“So that we don’t do something bad”!

The double-edged qualities of motorcycle-taxi driving in post-war Sierra Leone

Anne Menzel

Work in progress, comments are welcome

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1. Introduction

The hasty movements of more than 2000 motorcycle taxi drivers[1] are one of today's defining features of everyday life in Sierra Leone's second largest city Bo-Town. The "bike riders", who are sometimes also referred to as "okadamen" or "hondamen", transport their passengers from one part of the city to another for a fixed price of 1000 Leones; at least, this was the fixed price for in-town transport in the spring of 2009 when I did field research in Bo-Town. Due to inflation it has been rising, but remains approximately the equivalent of half the price for a proper meal from a street-caterer. Prices for journeys to the nearby and not so nearby villages have to be negotiated. During the daytime, inside the town, one can count on finding an available rider in a matter of seconds, minutes at the most. To call a motorcycle-taxi one simply has to step on the side of the road and yell: "Bike!", or "Honda!", or "Okada!". The latter is a Nigerian term for "motorcycle". Mistakes are not likely: There are only few people who use motorcycles for non-commercial transport.

In most parts of Sierra Leone bike riding is a new phenomenon, which only appeared after the end of the war. Before and during the war, passenger transportation was in the hands of four-wheel taxi drivers, (Peters 2007: 13-14), who still dominate the business in the capital city Freetown as well as longer-distance passenger transportation in the provinces. Motorcycle taxis were introduced to Sierra Leone by entrepreneurial ex-combatants and initially attracted primarily (male) ex-combatants from all different armed factions.[2] But it seems that this has been changing: Many bike riders in Bo-Town claim to never have fought and to simply have chosen bike riding as a livelihood strategy because there are no others jobs available.[3] Some have more or less concrete plans to further their education once they have earned enough money; others are waiting and hoping for jobs that will match their already acquired level of education or training. The vice-chairman of Bo-Town's bike riders' association estimates that, today, only 50% of Bo-

[1] This number is an estimate by the vice-chairman of Bo-Town's bike riders' association. Unfortunately I never got the opportunity to double-check it with the association's official, who is in charge of registering bike riders. But even he would not have been able to give me the exact number, as not all bike riders choose to register with the association.

[2] See also Fithen/Richards (2005: 135) and Peters (2007: 13); I have never seen or heard of a female bike rider, neither in Bo nor anywhere else in Sierra Leone. Richards/Bah/Vincent (2004) report that the Bike Riders Development Association in Bo-Town had started to train some 45 female bike riders in 2002. But apparently this has not led to an involvement of women in bike riding.

[3] See also Sesay (2006: 7).

Town's constantly growing bike rider population are ex-combatants. The other half of the bikers primarily consists of young men who have migrated to the city from rural areas. Starting with movements of mass displacement during the war, Sierra Leone has continued to experience high levels of rural-to-urban migration (Sommers 2007: 9; Peeters 2009: 13, 17). The vice-chairman went on to explain: "[...] we are getting new members every day. Every day...and some people come from the villages or they were mining diamonds, but they were not able to make money, so they come to join us."

Still, the "community people", as bike riders refer to their passengers, feel strong resentments concerning bike riders' allegedly "rough" or "brutal" habits and lifestyles, which they attribute to them being ex-combatants and therefore lacking respect for other peoples' life, physical integrity and property. Furthermore, they see such violent tendencies enhanced through bike riding: Bike riding is regarded as an occupation that requires and at the same time furthers a certain "roughness", since bike riders have to rush fearlessly through town in order to have as many passengers as possible and to make the most of their day. Also, bike riding is considered a job suitable to earn quick money for the day – to eat, drink, possibly smoke "jamba" (marihuana) and gamble a little – but unfit to feed a family and sustain an orderly lifestyle. Such sentiments are rarely voiced bluntly in interviews, but they can be experienced in everyday life and I have also picked them up in informal conversations. In any case, bike riders are very much aware of the community's perceptions of them: "They treat us as if we were no human beings!", I was told by a group of young bike riders in Bo-Town: "People think that bike riding is no proper occupation. But we are doing it so that we don't have time to do something bad." Interestingly enough, the "community people's" resentments do not keep them from using motorcycle-taxis, which are practical and affordable. .

Bike riding has been described as a new and promising form of social capital within post-war Sierra Leone (Richards/Bah/Vincent 2004: 35; Fithen/Richards 2005: 134).[4] In contrast, I argue that bike riding's consequences on social capital on an individual level as well as bike riding as a

[4] The concept of social capital used in Richards/Bah/Vincent (2004) is presented as roughly being borrowed from Emile Durkheim and points to social relations and structures, which facilitate collective action (ibidem 2004: 2). With regard to the theories, which I will draw on in this article, their concept is closer to Coleman's than to Bourdieu's.

form of structural social capital are neither "good" nor "bad" per se, but double-edged. There appears to be a tendency to overlook the "dark side" of social capital out of enthusiasm for its sociability. As Portes (1998) puts it:

> The research literature on social capital strongly emphasizes its positive consequences. Indeed it is our sociological bias to see good things emerging out of sociability; bad things are more commonly associated with the behaviour of homo economicus. However, the same mechanisms appropriable by individuals and groups as social capital can have other, less desirable consequences. (Ibidem: 15)

The double-edged qualities of bike riding can be located on an individual as well as on a collective level: On an individual level, bike-riding serves as a livelihood strategy for those who lack the connections and assistance necessary in order to find other, more "proper" jobs or education opportunities. But at the same time, young men, both ex-combatants and non-ex-combatants, who resort to bike riding, cement their low social status. The "niche" (Peters 2007: 6) bike riders occupy in urban post-war Sierra Leone indeed provides scarce livelihood opportunities, but at the same time endows them with attributes that provoke depreciative reactions or even outright fear among non-biking community members. By becoming a bike rider they tend to become socially *ex-combatized*[5]: They are being regarded as ex-combatants with all the negative or even fearful connotations that come with this framing.

On a collective level, bike riders' associations were formed in Bo-Town as well as in other provincial towns and in the capital city Freetown; in Bo-Town the official name of the bike riders' association is Bike Riders' Development Association (BRDA). The rationale of these organisations has been to both control bike riders in a patron-client or "wealth in people" fashion (Fanthorpe/Maconachie 2010: 261),[6] as well as to represent and further bike riders' interests (Richards/Bah/Vincent 2004: 35-36). These associations have the potential to facilitate information flow and collective action for peaceful purposes – or to be used to control allegedly

[5] I borrow this term from Joseph Goakia, who introduced it to me in a discussion about my field research results at Njala University in Freetown.

[6] The „wealth in people" concept of social relations, which was originally coined by Caroline Bledsoe (1980) is useful and has been used (for example Utas 2005) to disentangle the patronage-system from notions of "big men politics", wherein the issue at stake is competing about shares of the "national cake" (see for example Richards 1996: 35). "Wealth in people" establishes patronage as a social practice, which is lived by children, women and less powerful men as much as by "big men". Being controlled by powerful people or being powerful because of controlling people are "normal" features of everyday life in Sierra Leone, regardless the relative social status of a person (see Bledsoe 1980: 54; Ferme 2001: 106; Utas 2005:419).

ex-combatant bike riders to create fear and push power-politics.

I proceed by first providing a background on bike riding in Bo-Town. While it seems that bike riding developed at around the same time in geographically distinct urban areas in Sierra Leone (Bo-Town, Kenema, Makeni, Koidu; Peters 2007: 6), my empirical data is solely from Bo-Town.[7] Then, I turn to the double-edged qualities of bike riding, first on the individual and then on the collective level. In order to describe this double-edginess, I will draw on ideas from Pierre Bourdieu (1985; 2002 [1979]) and James Coleman (1988; 1990). These ideas serve neither to explain the emergence of double-edginess nor to predict its possible outcomes in any causal sense; they are merely drawn on as cognitive frames in order to be able to think about the social processes that constitute double-edginess on both individual and collective levels. Concluding, I will draw attention to how individual and collective level double-edginess combine and intersect and highlight the newness of some and the pre-war roots of other qualities of bike riding. The empirical data (interviews, informal conversations and observations) which forms the basis for this paper was collected during field research for my PhD-Thesis from January until May 2009.[8] Any bias that this article may contain, will most likely be due to the tight temporal and geographical limits of my empirical research.

2. Bike-riding in Bo-Town

Although the war in Sierra Leone did not officially end until 2002, bike riding was already present in Bo-Town in 2000, when large-scale violence had effectively ended in the southern districts of Sierra Leone, and a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program (DDR)

[7] This empirical data consists of 42 single and 12 formal group interviews with bike riders and "community people" such as students, traders, teachers, traditional chiefs, hairdressers, and local NGO-workers. I also conducted interviews among other groups of young men, who much like bike riders tend to be regarded as dangerous, such as car-wash boys and jobless young men. Among the bike riders, I did one group interview with members of the BRDA executive and riders who were interested in participating, as well as four single interviews. These formal interviews are complemented by a number of informal conversations that I had with current and former members of the BRDA executive and "common" bike riders in the course of my four months research stay in Bo-Town. Throughout my research stay I paid regular visits at the BRDA office and talked and interacted with bike riders on a daily basis.

[8] My field research was not solely focused on bike riders, but on exploring un-peaceful social relations; these are social relations in which illegitimate violence is expected and/or regarded as an option for social action. I found that there exists a specific class of allegedly dangerous young men, who are suspected to be ex-combatants – and are therefore regarded to be ready to choose illegitimate violence as an option for action. This class comprises bike riders, car-wash boys, so called "street children", and young men who have no steady job, no family of their own, are marihuana-consumers, and spend time in the "ghettos". It is noteworthy that definitely not all and maybe not even the majority of those who are identified as members of this class have actually fought; in the relative anonymity of

run by the UN was underway (Smith/Gambette/Longley 2004: 412; UN-Secretary General 2000: 5-6). As noted by one informant, "Everything had cooled down before the disarmament. No guns were fired; nobody was threatening people, no checkpoints or other things." The story of bike riding in Bo-Town was narrated to me by a former member of Bo-Town's bike riders' association's executive, to whom I have assigned the pseudonym "Hassan". He was introduced to me as one of the founders of bike riding in Bo-Town by a member of the current BRDA-executive. According to Hassan, Bo-Town and Kenema-Town were the first places to have bike riders after the war. There is only one town in Sierra Leone, Kabala in the northern Koinadugu-District, which has a history of bike riding that dates back to pre-war times:

> The distances in Kabala are very far and also the roads are very bad. When the rainy season starts, no car will be able to pass. So you have to use bikes. That is why bike riding started there. Then it started in Kenema and in Bo before it ever came to Freetown. Most of the boys who ride in Freetown come from here.

Having been a fighter of the infamous Revolutionary United Front (RUF) – as Hassan admitted laughingly while winking at the current executive member who has a background in the Kamajor civil defence movement –[9] he "came from the war" without undergoing DDR. From his account, it did not become clear whether he chose not to take part in the disarmament or, for some reason, did not have access to the program or shied away from it. In any case, the first stop in his personal post-war history was Tongo Field, the main diamond area in Kenema-District, where he tried to make a living presumably by mining diamonds. There, he met an old friend, who came up with a different idea:

> I first went to Tongo, when I came from the war. One of my friends was there, a Fula by tribe. [...] So he had access to someone in Conakry [Guninea] to buy bikes. So we went to Conakry and then came back with the bikes, with about three bikes. After we had come back, we went to Kenema and spend some time in Kenema, because we wanted to sell the bikes in Kenema. We spend one month in Kenema, but we were not able to sell the bikes. So, we came back [to Bo-Town]. When we came back, we had this one friend. He was working at Radio Kiss 104 [a popular local radio station].He became our first public relations officer. When we met with him, he told us: 'Well friends, I know you want to do business, but now the business is not

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Bo-Town's growing urban population young men are identified as ex-combatants, not because it is actually known that they have fought – but because they "look like" ex-combatants.

[9] Hassan probably felt that he should be honest with me since the member of the BRDA-executive who had introduced us knew about his RUF-past and could be assumed to have told me about it. I know that some of my other informants deliberately misrepresented the fact that they used to be fighters, when they assumed that I had not found out about their past yet – no matter the armed faction they had been fighting in. The apparent ease with which Hassan admitted to his past is rather unusual.

> going well. I want you to take the bikes, park them, and then I will broadcast the message that there are bikes for rent to go any direction that a person may want to go'.[10] So that is how we started the bike riding.

Today, Hassan has retired from bike riding as well as from the official positions he used to hold in the BRDA-executive. He now runs a small business in central Bo-Town. But he is apparently still well respected by the members of the current executive as well as by common bike riders. Several of them had advised me to talk to him, if I wanted to know "the history of bike riding". Furthermore, during our interview, several bike riders who were passing by greeted Hassan as "chairman", or with a friendly and respectful Krio-expression that translates as "your boy is here, brother". Most of his apprentices are also former bike riders – and ex-combatants. As they listened to our interview they oftentimes nodded in approval of his explanations.

Hassan stressed that bike riding was created by ex-combatants and by ex-combatants alone, without any help from NGOs or government officials:

> It was not the government. There were people who had money, you understand? But they did not even say: 'Ok gentlemen, this is what you have been doing, let us make some program to create development for young men'. Or: 'At least I will sponsor you or give money to the association". No! Nobody did such a thing."

Their creativity emerged against the backdrop of a DDR program that appears to have been quite successful with regard to demobilisation and disarmament, but largely failed to meet expectations with regard to its "reintegration" component.[11] These shortcomings were, for one, due to a significant lack of effective funding (see Keen 2005: 275), but also, the concept of "reintegration" has flaws that may render efforts that are based on it prone to failure, no matter how well they are funded. As Peters (2007) points out, "It suggests that the ex-combatants need to be supported and equipped to make their re-entry to peaceful society successful, but does not ask if there is still something into which to reintegrate." (Ibidem: 3) Indeed, "reintegration" comes with several assumptions about post-war societies that could use some scrutiny, for example: Former fighters are in some fundamental way (or in any way at all) different from the

[10] At the time of our interview, this man had just died and the bike riders were in the process of making plans to contribute to his funeral. It turned out to be a memorable event, with over a hundred bike riders being involved in the parade to the cemetery.

[11] In evaluating the impact of DDR in Sierra Leone it needs to be taken into account that weapons and fighters were also absorbed by the then still ongoing war in Liberia (see Keen 2005:288), and that combatants who were not armed with weapons "acceptable" for disarmament were not able to enter DDR (see Richards/Bah/Vincent 2004: 37).

rest of the population;[12] training will lead to ex-combatants being gainfully employed;[13] and if they are gainfully employed, they will be regarded as valuable members of society. As is the case for all current members of the BRDA-executive, bike-riding has provided Hassan with the opportunity to earn money and gain clients – but still, he feels that he is not regarded as trustworthy by other powerful people, because he is a known ex-combatant:

> Many people made promises to us, but they never fulfilled them. Nothing! Even some NGOs came to us. They said they would help us to get micro-credits, but nothing! [...] They really try, because they help the women. But they don't help us, the bike riders. They say that we are ex-combatants, so they don't want to give us money! They think that we will misuse it [...].

As Hassan went on to explain, bike riders urgently need assistance, especially micro-credits, because "the boys" need to own their bikes in order to earn enough money to be able to eventually retire from active riding, have a wife and children, build a house and/or found a business – just as Hassan had done it. Most common bike riders rent their bikes from wealthy bike owners, who in return receive a fixed payment; during the time period of my field research it was 25.000 Leones per day, which has to be considered the larger part of what a bike rider can make most days.[14] Only Sundays are "free" for the rider – he gets to keep all the money he manages to make that day. Owning their bikes would therefore improve bike riders' economic situation tremendously. Also, conflicts between owners and riders are common. They usually either evolve around bike-rent that has not been paid or around non-existent bike-licenses: Many owners try to avoid paying registration fees and taxes for their bikes, thereby putting their riders into a precarious position.[15] Any rider who is caught by the police on a bike without license faces considerable trouble. He will be arrested and even charged in court if the owner does not bail him

[12] For instance, recent research suggests that ex-combatants are not more "traumatized" or more aggressive than the rest of the population in post-war contexts; see Mooy (2007: 67-68) and Blattman/Annan (2009: 113-117).

[13] This assumption has quite obviously not materialized, as vocational training has not increased employment rates; see Sommers (2007: 11-14) and Peeters et al. (2009: 99-102).

[14] From informal conversations and acquaintanceship with several bike riders I would estimate that most bike riders get to keep between 5.000 and 20.000 Leones per day, if they decide to remain inside the city; this is between slightly below 2 and almost 7 US-Dollars per day. Travelling to the villages is much more profitable, but also considered dangerous. There have been several incidents in which bike riders were trapped, robbed and killed on their way. Presumably, most of these violent acts have been committed by their very passengers who really were after the motorcycles. Rumours also had it that bike riders were being ambushed and kidnapped to then serve as human sacrifices in juju or secret society rites.

[15] At the time of my field research the initial registration fee for a bike was 500.000 Leones. In addition, a commercially used bike needs a commercial license, which cost 450.000 Leones (interview with member of the BRDA-executive, March 2009). All together, it sums up to almost one million Leones – about 350 US-Dollars at that time.

out, pays a fine, and then properly registers the bike. The BRDA-executive has established regular contact with the police to assist bike riders in such situations: A member of the executive will "speak for" the rider at the police station and then make an effort to identify and contact the bike owner.[16] Even though this service is only meant for those bike riders, who are registered members of the BRDA and pay their membership fees, I know of several non-members who have nonetheless been helped. From the perspective of the BRDA executive such interventions may serve as a strategy to point out the advantages of joining the association to non-members. Also the executive is keen to present itself as the relevant authority with regard to all bike riders, be they members or not, in order to emphasize its importance for the control and regulation of bike riding in general. According to Peters (2007), in Bo-Town the "[...] usual practice is that a businessman provides the bike and the rider leases it, but after a time becomes the owner (i.e. it is a hire purchase contract)." (Ibidem 2007: 17) Why then, would micro-credit be needed? Possibly, the "usual practice" has already changed. Or it may be that established bike rider patrons, like Hassan, seek to crowd out bike owners by being able to supply more attractive financing conditions. From the way Hassan explained matters, the latter option seems more likely:

> We would buy bikes, distribute them among the boys and then we would give them fair conditions. We would tell them: 'Take this bike. You have to ride it for some time. After four months, it will be yours; you take the bike, as long as you have paid back that micro-credit money'. If they [common bike riders] had to deal with it all by themselves, it would create too much pressure. Let the boys not get stressed out, when they are stressed out they are hard to deal with.

[16] I had the opportunity to directly experience this procedure. Shortly after my arrival in Bo-Town, I was arrested for not wearing a protective helmet while riding on a bike as a passenger. At that time, I had not known that I was required by law to wear a helmet, as most people most of the time did not. Every bike rider is obliged to carry two helmets, one for himself and one for his passengers. These helmets are usually in very bad shape and either too small or too big; some consist only of a styrofoam cap tied with a rubber-band under the chin and do not provide much, if any, protection. To the contrary, most people feel that these helmets even pose an additional threat by potentially spreading diseases, for example Tuberculosis, from one user to the next. People had actually advised me not to wear a helmet and so, up to the day of my arrest, I never did. Upon noticing the police check point, the bike rider I was with that day tried to hand me the helmet in the middle of our ride; I did not understand the situation and refused it, clinging with both hands to a handle behind the seat trying to secure my position on the bike. Seconds later we were pulled over and escorted to the police station. It turned out that that the police had decided to enforce the helmet law that day. Even though the rider had worn his helmet, he was arrested as well, as he was unable to produce a license for his bike upon request. While my own arrest was unpleasant enough, the rider was worse off. He was put into a cell right away, while I was released after a few hours and sent to court to pay my fine. Deeply ashamed of having somewhat caused the incident by not reacting to my rider's request to wear the helmet, I informed the BRDA executive about his arrest. They immediately went to the police station and then traced the bike owner. The rider was released the next day.

In this quote Hassan suggests that most common bike riders are not able to handle "stress", be it dealing with conflicts, authorities or economic obligations. He therein draws on the same ideas of bike riders being ex-combatants and therefore not trustworthy that he rejected when talking about how NGOs did not regard the BRDA executive as trustworthy enough to handle money (see above). All taken together, his argument sums up as follows: Those who decide about the distribution of development assistance are quite right not to trust common bike riders. But they should trust those who are able to "control the boys". Hassan insisted that I was to understand this "message" and pass it on. It already contains clear hints at the double-edged qualities of bike riding, which I will turn to now.

3. The individual level: bike riding as livelihood strategy and social dead end

On an individual level, the double-edginess of bike riding is constituted by processes, in which individual actors' choices of livelihood strategies, which are already shaped by their low socio-economic status, tend to put them into new positions that are again of a low socio-economic status. Or in more practical terms: While bike riding does indeed provide a strategy for poor young men to earn some money, this strategy leads them to the social dead end of *ex-combatization*. The relation between socially shaped choices and their reinforcing social effects can best be pictured by drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's idea of how individual actors move inside social fields: Their movements are allowed and simultaneously restricted by the amounts and qualities of different forms of capital, economic, social and cultural (Bourdieu 1985: 243), which they possess or have access to. Further enablement and restriction come from internalized hypotheses, "knowledge", on how to practically use the available capital. In Bourdieu's conception, capital "[...] is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible" (ibidem 1985: 242). The hypotheses "[...] which social agents implement in their practical knowledge of the social world are internalized, 'embodied' social structures." (Ibidem 2002: 468). If both, actors' capital and their internalized hypotheses on how to use it, are shaped by an initial low socio-economic status, there will be a tendency that their movements inside the social field again lead them to a low socio-economic status – as is the case with bike riding: Young men choose to become bike riders, because their access to capital is relatively limited. They neither have enough money to attend school or university or to open a business, nor do they have the social connections necessary in order to find a "real" job, for example in an NGO or a government agency or to travel abroad and find their luck elsewhere. Given the imaginable alternatives ("practical knowledge"), either going (back) to the villages and working on somebody's farm or roaming the streets looking for odd jobs or becoming thieves, they feel that bike riding is their best option.[17] As they choose this option, young men, be they former fighters or not, put themselves into a position inside the social field, in which they will be assumed to be ex-combatants and associated with "roughness" and "brutality". Viewed through the lenses of this conceptual framework, bike riding itself does not form social capital. Rather, as a chosen livelihood, it is the product of choices based on what is objectively achievable given the available capital (economic, social, and cultural), and what is subjectively imaginable and desirable given a specific set of internalized hypotheses. As such, it shapes bike riders' abilities to form "useful" social relations in the future: social capital in the Bourdieusque sense of the concept (see Portes 1998: 12).

On the "good" side of bike riding's double edged qualities on the individual level is that, as an economically viable livelihood strategy, it is perceived as contributing peace. This local assessment rests on a specific idea on what "peace" is and on how it is produced. In a group interview on the question of whether or not Sierra Leone can be considered a "peacebuilding-success", a local concept of peace was voiced by one bike rider, whom I will here call Musa.[18] The participants in this group interview were members of the BRDA executive and a handful of bike riders who happened to be around the BRDA office and took interest in participating; Musa was one of the latter:

> The peace that we are fighting for today...the problem is, people don't have enough money and this is what makes them all disgruntle. [...] Because if you have work and I have work, I think I will be happy all the time. But when you see your neighbour pass by in a big jeep, showing off, and then you see the little people in the streets, then you will start to feel bitterness. You will ask yourself. 'Why does this man have all these things and I don't?' You keep that philosophy in your mind, so the next thing that you are going to plan is to steal.

[17] In interviews with bike riders in Makeni Peters (2007) has found that some ex-combatants also choose bike riding as a livelihood strategy because they find it "exciting": "[...] as becomes clear from Abdul's statement, excitement is an important part of what drew fighters to the war, and the excitement of riding a bike is an acceptable substitute in times of peace. Perhaps - and rather worryingly for passengers! - if speed is high enough the amount of adrenaline released comes close to fighting" (ibidem: 15). I never heard a similar statement in any one of my interviews in Bo-Town. My impression is rather that bike riders, ex-combatants and non-ex-combatants, are proud to be brave enough to live with the dangers of bike riding, such as accidents and sickness; many bike riders complain about severe coughs, which they suspect to catch from inhaling the street-dust while riding.

[18] All names in this section have been changed.

> There is not enough work for people in Sierra Leone. This is the only problem. If the little people have jobs, there will be peace. But as the poor man has no job, it will not be easy to make peace in this country.

Musa sees peace as the product of a social situation, in which people are not tempted to resort to violence: If their needs are satisfied and if they are able to live as appreciated and respected members of their communities, there will be peace. This idea was widely shared among my informants, be they bike riders, unemployed young men, petty traders, teachers, students, section chiefs or hair dressers. It also corresponds to a common local interpretation of war-time violence as having been about "stealing" – about unruly and disgruntled youths, "thieves", who violently took whatever they wanted.[19] There is also an academic version of this local interpretation which has been elaborated by Sierra Leonean authors (Abdullah 1998; Abdullah/Muana 1998; Kandeh 1999; Rashid 2004; Gberie 2004). It portrays war-time violence, which was mainly being directed against civilians, as a product of the mobilization of a marginalized social class, whose members – so called "lumpens", short for *Lumpenproletariat*[20]– had already been prone to criminal behaviour prior to the war. "Lumpens" are conceptualized as „[…] largely unemployed and unemployable youths, mostly male, who live by their wits or have one foot in what is generally referred to as the informal or underground economy. They are prone to criminal behaviour, petty theft, drugs, drunkenness, and gross indiscipline." (Abdullah 1998: 207-208).[21]

After Musa had clarified what appeared to him to be the most pressing problem with regard to peace, one member of the BRDA-executive tried to steer the discussion into a more cheerful direction; he suggested that I was probably less interested into "these things" but cared to know more about Sierra Leone being a "peacebuilding-success". I interfered and asked Musa to go on.

[19] Again, this interpretation is widely shared among my informants, but was voiced most clearly by a woman who overheard me talking on the phone to my parents one evening. She (rightly) assumed that my parents were worrying about me and explained: "People in Europe must have a bad impression about us, because of all this cutting off people's hands and all these things. But all of that was done by thieves. They were all just thieves who did not want to work. But now we have learned to deal with thieves." For other accounts of this interpretation, see Peters/Richards (1998: 200) and Ferme (2001: 228).

[20] *Lumpenproletariat* as a term for a specific social class that is situated "below" a potentially revolutionary minded working class was originally coined by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Gberie (2004) draws attention to how this concept is supposed to fit into the context of Sierra Leone: „They are lumpenproletariat who Marx and Engels describe as 'the dangerous class', 'the scum...that passively rotten mass thrown off by the old layers, may here and there be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution, its condition of life, however, prepares it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue' (Marx and Engels 1848). In short, they are incapable of any revolutionary action, much less revolutionary discipline." (Ibidem: 149)

[21] For critical views on the use of the derogatory term "lumpens" in social-scientific analysis see Peters/Richards/Vlassenroot (2003: 38) and Keen (2005: 65).

Others, who had not been paying much attention to our interview up to this point then came closer and listened, as Musa went on to talk about the everyday hardship of poverty. Eventually, his arguments led him to the DDR process, which, to his opinion, had shown the "international community's" good intentions – but had failed to provide jobs. Luckily, bike riding became a livelihood opportunity just in time: "If there had been no bike riding, most of us would have gone wayward" (Musa). We were then joined by another member of the BRDA-executive, David. He listened for a while and then took up Musa's argument and explained in more detail how it is that bike riding, by providing a livelihood strategy for the "little men", contributes to peace:

> I am telling you, even the peace that we have right now is not too stable. Simply because, after the war, elections came, problems came, this and that. [...] But now we, the bike riders, feel that we have created something. No government department or any elders told us: 'You have to do bike riding'. No! This is self-thinking, our own pioneering. If there was good governance, they would encourage this sector, because we help to reduce the unemployment. [...]. If now, I ride a bike, you cannot tell me: 'Come, I have five thousand Leones. I want you to go steal', or, 'Here, I have ten thousand Leones, I want you to go kill', because I am now able to make fifteen thousand in one day. So the money cannot encourage me to go do something bad. But if I don't have anything I will join you, because I am not even able to make five hundred, so five thousand is big time money. You understand? But the government neglects our contribution. No one ever came to encourage us [...]. Even this peace, which they say has come, it is only because of bike riding. Without bike riding there would be no peace, because initially, many of the boys were fighters. They were rebels, kamajors, soldiers. If there was nothing to do, what would be their focus? It would be to go steal. Armed robbery! Is that not so? They would make people feel uncomfortable. But because they are riding bike, because they are earning their own living, they have already withdrawn their attention from this kind of evil. So bike riding is really helping peace and stability in Sierra Leone. But the people are neglecting it. The government institutions are neglecting us. If they really want peace to go on, then they really have to focus on certain issues. If they don't, problems will develop and peace will one day be obstructed. And people will not find it very hard this time. First, there were many people who were not used to guns, but now they are used to guns. [...] It is because of the war. As you see me standing here now, I think that I will be able to handle all kinds of guns that anybody may give to me. I take it, dismantle it, put it back together and then I shoot. I am not afraid. You hear me? So tell the people to look at the bike riders in Sierra Leone. Out of this bike riding we are able to make money to build houses and to support our families.

In his statement, David essentially points to two different ways in which bike riding contributes to peace: For one, bike riding deprives "big men" of the opportunity to easily mobilize young men to turn to violence, as they become able to make money through peaceful means. Secondly, bike riding prevents violent crime by offering an alternative livelihood strategy to young men, especially to ex-combatants who are already "used to guns".

Many of my non bike rider respondents somewhat agreed: Since bike riders are considered "rough" and "brutal", they need to be engaged in something that diverts their minds from violence, and bike riding provides such diversion. But still, the general perception is that one has to be wary of bike riders – even though most people are reluctant to openly voice this perception in interviews. This reluctance is most likely due to a strategy of "*rational reconciliation*" (Strovel 2008: 311; original italics) which Sierra Leoneans have adopted after the war. As was explained to me during an informal discussion in a palm-wine bar, "We share one love. Then we force ourselves to live with all kinds of people. This is how we make peace in Sierra Leone." It is assumed that discrimination against ex-combatants may provoke violent reactions and therefore most people make an effort to avoid voicing prejudices in order to make and preserve peace; [22] not international peacebuilding but the fact that Sierra Leoneans have been and still are making such efforts is regarded as being the pivotal ingredient to today's state of relative non-violence.[23] But strategically trying to avoid discriminating against ex-combatants is just that: a strategy. Fear and distrust are nonetheless felt and – if unwillingly – do show up in everyday life.[24] Since it is assumed that bike-riders are ex-combatants, this strategy is also applied to social interaction with them and also tends to fall short of its aims, as demonstrated in the following examples.

One defining scene, which illustrates the "shortcomings" of the non-discrimination strategy, can

[22] See also Jackson (2005: 149-150) and Shaw (2007: 194-196). It is worth noting that this strategy may have its roots in experiences of war-time violence rather than post-war sensitization campaigns. As Keen (2005) points out: „Part of the purpose of violence seems to have been to silence or invert the normal reactions of condemnation and anguish, creating a micro-world in which shame could hardly arise. Rebels repeatedly showed anger at civilians condemning them or turning away from them. Significantly, insulting a group of rebels could bring an instant execution, even from groups who were otherwise relatively non-violent." (Ibidem: 78) In an earlier publication Keen (2002) describes in detail how people reported to have survived, because they had understood the psyche of the fighters. The following quote is from an interview with a man who had been held hostage by West Side Boys: "I tried to come to some kind of psychological understanding, that this is the situation and this is the way they will probably react. [...] You may know if this person is dangerous. By running away from him, this is going to make things worse. [...]So sometimes running away is going to exacerbate more cruelty. You have to say 'OK, I'm with you. I support you. There's nothing wrong with you.' Running away is isolating or alienating them further. I was able to use this tool to survive." (Ibidem: 14)

[23] The most frequent answer I was given when asking about the effects of international peacebuilding in Sierra Leone, was: "They have made an effort"; in Krio: "Dem don try".

[24] See also Boersch-Supan (2009: 34-39). But I do not fully agree with Boersch-Supan's interpretation that "[...] discrimination is a form of subtle punishment; mundane, local justice within a society that for the most part is overwhelmed by the request to 'forgive and forget' and needs pathways for venting feelings about the past" (ibidem 2009: 39). To my understanding, discrimination against ex-combatants (or those, who are assumed to be ex-combatants) is oftentimes not deliberate but rather something that cannot be helped, because they are being feared – despite the non-discrimination strategy.

be witnessed on the streets of Bo-Town every day: A person – no matter the sex or the age – is walking on the side of the road. A bike rider is about to pass by. Even though there is no apparent danger of an accident, somebody (for instance an observer from the other side of the road) warns the pedestrian: "Watch the road!" There is another scene, which is a bit more obvious: When I, "because of my [white] colour" obviously being a stranger who is assumed not to be familiar with everyday dangers, was walking on the side of the roads of Bo-Town, I was regularly pulled even more aside and told to carefully watch the movements of the bike riders. When asked why this was necessary, people usually explained to me that I should not trust the bike riders; that they had no respect for human life and just wanted to move fast to make more money; that they were "brutal" or "rough" and may even want to run a person over "for no good reason at all." One time, my questions were answered with a laconic "once a soldier, always a soldier" – directly relating being a bike rider to being an ex-combatant and therefore being dangerous. Even though most people did not usually make such statements in formal interviews, my empirical data provides one example in which an informant suddenly gave up on the non-discrimination strategy – possibly as a reaction to the intended naïveté of my questions. The quote is from an interview with an elderly man who works for a local NGO, James:

> A.M.: People still think that bike riders don't have respect for human lives. Isn't that the case?
>
> James: What do you think about this? You have been here for a while now.
>
> A.M.: I have met a lot of them. Most of them are nice boys.
>
> James: They are nice boys, but still their behaviour can be erratic in times. When you ride with someone, you have to realize that you are not alone and that you are responsible for two lives. But some of them are so used to that rough riding. And that is why we say that they don't have respect for human lives. But some are very conscious. Some are very gentlemanly. Yes.
>
> AM: But do they not have respect for human lives because they are ex-combatants?
>
> James: No. Not because of that. For one, it is because of their age. They are youths. And with some it is because of their orientation.
>
> A.M.: What do you mean by that?
>
> James: Well, you know that most of them are ex-combatants! They are used to this rough, rough way of living. It is still in them. And they still have it even though they may be forty years old.

It is this conception of bike riders as being "rough" and "brutal" ex-combatants that I call *ex-combatization*, and which marks the "bad" side of bike riding's double-edged qualities.

Being exposed to such preconceptions would not weigh too heavily on the social aspirations of bike riders, who indeed are “rough” and “brutal” ex-combatants or at least have settled on building social relations with individuals who are also being perceived as such. But for those, who desperately seek to leave their violent pasts behind and hope to become respected members of their community, being identified as ex-combatants via their occupation as bike riders is immensely frustrating. Victor, a former RUF fighter and now a bike rider, told me:

> Some people like bike riding, but other people, they just think that bike riders are ex-combatants. But not all bike riders are ex-combatants. And some people just think that bike riders are not responsible. They are not married men, they don’t have women, they don’t have children, they don’t think about anybody. You know, they think if you don’t walk properly on the streets they will hit you, hit and run. Yes, so that is their philosophy. They think that bike riders are rough. But not all bike riders are irresponsible.

After the war, Victor returned to a welcoming and supportive family, he went back to school, got married and sees himself as a “responsible man”. But since he has not been able to find a “proper job”, he now is stuck with bike riding. Ironically, people who just meet him in the relative anonymity of Bo-Town’s streets and don’t even know his background will still consider him an ex-combatant, because he is a bike rider.

Such ascriptions are probably even more frustrating for those, who never were fighters, like Sylvester, a teenage bike rider. He found it frustrating that bike riding is regarded as some sort of brutal endeavour, rather than just as a job:

> I became a bike rider, because I have no other way to earn money to further my education. I don’t want to become a thief or something else. I just decided that this is work for young men. I should do it. [...] The ones who have good intentions will think that people have to do this [bike riding, A.M.], because there is no other work in this country. So, this is an attempt to give work to young men. But not everybody considers this work.

Such frustrations do not automatically lead to willingness, let alone to initiative to resort to violence; for instance, neither Victor nor Sylvester seemed ready to fulfil the “rough” and “brutal” stereotypes of bikers. But they rightly feel that being bike riders limits their ability to enter into social relations outside the realm of bike riding, as most “community people”, who know them as bike riders, intuitively shy away from them.

4. The collective level: opportunities for development and opportunities for intimidation

On a collective level, the invention of bike riding has been accompanied by the emergence of bike riders' associations, in which senior bike riders and "their boys" are connected in relations of loyalty and trust, which facilitate communication, coordination and mobilization. James Coleman calls structures such as these "social capital" (ibidem 1990: 300): "Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible." (Ibidem 1988: 98) Coleman's concept differs from Bourdieu's in that Coleman locates social capital in social structures, and not in actors' abilities to make use of them. Its availability is therefore less tightly attached to actors' positions inside a social field. Rather, Coleman's social capital is openly available to actors "within that structure" (ibidem 1990: 302) who seek to draw on it, when and if they expect that it will serve their interests; actors "within that structure" are all those who have somehow gained entry. With regard to bike riders' associations, their potential usefulness to various actors with various goals points to the double-edginess of their qualities as social capital. Again, in more practical terms: Bike riders' associations facilitate the mobilization of bike riders by actors who have access to these organisational structures – be it for "good" or for "bad" purposes.

Most members of the current BRDA-executive have been involved in bike riding for just as long or almost as long as Hassan, who has been quoted above on the history of bike riding in Bo-Town. To my understanding, all of today's executives joined the fighting factions during the war – though not all as fighters; one of them explained to me in detail that he joined the Kamajors but "only" to provide intelligence. As of today, the BRDA executives have become wealthy men. They own houses, ride fancy motor-bikes (not for commercial purposes), are well-dressed and some reinvest in business or in agriculture. They have registered the bike riders' association as a Community Based Organisation (CBO)[25] and present themselves as the board of a "western" style labour union. On the other hand they also claim to "control" Bo-Town's bike riders. This

[25] I learned this much from the association's roadside billboard which identifies it as a CBO as well as from interviews and informal conversations with several members of the executive, though details about the legal design of the organization were not easy to pin down. For example, one time I was told that the association is registered under the Ministry of Transport and Aviation, another time that it was the Ministry of Finance and Development. Later on I learned from a local NGO worker that all CBOs are registered under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, and this is also the information available in a current edition of "NGO Law Monitor" on Sierra Leone (ICNL 2010). According to Richards/Bah/Vincent (2004: 36) and Fanthorpe/Maconachie (2010:

control was described as a product of relations of trust and loyalty that have developed between them and their "boys" – very much along the lines of patron-client or "wealth in people" social relations that, ideally, should be reciprocal (Bledsoe 1980: 54-55; Ferme 2001: 110):[26] According to members of the executive, bike riders have learned that "the association fights for them", which prompts more and more bike riders to register with the BRDA and to become official members.[27] They claim that, due to training in traffic rules and peaceful conflict resolution techniques, which the BRDA offered to its members with the assistance of several NGOs,[28] the accident rate on Bo-Town's streets has been reduced dramatically. As a more direct instrument of control, the BRDA keeps a so called "task force", which polices bike riders' behaviour – be they registered members of the BRDA or not – and is supposed to enforce the association's rules. For example: not to use offensive language, not to steal from passengers, not to ride a non-licensed bike, not to wear sandals while riding (because of security concerns), and not to ride without wearing a protective helmet. Noncompliant riders are punished on the spot.[29] Furthermore, a network of BRDA-authority posts has been established across town: There are several official bike parks in busy spots in and around town, where bike riders wait for passengers. Every park has its own park-chairman, so that an official authority is immediately available at all times to deal with conflicts between riders and passengers, accidents etc. Problems that cannot be solved on the spot are supposed to be reported either to the all-parks-chairman, who has his post by the market entrance in central Bo-Town, or directly to the BRDA-executive. The executives insist that they intend to use these structures to promote "development": to make bike riding safer, to start and supervise agricultural projects for "their boys", to implement a micro-credit scheme, to

261) the BRDA is registered under commercial law as a company limited by guarantee.

[26]See also Fanthorpe/Maconachie (2010: 361).

[27] There are bike riders who have not joined the association – for example, because they ride a bike that is owned by a family member and feel that they do not need the BRDA's protection. One time, I also met a bike rider, who was not even aware that there was such a thing as a bike rider's association in Bo-Town. He did not even speak Krio. As he explained to me in French, he had just recently arrived from Guinea to look for a job in Sierra Leone and somebody had given him an unregistered bike to ride. When I then asked him to take me to the central market, the busiest place in town, he admitted that he did not know his way around the town either.

[28] These are Search for Common Ground/Talking Drums (SfCG), Bo Peace and Reconciliation Movement (BPRM), and Green Scenery.

[29] Members of the executive openly admitted that there used to be serious problems with this task force, because its members were abusing their powers – charging bike riders penalty fees without good reason, taking their bikes from them to use them for themselves, beating them, and so on. As a result of growing complaints, in 2007, all task-force members were laid off and new members were appointed and trained. But in interviews and informal conversations with bike riders they still reported being charged excessive fines and being subjected to corporal punishment.

lobby for lower commercial registration fees and taxes and so on. Hopes are that the ruling government, "the government of the day", will acknowledge common bike riders' needs as well as the BRDA's ability to control them. At the time of my field research, a new and more proper BRDA-office was being built– the current one is very makeshift – which is supposed to express the BRDA's seriousness and commitment. One executive pointed out: "We need development. And we are part of development. So we cry for help to the government of the day, as this is the only government that can solve our problems. If it answers, it will turn out well for us and for our entire membership."

Still, these same structures are also susceptible to abuse: After a group interview at the BRDA-office (see section 3) the bike rider Musa took me for a walk and introduced me to Daniel Tucker. As Musa put it, Daniel Tucker – though at the time not a member of the BRDA executive – was the "real chairman" for Bo-Town's bike riders. Tucker agreed. To my considerable confusion he declared that he had been a founding member of the association and still controlled Bo-Town's bike riders, who were in need of a firm hand, because "these boys are like another rebel war". After consulting with members of the BRDA-executive and a long talk with a local NGO-worker, who had been monitoring the situation closely, the following story evolved: After general elections in 2007, a sizeable portion of Bo-Towns bike riders claimed, or possibly were mobilized to claim, that changes in the national government should be followed by an according change in the BRDA leadership; the incumbent Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) had just lost to the All Peoples Congress (APC), which, in the presidential run-off, had been backed by many supporters of a new and smaller party, the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC) (Kandeh 2008: 625; Wyrod 2008: 78). The BRDA chairman Femir Rashid, a declared SLPP supporter, was challenged by Daniel Tucker, who used to also support SLPP, but switched his allegiance first to PMDC and later to APC. Tucker also was Rashid's predecessor in office; he had been forced to resign from chairmanship because of a corruption-case. As a response to Tucker's challenge, several local NGOs stepped in to mediate and together with the executive organized BRDA-elections. The knowledgeable local NGO-worker described the situation as follows:

> They had a conflict within their organisation and this conflict came from the politicians. Immediately after the elections, the 2007 presidential elections, they [bike riders, A.M.] said since there was a change in government there also should be a change in the bike riders' own

> structure. And then we said “Ok, if this is what you want, don’t let it happen with violence. Go to the polls. Present a candidate and have the others presenting a candidate.” They accepted and we were there again, Talking Drums, Green Scenery [NGOs, A.M.], the police, civil society organisations...all of us came together and we said: “We are not against any changes in the structure; we just want to maintain the peace.” We had so many meetings. We started the whole thing in October 2007 and ended the whole thing in March [2008, A.M.], when they had an election. And indeed...Femir won.

Even though the incumbent chairman Femir Rashid won the elections Daniel Tucker did not disappear from the scene as many bike riders remain loyal to him personally. Tucker, in turn, appears to draw on their loyalty to gain benefits from politicians who take interest in using those loyal to him as so called “thugs” to intimidate political rivals as well as the electorate.

Such acts of intimidation were even evident in the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2007, which have been praised by many analysts as a milestone in the peace process.[30] Christensen/Utas (2008) provide a counterstatement: Supposedly with the intention “to create a general state of ‘panic’” (ibidem: 522) political leaders of the competing parties mobilized ex-combatants, who then served as private security, as violent thugs or just hung out around the party offices in a fearful demonstration of their respective allegiance.

> The political mobilization of ex-combatants and ex-prisoners began to take shape in the summer of 2006. Initially, the presidential candidates invited the top-ranking commanders for negotiations and in both cases the process of mobilization was conducted through chains of command established during the war. For example, former RUF commanders stated that during their imprisonment Ernest Bai Koroma [formerly APC presidential candidate, today the president of Sierra Leone, A.M.] had already informed them that he wanted to employ them as special security forces, while other newly released ex-combatants were heading for negotiations with politicians just weeks after gaining their freedom. As Koroma’s mobilization of RUF combatants intensified, Solomon Berewa [SLPP presidential candidate, A.M.] called West Side Boys and soldiers for meetings. Additional influential ex-combatants were released between the first and second rounds of the 2007 general elections, strengthening the evidence of a link. (Ibidem: 520)

After such “influential ex-combatants” had been recruited, they went about mobilizing the rank and file – “their boys” who still trusted them and were loyal to them: “When former commanders set out to sensitize ‘their boys’, asking them to join the campaigning, it was only a minority who turned the offer down.” (Ibidem: 526).

Apparently such mobilizations have been and still are also taking place among bike riders:

[30] See for example Kandeh (2008: 606), Jalloh (2008: 315) and Wyrod (2008: 79).

Several informants reported that bike riders had served politicians as thugs in the 2007 election-campaign, and when a wave of so called "political violence" shook Sierra Leone in March 2009, Tucker and some of those loyal to him were involved in violent attacks in the town of Gendema/Pujehun-District, where a local bye-election was supposed to be held. It was reported that Tucker had been recognized as he and other camouflaged men attacked SLPP supporters; when confronted with these allegations, Tucker neither denied his presence in Gendema, nor that he had been involved in the "political violence". He only claimed that he and his men had been attacked by SLPP-supporters first. Although the details remain cloudy, the situation looked intimidating enough to cause local people to seek refuge in bush hide-outs.[31] In any case, intimidation seems to have worked: When the bye-election was held, it turned out in favour of the APC – even though Pujehun-District can be assumed to be heavily dominated by SLPP-voters.[32]

Only a month after the violent incident in Gendema, Tucker was elected chairman of the newly formed national bike riders' association, Bike Riders' Union (BRU), at a national bike riders' convention in Makeni. When asked how they felt about this new development, members of the BRDA-executive declared that they were quite satisfied. Now that Daniel Tucker had been given an important position, they expected "peace and unity" for the BRDA in Bo-Town as well as for bike riders in the whole of Sierra Leone. Judging from this statement, Tucker's election may have been the result of a deliberate and coordinated appeasement strategy in order to prevent him from splitting up Bo-Town's, or possibly even Sierra Leone's bike rider population into factions. Or, even more worrying, the "government of the day", to which the BRDA-executives look for support, may have interfered to place Tucker into a position, from which he should be able to provide a greater number of men for future intimidation purposes. But this is only speculation. What is clear is that bike riding-structures have the potential to be used to mobilize bike riders for "political violence", as has been demonstrated by Daniel Tucker and his men in Gendema. Controlling the bike riders, that is a couple thousand able-bodied men who are generally assumed to be former fighters, must be considered a temptation for politicians who seek resources for intimidation in view of the next general elections in 2012.

[31] See also UN Secretary-General (2009: 1).

[32] See Wyrod (2009: 78-79).

5. Conclusion

While it is helpful to analytically differentiate between how bike riding has double-edged qualities on an individual and on a collective level in order to organize empirical findings and their interpretations, in social reality these two levels combine and intersect: Controlling the bike riders can be considered as tempting for politicians who seek to intimidate the electorate, exactly because bike riders are widely assumed to be ex-combatants and therefore "rough" and "brutal." If they were perceived as peaceful young men doing the work that is available to them, they would hardly make a valuable resource for intimidation. Simultaneously, this same *ex-combatization* that makes them a valuable resource for intimidation is also responsible for the stigma attached to bike riding. Most people regard roughness and brutality as a-social personality traits, and recognition as "serious" and "responsible" young men is therefore largely denied to bike riders. They in turn perceive this denial not only as the degradation that it is, but also experience that it very practically limits their social options and chances, as social relations are not easily formed outside the realm of bike riding. The resulting frustrations do not automatically lead to a willingness to resort to violence. But they may eventually enhance bike riders' susceptibility to promises made in return for intimidation-services – if these promises include prospects for social recognition and a higher status future. Christensen/Utas (2008) point out that such prospects worked as pull factors during election-campaigning in 2007:

> For hundreds of ex-combatants who decided to remobilize, their future expectations proved to be the most significant motivating factor. [...] When deciding whether to join politicians' campaigns, it was the promise of jobs, further education and other long-term benefits that had the most powerful appeal. At initial meetings, both presidential candidates promised ex-combatants that they would give them work after the election. (Ibidem: 528)

Even though these promises remain in most cases unfulfilled their pull is not likely to wear off, as every campaigning period offers a new chance that they may be held this time. At least, compared to remobilized ex-combatants, who are described as being "largely unemployed, with minimal possibilities of gaining structural and social security" (ibidem: 523), bike riders are better off economically: They have a steady income, however small. Whether this provides enough incentives for most of them to stay out of potentially promising "political violence" remains to be seen. Also many bike riders are indeed ex-combatants a well, though whether and exactly how this fact really matters remains unclear. For answers, one would have to look into whether those bike riders who are ex-combatants have been more likely to take part in "political violence" and, if so, whether this is due to them being somehow hardened to violence or to their loyalty to former commanders.

While bike riding as a livelihood strategy as well as bike riders associations are clearly new post-war features (see Richards/Bah/Vincent 2004: 53-36), some of their qualities are not so new. Fanthorpe/Maconachie (2010) criticise Richards/Vincent/Bah (2004) and Fithen/Richards (2005) for describing the BRDA as a *new* form of social capital, because beneath a bureaucratic looking layer it still consists of patron-client social relations (Fanthorpe/Maconachie 2010: 361). Section 4 of this paper is very much an affirmation of their argument, but one has to be cautious not to blanket pass off this finding as a proof of "bad" intentions on the side of the BRDA executives. At least some of them really do feel responsible for the bike riders and seek to work in their interest; only they do so within social structures and hierarchies that they take as a given and which provide them with privileged patron-positions. Also, the notion that certain kinds of young men are "rough" and "brutal" does not appear to be new to Sierra Leone: In his account on the origins of the RUF Ibrahim Abdullah (1998) describes a social class of urban "lumpens", which, as he argues, were despised in pre-war Sierra Leone: "Mostly unlettered, they were predominantly second-generation residents in the city [...]. They were known for their anti-social culture: gambling, drugs [...], petty theft and violence." (Abdullah 1998: 208) This is not so different from the common picture of bike riders today. Only today, contempt and fear are enhanced by the experience of war-time violence, which is understood as having been carried out by young men of "this kind"– who are oftentimes termed "thieves" in talks about the war (see section 3 of this paper). And there is yet another element of continuity: In pre-war Sierra Leone as well, "such" young men were recruited as thugs by politicians who sought to intimidate political rivals and the electorate (Abdullah 1998:208). As Christensen/Utas (2008) point out, "In Sierra Leone, politics and violence are intimately tied together and elections have typically been times of heightened and sometimes violent tension. Urban rarray boys, today simply labelled 'youth', have from independence onwards been key actors of violence." (Ibidem: 517).[33]

[33] See also Wiseman (1986: 514), Gberie (2005: 21).

While intimidating voters may seem silly in the context of “western” style liberal democracy, within a specific understanding of power as “a matter of strength rather than common purpose” (Hoffman 2004: 222) that is and has been at work in Sierra Leone, intimidating voters makes sense: In this logic, voters will decide for the person or party they fear the most, in order to avoid the anger and demonstration of power that would be provoked by a defeat at the polls, and to secure powerful protection:”[...] politicians and political factions which openly display their capacity for violence also possess the strength to protect those who accept them as patrons.“ (Ferme/Hoffman 2004: 88) It is this logic of power, which passes off violent intimidation as a rational strategy for election-campaigning that most of my informants, bike riders and non bike-riders alike, consider the most imminent danger to the state of non-war, which they have managed to create and keep in post-war Sierra Leone so far.

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