resolution mechanisms. Violent tensions emerged on 3 January 2011 when 32 people were killed after a Guinean woman was assassinated. Ahoua Toure and Yahi Octave convened a large meeting with representatives of the different ethnic groups and religious communities. On 4 January, Yahi Octave went to the central mosque and explained the mystical origins of the town of Duékoué in an effort to suppress identity divisions. He recalled that their elders decided to do a human sacrifice around the Guemon Lake and that the young virgin girl sacrificed was of Senufo origin. By this mystical tale, he was showing how the town was built on the blood of this young girl and that the violence was now killing again this young girl. Migrants and non-migrants had built together this town. However, two months later, nothing could be done to stop one of the biggest massacres of the post-electoral crisis in Cote d'Ivoire.³⁴

The other criticism to this analysis is that the divide between urban and rural dynamics should not be exaggerated as both worlds are connected. In fact, there were also local peace initiatives that were trying to build new ties between rural areas surrounding the urban centres. Some members of the Guiglo community in Côte d'Ivoire were reaching out to other villages. For example, the initiative in the Soukoura village was followed 2 weeks later, by a visit from the leaders of the village at Guiglo, thereby breaking the silos and helping to restore the trust between these different geographical communities.

The relationships between these peace initiatives in communities and armed groups are interesting in many ways. In the Western region of Côte d'Ivoire, one obvious link has been Yahi Octave. He is a man of paradox. While he was active in trying to create a dialogue between the different opposing parties and facilitating the creation of zones of peace, he was the leader of a militia (UPRGO). The objective of the militia was to recreate stability and expulse Liberian mercenaries that stayed in the region after the 2002 war. The movement contributed to the security of the area. However, certain

³⁴www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/04/02/des-affrontements-ont-fait-au-moins-800-morts-a-duekoue-selon-le-cir_1502042_3212.html#ens_id=1476585.

elements, in particular those under the supervision of Banao in Duékoué, became much more radicalised, they were more aggressive than defensive and committed a number of acts of violence leading to many deaths.³⁵ This paradox between leading both peace and war initiatives is well explained in the following quote by Yahi Octave himself when attacks happened in 2005 in the villages of Guitrozon and petit-Duékoué, declaring ‘we are not attacking. We are resisting. When there are no rebel attacks, we do nothing. Some are even in the fields. We do not have the time and the means to attack; however, once we are attacked, we will defend ourselves.’³⁶ Yahi Octave also created a local NGO, *Nouvelle Famille*, to have more freedom and manoeuvre as some of his different reconciliation initiatives were not appreciated and supported by other political leaders in the region. Of course, one could argue that this approach started in 2006 when it became clear that a local political settlement would prevail over a military one. Yahi Octave represents an interesting example of the fluidity of individual trajectories during conflicts and the importance of agency within networks of peace and conflict. It is not uncommon for individual agents to change sides, become agents of violence and also for peace at different points of the conflict. Octave is not just a peace leader, he was a politician and a war hero, he had legitimacy amongst fighters as well as local traditional communities and was able to use this legitimacy to act as an agent between different groups.

But the relationships between these peace initiatives in communities and armed groups are more complex than this example may appear to prove. Relationship may not be the right word. Armed actors were not clearly separated from rural or urban communities. Armed actors were not necessarily organised and seen as an obvious contact point. In rural areas, this distinction was even more porous and they were no clear examples of relationship between these locally driven initiatives and armed actors. The final factor to consider is also the chronology of the conflict and the motivation of these militias and armed forces. Many of the militia members in 2010 and 2011 were disillusioned and lacked motivation. In Gagnoa, the Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration failed to deliver promises of training and indenisation and the militias became less ideological. Communities included armed individuals decided to distance themselves from a war that is not theirs and act to redeem their right to live peacefully.

This relates to our last point of analysis which is about how the peace processes in these zones of peace were driven. Many of these local peace processes were internally driven but it is important that micro-level histories do not ignore the national environment’s role in shaping and containing violence. First, chronologically, it is important to understand that from 2005 onwards until the post-electoral crisis in 2011, the political dynamics operating in the country were more peaceful, with the constitution of a coalition government in 2005, although the underlying tensions were still present. A second factor has been that the violence of the 2011 post-electoral crisis was limited to two key geostrategic areas, the town of Duékoué and the capital city. Military violence in this sense was limited as there were no direct confrontations between the New Forces and the army that was under the orders of Gbagbo. The battle in the town of Duékoué

³⁵ ONUCI (Opération des Nations unies en Côte d’Ivoire), Rapport sur les violations des droits de l’homme et du droit international humanitaire commises à l’Ouest de la Côte d’Ivoire, 10 mai 2011, < reliefweb.int> .

³⁶ A Fraternité Matin article, appearing on allAfrica.com on 1 February 2006.

had also an important psychological effect. Following the loss of the town, many armed groups started to fear the power of the Dozos and their mystic powers. Similar to in Sierra Leone, these groups were believed to have magical powers to become invisible soldiers. After the first battle in Duékoué, one should not underestimate the impact of fear and rumours on the logic of the restraint of violence.

Finally, it is important to question this external/internal dichotomy as proposed by Idler et al. In many of these peace zones, the most influential person was an ‘influential national outsider that was an insider’. This was the case of Zadi Kessy Marcel or Yahi Octave who lives in the capital city or regional towns but that had strong connections with their native villages. Or in other cases, these were externally appointed insiders, whether as sub-governors or as religious leaders.

Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, diamonds played a central role at the onset and throughout the civil war and, in some communities, were reportedly used to buy peace, something that is frequently reported by former combatants.³⁷ One documented example relates to a diamonds-for-peace arrangement but also to the continuing operation of local diamond trading in Kenema throughout the war, as a way to facilitate the transfer of diamonds to global diamond markets.³⁸ The Kenema ‘island of peace’ rested on the uneasy assumption that mining and trading in diamonds was more profitable than conflict. Government-supported *Kamajor* militia (CDF) and RUF fighters were reported to be mining together and then trading in town. The Government threatened to raise taxes and make this difficult but government inspectors were then paid off as a ‘contribution to the war effort’.³⁹ In other words, Kenema managed to survive as a peaceful space because it was useful to both sides, and the cost of taking the city was greater than the benefits of keeping the diamond trade going. The diamond-trading rebels have an interest in maintaining the status quo in order to facilitate access to diamond markets and supplies but also because many of them had family in the city, producing a stalemate that suited both sides. It also talks to the core motivation of some of the rebel groups and their interest in mining rather than any broader ideological aims.

After the collapse of the first set of peace agreements,⁴⁰ in the withdrawal of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and the Nigerian peacekeepers, Kenema was garrisoned by around 800 unarmed Sierra Leone

³⁷The author carried out extensive fieldwork in the countryside between 2002 and 2005 where this was frequently raised in conversation – ‘oh yes, we knew he was RUF, but he came in to town to sell diamonds’.

³⁸These arrangements in Kenema are partly documented by UK’s Guardian newspaper in ‘Diamonds buy peace for Sierra Leone city’, 24 June, 2000, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/jun/24/sierraleone>, although the author was also in Kenema shortly after this episode. The peace referred to is both the peace at the local level but also the fact that the Lome Peace Accord led to several RUF leaders being incorporated in to Government at this time. That peace was relatively short lived. There were other activities taking place in the town, including peace education by the INGO World Vision (Concord Times (Freetown) 31 July, 2000). This is also mentioned in the USAID Field Report of July 2000 available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/sierra-leone/usaaid-field-report-sierra-leone-jul-2000>.

³⁹This was reflected across several different interviews during fieldwork immediately after the war between 2002 and 2005 in several districts across Sierra Leone but is little documented. There is some mention of these rather unstable arrangements within the Sierra Leone *Truth and Reconciliation Report*, available here <http://www.sierraleonetr.org/index.php/view-the-final-report/download-table-of-contents>.

⁴⁰Allouche, J., ‘Politics, exit strategy and political settlement in Sierra Leone: a critical analysis of a laboratory experiment (1991–2015)’, *Conflict, Security and Development* 17, no.3 (2017): 225–46.

Army soldiers and 800 Ghanaian peacekeepers. The Ghanaians were amongst the best troops that faced the rebels during the ECOMOG intervention and had an excellent reputation. Disciplined, well-armed and well trained, the Ghanaians, supported by local CDF, had already proved that the RUF could not take Kenema without a fight. However, this situation suited the local conditions and Kenema benefitted from a useful stand-off whereby both sides could come in to the town to trade diamonds.⁴¹ There are other examples of local deals being done that were essentially commercial deals or a form of buying peace with diamonds but most are verbal examples of this type of activity and not documented, even though they are thought to be widespread during the war.⁴²

In Sierra Leone, the leader of the Organisation for Peace, Reconciliation and Development Sierra Leone (OPARD-SL), Mukson Sesay, played a key role in facilitating peacebuilding in Mile 91,⁴³ which represented another island of peace during the war.⁴⁴ The success of OPARD during the war in brokering peace at the local level was in no small way down to the skills and background of Mukson Sesay, who, like many members of OPARD who had close relationships with RUF rebels, was a former combatant himself. Sesay had been head of a rebel group called G5 that had enjoyed considerable power during the war, managing movement of civilians between villages (Keen, 2005). This meant that Sesay and others were very well connected in the RUF personally and were able to use those contacts to broker peace between the UN and the RUF in 2000. A group committed to peacebuilding after their experiences, OPARD was able to broker a significant peace agreement at Komrabai and also to negotiate the opening of the main road between Mile 91 and Magburaka for the transportation of foodstuffs. OPARD is located in Mile 91 and exists to facilitate peacebuilding. Critically, OPARD existed during the war and played an important role in facilitating the 8 December 2000 meeting between RUF and UNAMSIL that aided the peace process overall. This meeting was held at Robis Ferry junction between Mile 91 and Magburaka and is held to be so significant that it now has a peace monument. Mile 91 itself was attacked by the RUF some 19 times during the war and with the nearby road junction at Masiaka, subjected to several changes of control.⁴⁵

In Sierra Leone, the Sulima Fishing Community Development Project (SFCDP) developed alternative local judicial mechanisms during the war. The SFCDP was originally established in the extreme Southern district of Pujehun on the border with Liberia on the coast. Pujehun was marginalised for years before the war started in 1991 following an earlier conflict in 1982, known as the *Ndogboyasi War*, where the ruling

⁴¹Field interviews, March 2002, Kenema. Discussion with USAID, Sierra Leone Team Leader, UNDP Team Leader and Ministry of Community and Local Government (now the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development) 2002.

⁴²There is considerable anecdotal evidence for this, but little systematic documented evidence. During interviews with former combatants and local officials in 2003–4 in Kenema, Kailahun and Makeni, this was raised as a matter of course.

⁴³Mile 91 got its rather evocative name because it is the end of the tarmac road out of Freetown. They got 91 mi and stopped, where a sizeable terminus built up. Strategically, it is therefore important in its own right as a strategic junction linking Freetown with Makeni and Bo.

⁴⁴OPARD maintains a detailed website here <http://www.insightonconflict.org/conflicts/sierra-leone/sierra-leone-peace-building-organisations/opard-sl/>.

⁴⁵The author visited Mile 91 several times between 2002 and 2012, interviewing local chiefs and chiefdom treasury clerks in March, April and May 2004 and then local government officials in September 2004 and January and February 2005.

All People's Congress unleashed a 'special squad' of customs police against the fishing community.⁴⁶ There was no reconciliation following this violence and consequently many local people were amongst the first to join the RUF in 1991. The peace accords of 1996 led to the *kamajors* taking control of Pujehun district, but the 1997 coup led to exile for many pro-RUF and local leaders of the project and the marginalisation of the traditional Paramount Chiefs system.

However, in the refugee camps in Liberia, the SFCDP regrouped and held a series of community meetings in the camps along the Liberian border in order to prepare for their return to Pujehun. This consisted of needs analysis and reconciliation between generations, and between RUF and non-RUF. Consequently, when the refugees returned following the end of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council junta in 1998, the community was able to take a role in tackling issues like community dispute resolution, 'palavers',⁴⁷ youth misbehaviour, the degraded system of chieftaincy and conflicts between returnees and those who stayed behind.⁴⁸

The SFCDP works through peace monitors and there is one monitor for each section of the Chieftdom to resolve disputes and for early intervention to prevent conflicts. There are also grievance committees and local cases are brought to this committee for arbitration. The 12 peace monitors work for 10 days each month for a small stipend and are also usually respected Koranic scholars.⁴⁹ Where there are local grievances over drug abuse, land issues, family matters, etc., the people prefer to go to the peace monitors over courts. One side effect of this is that the local administration is hampered in its functioning because it cannot gather sufficient revenue to function effectively – and this also leads to resentment of local officials. It costs 10,000 Leones (\$4) to go to the Native Authority Courts but peace monitors are free.⁵⁰

The social upheaval involved in the conflict had led to a significant change in legitimacy at local level and the usurping of chiefs as the only conflict resolution vehicle – essentially the war had led to the emergence of new leaders at community level. Social cohesion was certainly enhanced by the fact that this community is overwhelmingly Muslim and that the infrastructure had been in decay since before the initial war in 1982, so the community felt quite isolated from the rest of the country.⁵¹ The leaders who emerged from this situation were all proposed locally and then given training in conflict resolution whilst in exile in Liberia. These people then became the location of choice for local dispute resolution rather than the native courts, bypassing traditional social hierarchies upheld by the chiefs. These 'peace monitors' are able to intervene at a local level to prevent conflict escalation, are able to talk and negotiate with all sides and even able to call on additional support with bigger disputes between villages. Overall, the peace monitor approach has been able to provide effective conflict resolution at the

⁴⁶ Massaquoi, J. *Building mechanisms for conflict resolution in south-east Sierra Leone: The Sulima Fishing Community Development Project*. Paper presented at the First Conference on All African Principles of Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation, Addis Ababa, November 1999. Available at http://www.c-r.org/downloads/BuildingMechanismsForConflictResolution_199911_ENG.pdf.

⁴⁷ 'Palaver' is a generic Sierra Leonean term for a local dispute; hence, chiefs hear disputes in their 'Palaver huts' in the villages. During fieldwork in Pujehun, this is typically where the author met traditional officials.

⁴⁸ Massaquoi, 'Building mechanisms'.

⁴⁹ Baker, B., 'Who do People Turn to for Policing in Sierra Leone?', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 23, no3 (2005): 371–390.

⁵⁰ Baker, B., *Security in Post-Conflict Africa: The Role of Nonstate Policing* (London: CRC Press, 2009).

⁵¹ Field interviews in the district also reinforced this 'otherness'.

local level and to develop a resolution system that is regarded as fairer than the original native court system said to be one of the root causes of disaffection before the war itself.⁵²

Sierra Leone has a number of peace monitor groups at the local level and they have expanded out from their usual urban bases in to rural areas. The Bo Peace and Reconciliation Movement, for example, is a coalition of 11 community groups working on conflict prevention and mitigation and its 20 peace monitors resolve conflicts ranging from family matters through to land cases and leadership disputes (they handled 255 cases in 2004 alone) and the evidence shows that they have certainly helped with reintegration of former combatants and also in reducing recourse to litigation in local courts.⁵³

Conclusions: what might an African approach to zones of peace look like?

This article has used six examples where civilians have managed to prevent, or at least delay violent conflict. The nature of the examples does mean that there are limitations with regard to generalisable conclusions, but we remain convinced that they should be not ignored as a result. The literature on civil wars is notably quiet on instances where there have been lulls in the fighting, 'islands of peace' or 'zones of peace'. The six examples outlined in this article can be arranged around the three subgroups proposed by Idler et al.⁵⁴: the characteristics of the civil resistance movement in the peace territory, the relationship of the community with armed actors, and the role of external actors.

Where local peace efforts were successful, even in the short term, there was an alignment of factors that supported a particular set of agreements that reduced violence. Whilst certainly not constituting peace processes in a lasting sense, all of the cases may contribute to ideas of how civilians can achieve peace for periods of time during a war. The Ivorian village of Yacoli Dabouo could constitute a longer term agreement where the work of a local notable, Zadi Kessy Marcel, could be said to constitute a real process which prevented land-related violence by putting in place clear and consensual mechanisms for the usage of land.

What is clear from each of these cases is how war in many ways represents violence against social structures.⁵⁵ Our research certainly complements other research in Liberia and Nigeria that shows that civilians can affect conflict and violence if they enjoy sufficient legitimacy and authority.⁵⁶ The presence of violent actors who are capable of defeating civilians does not mean that they will act upon that. Legitimacy and authority derive from their embeddedness within local institutional structures, the ability of big men to act and shape those structures and the relationship of the particular community with the armed actors. There is therefore an alignment of agency and structure that does not speak to a simple dichotomy between them.

⁵²Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*; Jackson, P., 'Chiefs, Money and Politicians: Rebuilding Local Government in Sierra Leone', *Public Administration and Development* 25 (2005): 48–58; Jackson, P., 'Reshuffling an old deck of cards? The politics of decentralisation in Sierra Leone', *African Affairs* January 106 (2007): 95–111.

⁵³Baker, *Security in Post-Conflict Africa*.

⁵⁴Idler et al, 'Peace territories in Colombia'.

⁵⁵Duffield, *New Wars*.

⁵⁶Moran, *Ethnography of Political Violence*; Krause, 'Non-Violence and Civilian Agency'.

Local communities can flee or stay, but if they stay they face choices about their ability to resist, the likelihood of the violent group being susceptible to coexistence or dealing and the opportunities for collaboration or collusion in, for example, the extraction of resources. In the absence of formal state control, the simple binary between 'government' and 'rebel' does not always hold true in either case that we examine here, with considerable shifts in the makeup of each side throughout the wars in question. The characteristics of each force, of the war itself and the political order during wartime, are shaped by the political relationships between the contenders.

All of these instances of localised peace are not just internally driven. They all closely relate to the nature and willingness of the violent movement to accommodate or resist them. The RUF in Sierra Leone were not capable of entirely controlling *Pujehun* or *Kenema* in the face of resilient, well organised and coherent opposition. It was far less costly to them to come to an accommodation with the local leadership and essentially leave them alone. Violent movements like rebel groups cannot maintain order for long periods of time through coercion alone.⁵⁷ Rebels must take into consideration the demands made by local populations to secure loyalty at least partly because challenges to power may be more costly than inclusion in decision making but also because mass killing of civilians is expensive and potentially counter-productive. It must also allow for the organisation of resistance in the form of defence militias and local volunteer forces that may be more capable than many rebel groups. Certainly, the government-aligned militias in Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire were able to insert themselves into local networks of violence and change the nature of the social structures surrounding the civilian population both in terms of enhancing customary authorities but also by providing a space where the rebel army and forces could not guarantee victory. This creates space for negotiation between civilian and violent groups that may include a wide spectrum of activity ranging from collusion to outright resistance.

The nature of the wars themselves in both Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone was extremely fluid, subject to rapid change and included actors who may have been acting for both sides. In this way, the nature of zones of peace within West Africa differs from the Colombian examples that inform the literature on zones of peace. In particular, the long-term nature of the Colombia war provides a far more stable framework, no matter how violent, for developing lasting zones of peace, whereas the examples drawn from Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone are invariably short term and unstable over time. This reflects the fluid and unpredictable nature of the warring parties, the fact that there were no 'front lines' and the conflicts themselves tend to comprise series of social convulsions rather than prolonged ideological struggles. This means that the more temporary zones in Africa are far less institutionalised than those in Colombia and perhaps more reliant on a few central factors, including the power of individual agents to broker short-term deals, temporary financial arrangements that reflect the aims of some rebels and redistribution of some resources, including land, to allow the diffusion of conflict.

⁵⁷Wood, E., *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 03); Arjona, A., 'Civilian Resistance to Rebel Governance', *Households in Conflict Network Working Paper* 170, February (2014), University of Sussex www.hicn.org; Mampilly, Z.C., *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War* (Chicago: Cornell University Press, 2011).

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