Militarized youths in western Côte d'Ivoire: local processes of mobilization, demobilization, and related humanitarian interventions (2002-2007)

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Photograph 9: Ex-combatant taking part in an informal production of charcoal, Guiglo

Photograph 10: Soccer team, Man, including one ex-combatant
Blurred spaces:
Militarized youths and
their relationships with
their immediate environment

It is often assumed that youngsters who have been involved in armed groups must be resocialized after their military experience, as if their bond with society was cut during their engagement (Geenen, 2007). The vast majority of reinsertion programmes are based on this postulate. There is, however, growing evidence that militarized civilians often retain contact with civilian life during their period of engagement in an armed group, especially the ones locally recruited who remain in their immediate surroundings (their main peculiarity in fact is to never stop being involved with family, friends and pre-war acquaintances). In western Côte d’Ivoire, many recruits I interviewed involved themselves in extra-military activities when heavy fighting diminished and there were always the basic logistics to ensure that implied continuous interaction with non-military people.

If not yet mainstream, this conception of armed violence as a prosaic and intermittent occupation has been noted by other scholars (Debos, 2010; Guichaoua, 2010), and calls for a nuanced approach when analyzing processes of violent mobilization, an approach that rests foremost on the assumption that borders between the military, the civilian and the humanitarian spheres are fluid and blurred, especially once open fighting is over. In the same writing style of
Christiansen et al. (2006: 12), we could assert for the regions under study that ‘within the same day, a person can be positioned (or position him/herself) as combatant, ex-combatant, civilian, “beneficiary” of humanitarian assistance, employed youth or unemployed, depending on the situation and the stakes involved in the relationship with the other party.’ Respondents have certainly made use of these different framings, presenting themselves differently to various outside entities depending on the image they wanted to convey at a particular time, consciously positioning themselves in certain groups but not in others, navigating between categories in pursuit of their best interest; this intentional identity bricolage is after all normal in situations where the people benefiting from an intervention are also the usual residents of the environment hosting that intervention. The aim of this chapter is therefore to rehabilitate these multiple identities by reflecting on the complex relationships militarized youths have entertained over time with the different arenas in which they were routinely embedded.

**Part-time recruits**

What does it mean to be considered – or to consider oneself – ‘militarized’ when most of the week is devoted to agricultural activities or non-military petty tasks? The Ivoirian case illustrates this paradox quite well, as most non-professional recruits have actually been part-timers in the Ivoirian conflict once the period of combat had passed. The extracts below exemplify well this peculiarity on both belligerent sides:

B. is still active in the rebellion. He is responsible for selling the compulsory ‘verification’ tickets to transporters at the Zélé checkpoint. The ticket proves that the transporter has paid his daily tax to the rebel forces. When he is not commissioned (4 or 5 days per week), he is engaged in another activity: ‘I do not have a lot of [financial] means. So I am currently working on a project with a friend – the person who just called me. He works the iron. We try to come up with a project for producing coffee/cocoa mills, to see if it can become something. If this project does not work, we’ll see.’ Eight months later, I meet B. again. He is still selling tickets to the transporters for the rebel forces, but he now invests his free time in a gardening project. We visited his field of cucumbers. He said that it was quite a lucrative business. The plan was to sell at the market.

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1 Reflecting on how complex it is to properly define youth, Christiansen, Utas and Vigh have argued that youth is better conceptualized as a social position (rather than a social or cultural entity in itself or a rigid developmental life-stage), internally and externally shaped and part of a larger societal and generational process. How youth position themselves, how they are positioned within generational and societal categories, how young people construct ‘counter-positions’ are central questions for them. The dynamics of this social position, its ‘navigating’ component, is perhaps best captured in this quote, taken from their introduction, and which I paraphrase here for the Ivoirian context: ‘Within the same day a person can be positioned as a child, youth and adult, depending on the situation and the stakes involved in the relationship’ (2006: 12).
A. is also part of the rebellion, working for the *eaux et forêts division*. During his spare time, he manages a *cabine* (a cellphone stall): ‘I am settled in Man but sometimes I have to move around. You know, the ones who live out of town actually pay transport to be able to place a call. In the bush, there are many areas where there is no cellular network.’

On the other side of the ex-front line, J. tells me that he used to work as private vigilante in parallel with his activities in the militia: ‘When I was based in Guiglo [he was based there three months in the beginning of the war], I guarded private shops when I did not have to work at the checkpoint. We were three from my group to do this. We were paid 15,000 francs each, every month. Our chiefs had no problems with that, they let us do it. When we left for Zagné, we continued to stand guard in rotation at the checkpoints. When I was off duty, I was selling plastic shoes. I used to do that before the war.’

In the same area, H. explains: ‘After the attack of Logoualé, we retreated to Zéo. I stayed there 4 or 5 months. Then we moved to Guiglo. The war had calmed down and it was no longer necessary for us to stay in Zéo. In Guiglo, I started working with someone, I was managing his *cabine*. He was paying me 5,000 by pre-paid card of 100,000. In a month, I could empty four such cards. I was placing the calls for the people and they were paying me.’

Extra-military activities indeed did not start when belligerents were still competing for territory; regardless of individual duties, there was no time at that juncture for doing something else and combat operations were the priority. People instead started to diversify their activities when the situation grew calmer, after the period of fighting. For those who did so, the main goal was often quite modest: just to earn enough to pay the rent and routine expenses. The start of intermittent work is perhaps easier to trace on the counter-insurgency side, where those who started working usually began their activity in the second half of 2003, or in 2004. The situation at the time allowed a clear division of labour between ‘checkpoint shifts’ every fortnight or so, and ‘private work’, and in addition, militia leaders were showing a certain leniency in this respect by not hampering their elements to work when they were not on duty. About two thirds of the interviewed militia members were involved in extra-military paid occupations in parallel to their activities in the militia. Activities ranged from hairdressing to painting, from masonry, farming, cellphone services, to running local bars. On the government side, I even came across a few cases where the respondents, who were living in Abidjan before the war, were still managing their Abidjan activities from a distance, receiving money on a regular basis from the relative or skilled apprentice they had put in charge.

With the progressive closing of checkpoints in 2004 and 2005 (notably boosted by the deployment of the impartial forces in the western region), those years also marked the end of active involvement for most militia members, even if a few continued to maintain relationships with militia leaders and occasionally executed sporadic missions. Perhaps the label ‘intermittent’ is then misplaced for the bulk of the pro-government militias after 2005 and we’d better speak of the ‘end of armed mobilization’. Interviewed militia members in this respect were
much freer than their rebel counterparts, who literally could not demobilize themselves from the rebel forces in the same period without facing trouble. There was a much greater stake to keep the elements together on the rebel side since the rebel forces had to maintain the impression of potential military threat. On the insurgent side at the time, the military hierarchy sustained an ambiguous attitude towards its low-ranked elements. Until 2006-2007, being involved in extra-military economic activities was usually interpreted as a sign of lack of interest in military duties, and carried the risk of leading to serious intimidation. From 2007 onwards, being a part-time recruit was usually tolerated in the rebel ranks, as long as the recruit continued to give visible signs from time to time of his or her belonging to the movement (I illustrate this point later in the chapter).

Social relationships within the armed groups

Hierarchical relationships within the different armed groups vary widely from one individual to another, ranging from the display of paternalist behaviour (e.g. commanders giving petty cash to individuals from time to time), to certain forms of authoritarianism (to fight against defection), and tolerated practices of laissez-faire. I examine below some examples of interactions between low-ranking recruits and their direct hierarchy. In addition to providing a series of individual accounts, rich in detail, the interview fragments presented here also shed light on the basic functioning of insurgent and counter-insurgent armed groups.

The question of payment

‘There is nothing of nothing in the rebellion. Now we see it clearly. It only delays a man. You earn nothing, you do not eat well, you are dressed in dirty clothes, it is zero. When it is over, I am going to run a small business, or buy a truck, build a house. I want to run a small shop, one of those selling soap, biscuits, Omo, milk, huile du nord.’ (S., Man)

‘I was given 15,000 CFA francs a day [during combat operations]. But you do not know if there is a tomorrow, so you spend it all. You waste it buying drinks, or you go and buy cigarettes, even if you did not smoke before the war.’ (C., Guiglo. She fought with the Lima forces in the beginning of the counter-insurgency).

‘In the beginning, we were given 10,000 CFA francs per month every two months and then it stopped. Afterwards, we were coping as well as we could. At the checkpoint, you could get 5,000 a day. It was our parents who were actually taking care of us. We were getting food from the village, my wife was actually sending me manioc. And when we set a town free, we received a bonus, a prime d’État.’ (T., Guiglo).

‘In Toulepleu, we were given 25,000 CFA francs per month, for three months. We were paid by a Liberian chief. In Liberia, we were given 20,000 Liberian dollars every two weeks.’ (S., Blolequin).

‘When we were based in Blolequin [during combat operations], we were not paid but we were given encouragement incentives to pay for our cigarettes, our soap. Some days, for instance, our section chief could give us 10,000 each, it depended. We were called the
Forces Spéciales, the ‘ready-to-die’ (les prêts-à-mourir). We could be called at anytime to fight. Other sections did not earn anything, for instance, those who would come to replace us, or those who were doing the security in the villages. Not everyone was earning something. But us, if we were told, “the rebels are positioned there”, once you get the information, even if you’re asleep, they wake you up, you have to go fight. This was the task of the first five sections. Each of us had a weapon and we were sent to cleanse a place [of rebels]. When the place was secure, the other sections could come to guard the location and to make sure that the rebels would not come back. With these sections, there were perhaps ten people for two weapons. With our section, everybody was armed.’ (G., Guiglo)

Far from suggesting that rebels were not paid and that pro-government militias were financially much better off, I use these introductory accounts to illustrate the extreme diversity of stories. Some respondents were never paid, some were paid generously in the beginning but only for a short period, some consistently received a regular incentive, some were fully dependent on their spouse’s income, and some only could lay hands on an annual ‘carrot’. Such an extreme variation within the same ‘class’ of recruits (namely: non-professional and low-ranked) can be explained by several factors: the function they fulfilled in the armed group, the social proximity to the local commander and to the mid-ranking officers, the period of conflict, the belligerent side. Not surprisingly, those who fought in the first line were usually properly rewarded during combat operations, however, this never lasted. It also was at a time when the future seemed so uncertain that all the money earned was usually spent the same day. As C. put it, at that time, you literally did not know if there would be a tomorrow.

• Checkpoints

On the rebel side, the État-Major developed the practice of paying his troops by sending them to the ‘corridor’, which meant posting them temporarily to a local checkpoint, usually for two or three days. Given the number of recruits, low-ranking militiamen were usually sent on duty once every fortnight, unless they fulfilled specific duties that required their presence more often. They were paid 2,000 CFA francs for this by the État-Major (what they called ‘la ration’ or the act of ‘être rationné’), and on top of that came extra petty cash collected at the checkpoint, which mainly came from bribing civilians (the compulsory taxation of economic operators was entirely given over to the État-Major).

‘I do not have extra-military activities. When I go to the corridor, I go about every week, I can earn 2,500-3,000 CFA francs, with the ration on top.’

‘When I was with the MPIGO or the MJP, I did not receive any money. There was no such thing when there was fighting. They gave us 5,000 recently. Twice. When posted to the corridor, you can more or less get by. You do not earn a fixed amount, it varies. Sometimes, you can go and earn 2,000, sometimes you earn more. I go more often than the others because I sell the tickets for the État-Major, for the transporters. I can go two or three times a week. The transporters pay 1,000 CFA francs for a 24-hour permission. What the others do is different. Them, they are “rationed”. Us [they are several per shift], we sell tickets. In the
evening, we count the money, we deduct our rations, and the rest we send to the État-Major so that it can pay for the food and medical care of the other militia members in town.’

Twice in December (in 2005 and 2006), around the period of Christmas, the rebel État-Major distributed 5,000 CFA francs to all the low-ranked elements as end-of-the year incentives. As one respondent cynically put it: ‘5,000 is not a payment, it is a favour. It is perhaps only to check the number of people in the rebellion’. Probably so, but giving petty cash in December to dependents is also a widespread cultural practice that was confirmed by many individual recollections of pre-war life. The rebel État-Major was just reviving the tradition, which was opportunistically coloured by a military agenda.

On the counter-insurgent side, militia members also rotated at the checkpoints, usually filling a position for a whole week before being relieved by another group. Beside the petty cash collected there (the non-autochthonous passers-by were particularly targeted), payment was extremely variable, from nothing to periodic incentives, or more regular wages. The driver of Maho for instance received 50,000 francs every month. Those who had fought or held positions close to the front line during the period of combat were often paid in the beginning (every two weeks), but for a very short time and it did not last long (‘We received pay six times’). Others never got anything. The counter-insurgents who were eventually seeing to the security of their own villages and nearby surroundings occasionally received bags of rice, but were mostly paid by what they extracted from passers-by. The interview fragments below shed some light on how payment trickled down to the individual:

‘We were not paid. We were given nothing. Apart from the food. I was paying my rent with the small contracts I was doing on the side.’

‘The chief of section was receiving money from time to time, 300,000. That paid for food and soap.’

‘When there was a ceasefire, the chiefs gave us 10,000 francs to go back to our families.’

‘We received contributions from the cadres of Doké [cotisations]. They once sent 150,000 francs, rice and medicines. Otherwise, the FANCI usually provided us with coffee, rice and tinned beef. It was sent from their camp. When we were setting a town free, the villagers were happy and were preparing food for us.’

‘I went to the checkpoint everyday during six months. We were not paid. Our salary was the money we took from people. We did checkpoints in the villages of Doké, Kouably, Pohouin. When the checkpoint was in Doké, I slept at home, but when it was in the other villages, I was sleeping on the road. We could make 1,500 francs a day, so about 10,000 a week. When we were doing checkpoints in the other villages, there were always villagers with us, so we always knew who was from here and who was not. Those who were not from the village were obliged to pay 100 francs to pass.’
• The practice of stealing

Despite the internal rule of ‘no stealing’, several respondents on both belligerent sides confessed to having sold equipment found in empty houses. Their loot ranged from fans, tools, machines, cocoa bags, with respondents’ families often receiving a share of the loot. The practice of stealing dead enemies was also quite widespread.

‘If you enter an empty house and if there is food, you take to eat. The equipment, you don’t take. The chiefs take it all anyway. But I could keep some stuff. In Zouan Hounien, I sold a TV for 30,000 francs. I also sold a pulverizer for 10,000. I sold the equipment to soldiers. We were paying ourselves using the towns we set free.’ (D., Blolequin)

‘My chief told me to break into the houses people had abandoned to steal things. Our commander did not like that, but I was obliged to do it because it was an order from my chief. We used to search everywhere in the houses. I had to give everything to my chief. I was not allowed to sell the stuff myself. If the chief was in a good mood, he would give me some money. If not, I got nothing. Sometimes, I kept small things for myself. I kept a Walkman and a tape player.’ (D., Man)

‘I earned five mattresses in Toulepleu. I sent one to Bedy Gouazon, to my wife. I also gave one to my parents. I still have two. The Liberians were often traveling to Guiglo so I could find transport to send the equipment. I also gained six bags of cement. I sent four to Bedy Gouazon and I sold two in Toulepleu. Also three fans. I gave two to my older brother. He lives in Port Bouët. I also got pagnes, “les complets wax”, I gave those to my mother, and I also got two radios. One I gave to my sister, one I kept. I also could sell four fridges in Toulepleu, 7,500 each. And in Liberia, I got a motorbike, but because I could not have it cross over, I sold it for 50,000 Liberian dollars.’ (S., Guiglo).

‘When we kill rebels, we search them. If they have money, we take it. Sometimes we can get 100,000 francs from a rebel, sometimes 5,000, it is a matter of luck. When we earn something, when there is a truck leaving for the village, we send money to the family.’ (M., Blolequin)

Ambiguity of the rebel hierarchy:

Between paternalism, authoritarianism and laissez-faire

From the points of view of the interviewed recruits, the rebel military hierarchy cultivated an ambiguous attitude towards its low-ranked elements. If there was some kind of standard pattern in terms of general modus operandi (the État-Major was ensuring a regular turnover of militiamen at checkpoints, free food was provided and in order to maintain some kind of social cohesion, daily and weekly military assemblies were held, ‘rassemblement’), unequal treatment was the norm when it came to individual requests, and this strikingly came out of the individual interviews. With some recruits, the rebel État-Major was quite gene-

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2 The daily assemblies only concerned the elements of a military camp, and there was one daily assembly per camp. The weekly assemblies were a gathering of all members of all camps in town, once a week.
rous when asked for help, with others it showed much less empathy, as these two accounts illustrate:

‘The chiefs here, they do not give anything. If you do not have a shoe [she takes off her shoe], if you go and plead your case, the chief is not going to give you anything. It is because we are so many. If he gives to you today, others go to see him afterwards to ask, and later the chief is upset and asks me, “Why did you tell the others that I helped you?”’ (F., female recruit, Man)

‘To get by, I go to the corridor. When I have problems, I go and see the chiefs. They usually help. They give money, bags of rice.’ (B., female recruit, Man)

Without being too greatly mistaken, one could attribute these differences to the quality of the social network in question. Unsurprisingly, those closer to a high-ranking element were likely to benefit more than those lacking such privileged contacts, and the volume and quality of personal networks varied widely according to someone’s geographical position and appointed places of duty. One female respondent, for instance, mentioned that she was very well treated in Korhogo by the chief she had been following since the beginning, but when she moved to Man after the death of her commander, things changed drastically as she had no ‘protector’ to rely on. Rebel paternalist behaviour found several modes of expression on various occasions: commanders distributing petty cash or in-kind contributions to some of their troops; commanders paying for medical expenses; when the rebel État-Major promoted all low-ranking recruits to the rank of corporal (2005). When support was granted (elements had to plead their cases individually), it was usually punctual, limited in time and scope, and geared at solving a very specific problem (for instance paying for funerals, medical expenses, transport costs, etc.):

‘If I have a problem, I go to see the Com’Zone, or his deputy. When I lost my uncle, the brother of my father – he was living in Man, he was like a father to me – they helped me with the funeral, they did that. So for me, Forces Nouvelles are like my parents. If I have a problem, they solve it well. When my mother got sick, I went to see the commander, and every time I have pressing problems, he takes care of it.’ (A., female recruit, Man)

‘The chief, if I have a problem, he can help but he is not obliged. When I have family issues, I go and plead my case.’ (G., male recruit, Man)

If someone could ask for petty assistance, he or she could not ask for more. Requesting help for beginning a small business, for instance, even when many recruits were ostensibly performing an extra military task when not on duty, could simply not be done. The first reason was indeed that it would open the door to widespread defection (something the État-Major could not back). The second (less intuitive) reason was that it would have closed an important channel of day-to-day support for many low-ranking recruits, namely a source of petty cash and free food that was also benefiting their close family. The interviewed low-ranking recruits were in fact continuously playing on that ambiguity: trapped into a
movement that could not release them, they nonetheless regularly used their position to extract funds from mid-ranking and high-ranking commanders for their routine expenses. If they were no longer enlisted, one of their channels of support would inevitably dry up.

‘It is because I work with them that they help me. I am their element. The commander cannot help you anymore if you tell him that you are leaving the army to do something else. He is not going to want that. So I did not tell him that I was working.’ (A. worked part-time as a hair-dresser for a short period while she was still active in the rebellion.)

‘If I have a problem regarding pommade (skin cream), I go to see a chief. I ask him, even little, 200 francs. I don’t always go to see the same person. It depends. When I have 2,000 francs, I go to the market and buy my things.’ (G., female respondent, Man)

But reducing the rebel military hierarchy to a means of providing welfare would be a mistake since the rebel État-Major regularly took coercive measures against his elements when it was considered that they were overstepping the rules. Those who were caught stealing or who were harassing civilians too much were usually arrested (in the early stages of the insurgency, they were executed). Leniency was far from being a given and the rebel hierarchy knew how to rule with an iron fist. One respondent reported having experienced serious intimidation when he resumed his pre-war activity shortly after arriving in Man:

‘One morning I wake up, all my equipment is on the floor. I’m told: “Did you come here to do war or work?” I was obliged to let it go. When my workshop was destroyed, I went and filed a complaint at several police stations. But I was always told the same thing: “We have come here to do the war, we did not come to work. We do not have a solution for you.”’ (E. is a technician who was forced to enter the rebellion in Borotou to provide rebel forces with technical support. When he was deployed in Man, he set up a small repair workshop in town, in parallel with his military activity. E. usually made a point of not wearing a uniform ("treillis"). He also avoided eating at the camp.)

Timing and form were certainly two important factors when deciding to show signs of detachment from the military. It is for instance noteworthy that after some time, E. did not have a problem working for someone everybody knew in town:

‘There was a Senegalese here, at the market. He hired me to check his devices. The machines came, I checked them. If one was broken, I repaired it, I did the maintenance. They [the rebels] knew that. The Senegalese was a well-known man; the rebels even took their equipment there for repair, so they could not do anything to me. The Senegalese was paying me per day. One VCD at 1,500 CFA francs, the big TV screens at 2,000. He was paying me all at once, after I did five or ten repairs. Sometimes we had to wait one week before the next stock arrived. When I was finished with all checks and repairs, I was selling the equipment with him. He would have told me before: “This, you have to sell it at 17,500 CFA”, so if I sold it at 18,000, then 500 were for me. I also did a lot of cell-phone repairs. I could make 50,000 per month sometimes.’

Six months later, the same respondent was self-employed, earning much less than when he was employed by the Senegalese. His boss had actually moved elsewhere (without helping him to start his own workshop as promised) and after
some time on his own at the market, where he was paying 5,000 CFA francs rent plus 500 CFA francs a week to the Forces Nouvelles for his authorization to sell, he moved to another workshop in another neighbourhood, mainly because he could not cope on his own with all the expenses:

‘I’ve known the workshop’s owner for two and a half years. He is a friend. He is a civilian. I work well with him. I repair outside the workshop, either directly at the client’s home, or in the village. They call me and I repair there. It is better than being at the market. There, there were always problems with the electricity, the rent, the licence (patente). It was a lot of expenses. Sometimes, my friend goes outside to work and I take care of the workshop in his absence. When there is not a lot of work – sometimes, we can go three or four days with nothing – we go to villages on market days. We travel regularly. It is difficult these days. The big workshops in town are doing well, but there I would be an apprentice and I don’t want that. In the big workshops, all the repairs you do are for the boss. You only get prix du savon, perhaps 150 francs a day. And when you come back to your house, what can your wife do with that??? So to get by, I prefer staying with my friend in the small workshop.

I have not joined assembly at the camp for a long time. Foremost because I lack the means to go there and Grand Gbagpleu where I work is quite far from the military camp, and because I have to travel a lot for work. But they told us recently that they were distributing 5,000 CFA francs for the holiday season. So I’ll go there. But I know that because they have not seen me a lot, they will divide. They’ll probably give me 2,500 instead of 5,000. But because it is a gift, I cannot complain.’

In 2006 and 2007, such practices of laissez-faire were relatively common in rebel-held territories (after March 2007, it was probably boosted by the Accord Politique de Ouagadougou, which while fostering inter-Ivorian dialogue, had also reiterated its attachment to the disarmament and demobilization of militarized civilians). At the time of doing fieldwork, not attending the daily and/or weekly military assemblies was tolerated, as well as the practice of not going to the checkpoint when appearing on the roster. On that last point, several respondents openly expressed their shame to be put in a position where it was expected that they would extort from civilians. Noteworthily, there was no sanction when they stopped going.

Modus operandi on the counter-insurgent side,

In many respects, the modus operandi of the counter-insurgents resembled that of the rebel forces: the question of payment, punctual ‘gifts’ supplied by militia leaders, the supply of militia cards to ensure free transport, the supply of free food during the encampment period (although in advanced bases, this was far

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3 ‘There had been a call on the radio asking everyone who had gone to war to go and fetch the card. It is after the war that I came to the Mayor’s compound. He gave me the FLGO card.’
from as systematic as within the rebellion). Paternalist behaviour expressed itself in a number of ways but appears much more centralized than with the rebel forces, respondents usually mentioning ‘the General’ as their direct source of support:

‘The General would take care of the family if someone died during combat.’

‘The General gave me two loads of wood so I could start making charcoal again.’

‘Maho paid for everything. Our food, our sleep. Before, we used to be 1,100 at his camp. Now we are 600. Before the demobilization, I was earning 20,000 every month. The wage depended on your rank but also whether or not you had to pay rent. I rented a house for 10,000, so I was given 20,000 every month. The others could perhaps get 5,000.’ (R. moved to Guiglo from Abidjan to defend his region. After the period of combat, he stayed at Maho’s camp for a while. Later, he moved out to stay in a rental place with his spouse. In the summer of 2006, he received a demobilization incentive of USD 900.)

‘The chiefs were sometimes giving rice when the family was not good.’

A typical trajectory that came out of the interview was to alternate a period of serving in the bush with a period of encampment (in more or less advanced bases), and when the situation calmed down, to retreat to a militia leader’s compound or to go back home. Encampment did not necessarily mean that all militia members were sleeping at the camp, and many houses abandoned due to the war were converted into militia quarters. Until 2005, encamped recruits had to request permission if they wanted to go on leave. It was not a given, and non-expendable recruits (the ones particularly skilled in combat operations) could experience difficulties as the following account illustrates:

‘I had to lie to go and visit my family. I had to say I was sick. The problem is, when you are skilled, it is difficult to let you go.’ (A.)

A peculiar trait of the pro-government militias has been their close connection with the national army and police up until 2004-2005. Several testimonies in fact pointed out that in the first two years of the counter-insurgency, the national armed forces were regularly coming to fetch militia elements when going on patrol (which was every night). Another characteristic of the low-ranking militia elements has been that they have developed privileged partnerships with private businesses, and that in part this was to their own benefit. We mentioned earlier in this chapter the securing of small businesses as an extra-military paid occupation (third interview fragment: J. used to work as private vigilante for a small Guiglo business in parallel to his activities in the militia. He could earn 15,000 francs every month from that activity). But on a larger scale, a whole network of

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4 I remember a MILOCI recruit complaining about ‘eating bad’. If we place his remark into context, it is perhaps not surprising. The MILOCI was created in 2005, thus this was years after the first counter-insurgent groups had emerged; civilian support in terms of food and cash had probably run dry then.

5 They refer here to Maho, the FLGO leader described earlier.
surveillance developed around the timber export industries, and low-ranking militias were sent to escort timber or to guard equipment:

‘Mr. M. used to sign contracts with us. We were sent ten or fifteen elements to guard a portion of road, to block the trucks that come to steal the wood for sending to San Pedro. We could get 10,000-15,000 each per mission.’

‘Quite often, we went to the bush to guard the machines of the timber industry [he names the company]. When you go on a mission, you can get up to 60,000. Also, when there was a soccer game in town, we can be called to do the security and to prevent disputes.’

The military-civilian nexus

The relationships between militarized recruits and local populations in western Côte d’Ivoire have generally been based on a combination of solidarity and coercion, and were all the more complex when they involved family ties. They varied over time as the conflict evolved and as the immediate stakes of capture or defence were replaced by the necessity for each group to find ways to control their zones; they also varied by location, as the insurgents had more stakes than the counter-insurgents groups in securing economic self-sufficiency in the zones they controlled by extracting resources from economic operators. In the literature, the military-civilian nexus has foremost been explored from a macro perspective and has mainly been framed in terms of the extent of civilian control over the military – the main argument being to place ultimate responsibility for military matters in the hands of a civilian political leadership rather than in the hands of military officers (Houngnikpo, 2010). But there has been a striking lack of studies that have taken an approach viewing matters from below. This chapter partially attempts to fill that gap by exploring in situ – from the testimonies collected – the social relationships between civilians and low-ranked recruits.

Mutual support between recruits and civilians: Genuine solidarity or social obligation?

At the time belligerents still had moving bases (as they were advancing or retreating), solidarity expressed itself in a number of ways. On the counter-insurgent side, much of the financial aid was sent through private channels, at several levels, at group or individual initiative. In the rural areas close to the front line, female villagers were preparing food for the fighters alongside women who had been enlisted in a militia and who had ended up in this particular village as they had followed their group. Guéré cadres were raising money in their respective towns to send to the front. Collecting money also developed overseas within the Wê diaspora. This was sometimes directly stated in the interviews, ‘les cadres se sont cotisés’, or as here:
'During the war, parents were raising funds per canton (sub-district) within the Guéré community. The guys were then sending this to us. They paid four times. The first time, they sent 100,000 CFA francs and bags of rice. Each village had to raise a contribution and send, one after the other. We were sharing among all of us. For instance, if the village of Nounoubaye paid, we shared with everyone, even with the ones who were not from Nounoubaye. Some villages did not send anything. The village of Goya for instance.'

These expressions of support certainly played an important role in ensuring basic logistics and a (relatively) steady source of cash and food in the beginning of the counter-insurgency. Yet a question remains: Were these contributions genuinely meant (by the contributors) as a contribution to the war effort or were they foremost directed at providing some kind of support to the war-affected populations residing close to the front line? Even if we lack information to be able to make a completely informed analysis, we must question this assumed civilian volition on the counter-insurgency side. Although an article dated 7 January 2003 from Le Grand Soir (Le Grand Soir, 2003) testifies to a real interest by the Wê diaspora in providing financial and in-kind support to the affected Wê populations (they were planning to raise funds, to collect food and basic supplies from French supermarkets, to liaise with the comité de crise du Grand Ouest in Abidjan), humanitarian and military goals were probably condemned to end up overlapping given the circumstances, thereby providing a very nice example of a forced military/humanitarian alliance confined – for a change – to very local stakeholders.6

On the rebel side, contribution to the war effort was more coercive, in the form of compulsory taxation, but an interesting trait that came out of the interviews was the dilemma rebel recruits experienced when posted in a familiar place (after the period of fightings), as they literally appeared trapped between their military duties and their social obligations. One respondent expressed it quite well when describing the line of acquaintances who regularly came to see him to request help in getting family or friends out of prison. It became such a burden for him (he even began to be poorly perceived by his superiors) that he asked for a transfer elsewhere. Other testimonies point out the dilemma of having to arrest a parent:

‘Because Biankouma is my home and many times people were leaving their village just to see me, to tell me: “Ah! We have this brother who has been arrested, you have to go and fetch him.” My chiefs were not very keen on me. They were saying: “But you here, you are

6 It is noteworthy that at the time of doing fieldwork (2006-2007), there was a tendency to remain quiet about such past civilian support. In the local press and through the eyes of the dominant public opinion, militiamen were equated with criminals and lumpen youth, and the Ivoirian conflict became conceptualized as the work of others. The fact that most militarized youths had in fact been recruited locally to protect their region and that their own parents did play a significant role in sustaining the movement were no longer brought to the fore.
always the one who comes and intervenes.” That is why I decided to leave there. I came to Man at the end of 2003.’

‘When you are in the army, it is not good that you stay home. The thing is, when you are in the police, if you are sent on a mission and if you have to catch your parents, you are obliged to do it, it is an order. But if you catch your parents, they are not going to understand that you do that because it is an order from your chief. They will misinterpret.’

Persistence of family ties has been a striking feature on both belligerent sides. If social links were disrupted by the war, close familial bonds somehow succeeded in enduring and the flows of food, cash and services were going on both sides between the militarized recruit and those who remained civilian. Recruits were dispatching whatever they could, whenever they could, depending on the occasions of transport. It could be bags of rice, petty cash, pans, plates and cooking gear (especially from those working in a military kitchen). Those with family nearby continued to be involved in family affairs, notably when there were funerals or medical expenses. On the rebel side, rebel commanders also used the family unit as some kind of leverage to discipline their troops. Following a reported case of robbery in Logoualé, the Com’Zone of Man issued this awkward statement on the local radio:7

‘Mothers should warn and look after their rebel kids. If their children want to remain rebels, they have to stay on the right track and accept the internal rules.’8 (extracts from an INGO situational report, Man, 8-19 November 2003)

Expressions of support and mutual help did not remain confined to the family unit and several accounts pointed out the strategies some militarized civilians used to protect a simple passer-by:

‘The way I did my work, God will help me. I can even give the name of someone I saved. It was a Baoulé. He was accused of being a suspect at my checkpoint, the boys wanted to kill him. I asked them to keep him alive, time for me to check his story. The Baoulé was saying that he was coming from Séguéla. I went to see the Mossis who were working at the truck station. They eventually confirmed that the Baoulé was not a suspect and that he had a chicken farm in Séguéla. There were sometimes buying eggs from him.’

On the counter-insurgent side, since the bulk of the militia youths had been locally recruited and were still close to their place of residence, most continued to keep close contacts with their family during their time in the militia. During

7 Rebel commanders have often made use of the local radio to disseminate information to the general public, notably for appeasing tensions or for communicating new developments (they used the local radio in 2004 to announce the deployment of the blue helmets, to provide information on DDR, and to inform on the demobilization of children).

8 The rebellion had formalized strict rules in terms of how their elements should interact with civilians and newcomers entering willingly were usually notified about them upon their registration. Stealing from civilians and hassling people was for instance strictly forbidden. In Man, a rule was also set among the soldiers that rapists were to be killed immediately. If recruits wanted to go and visit family or friends (even for attending funerals), they had to request official permission. There was, however, an unavoidable gap between theory and practice, and many free-riding elements and commanders.
the encampment period (which lasted until the end of 2004), several respondents reported that they were commuting regularly from their military camp to their home village when they were not in service, up to several times a month (transport was free upon presentation of their militia card). Several respondents also mentioned that they dispatched everything they could to their relatives in their village whenever they had the chance (cash, mattresses, cement, radios, air fans, *pagnes*). If we look at the data collected, about half of the interviewed militia members were supporting their family while still active in the group. Conversely, some respondents mentioned being completely financially dependent on their spouse’s work of during their time in the militia. The youths who mentioned having no contact at all with their family before returning home were usually the ones who had only served for a short period at the height of the conflict and who had then returned home directly. Sometimes the family had even been informed that he or she had been killed during combat operations.

*What degree of civilian leverage in coercive relationships?*

If the relationship between armed forces and local populations also followed a logic of coercion, there was a certain degree of civilian leverage. On the insurgent side, perhaps coercive measures were more prominent in the beginning; after all, more recruits seem to have been forcedly drafted and freedom of movement was severely hampered by routine bribes and compulsory ‘exit’ taxes. 9 They lasted longer in any case, for the mere fact that in the absence of national tax income, the rebellion had to find ways to sustain itself.

As already mentioned in the contextual chapters, rebel forces started levying compulsory taxes at the end of 2003. It included the ‘verification tickets’ mentioned earlier, proving that transporters were paying their daily contribution to the movement, and it also included organized forms of extracting money from local businesses. In Man, shops and market stalls were taxed 500 CFA francs a week and they were regularly checked. Heitz’s work (2009b) sheds some light on these local mechanisms of taxation. 10 The large export industries of cocoa, coffee and timber were ransomed at every single level of the chain and a system even developed to control the supply of fuel. In addition to this formalized taxation, bribing was still commonplace. If part of the tax could be considered to be redistributed to some extent to the local population in the form of services (after all, for nearly a decade, rebel forces served locally as police, gendarmerie, cus-

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9 In Zouan-Hounien and Danané, Human Rights Watch reports similar stories to those from the Péhé and Toulepleu areas: ‘Liberian mercenaries were forcing civilians to pay 25,000 CFA or more to leave the towns’ (Human Rights Watch, 2003b).

10 She notably brings to the fore that the municipality of Man had succeeded in negotiating a share of the market taxation with the rebel *État-Major*. 
toms officials, *eaux et forêts*, and judiciary in the zones they controlled), excessive taxation weighed heavily on individual households and did little to alleviate already strained socio-economic circumstances.

If there is a tendency to assume that local populations residing in war-affected areas are either victim, passive or neutral, what happened in Man shows in fact that they are capable of surprising resilience. Even confronted with dire circumstances, the local populations of Man have continued to organize themselves and to negotiate with the rebel forces with whatever room to manoeuvre they had. When a local butcher was killed by a group of rebels in late 2003, all butchers in Man went on strike for a full week (extracts from an INGO situational report, Man, 8-19 November 2003). The extent of leverage civilians had on the rebellion is probably best exemplified when examining individual accounts on accommodation. When I was doing fieldwork, an issue that regularly popped up during interviews was the reappearance of landlords (who had fled their homes when the war erupted) and the necessity for the militarized recruits who were occupying their premises to start paying rent. The rebel *État-Major* was even in favour of this, asking his troops to regularize their housing situation with their respective landlords. In 2007, many respondents were still ‘squatting’ for free in houses they had requisitioned (many houses having been left empty after the first attacks), and were finding themselves in the awkward position of having to negotiate their stay with a private person:

“I live in a house with other soldiers. But we have to leave. We have to pay rent. The house was entrusted to us by a neighbour with the owner’s approval. The neighbour lives in the same *cours* and the owner left years ago for Abidjan. But now the owner says he is about to come back, so the neighbour asked us to find another place. We said, “No problem. We’ll search for another house.”” (T.)

On the counter-insurgent side, the ambivalence of the militia/civilian relationship reached its peak in the very beginning, when Liberian mercenaries were still active. A report released by Human Rights Watch in 2003 in fact pointed out that in locations close to the Liberian border, the civilian population was being robbed and held hostage. In Pêhé, the town closest to Toulepleu, home to many displaced people who had fled the Toulepleu area after rebel attacks on their villages, it was reported that the population was forced to pay the Liberians at checkpoints to get wood or be allowed to go to their fields. They also had to pay to leave towns: 11 ‘Those trying to leave Toulepleu in late January 2003 were forced to pay the government-backed Liberian forces between 95 and 200,000

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11 Preventing civilians from fleeing is in line with a war strategy that uses local populations as forced labour to bury corpses, find food or carry equipment. The use of civilians as leverage to secure basic supplies for the functioning of armed groups does not seem to have been a prominent practice in western Côte d’Ivoire.
francs CFA’ (Human Rights Watch, 2003b). People were not free to leave: ‘They [the Liberians] said people can’t leave because they don’t want the region to be empty’ (ibid: 38). Similar stories came up during the interviews I conducted. One respondent, for instance, openly said that he joined the Liberian forces because he was fed up with being enslaved by them. Because he could not leave, he had no other choice than to comply with the occupant’s demands. His enlisting was therefore seen by him to be a pragmatic alternative: at least he could set himself free by enslaving others. Later, as the conflict started to last long and as the composition of armed forces evolved (with the visible retreat of the Liberian allies), coercive measures were more diffuse and only applied to a certain fringe of the population: during the checkpoint period, Burkinabés, Dioulas, Lobis, were particularly prone to extreme extortion. After the checkpoints’ dismantlement in 2005, coercive measures continued underground, on a more individual and hidden scale.

**Blurred spaces**

An important feature to bring to the fore is that it is in fact quite difficult to draw a clear line between the military and civilians: examined from individual perspectives, both arenas regularly overlap. Soldiering has become so much a part of the residents’ immediate environment, especially in towns where military camps are based, that militarized recruits and civilians have been compelled to interact. This feature was particularly visible in Man, in rebel-controlled territory. If we look at accommodation habits, respondents were usually living in a military setting at first (either in a military camp or in a private place requisitioned for hosting the rebel elements) before transferring to private places with family or court-mates. In some cases, respondents were living with their spouse and children, in others with relatives or civilian acquaintances, sometimes with other soldiers. Interestingly, when finally having left their military home, some made a point in not speaking about their belonging to an armed group:

‘In my neighbourhood, many do not know. It is not something to advertise. You can be emotional about it. I do not find it important now because it is something from the past. When I talk to my friends, we talk about other things.’

Eating practices clearly show the entanglement of the military with the private sphere. Some respondents always ate at the camp (some even had a spouse or mother working as cook at one of the military bases), some took home food from

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12 This was to be expected from people who were not residents of the Man area before the war, but it was initially also the case for the recruits posted in their own town.

13 One reason to leave the military camp as accommodation place was the robberies taking place there.
the camp to share with their close family, and others were keen on saying that they always ate outside camp, showing that they could fend for themselves, outside the military structure. Some were claiming to be full-time recruits, doing nothing on the side, while others were visibly working outside their military duties, earning a living. Most respondents were easily mistaken for civilians when they were not on duty and when they were not in uniform. These examples challenge the popular idea that conceptualizes the military and the civilian spheres as two completely different spaces with few links between them. But in Man and elsewhere, armed men had just become part of the town, and navigated between their civilian and military lived realities, depending on needs and obligations.

The humanitarian-military nexus

If we already started the reflection in Chapter 5 when examining the extent of capture of humanitarian resources by the armed groups operating in the western region, it is worth exploring the humanitarian-military nexus from two additional angles. A first interesting approach is to examine, at the individual level, the perceptions militarized recruits have of humanitarianism, especially the ones who are – or were – involved in a project (after all, any direct intervention has the potential to impact them directly). The second perspective worth looking at is linked to the shift in activities of certain militia warlords in post-conflict settings, as some of them converted into development brokers.

From the individual’s perspective

Several young rebels I interviewed who were participating in a reinsertion project run by a German agency pointed out their mixed feelings about the intervention. On the one hand, they usually acknowledged that the intervention was providing them with a small extra: another place where they could receive free food, an opportunity for following short-term training, in sum, some in-kind support. But on the other hand, their participation in the project was sometimes interpreted as

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14 In a context of general impoverishment, the provision of free food proved in fact to be an important factor in holding the rebel elements together.

15 At the meso-level, the blurring of the military/civilian divide is perhaps best exemplified when armed groups started to take public prerogatives in the absence of the State. In Man, this was not limited to the security sector (police/gendarmerie), and rebel agents were also acting as customs, eaux et forêts, and judicial officials in the zones they controlled. Some respondents were penitentiary guards, some had passed a test to enter the local police force, some were appointed in the local forests for forestry control. What is particularly striking in the Ivorian case is that all pre-war administrative structures continued to persist in the rebel zones. They have not merged, new names were not created, rebel agents have just continued the pre-war routine checks, while exacerbating its bribing part.
a burden. Some even expressed their fear of being excluded by their rebel superiors from services they could normally apply for if they had not been participating (that concerned food rations and the financial prospect of the DDR safety net). The following accounts are particularly telling:

‘It is not sure we’ll get the safety net if it comes. At the camp, they say, “No! We are with GTZ, we received the kit, we are already demobilized.” But we did not receive anything! You cannot do the war for five years and then get a kit of 75,000 francs and then say that you are demobilized!’

If there is a clear gap between what ‘small men’ say in the army and what the rebel État-Major does and promotes, such remarks were nonetheless fostering an ambiguous climate, in line with what we mentioned earlier: if someone shows too visibly clear signs of detachment from the rebel apparatus, he or she runs the risk of ending up excluded from potential benefits.

If the État-Major had no intention to start releasing recruits (talking about demobilization was taboo in the rebel-controlled areas at the time the fieldwork was being conducted), individuals interpreted their room for manoeuvre very differently. For some, participating in a project was clearly subordinate to their participation in the rebellion:

‘Presently, I run the pig farm, here in Man. I am not from here but the chiefs say the war is not yet over. So we cannot go home yet. But when DDR comes, we will be able to go wherever we want.’

For others, the connection was more fluid and they had clearly started to cut back the frequency of their military tasks:

‘Thanks to GTZ, I now run a small home business. I no longer go to the corridor. The last time was perhaps two or three months ago.’

On the counter-insurgency side, perceptions of humanitarianism also varied depending on the individual, and despite the fact that all respondents had received financial compensation in 2006 (unlike their rebel counterparts). I develop the use of such incentives in the following chapter; here I just mention a few examples of respondents’ satisfaction or disillusionment:

‘Some say GTZ did not do well. But this is not true. GTZ did what it could with the means it had. I will be given my kit tomorrow. I’ll take it home then, and perhaps if I’m lucky I’ll even get a diploma. At the garage where I’m enrolled, they’ll probably give me a certificate. It would be a great asset for me.’

‘They told us that when we will be disarmed, they will give us plenty of things. They told us that we would be comfortable, that we would forget all this. We’ve been waiting. True, we are disarmed, but for the rest, we’re still waiting.’
Extent of entanglement of humanitarianism with the remnants of warfare

A second interesting approach for exploring the humanitarian-military nexus is to examine the extent to which humanitarianism has interacted with the remnants of the apparatus of warfare, especially in Guiglo where local warlords converted into development brokers. Bierschienk, Chauveau and Olivier de Sardan were the first to come up with the concept ‘courtiers locaux du développement’ to refer to social actors implanted in a given local arena who play the role of intermediaries in order to attract external resources with the aim of ‘developing’ the arena in question (by ‘developing’, it is meant fostering any kind of activity that could improve the local living conditions). This of course includes liaising with international INGOs active in the area but not just with these. Public or private parties with a genuine interest in developing a certain domain can also be seen as potential sources to tap into.

In Guiglo, when it became clear that a political settlement would prevail over a military one, militia leaders were keen on (re)endorsing a local politician hat. For at least two major leaders, this meant resuming pre-war local political functions\footnote{Before (and during) the war, FLGO leader Maho Glofêhi was the third assistant of the Mayor of Guiglo, member of the FPI, and a traditional Wé chief. UPRGO leader Octave Yahi had just been named Vice President of the Conseil Général in Guiglo.}, and since they had militarized civilians to ‘reinsert’ (those who were previously under their command), their political persona had to also function as a development broker. What happened there is in fact a good illustration of local leaders’ multiple registers of action, with some assuming many roles within the community they belong to, from armed faction representative to respected traditional chief, via local politician to President of a local NGO. Because individuals could pass from one register to another and introduce themselves under different guises to outsiders, the action repertoires were inherently blurred and a former militia leader had no difficulty taking on a humanitarian persona. In Guiglo, the UPRGO militia leader, Octave Yahi, founded the local NGO Nouvelle Famille, to be able to tap into the burgeoning hevea export industry nearby, by positioning himself as a potential partner. Cultivating hevea was particularly in vogue there when fieldwork was being conducted, a popularity amplified by a campaign run by the Compagnie Hévéicole du Cavally (CHC) to incite small farmers to produce this crop. Information on hevea benefits was disseminated through public meetings and partnerships with local stakeholders. Hevea was presented as a very lucrative prospect with yields estimated at 100,000 CFA francs per hectare and per month when the plants reach maturity (six years after planting). This was indeed an attractive revenue for many people, especially since rubber trees produce nearly all year long and can last up to fifty years. The local NGO Nouvelle...
Famille was further claiming its aim was to reintegrate ‘deviant young men’ into society by fostering the promotion of hevea cultivation. It therefore combined a humanitarian goal with the promise of boosting the CHC production capacity. During his time in Zagné (the former location of the UPRGO base), Yahi had developed privileged contacts with the CHC. He knew that only one third of the company’s production capacity was being exploited for lack of raw material, and that the company was looking for independent farmers it could sub-contract to increase its production. A certain number of incentives were therefore proposed to peasants to produce or increase their production of rubber: this included the free supply of hevea plants (young seedlings) and extensive training for setting up seedbeds in the region. Nouvelle Famille succeeded in positioning itself as a more or less unavoidable partner to the CHC, which gave it free access to young plants and a hand in the hevea business on the supply side. On paper, the Nouvelle Famille project was targeting 1,200 youths, of whom many were known to be former militia members. To be eligible for entry, participants had to fill in a registration form and purchase a Nouvelle Famille membership card (2,000 CFA francs), and also had to show a certificate of land property, which had to be signed by the village chief where the youth wanted to settle. The plots were supposed to be given ‘in recognition of the services rendered during the war’ (personal communication with Yahi, June 2007).

Concluding remarks

This chapter has challenged the traditional boundaries used in the analysis to explore the humanitarian, civilian and militarized spheres. Rather than conveying the idea of a clear distinction between the three arenas, it has stressed their overlaps, their dynamics, and has clearly dismissed strict conceptual boundaries. It has in addition stressed several opportunistic manoeuvres of the militarized youths, which has reinforced the blurring effect. On both belligerent sides, full-time involvement in an armed group gradually evolved into a ‘part-time’ one, after the peak of the conflict had passed. Extra-military activities took longer to develop on the insurgent side since there was a genuine willingness to fight against widespread defection, however, they nevertheless ended up emerging – if we can date the start of the phenomenon to 2004 for the pro-government militias, 2006 is a more appropriate guess for the start of extra-military activities on the

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17 The CHC was planning an extension of small farmers’ plantations of approximately 1,000 hectares per annum and an increase in its production targets of 2.17 t/ha for the company plantations and 1.70 t/ha for individual plantations (company website, accessed 28 November 2008).

18 The use of seedbeds was estimated to decrease the price of seedlings from 180,000 to 35,000 CFA francs per hectare.
rebels. On both belligerent sides, relationships between militarized recruits and local populations have been based on a combination of solidarity and coercion varying over time, depending on strength of ties and the immediate stakes involved. Concerning the group of recruits locally recruited, the persistence of family bonds was a striking feature in Guiglo and Man and the flows of food, cash and services were going in both directions between the militarized ones and their respective families. But relationships with civilians went beyond the close family structure and an important feature that this chapter brought to the fore is that it is in fact quite difficult to draw a clear line between military life and civilian life: eating habits, accommodation practices, continued participation in family affairs, obliged militarized and non-militarized civilians to continuously interact, with the effect to have less and less distinct roles.