

Kennesaw State University

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2012

Liberia: History of the Origins of War and Profiles of Actors

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/emmanuel_kotia/2/

LIBERIA: HISTORY OF THE ORIGINS OF WAR AND PROFILE OF ACTORS

Introduction

The cause of the civil war in Liberia can be traced to the country's unresolved ethnic and political differences. The country that was founded on the principles of freedom and democracy¹, but after one and half centuries, of its existence the country descended into destruction in which both democracy and human rights were compromised. This paper traces the history of Liberia from its establishment to the outbreak of the war in 1989 focusing on some of the causes for contradictions in that long history. In particular, the geo-political profile of the Liberian state is examined with a focus on the period from Liberia's independence from 1847 to 1990. The socio-political character of the warring factions are analysed and the dynamics of the war up to the ECOWAS intervention in August 1990. The paper concludes with a summary of the causes and effects of the 14-year conflict.

History of Liberia

Liberia was founded as a colony for freed slaves from the United States of America (USA) by the American Colonisation Society (ACS), a philanthropic organisation which had the support of the then US President John James Monroe (Lowenkopf: 13).² The first shipload of freed slaves arrived in Liberia in January 1822, after a supposedly negotiated purchase of the Cape Mesurado area (present day Monrovia) by Elis Ayres and Robert Stockton from King Peter and five other chiefs who owned the area.³ This event is often used to mark the beginning of the story of Liberia, largely because those settlers and their descendants (the Americo-Liberians) for almost one and half centuries dominated the political, social and economic life of Liberia. But it is equally important to remember that before the arrival of the freed slaves from the USA, there existed for at least a hundred years, what used to be called the Grain Coast, which was inhabited by

¹ The American Colonization Society (ACS) provided that the settlers would be entitled to all rights and privileges of the free people of USA.

² The ACS was itself founded in 1816. President Monroe after whom the Liberia capital was named took personal interest in the work of the ACS. The US Congress approved of \$100,000 for settlement of slaves.

³ Elis Ayres became the first agent of ACS in Liberia and Stockton was the Leader of the military escort.

about one and half dozen ethnic groups. Though they were destabilised occasionally by minor strife those ethnic groups had co-existed in relative peace (ibid: 13).

This last point is essential. Firstly, because to equate the history of Liberia only to the fortunes and characteristics of the nineteenth century immigrants from America and their descendants, is to obscure the fact that the Americo-Liberians form only a small minority of the total population of Liberia (Fraenkel:1). More significantly, the relations between the newcomers and those they met remained a source of conflict throughout Liberia's history (Bulls:11). Furthermore, if the colony of the freed slaves had been carved out of an unoccupied piece of land, the story of Liberia would most likely have been different and perhaps ECOWAS and the UN would not have had a conflict resolution role to play between 1990 and 2003.

The story of the initial purchase of the Cape Mesurado area has been told variously: this ranges from a peaceful contract signed between the chiefs and the leaders of the settlers to the forceful seizure of land from the indigenes (Simpson, 1961:43). Whatever the true account, the seeds of discord and distrust between the indigenes and the settlers were sown soon after the settlers' arrival, and initially over issues of land acquisition and later the attempt by the settlers to impose an alien socio-cultural, political and economic system, (in which they were themselves not properly trained) on the indigenes (Kieh:26).

In reaction to the settlers' determination to establish hegemony and to dispossess them of their lands, several indigenous groups put up resistance. The coastal Kru, Grebo and the Gola engaged the settlers in protracted conflicts, which sometimes assumed the proportion of minor wars. However, the settlers were not pushed, as it were, into the sea partly because the natives had their inter-tribal jealousies some of which were deeper and older than the quarrels with the new comers. As a result, the attacks came from one ethnic group at a time (Marinelli:46). The lack of unity among the Liberian natives could as well have been the effect of the slave trade which made the tribes attack one another for slaves (Kieh:26).

One lesson which the settlers learnt early enough was that their survival depended on cohesion within their camp. They needed a united front to respond effectively to the hostilities of the natives. This largely explains why in 1839, all the clusters of independent black American settler's enclaves along the Grain Coast came together as a self-governing commonwealth which prepared the way for Liberia's independence in 1847.⁴ Thus, the settlers won the initial series of wars but the mutual distrust and suspicion that had been created, and the more difficult and persistent problem of incorporating the native population into the political, social and economic life of the nation, would remain unresolved, and explode from time to time.

Geography and Political History of Liberia

Liberia became independent in 1847 as a settlement of freed America slaves. As a result, it became one the first independent Republic in Africa. Although the US exercised substantial influence on this settlement, Liberia was never colonized. The country lies from 4° 20' N to 8° 31'N of the Equator, and is situated at the south-western corner of the western bulge of West Africa, bordered on the northwest by Sierra Leone, the southeast by Cote d'Ivoire and on the north by the Republic of Guinea (see Map 2.1). It covers an area of 111, 370 square kilometres. Large parts of the country are made up of thick jungle while the coastal region is characterized by swamps with mangrove trees, low bushes and oil palm trees stretching inland for about 40 kilometres. Thereafter the country rises and forms a plateau, making up half of Liberia, broken up by a mountain range, which contains iron ore, and is covered mostly by thick forest. The border region with Cote d'Ivoire is the agricultural heartland of Liberia, producing cassava, rice, coffee, cocoa and palm oil as the main crops.

⁴ Apart from the settlement of Monrovia, other independent settlements included Maryland, Bassa Cove and Mississipi-in-Africa. Their independent existence also created legal problems.

Map 1: Political Map of Liberia with 13 Counties

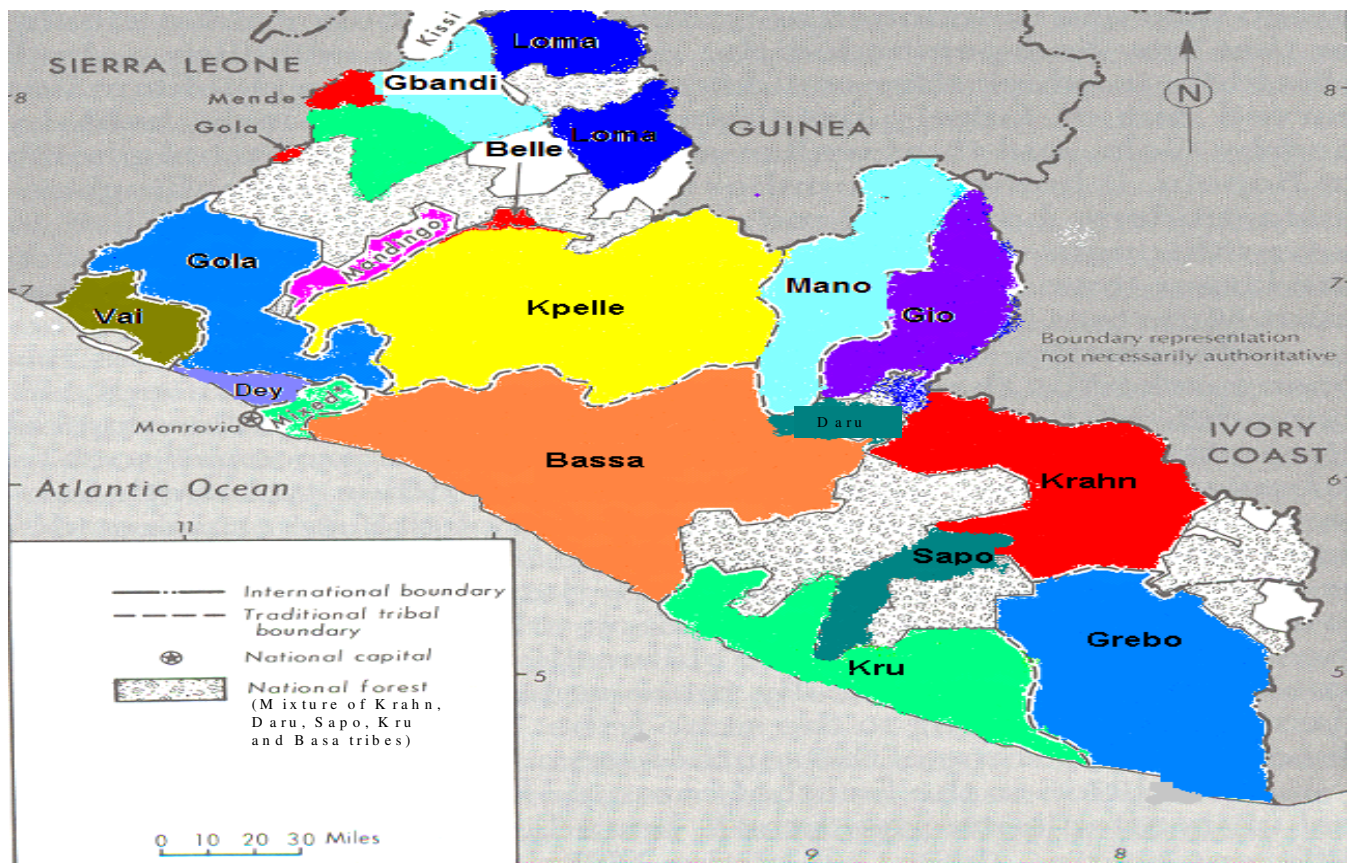


Source:

Of an estimated population of 2.5 million in 1990, about one million had either been killed or had fled to other countries as refugees by the end of the wars in 1996 and 2003 (UN website, June 2005).

There are 16 officially recognized ethnic groups living in 15 counties in addition to the Americo-Liberians, who had settled in Liberia since 1822. The major indigenous groups as shown at Map 2.2 are the Kpelle, Kissi, Gola, Grebo, Kru, Madingo, Bassa, Belle, Dei, Gio (Dan), Krahn, Lorma (Buzzi), Mano (Mah), Mende and Vai (Harold:185). Liberia boasts of its pidgin language known as ‘Simple English,’ so widely spoken across tribe, gender and age groups that communication is relatively easier in Liberia than say, Ghana, where most rural folks do not speak English at all. Half of the adult population of Liberia is adherent to indigenous religions, with the rest about equally split between Christianity, mostly Protestants, and the Muslim faith (Harold:185).

Map 2: Location of Liberia’s Indigenous Tribes.



Source: Adopted from Harold, 1984:185.

Liberia has the Roberts International Airport and the Spriggs Payne Airfield as well as the Monrovia seaport. The second largest seaport is at Buchanan with smaller ones at Greenville and Harper

Liberia: From Independence to the Second World War

The declaration of Liberia's independence in 1847 once more brought to the fore the question of the relations between the settlers and the indigenes. The question was whether Liberia is to be an exclusive or all-inclusive society. The Americo-Liberian leaders opted for "a settler state that would exercise prerogatives of government over a settler-dominated society" (Sawyer, 1997:4). The preamble of the 1847 Republican Constitution confirmed the emergent segregated society: "We the people of the Republic of Liberia were originally the inhabitants of the United States of North America. And with that, citizenship was restricted to only those of the settler stock, while the indigenes, the original inhabitants, were excluded" (Huberich: 829). Worse still, the constitution made no provision regarding the government of the indigenous groups but left all such questions to be determined by general legislation of the government of Liberia. Yet, the natives were required to pay taxes. Other aspects of the contradictions in the declaration of Liberia's independence could be found in Liberia's motto, "The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here", as well as the national flag, national anthem and seal, all of which did not reflect the cultural values and realities of Liberia but those of USA (Kieh: 29).

By the end of the nineteenth century, much of the structure of Liberia's political and social organisation was fixed. As Clower (1966:27) and others, succinctly state: "The Americo-Liberians occupied the coastal strip and ruled the hinterland tribes they had learnt to subdue and treat harshly. Special taxes and coercive sanctions were imposed on the tribal people. The original inhabitants were thus set apart and treated as a subordinate and inferior group while discrimination against them hardened into a policy as well as a habit of mind." This was comparable to the white settler regimes in other parts of Africa who were agitating for self rule. As a result, the threat of conflict would continue well into the twentieth century in Liberia.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that the settler group was itself monolithic. Three classes initially existed within this group based largely on colour of skin and how the settlers entered Liberia – the lighter pigmented (mulattos) at the top, the darker skin in the middle, and the Congoes at the bottom (Keih: 31).⁵ It was to the lighter skin settlers who also formed the comprador (commercial) class based in Monrovia that declared Liberia's independence and remained the ruling class for at least the first quarter century producing the first four presidents. The darker skin class which was largely agrarian and based outside Monrovia received the declaration of independence with mixed feelings because they feared comprador domination. Later, darker skin class pitted its strength against and wrestled power, with the support of the Congoes, from the compradores (Fraenkel: 7). It is important to note, however, that these struggles for power remained largely a "family" affair which was not allowed to mar the cohesion of the settler group or change its relationship with the natives. Also with time and as a result of intermarriage, class distinctions became blurred. Thus, for the first half century of Liberia's existence as an independent state, the authorities retained only a passing interest in the more remote hinterland. Apart from putting down rebellions when they arose, the settler society made no attempts to regulate the internal affairs of the tribal areas till the end of the nineteenth century. To a large extent, therefore, two distinct societies existed (Lowenkopf: 31).

Another interesting aspect of Liberia's independence is that while it was readily recognised by most of the European powers, it took the USA so many years, to do so (ibid). This could be described as neglect of Liberia by the USA which was the same attitude the USA exhibited at the beginning of the civil war almost one and half centuries later.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Liberian authorities were under pressure from British and French imperial demands to demonstrate evidence of effective occupation and control of the territories they

⁵ The initial settlers in Liberia were American Negroes who had been born, about one-third of whom were Mullatoes (light skinned). The second wave of settlers was made up principally of former slaves who had emancipated on condition that they migrated to Africa. The third wave was the Congoes' – the recaptured African slaves liberated on the high seas.

claimed (Sawyer, 1992: 265). This revisited the question of what to do with the indigenous population. In response, the Liberian government was compelled to grant citizenship (second-rate) to the residents of the interior and introduced an interior administration aimed at expanding control over the land beyond the limits of the initial settlements (ibid).

The comprehensive strategy for facilitating the control of the interior by the settler authorities was the Barclay Plan of 1904. The Plan, *inter alia*, re-organised the administrative structure on the basis of districts, chiefdoms, clans, towns and villages and made the paramount chief a political functionary of the government under the control of a district commissioner who was in turn accountable to the president through the secretary for interior (ibid). The Plan set the tone for settler-indigene relations for the first four decades of the twentieth century. It established the machinery for effective domination and exploitation of the indigenous population; eroded the traditional base of the authority of chieftaincy and made it vulnerable to manipulation and granted enormous powers to the government, especially the President. In Sawyer's view "The implements of exploitation galvanised by the Barclay Plan made it easy for succeeding administrations to manipulate the traditional political system, appointing chiefs and increasing taxation." The hall-mark of this exploitation was the allegation of the exportation of labour to Fernando Po which eventually led to the demise of the President King in 1930. The irony of it is that a group, whose ancestors had been freed from slavery and had declared war against slavery on their arrival, should indulge in slave trade.

Against this background, it should not be surprising that rebellion of indigenous citizens against the settlers continued up to the mid-1930s. For instance, in 1915, the settler government had to rely on US military advisors and weapons to put down an uprising among the Krus only for them to rebel again in 1930 (Clower: 275).

President Edwin Barclay (1930 - 44), who assumed office after the exit of President King,⁶ took steps to stamp out internal rebellions by launching military campaigns to quell them and also by establishing military garrisons at strategic locations around the country. To stifle dissent, he promulgated stringent sedition laws (Sawyer: 275). Barclay's policies were popular among the settler group who saw his pacification campaigns along the Kru Coast and the liberal use of sedition laws against the indigenous intelligentsia as appropriate measures designed to restore peace and stability. But among the indigenous communities, not even Barclay's effort to repair relations with the chiefs and their people could remove the deep scars of the campaign. To them, Barclay was a "stern president who engendered fear and respect but not friendship" (ibid: 277).

It was from 1935, after the indigenous groups had failed in their attempts to re-gain their autonomy through armed resistance that they sought and struggled for positions in the Liberian body politic as full blooded citizens (Sawyer: 5-6). Not much, however, was achieved in this direction until the accession of William Tubman to the presidency in 1944. The settler close up indigene relations that had existed thus far was such that Tubman himself would later describe it as "colonial" (ibid).

2.5 The Tubman Era

The 27 years of William Tubman's reign often creates the impression of a benevolent leader who took his people through an era of economic development, national integration and political stability (Clower: 281). However, a critical review of that period in Liberia's history also reveals several paradoxes which not only kept the Americo-Liberian hegemony intact, but also eventually contributed in no small way to the crisis. Apart from the problems which Tubman's reign created for his successor Tolbert, some of the techniques of suppression that would be later employed by Doe against his opponents could be traced to Tubman's tenure of office.

⁶ As a result of persistent allegation of slave trading, the League of Nations instituted a commission of inquiry which forced President King and his vice Allen Yancy out of office and brought Edwin Barclay to power.

Tubman, very early in his rule, initiated two policies which virtually became synonymous with his name – the Open Door Policy and the Unification Policy. The former placed at the core of Liberia’s approach to economic development the exploitation of mineral and agricultural resources through foreign investment (Sawyer: 283). The adoption of this policy was largely dictated by the fact that Tubman’s assumption of office coincided with the growing demand for rubber and steel after the Second World War. The policy which was based on joint ventures between the government and foreign investors had the positive effect of stimulating economic growth including employment.

The Unification Policy which was proclaimed on 14 February, 1944 officially aimed at bridging the gap between the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous people (Wreh: 42).⁷ It involved the extension of the suffrage for the first time to the indigenes, the formulation and implementation of national unification schemes to obliterate the psychological impediments to integration and the restructuring of the subdivisions of the country to foster parity in representation (Kieh: 33). Tubman himself had emphasised that the Unification Policy was based on the belief that the nation should be composed of men who were equal under the law and had the same rights and privileges (Wreh: 43).

On the surface, the positive aspects of “Open Door” and “Unification” policies seemed not to be in doubt. Even Tuan Wreh, one of the critics of the regime admitted that “Tubman brought Liberia into the mainstream of twentieth century development. He promoted several ambitious and laudable projects and other well meaning policies.” However, underneath the reforms were a number of disturbing developments. First, the economic prosperity that followed the Open Door Policy increased the revenue available to the government. This in turn increased the scope of presidential patronage which enabled Tubman to regard the presidency as his personal domain. Second, because the policy was over-reliant on foreign investment, it increased the external dependence of Liberia and failed to stimulate local entrepreneurs (Sawyer: 263).⁸ Furthermore, Lowenkopf (1979) indicates that “the substantial economic growth in the 1950s and early

⁷ The date later became an annual public holiday as Unification and Integration Day.

⁸ Even as late as the early 1970s, 16 cents out of every dollar earned in Liberia stayed in the country.

1960s did not produce commensurate broadly shared economic, social and political development. Rather it strengthened the Americo-Liberian domination over the indigenous people.

Similarly, although the Unification Policy succeeded in reducing tension and attempted to break the long standing suspicion between the settler and the indigene, it did not ameliorate some of the worst excesses of previous administrations. Rather it was as a domestic response to African nationalism and international criticism of the regime of personal rule of the country. The Unification Policy provided a means of preventing the indigenous people from rising up against the settler elite at a time when struggles for liberation and self determination were in vogue throughout the world. Tubman reduced the suspicion between the indigenes and the settlers, and created a new sense of belonging in the hinterland. At the same time he was able to develop a system of government based on personal loyalty, and reduced international criticism of Liberia's seemingly non-inclusive system of governance (ibid). In effect, through the "Unification Policy" Tubman attempted and largely succeeded in killing three birds with one stone.

In spite of the darker side of Tubman's rule he escaped the fate that would befall his successor, William Tolbert. The reasons are not hard to find. First, the majority of the indigenous Liberians were grateful to Tubman for what were, to them, grand breaking reforms which reduced the excesses of previous administrations. According to Sawyerr (1977), "almost every physical and social project undertaken by Tubman was a pioneering effort that enhanced his image among Liberians." They were, therefore, quite tolerant of some of the infringements of their rights and freedoms. Second, the political consciousness of the indigenes remained generally low because the effects of his educational expansion would be felt later in the 1970s. Third, the pervasive nature of his security apparatus and the victimisation of individuals stifled opposition enough for Tubman to leave the scene relatively peacefully. Fourth, a greater part of Tubman's rule coincided with the era of economic growth which enabled him to use the patronage system to buy the loyalty of the indigenes, and at least show some semblance of development (ibid: 286).

The Tolbert Administration in Liberia

Tubman was succeeded in 1971 by William Tolbert who served as his Vice President for nineteen years. The legacy bequeathed to Tolbert however, was unenviable – a declining economy (which was soon worsened by the oil crisis and the global recession), growing unemployment, a more politically conscious indigenous populace and an unwieldy security apparatus. The combined effects of these were the lowering of living standards of ordinary Liberians (ibid: 373). The end of Tubman's autocratic rule gave vent to hitherto repressed social forces. The result was the formation of many radical political and social groupings and organisations in all sectors of the society, a development which was encouraged by Tolbert's attempt to cut Tubman's security apparatus to size (ibid: 287). The options open to Tolbert were difficult and contradictory. He had to establish his authority without the financial resources controlled by his predecessor; he had to cope with the emergence of civil society and yet maintain the status quo; and he had to flirt with a new generation of politicians without antagonising the old guard (ibid: 287-288). Against this background, Tolbert initiated reforms in various sectors. He sought to replace Tubman's patronage network with a system of civil administration; he disbanded the Public Relations Office; trimmed to size the security apparatus and retired more than 400 ageing and untrained soldiers (Ibid). The replacement of the ageing and untrained soldiers with poorly trained young men, recruited largely from among the urban unemployed, proved to be a recipe for political disaster. It was from the ranks of this group of soldiers that the leaders of the April 1980 coup emerged (ibid: 374).

Tolbert also tried to build a constituency of his own in an effort to extricate himself from the shadow of Tubman. In this enterprise he relied on the emerging group of young professionals, technicians and bureaucrats, the university, the emerging rural educated elite, and the emerging stratum of Liberian entrepreneurs as well as the top hierarchy of a more professional military (ibid: 288).

In a situation of persistent economic decline and growing social and political awareness, Tolbert's policies were besieged by several countervailing forces. Prominent among them were the old guard from the

Tubman era. This group found its privileges diminishing and felt threatened by the presence of what it saw as 'young upstarts' who possessed advanced education, were familiar with technology and were clamouring for democratic freedoms (ibid: 289). Most of them felt that Tolbert's flirtation with the younger generation was going too far, breaking with tradition and showing ingratitude to the old order that had produced, nurtured, and elevated him to the presidency (ibid). The old guard harboured these throughout his term to the extent that it was even alleged that before the April 1980 coup, some die-hard True Whig members who saw Tolbert as too radical, were plotting their own coup to topple him.

On the other hand the emerging social forces did not see Tolbert's reforms as radical enough, and pressed for more. The Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA) and the Progressive Alliance of Liberians (PAL), which remained a thorn in the flesh of Tolbert to the end, epitomised the posture of these groups. Ellis (1995: 175) illustrates Tolbert's dilemma in a dramatic fashion: "(He became) a victim of the reforming government, losing the support of his conservative base without being able to satisfy fully the new constituencies he was wooing, whose political appetite he had aroused." Caught in a web from which he could not extricate himself, Tolbert vacillated between making concessions to the old order and moving decisively in the direction of the new forces (Sawyer: 289).

In April 1979, there were rice riots, which marked the beginning of the end for Tolbert. The protest was closely organized by PAL, an organisation formed in 1975 in the USA under the leadership of Gabriel Baccus Matthews, essentially as a pressure group in search of an opportunity to organise a political party. In 1978 it established offices in Monrovia and had support among the urban unemployed and underemployed (ibid: 290). Later that same year, the Tolbert government proposed an increase in the price of rice from \$22 to \$30 for a bag of 50 kilograms. After several attempts by the PAL leadership to get the government to rescind its decision had failed, it planned a peaceful demonstration which turned into a violent confrontation with the security forces. The rice riots ended in a bloody massacre. This event exposed the weaknesses of an unrepresentative but stable political order.

Politics of Dissent and Domination

The handling of the rice riots exposed the weakness of the Tolbert government. The government tightened its grip on political dissent and arrested the leaders of PAL and others, set up a new Ministry for National Security, passed a Sedition Law, and followed in October 1979 with a new labour law that made strikes illegal. In another development, the popularity of Dr Amos Sawyerr as an independent candidate with the support of the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA) in the race for the 1979 Mayoral electoral race of Monrovia forced Tolbert's government to postpone the elections. When PAL registered as a political party under the name, the People's Progressive Party (PPP), in December 1979, there were indications of further political troubles ahead for the Tolbert government. The PPP immediately launched a strike action to force the resignation of the President. The government responded by not only banning the PPP; its leaders, including Baccus Matthews and Chea Cheapoo, were arrested under the Sedition Law and were due for trial on 14 April 1980 (Vogt: 43). It was in this situation of repression and growing political unrest that a group of 'native' Non-Commissioned Military Officers (NCOs), led by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe, staged the successful coup of 12 April 1980 in which Tolbert was assassinated.

The (Doe) Military Intervention in Liberia Politics

The coup makers formed the Peoples Redemption Council (PRC) assisted by a 17 member cabinet which included eleven civilians, representing the PPP, MOJA and the United Liberia Association in the Americas (ULAA), and three members from the defunct Tolbert regime (Harold, 1984). The composition of the cabinet created the impression of a shift in the balance of power from the Americo-Liberians to the indigenes. But it turned out to be a highly polarised and unstable cabinet with the politically inexperienced PRC members at the top. To appreciate the nature of the difficulties that confronted the military regime, it is important to note in Table 2.1 below the rank structure and tribal balance of the power within the PRC before and after the coup.

Table 2.1: Status of the Peoples Redemption Council after the 1980 Coup in Liberia.

Serial	Rank		Name	Tribe	Portfolio
	Old	New			
1	M/Sgt	Gen	Samuel Doe	Krahn	Chairman
2	S/Sgt	Maj Gen	Thomas Syen	Sarpo	Co-Chairman
3	S/Sgt	Brig Gen	Thomas Quiwonkpa	Gio	Member
4	Cpl	Maj Gen	Nicholas Podier	Sarpo	Speaker
5	Cpl	Col	Larry Borteh	Kru	Member
6	Cpl	Col	Abraham Kollie	Lorma	Member
7	Cpl	Lt Col	Fallah Verney	Lorma	Secretary-General
8	Cpl	Col	Harrison Pennoh	Krahn	Member
9	Cpl	Brig Gen	Jeffrey Gbatu	Gio	Member
10	Private	Lt Col	Nelson Toe	Krahn	Member
11	Private	Lt Col	Albert Toe	Krahn	Member
12	Private	Lt Col	Robert Zuo	Gio	Member
13	Private	Lt Col	William Could	Krahn	Member
14	Private	Lt Col	Robert Nuwoku	Lorma	Member
15	Private	Lt Col	Jerry Friday	Grebo	Member
16	Private	Lt Col	Joseph Tubman	Grebo	Member
17	Private	Lt Col	Korlonseh Gonyon	Gio	Member

Source: Youboty, 1993: 46.

The dominance of the Krahn, Doe's native ethnic group on the PRC marked the beginning of the creation of Krahn hegemony in Liberian politics before the civil war. In addition, the appropriation of political portfolios by the coup makers, on grounds that they could best safeguard their own politico-military enterprise, was in itself an invitation for further coup attempts. On the other hand, the rapid promotion of lower ranking officers over an officer corps that was the preserve of Americo-Liberians destroyed the professionalism of the Armed Forces and alienated the America-Liberian officers. It might be for this reason that the Americo-Liberian attempted to restore the status quo.

The successive attempts at toppling the Doe regime, especially by the Americo-Liberians, only increased the resolve of that military government to consolidate its hold on political power. Doe sought to do this by recruiting more Krahn into the AFL, and through repression of members of the erstwhile government (Youboty: 59).

The first crack in the PRC occurred in March 1981 over allegations that the number-two man, Major General Syen and about twelve others mostly from the ruling Council, had plotted to overthrow the PRC Government. Syen and four other members of the Council were executed after a unanimous decision by the ruling Council. Another group of 13 low-ranking soldiers was also condemned to death in June 1981 for another alleged plot (Sawyerr: 295).

Under increasing public pressure and plagued by political defections and opposition, the government constituted a Draft Constitutional Commission in 1981. A draft Report on a new Constitution was submitted in March 1983 and a revised draft Constitution approved in October (ibid: 295-377). Doe's next move was to consolidate his hold on political power by transferring General Quiwonkpa from his position as the Army Commander to the post of Secretary-General of the PRC. Quiwonkpa declined the appointment and left Monrovia (Ellis: 177). Following the October 1985 elections in which Doe was declared elected as President, Quiwonkpa returned in November to stage a coup, which failed after an initial success. Quiwonkpa lost his life in the process. However, the defeat of the Quiwonkpa invasion was not complete because Major Duopu, Lieutenant Prince Johnson, Police Major Yormie, and others, "who fought and ran away, lived to fight another day" on 24 December 1989 from far-away Butuo in Nimba County. Sensing further repression as a result of the abortive coup by one of their tribesmen, Liberia Gios fled to Cote d'Ivoire, which became a fertile recruitment base for a new invasion of Liberia that led eventually to the collapse of the Liberian state (ibid: 192).

Civilian Rule under Doe

One programme which if faithfully executed could have averted the Liberian crisis was the transition programme of 1986. The programme was launched on the first anniversary of the coup, ostensibly to demonstrate the PRC's commitment to an early return to civilian rule. The transition turned out to be nothing more than a strategy by which Doe would perpetuate himself in power in the guise of a civilian president. It is in this context that the number of contradictions that characterised the events between the setting up of the constitutional commission on 12 April, 1981 to the installation of Doe in January 1986 must be understood. A few of such contradictions are cited below:

- First, a member of the 25-member Constitutional Commission which was under Amos Sawyerr's chairmanship, Dr. Patrick Seyon, was arrested and imprisoned for alleged involvement in a coup plot before the Commission could begin its work. Sawyer's political party was later denied registration and himself banned from politics.
- Second, another body, the Constitutional Advisory Assembly (CAA), was set up to review the draft constitution of the Sawyer Commission. The CAA rather removed all provisions meant to ensure greater accountability from public officials, and altered the draft to suit the ambitions of Doe. The CAA Chairman, Edward Kesselly, was not only rewarded with a seat on the Interim National Assembly (INA). His Unity Party (UP) became the next to be registered after Doe's own National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL).
- Third, while Doe's NDPL was registered immediately after the ban on political parties was lifted in July 1984, the only other party which had been able to clear the cumbersome registration hurdle one year later when the election campaigns began, was Kesselly's UP. Another fringe party that later scaled through was the Liberian Unification Party (LUP) of Gabriel Kpolleh. Doe allegedly donated

\$150,000 as registration fee to LUP's presidential candidate. The Liberian Action Party (LAP) made it just before the election day; but two other parties which were very popular – Sawyerr's LPP and Matthew's United People's Party (UPP) were denied registration.

- Fourth, President Doe added two years to his previously announced age in order to meet the minimum age of 35 years for presidential candidates.

Despite all the policies of intimidation, manipulation and exclusion, President Doe had to disband the Special Electoral Commission (SEC) when its Chairman admitted that there had been extensive election irregularities. He later handpicked a fifty-member committee to count the votes before he would be declared winner by 50.9% in the October 15, 1985 elections. His party also won 22 out of the 26 seats in the Senate and 51 of the House seats. The general impression after the election, however, was that it was Jackson Doe, the candidate for the Liberian Action Party (LAP), who was the real winner. Eventually Samuel Doe was sworn in as the first president of the Second Republic of Liberia in January 1986.

The Quiwonkpa Coup-Attempt

During the confusion that followed the October elections, Thomas Quiwonkpa, the self-exiled former Commanding Officer of the AFL returned to Liberia and on 12 November 1985 attempted to seize power from the Doe government. The coup was eventually foiled but with very bloody consequences.

A brief review of the relationship between the two former colleagues will help illuminate the issues involved in the coup attempt and its linkage with the Liberian crisis. Initially Doe and Quiwonkpa were among the core group that made the 1980 coup. When Weh Syen was executed in 1981 the two became the leading members of the PRC. Both of them hailed from the eastern part of Liberia. Doe hailed from Grand Gedeh in the South-East and Quiwonkpa from Nimba in the North-East which share a common border with

each other. Like other PRC members, both had limited education and had been hardened by the conditions of urban poverty. Beyond these similarities were differences which became the source of conflict.

When the PRC came to power, Quiwonkpa became the Commanding General of the military while Doe assumed the more political role of Chairman of the PRC and head of state. Initially, those two roles did not appear conflictual, but eventually they did. Doe adopted a presidential lifestyle which surpassed that of all his predecessors, while Quiwonkpa maintained a modest lifestyle, continued to live in the barracks, and became a symbol of integrity in a government which was increasingly becoming corrupt. Quiwonkpa, was in a better position to court the loyalty of the military because of his position as head of the AFL and his modest lifestyle compared to Doe who seemed cut off from the military. It was Doe's fear of what Quiwonkpa could do with a loyal Army that forced him to transfer him to the post of Secretary-General of the PRC in 1983. Quiwonkpa's rejection of the new appointment marked the beginning of the hostility between the two.

After the coup, the two men needed political advisers (Ellis: 177). Doe's search found his fellow Krahn, George Boley who possessed a doctorate degree in education from the USA. Dr Boley was appointed Minister for Presidential Affairs. Quiwonkpa on the other hand, appointed the little known Americo-Liberian, Charles Taylor, an economics graduate and relative of Quiwonkpa by marriage. The appointment of Taylor as director of the obscure but powerful General Services Agency (GSA) would prove fateful. (ibid: 180). It would seem that the conflict between Doe and Taylor over procurement in 1983 became part of Doe's justification for giving Quiwonkpa a bad name.

Furthermore, Doe and Quiwonkpa tried to build constituencies in the army with each of them relying on soldiers from his ethnic group – the Krahn for Doe and the Gio and Mano for Quiwonkpa. The removal of Quiwonkpa from the military, therefore, was perceived as part of Doe's plan to put his own people in top military positions, and rid the military of the non-Krahn. The rivalry between the two men was therefore

translated into rivalry between their respective ethnic constituencies in the army. This, as later events proved, would be extended to Liberian society at large in the form of ethnic factions in the civil war.

The two men also differed in their attitude towards a return to civilian rule. Quiwonkpa was insistent that they should keep to their promise of a quick return to the barracks, while Doe had other plans – namely, to manoeuvre to stay in power. By 1983 when Quiwonkpa fled Liberia, what began as differences in personality and lifestyle had degenerated into conflict which would in the end swallow not only the two players and their respective ethnic groups, but Liberia as a whole.

The return of Quiwonkpa in 1985 and the abortive coup was not a mere personal vendetta by which he had wanted to punish Doe by taking advantage of the festering discontent in the wider society following the rigged elections. But its supporters saw it as an attempt of patriotic forces to rid Liberia of a dictator. The events that followed the failed coup were crucial for understanding the outbreak of the civil war.

Instead of taking the failed coup as a warning of the deepening disaffection with his regime, Doe rather saw it as a god-sent opportunity to clamp down on his political opponents. Several opposition politicians were detained while others lost their lives during demonstrations against Doe's government. Doe purged the AFL of the Gio and Manos, and mounted reprisals on Nimba County, looting and killing defenceless citizens as a collective punishment for the actions of Quiwonkpa (Ellis: 175). About three thousand people lost their lives through assassinations and killings purported to be carried by the Doe government. Many Gios and Manos (including some ex-soldiers) were forced to flee from Nimba County to Cote d'Ivoire from where they would return in 1989 to seek revenge. (ibid)

Furthermore, Doe officially recognised the Madingo as bona-fide Liberians (Brehun: 31). The Madingo are a group of Moslem immigrant traders originally from Guinea, but scattered throughout Liberia. In spite of their long stay, Liberians had generally perceived them as foreigners. Doe's action, therefore, was an affront to most indigenous Liberians. Also the bulk of Madingo were in Nimba County close to the

Guinean border. By according them citizenship, Doe could use the Madingo as a political force in Nimba County. He appointed the Madingo's to official positions in the county (and at the national level) and encouraged them to purchase vast lands in the area. He also used them as commanders in the Krahn-dominated army to hunt down the Gio and the Mano after Quiwonkpa's abortive coup (Ellis: 179). Doe's mobilisation of the Krahn, as well as the Madingo against his perceived opponents had serious repercussions on the civil war that erupted later.

Doe's Autocracy

"By autocracy we mean a person with unlimited power or authority." After Doe had been installed civilian president in January 1986, he continued to take decisions and actions that further antagonised his opponents and jeopardised his rule. Three examples of his conduct will underscore this point. At his inauguration he offered an olive branch to his political opponents while some of them, including legislators-elect, languished in detention for their alleged involvement in the Quiwonkpa abortive coup. In May 1986 he attended a historic meeting with leaders of the opposition at the invitation of the chairman of the Liberian Council of Churches (LCC), Archbishop Daniel Francis. In an unprecedented move, Doe held hands and sang with his opponents as a sign of reconciliation. But immediately after that he arrested two journalists for downplaying the significance of the "holding-of-hands diplomacy," and banned press coverage of the activities of the opposition. Finally, in 1988 Doe got the constitution amended to give him an unlimited term of office, ironically, on the grounds that the limitation of the presidential tenure to two terms "restricts the rights of the people to choose their leader.

Towards the Civil War

By the time of his inauguration as President, Liberia was almost bankrupt. The IMF had blacklisted Liberia for non-payment of debts; and the USA, embarrassed by the aftermath of the 1985 elections, was threatening to withhold aid if Doe did not improve his human rights record. On 24 December 1989, the

National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) under Charles Taylor took advantage of this economic crisis and the deteriorating political situation to launch an attack from the small town of Butuo in Nimba County. His aim was to overthrow the government of Doe, and complete the mission Quiwonkpa launched in 1985. Taylor declared his intension to rid Liberia of the despotism of the Doe regime in 90 days (Author's Notes). Taylor is alleged to have promised to restore full constitutional democracy through free and fair elections; rebuild the economy based on free enterprise; and, to unify all Liberians irrespective of class, social status, ethnic origin, and religious or political affiliation (Author's Notes).

The difficulty in analysing the causes of internal wars, according to David (1997: 554) is that: "At times an internal war is the result of individual calculation, at other times group interests...some internal wars are rational and purposeful, while others are emotional and nihilistic." It could also be a combination of all these and many more factors. What then were the main causative factors of Liberia's civil war? In the following section we argue that the ethnic factor is the principal cause of the civil war. Other factors like bad governance, the revenge factor, and Liberia's relations with neighbouring countries become important in relation to the ethnic factor.

The Ethnic Factor

For most of Liberia's history, ethnicity along the settler-indigene dichotomy underpinned social, economic and political relations in Liberia. This is why the 1980 coup was viewed as an attack on the power and privileges monopolised by the Americo-Liberian elite. Initially, Doe's regime was, to a large extent, based on an alliance between some of the most marginalised ethnic groups in Liberia – the Mano, the Gio and the Krahn (Sawyer: 11). However, it soon became clear that he was using his position to project his Krahn ethnic group at the expense of all others. According to Amon and Carl (1996: 11), "At the time of the coup, very few Krahn were equipped to serve in senior government positions. Doe adopted the policy of appointing Krahn men and women to top jobs in the bureaucracy, public services, and to the officer corps of the army and the security services to the extent that as late as 1995, at least eight out of eleven top positions

in the AFL still remained Krahn.” And according to Sawyer (1997): “ethnicity rather than qualification became the basis for recruitment into and promotion within the AFL. There was a deliberate policy to rid the ruling PRC and the AFL of non-Krahn.” In pursuit of his goal of promoting Krahn hegemony, Doe used the Krahn dominated military to stage reprisal attacks on other ethnic groups, especially the Gio and the Mano of the Nimba County. It was the purge in the army and the reprisals against other ethnic groups that forced ex-soldiers of the AFL to flee to Cote d’Ivoire where they became ready material for recruitment and training in Libya and Burkina Faso to form the nucleus of Taylor’s invading force (ibid). The AFL targeted the Gio and Mano as the NPFL attacked the Krahn and Mandingo. Clearly Doe’s regime had intensified hatred and rivalry among ethnic groups in the hinterland rather than unify them to throw off the hegemony of the Americo-Liberians.

Bad Governance

According to Vogt (1992), “For almost a century and a half, the Americo-Liberians deluded themselves that Liberia was an outpost of Western civilization, and was an oasis of tranquillity in a continent awash with political crises and civil wars.” Contrary to this, the indigenous people of Liberia felt that they were dominated by the minority Americo-Liberians politically, economically, socially, and in other spheres life.

Here lies the seed of the Liberian conflict which had been sown, watered and nurtured for almost one and half centuries. But this conflict seed was brought to fruition by the failure of the Doe regime to address fundamental problems such as social and economic inequality, human rights issues and a decaying economy. After the 1985 elections the political process was increasingly ethnicized and militarized, while the integrity and professionalism of the officer corps of the AFL were destroyed. By 1989, Liberia was a country waiting to explode from the accumulation of social, economic and political grievances arising from bad governance. While in a sense this was Doe’s personal tragedy, it became much more the tragedy of the whole of Liberia and a metaphor for Africa’s leadership crisis in the 1990s.

The Revenge Factor

The revenge factor arose from the role of Charles Taylor, the leader of the NPFL, in the Liberian crisis. As noted earlier, Taylor, an Americo-Liberian from Arthington, twenty miles from Monrovia had his university education in Economics in the USA in the 1970s. While in the USA he was in the forefront of the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA), an organisation that vigorously agitated against the Tolbert Administration. Taylor returned to Liberia just before the Doe coup in 1980.

On the recommendation of Quiwonkpa (then the number three man in the Doe government), Taylor was appointed Director of the General Services Agency (GSA). He was able to secure for the GSA the sole right to furnish all government ministries and agencies. This meant the centralisation of government procurement in Taylor's hands which allowed him "to take commissions from each contract in such a manner as to amass a fortune within a very short time" (Ellis: 180). By 1983 Taylor had fallen out with Samuel Doe, and escaped into exile before he could be tried for allegedly embezzling \$900,000 (ibid). It was during this same period that his mentor, Quiwonkpa was being haunted out of the PRC and eventually out of Liberia. Taylor was pursued in exile and arrested in Boston, USA. However before he could be extradited to Liberia for allegedly embezzling, he escaped from prison and returned to West Africa (ibid). During this period he was able to establish contact with other exiled opponents of the Doe regime and together sought international backing for an armed resistance movement which eventually led to the December 1989 incursion into Liberia with the aim of overthrowing Doe's regime. He also promised to restore full constitutional democracy through free and fair elections; rebuild the economy based on free enterprise; and, to unify all Liberians irrespective of class, social status, ethnic origin, religion or political affiliation (Asante: 30). However, as argued by Vivian Lowery Derryck (1993:71): "When Taylor invaded Liberia he had no ideological difference with Samuel Doe. He never crusaded to make Liberia a better managed, more secure and more socially just and equitable nation state. On the contrary, he was merely inspired by personal revenge."

The urge for revenge was both personal and on behalf of his mentor Quiwonkpa who had been killed in the 1985 coup attempt. The aim of avenging Quiwonkpa's death dovetails into the ethnic factor considering the fact that the 1985 abortive coup was followed by wanton reprisal attacks on the other ethnic groups especially Gio and Mano. The fact that Taylor did not stop fighting after the demise of Doe does not diminish the significance of this factor which is also not difficult to explain. First, Doe did not die at the hands of the NPFL as Taylor had wished. Second and more significantly, by the time of Doe's death, Taylor's objective, given his successes in the war had shifted from personal vendetta to personal aggrandisement. He was then searching for both power and wealth. Third, there was also an element of fear of reprisals - from the Liberian authorities, the NPFL fighters whom Taylor could not effectively control, and the foreign elements in his group to whom he had promised assistance for similar rebellions on assumption of power (Richards, 1993).

Liberia's Relations with Neighbouring Countries

Before his death, the Doe regime had antagonized some of Liberia's immediate neighbours. President Houphouet-Boigny of Cote d'Ivoire and many senior Ivorian government officials were friends of Tolbert and his cabinet colleagues who were executed during and after the coup. A.B. Tolbert, the son-in-law of the Ivorian President, was also killed in spite of pleas from Houphouet-Boigny and an earlier promise by Doe to spare his life (ibid). Houphouet-Boigny never forgot this humiliation. There was also the burden of refugees from Nimba County who had moved to Cote d'Ivoire after Quiwonkpa's abortive coup in November, 1985 which was followed by reprisals against non-Krahn ethnic groups in Nimba County. President Blaise Campaore of Burkina Faso was also related to the Ivorian president by marriage (Shaw and Okolo: 225). For Houphouet-Boigny and Blaise Campaore, therefore, Taylor's invasion of Liberia was an opportunity to avenge Doe's disrespect towards them almost a decade earlier. This explains the support Taylor received from the Ivorian and Burkinabe authorities. Houphouet-Boigny offered his country as sanctuary and arms

conduit for the NPFL while Campaore offered Taylor military bases, training facilities and commandoes (ibid).

Liberia's relation with Sierra Leone its immediate neighbour to the west was also never cordial throughout his decade-long rule. In 1980 Sierra Leone had hosted the OAU (AU) Summit. Doe was not admitted to the summit for killing the OAU's current chairman, Tolbert. President Siaka Stevens also seemed never to have come to terms with the presence of Doe at the helm of affairs in Liberia. He had set a bad example which he feared could be replicated in his own country (ibid). Additionally, Doe's own actions also did not encourage cordial relations with Sierra Leone. Early in 1983 Doe cut all sea and air links with Sierra Leone and moved troops to their common land border, because of an unfavourable publication in a private Freetown newspaper. Doe extended the conflict by claiming that parts of the Shebro and Solomon Islands in Sierra Leone had belonged to Liberia since 1850. Arguably it was in retaliation for such actions that in 1985 the Siaka Stevens government made training facilities available to Quiwonkpa and his Patriotic Forces. This policy of assisting dissidents against Doe's regime was continued by Joseph Momoh, Siaka Stevens' successor. In short, the Doe regime had created a ring of hostile neighbours around Liberia who willingly facilitated Charles Taylor's invasion.

The Post Cold War Factor

The tenure of the Doe regime (1980-90) coincided with the Reagan years when global and regional issues (for example, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Libya's forays into Chad) had re-ignited the Cold War (Kotia, 2005). US-Liberia relations during this period was viewed with Cold War lenses which explains why the Reagan government played the doleful father, pumping a large amount of aid to Liberia in spite of Doe's poor human rights record. Throughout the Reagan years Liberia became the largest recipient of US

aid in Africa, a considerable proportion of which was military aid.⁹ It was such generous US financial and military support that shored up the Doe regime.

As later development underscored, Liberia lacked any strategic significance for US foreign policy beyond its being a tool in the Soviet Union-United States cold war competition for influence in Africa. By 1989, the Cold War was edging to a close and the urge for the US to use Liberia to contain the spread of communism in Africa had evaporated. Henceforth the US government would cut back on its aid to Liberia, citing poor human rights record, which had not featured in earlier foreign policy considerations toward Liberia. The reduction in financial aid limited Doe's ability to oil his patronage system; while a reduction in military aid made the regime more vulnerable to armed insurrection. Hence the Doe regime could not contain attacks from even the smallest band of rebels.

One factor which cut across all these themes was Doe himself who was driven by ethnic considerations. He was the product of the indigene alienation; his decade of rule saw the worst kind of leadership, characterised by oppression and corruption. His appetite for power and wealth pitched him against Quiwonkpa and Taylor who were united to remove him from power. His regime promoted ethnic rivalry and conflict that alienated others, and created hostile relations with his immediate neighbours. It was these factors which fuelled the flames of Liberia's tragedy in which he lost his life.

The Dynamics of the Liberian Civil War

Apart from tribalism which changed the structure and duration of the civil war, there were other factors. Undoubtedly the Liberian war was the result of conflicting demands for and on political power. The war represented the collapse of all peaceful democratic measures aimed at resolving the conflict. A certain

⁹ By 1986 the Doe government had received more US aid than all his predecessors combined. West Africa of 10 February 1986.

dynamic of political ambition, therefore, was shown by the leaders of the factions, who sought control of territory in order to exploit its natural resources for their individual war efforts. What mattered in the war was therefore access to economic resources to support for the war effort and the control of territory to bestow legitimacy. These factors encouraged the emergence of warlords who sought primarily to gain strategic control over territory that would facilitate access to the rich mineral and other resources of Liberia. The warlords who stood clear at the beginning of the Liberian war were: Samuel Doe using the Armed Forces Liberia as his combatants; Charles Taylor leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia and Prince Johnson leader of the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia. In the following sections the motives, tactics and operations of the warring factions are discussed.

The Armed Forces of Liberia

The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) was established in 1908 as the only military force recognised under the laws of Liberia. The mission of the AFL has traditionally been to secure the country's borders, safeguard national security, and protect the population from external threat or aggression. From the strength of about 3,000 in 1970, the AFL grew steadily to a force of about 4,000 in 1981 and to about 6,000 in 1990 at the time of Doe's coup (Harold, 1984:76). During the early stages of the Liberia war, Doe as the Commander-in Chief of the Armed Forces of Liberia took personal command of the AFL and directed its operations from the Executive Mansion. The AFL lost its neutrality during the early stages of the war partly because it became involved in the politics of the war and directed its attacks against other factions in the civil war instead of defending the nation as a whole and allowing politicians to resolve the conflict. The AFL's partisan posture in the civil war turned it into the army of the Krahn who dominated it. Doe's strategy was to use the AFL to defeat his opponents in the conflict, and thus refused peace initiatives by various groups, including those from the international community. After the death of Doe in 1990, the AFL remained a tribal army made of Krahn soldiers. Its command structures broke down, and it became a Krahn controlled fighting force to redeem the ideals of Doe and retain power for the Krahn ethnic group. It continued to fight

as a partisan force in the civil war until peace was restored. This is why the AFL was disbanded and a new Armed Force created for Liberia as part of the comprehensive UN peace process (ibid).

The National Patriotic Front of Liberia

Charles Taylor, a former Director of the General Services Agency (GSA), formed the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). The estimated 15,000 strong force was led by 150 Special Forces Commandos trained in Libya and Burkina Faso in the late 1980s. Gio and Mano youths who had fled the repression of the PRC following the abortive coup of 1985 swelled the ranks of the NPFL. It was reported to have included some hardened criminals and ex-convicts released from Ivorian prisons. The intelligence cell of the NPFL was known as the G2 and was located in Boplay, Nimba County. It later controlled the NPFL radio station. The main foreign support came from the governments of Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire and Libya (Youboty: 65).

Taylor had a security arrangement that was neither conventional nor unconventional for his NPFL forces. The generals answered to him personally. Each had sweeping powers over those he commanded but there was no attempt at an integrated structure. Instead power was deliberately divided so that no one unit had the means to launch a coup against Charles Taylor - the self-proclaimed ruler of Greater Liberia in the early 1990s, and the formally elected, internationally recognized president from 1997 to 2003. Credible estimates of the numbers in pro-Taylor units ranged from 7,000 to 11,000. There is a further figure of between 20,000 and 30,000 in militia units loosely aligned to the NPFL (Author's Notes).

The majority of the NPFL combatants were 10 and 30 years and illiterate. The rank and file of its illiterate combatants lacked any sense of civic and national consciousness and responsibility. Living on the edge of life, many were wicked beyond description, normally driven by ethnic vindictiveness, drugs and youthful adventurism to commit heinous war crimes and crimes against humanity. Young ladies were found in the early days of the conflict, as bodyguards (ibid). As part of the NPFL's strategy, young ladies were used to

seduce generals, commanders and other influential men who were later killed or held hostage for bargaining purposes. Some of the young ladies were used to collect intelligence on the positions and activities of their opponents and of ECOMOG Forces (ibid). The NPFL combatants generally wore a mixture of military fatigues and camouflage, and civilian clothes. This was apparently due to poor organisation and lack of any attention to good administration. There was no clear organisation or arrangement for troop maintenance. This forced the rank and file to rob suburbs and villages and loot farms for food.

The thick forests, rubber and palm plantations, as well as mining fields in the hills and valleys provided safe areas for camps used by NPFL combatants. The combatants used rubber-tapping, palm fruit harvesting and mining activities as a cover for training and concealment of their arms, ammunition and loot (ibid). They also derived considerable revenue from these commercial operations. To control their territory, the NPFL rebels either expelled villagers who took cover in the neighbouring forest, after which they occupied the villages. Or they hid in the neighbouring forest themselves and exacted food, money and medical supplies from the villagers (ibid). Either way, they looted at will and created military kingdoms for the survival of generals. The NPFL established a network of roadblocks as checkpoints which they used to extort moneys from traders and travellers. The checkpoints were also used by the NPFL combatants to segregate people into tribes so that those from opposing factions could be eliminated. By such actions the NPFL gained notoriety and gross abuser of human rights in the Liberian conflict.

The Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia

Lieutenant Prince Johnson, led the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL) to a split off from the NPFL in April 1990 after Taylor had summarily executed a number of Johnson's/Taylor's fighters following a crushing defeat by the AFL at Ganta. Prince Johnson, a Gio, was a military veteran of the AFL who was also involved in the failed coup attempt by Quiwonkpa in 1985. After the invasion of Nimba County and the lightning race to Monrovia, he protested that Taylor was bent on seeking power and accused him of being backed by Libya. Even though Prince Johnson claimed to command several thousand of

troops, it is estimated that the INPFL comprised just about 1,000 troops, however it was better organized and displayed more operational efficiency in the capture of limited but vital objectives such as the Freeport, as well as the capture and murder of President Doe. It was also adept in the use of deception to facilitate its operational places and undermine the plans of the NPFL and the AFL. Like the NPFL, its command and control system was weak could therefore control its forces on the ground. It was eventually disbanded in about September 1994 (Youboty: 89).

The INPFL also established a network of roadblocks and checkpoints which they used to extort moneys from traders and travellers. These checkpoints were also used by the INPFL combatants to segregate people into tribes so that those from NPFL or the AFL faction were eliminated (ibid). Like the NPFL, the INPFL also used the thick forests, rubber and palm plantations, as well as mining fields in the hills and valleys of Liberia as safe areas for camps. Furthermore, the combatants used rubber-tapping, palm fruit harvesting and mining activities as cover for training and concealment of their arms and ammunition (Author's Notes). They derived considerable moneys in return for these commercial activities.

On the whole the factions, including the AFL, were formed on ethnic lines. All of them engaged in gross human rights abuses because the command and control structures of all of them were ineffective. Consequently the rank and file were able to commit widespread atrocities. The conflict in Liberia also shows that there was a tendency for factions to multiply the longer the conflict became protracted. This is in sharp contrast with the legacy of the Liberian conflict in Sierra Leone where the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) remained the major protagonists in the conflict against the forces of the Government and the Kamajor.

The Search for Peace in Liberia

Following the intensification of the war and the sharp deterioration in the humanitarian situation, the Liberian Inter-Faith Mediation Committee (IFMC) initiated the first mediation effort on the civil war in

early August 1990 (Youboty: 277). The IFMC comprised the Liberian Council of Churches, which grouped Catholics and Protestants, and the National Muslim Council. The IFMC proposals included a ceasefire, disarmament of the warring factions, establishment of an interim government, and elections that would return the country to democratic rule. Charles Taylor refused to accept the IFMC's proposals. Instead, he vowed to continue fighting until Doe was overthrown (ibid).

The talks that the IFMC initiated obviously failed partly because they were wrongly timed. The INPFL and the NPFL had scored massive military successes which encouraged them to adopt an uncompromising position (Author's Notes). Doe on the other hand was in a weak position because of the military successes of the NPFL and the INPFL. He could not counter the military successes of his adversaries. This eventually led to his capture and murder by INPFL combatants. Shortly after Doe was killed, Taylor went ahead to unilaterally announced the formation of an Interim Government, and a 24-member National Assembly over which he announced himself as the leader (Youboty: 304). The death of Doe left the AFL without a creditable leader and total disarray (Author's Notes). Taylor's actions led to the emergence of new warring factions whose aim was to mobilise Liberians to free their country from the feuding warlords. The new factions comprised the United Liberation Movement for Democracy, the Liberia Peace Council and the Lofa Defence Force. The activities of the first group and the existing warring factions led to a peace agreement in which Liberia held its first elections since the outbreak of the war in 1990. Taylor was elected and sworn-in as President of Liberia. Taylor's presidency was however characterised by agitations against his bad style of governance. This led to the emergence of another group of warring factions whose aim was the overthrow Taylor. This last group of warlords were; the Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia. These groups invaded Liberia from Guinea and Cote I'Voire, and made Liberia ungovernable. Their action reignited the war leading to the deployment of ECOWAS forces, and eventually UN peacekeeping forces to supervise a ceasefire. Charles Taylor eventually went into exile in Nigeria paving the way for another democratic election. The activities of the warring factions are discussed in the following sections.

United Liberation Movement for Democracy

The United Liberation Movement (ULIMO) was formed in Conakry, Guinea, on 29 May 1991 as a non-tribal and non-sectarian movement to mobilize Liberians to free the country from Charles Taylor. Under the chairmanship of Raleigh Seekie, it consisted of Albert Karpheh's Liberia United Defence Force, and Alhaji Kromah's Movement for the Redemption of Liberia Muslims (MRM) and other personalities. Despite its declaration of being non-tribal and non-sectarian, the fact that it was formed in Guinea and included a large number Mandingo as well as Muslims, made the movement ethnic. By October 1991, its strength was estimated at about 850. Considering its successes against the NPFL in the subsequent years and months, it possibly grew to several thousand though it remained a smaller force than the NPFL. Because of internal leadership squabbles that ended in the killing of Field Commander Karpheh in June 1992, it eventually split along ethnic lines into two factions after serious in-fighting in March 1994. ULIMO-J came under Roosevelt Johnson, a Krahn, and ULIMO-K under Alhaji Kromah, the Mandingo Muslim who advocated a jihad. (Youboty: 91).

The Liberian Peace Council and the Lofa Defence Force

The Liberian Peace Council (LPC) emerged in late 1993 from the problems of implementing the Cotonou II Accord of July of that year. Its leader was George Boley, who was a founding member of ULIMO. The rank and file combatants of LPC were young Krahn, mostly former AFL veterans, who were pushed into exile by the persecution of ethnic Gio and Mano by the NPFL. At about the same time, the Lofa Defence Force (LDF) emerged under Francois Massaquoi (Youboty: 97).

George Boley's break from ULIMO may have been due to personal differences with the leadership of ULIMO, which soon caused that Movement to split into two ethnic factions. In principle too, it is possible that Boley was himself ambitious for a slice of political power that was up for grabs. This is quite plausible judging from the fact that being a Krahn he could have gone with Roosevelt Johnson in ULIMO-J. The fact

that this did not happen either points to differences with Roosevelt Johnson as well, or to his own political ambition, or yet still to a Krahn strategy to multiply Krahn-controlled factions in order to present a more formidable front on the fractured Liberian political landscape. Furthermore, the acquisition and control of territory afforded access to economic and political power, which the warlords needed so badly in order to enrich themselves and prosecute the war. (ibid: 98).

Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy

In the year 2000, Liberian refugees in Freetown, Sierra Leone formed the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). The group had elements operating in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire. The leader of LURD was Sekou Conneh, an embattled rebel leader who is said to have harboured presidential ambitions. LURD's stated mission was to force Charles Taylor from power as the President and to establish a sustainable democracy in Liberia. LURD drew many of its recruits from rebel groups who fought Taylor's forces during the bloody civil war in the 1990s. The group initially operated largely from Guinea, and reportedly received the bulk of its funding from the Guinean government. The rebel group's goal was the repatriation of Liberian refugees, the resettling of internally displaced persons in Liberia and the professionalization of Liberia's military and security forces. (Author's Notes). LURD was determined to have Taylor removed from power for bad governance practice.

Despite its military successes, LURD had a major political handicap. Like other Liberian factions, it was a mixture of volatile elements. Also like other factions, it was largely descended from a militia formed in the early 1990s. In this case it was a wing of the defunct United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia, ULIMO-K that had won an appalling reputation in parts of western Liberia, where it was responsible for wanton looting probably worse than any other warring faction, and committed some of the worst atrocities, particularly in upper Lofa County. If only for this reason, LURD was faced with the problem of erasing its history of deep distrust.

Liberians regarded LURD as a movement dominated by Mandingos, and indeed Sekou Conneh and many senior commanders were from that ethnic group, which was known to have its historic centre in Guinea. Mandingos are widely seen as foreigners, despite their long presence in the country. Largely for this reason, many Liberians discounted the possibility of a Mandingo president, and LURD nominees, particularly if Mandingo, could expect nothing more senior than a cabinet ministry. Realization that their movement's political limitations, some of LURD fighters challenged the peace process which, they calculated, offered them little.

In 2003, a split developed in LURD over disagreements regarding the group's objectives. Despite the internal crises, LURD enjoyed remarkable military successes from January 2003 onwards. They advanced from the Guinean border killing thousands, displacing tens of thousands and creating a humanitarian crisis. Hence, Amnesty International was compelled to condemn LURD for abusive practices that included killings, rape, torture, looting, kidnapping and the use of children as combatants. (Moore:31).

Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL)

In March 2003, dissatisfaction with Conneh's leadership of LURD led to the emergence of another rebel group called the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). The group quickly became a major player in the war, taking control of strategic areas in Liberia's south and east. It was composed of roughly a thousand anti-Taylor fighters, political asylum seekers and refugees based mainly in Cote d'Ivoire (Moore: 34). The group, about one-third the size of LURD, was reportedly linked to the government of Cote d'Ivoire. The mission statement of MODEL was that it would strive to protect the security of all citizens within the borders of Liberia, and respect and promote individual liberties. The second goal of MODEL was to prevent LURD leader Conneh and his Mandingo ethnic group from gaining power in Liberia. Many of the MODEL fighters came from the Krahn ethnic group. While others joined the rebel cause on their own accord, many Liberian refugees were conscripted into it (ibid).

MODEL's organizational structure was unclear but it was heavily dependent on the government of Côte d'Ivoire. Its unusually rapid movement into the southeast of Liberia was attributable largely to sponsorship from the Ivorian government led by Laurent Gbagbo. During all its attacks, MODEL was fully supplied by Ivorians with uniforms, weapons and money.¹⁰ Hence within a few months, it could push along the coast to take control of Grand Bassa County and Liberia's second-largest city, Buchanan, which was not only the base of the OTC timber company, once a major source of Taylor's income, but also a major port through which his weapons flowed and which held 800,000 tons of iron ore deposit worth about U.S. \$5.6 million (ICG Africa Report, 3 November 2003:11). MODEL's links with the Ivorian government was not easily severed. A military supply line existed from Guiglo, and MODEL retained a command post in Toulépleu, close to the Liberian border, where its commander, Paye Duoway ('General John Garang'), was based until he moved to Zwedru, in Grand Gedeh County.¹¹

Map 2.3: Map showing LURD and MODEL Control Areas as at July 2003

¹⁰ International Crisis Group (ICG) interview with international journalist, London and the UN Mission in Sierra Leone officials in Freetown, September, 2003. ICG Africa Report Number 71 dated 3 November, 2003.

¹¹ However, many Liberian MODEL fighters also speak French, as the core of MODEL is composed of anti-Taylor elements who fled to Côte d'Ivoire during Liberia's first civil war (1989-1996) and lived there as refugees, particularly in the west of the country.



Source: <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/Cartographic/unmil.html>, accessed 15 March 2009.

MODEL was much smaller and weaker than LURD, and international NGO workers reported that the group generally accorded them respect and allowed them to operate freely in territories held by their fighters. MODEL fighters however intimidated the population in areas they occupied. There were also reports of theft and rape by its fighters (ICG Africa Report Number 71).

Politically, MODEL was largely seen as a movement of henchmen of the former president, Samuel Doe, and was dominated by his ethnic group, the Krahn.¹² A number of MODEL fighters wore grey t-shirts made

¹² While the story remains incomplete, a power struggle unfolded within MODEL when Roosevelt Johnson arrived in Abidjan from his home in Nigeria on about 16 June 2003. Johnson's arrival was linked to events in Liberia, in particular the indictment of President Taylor, the increase in fighting in Monrovia, and the peace talks in Accra. Several MODEL fighters, including the chief of staff, Amos Chayee, reportedly visited Johnson in Abidjan to seek his help and advice in handling their military movement in Sinoe County along Liberia's Atlantic Coast. Amos Chayee was Chief of Staff of Roosevelt Johnson's ULIMO-J militia during the first Liberian civil war. The then acting coordinator of MODEL, Thomas Yaya Nimley, was reportedly furious about Johnson's appearance, especially after Johnson reportedly stated that he was the rightful

in Côte d'Ivoire with the inscription 'New Horizon, New Idea, New Direction.' Members of the New Horizons movement were created by Krahn living in the US. MODEL's command and control structure was unclear. Internal problems came to a head in June 2003, when the former leader of ULIMO-J, Roosevelt Johnson, appears to have made an attempt to challenge Thomas Nimley's leadership (Author's Notes).

The emergence of the new warring factions created more confusion in the civil war. This was because the original reasons for forming the factions were abandoned. The warring factions became tribal armies eager to capture territory from one another for strategic reasons. However they continued to dictate the momentum and direction of the civil war, and rendered any moves for a negotiated settlement almost impossible. That impasse called for external political and diplomatic initiative and intervention. As was the case during the first war, ECOWAS again saw it as its obligation under the ECOWAS Treaty to intervene. Taylor subsequently went into exile after the UN Special Court for Sierra Leone had issued a warrant for his arrest. The UN subsequently deployed troops to supervise a ceasefire in Liberia in 2003.

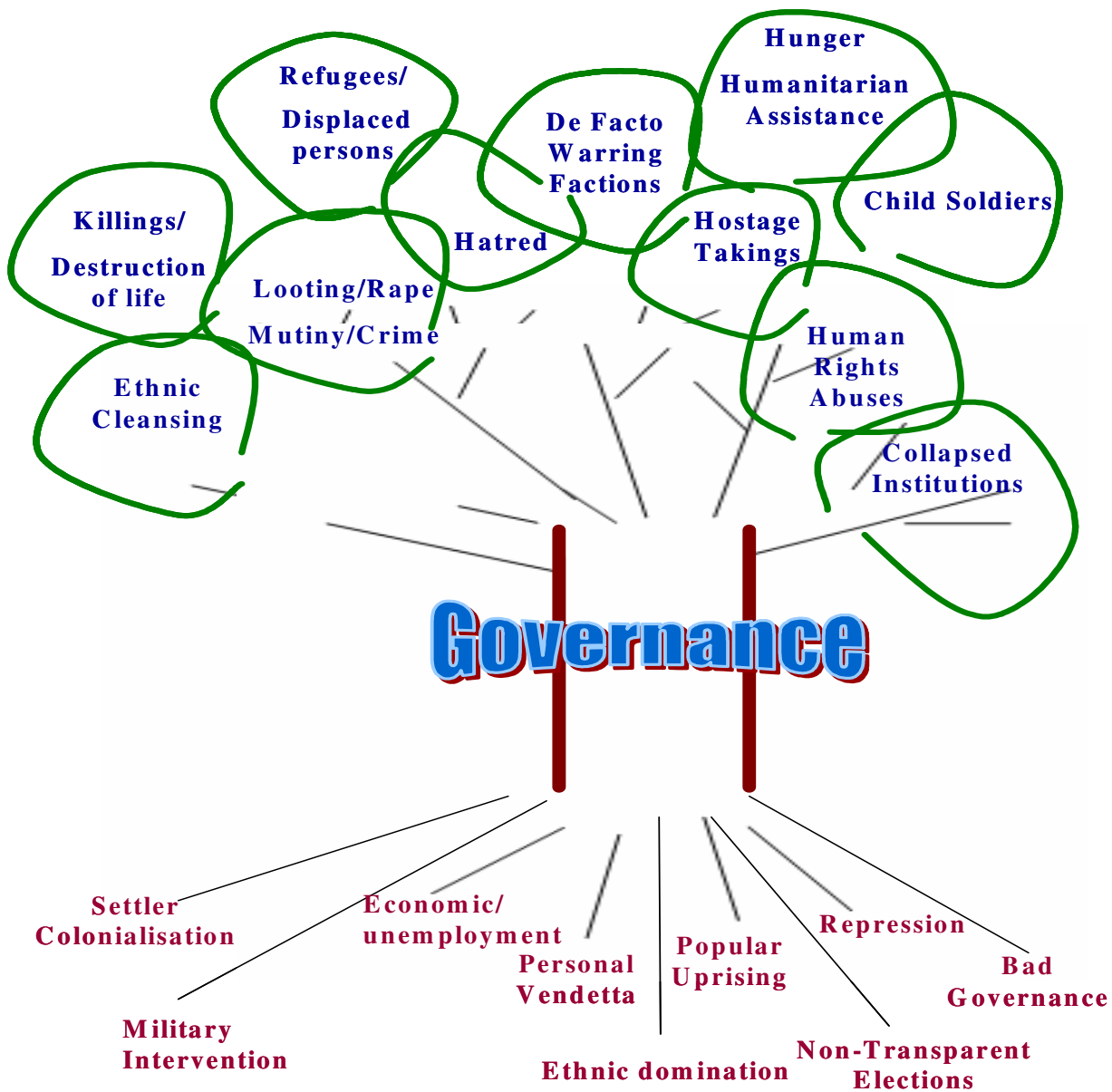
Conclusion

From the discussions in this paper, it has become clear that the seed of the decade long Liberian civil war was sowed by the Americo-Liberian oligarchy that monopolised political power and exploited the indigenous Liberians as if they were not citizens. This autocratic power relationship was modified by the military coup of NCOs who, refused to democratize power but rather imposed another minority group, his Krahn tribe, over the others. When the military regime turned the government into a Krahn politico-military machine, other leaders mobilized their respective ethnic groups to fight for control of the state. Ultimately the Liberian war degenerated into a predatory war – a war to control the nation's resources for private benefit.

leader of MODEL since many of its fighters were drawn from his ULIMO-J. Nimley, fearing that he might lose the leadership of MODEL, informed President Gbagbo of Johnson's presence in Abidjan, claiming that he was a threat to Ivorian security. Nimley also apparently threatened Johnson. Johnson was later flown to Accra by the Ivorian authorities, while Amos Chayee was imprisoned because of his alliance with Johnson, whose Nigerian bodyguard was reportedly shot dead.

In short, the ethnicization of Liberian politics resulted in the decade long civil war. What the warlords fought to achieve was not the restoration of the Liberian nation-state but to carve out an ethnized state that would be strategically positioned to ensure access to and exploitation of the natural resources of the territory for private benefit. The causes of the Liberian conflict are summarized in the Conflict Tree as shown at Figure 2.1. The root of the tree outlines the root causes of the conflict, the stem illustrates the core problem of the crisis (governance) and the branches of the tree outline the numerous effects of the conflict.

Figure 2.1: Conflict Tree summarizing the Liberian Conflict.



Source: Adopted from Training Manual, Developing Capacity for Conflict Analysis and Early Response.

The first positive attempt at mediation in the conflict was by the Liberia Inter-Faith Mediation Committee (IFMC). The IFMC failed in their mission because of entrenched positions taken by the government and the warring factions. The impasse called for external political and diplomatic initiative that took the form of a political and military intervention initiated by the ECOWAS as from August 1990 provided in the ECOWAS Treaty. The main concerns for the ECOWAS intervention was the potential threat to the safety of West Africa nationals resident in Liberia; the contagious effect of the conflict on the sub-region and the

grave humanitarian disaster that the war had created. The UN intervened after the outbreak of hostilities in 2003 leading to the deployment of a bigger force.

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