

Urban Brokers and Entrepreneurs of Violence: War/peace continuities in Liberia and Sierra Leone

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During the two internal wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone new powerful broker figures, often mid-level commanders in rebel armies, national armies and militias emerged. Many of them originated from urban areas, were literate and often had middle class upbringings. During the wars they managed, or commanded, human and other resources for armed movements. The human resources were typically cadres of young violent entrepreneurs enticed by untied political ideas, individual social aspirations and a variety of security motives. To many brokers of violence the official end of the wars in the two countries did not, despite international efforts of destroying command structures and demobilizing soldiers, mean a direct change in political or economic powers, but rather a continuity as command structures morphed into informal networks, senior military commanders were substituted with other political and economic leaders and their go-between roles maintained importance for both elites and entrepreneurs of violence at the lower end of society. In this paper the authors explore the roles of urban broker figures often socio-politically located within urban elites, or with direct links to urban powers. The focus of the paper is on the two post-conflict countries Sierra Leone and Liberia and the intention is to scrutinize war and post-war realities as a political continuum rather than distinct periods of time.