THE POLITICS OF CONFLICT AND INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CAUSES OF THE LIBERIAN CIVIL WAR

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Abstract
        The perennial status of peace and conflict dialogue in Africa has been very consistent. There is hardly any African States today that is not ridden with one form of internal conflict or the other. Some actions and inactions still have the possibility of generating more conflict in Africa. The possible missing link is that most African States (the leaders and the led) have not learnt the value of learning from history especially the causes and the effects of the Liberian Civil War on its economy, politics, social and citizenry. The Liberian Civil War, which was one of Africa's bloodiest, claimed the lives of more than 200,000 Liberians and further displaced a million others into refugee camps in neighboring countries. Thus, this paper takes a critical look at the incidents of the Liberian Civil War with the intention of critically reflecting on both the internal and the external causes of the war and the countless number of internally displaced people. The paper, dwelling on extensive secondary data, exposes some hidden trajectory to the historical Liberian Civil War with the intention of providing the rest of the African States enough "food for thought" and also provide a comprehensive understanding of the causes and the background of displacement in Liberia.

Keywords: Politics, Internal Displacement, Liberia and Civil War

Introduction
        Liberia, at first glance, is a prime candidate for the status of a "failed state." In an article published in April 1994 by Influential Atlantic Monthly periodical, journalist Robert Kaplan voiced fears in Washington and elsewhere that Liberia and its troubled neighbour, Sierra Leone, are part of a

growing "zone of anarchy" where armed young men fight because they have little else to do. Kaplan attributes the collapse of political order to demographic and environmental stress. Moreover, weak state administrations are unable to manage rising popular expectations and the competition for increasingly scarce resources. He argues that cultural traits and ethnic diversity undermine government efforts to manage these pressures (William, 1996).

As with any conflict, the causes and prolongation of Liberia's first civil war that led to mass displacement of its civilian population is complex and controversial. Sources differ on the relative influence of colonial, regional, and ethnic politics. Meanwhile, certain factors with a particular bearing on the nature of displacement merit further discussion.

External factors
Regional Political Involvement

Regional involvement in Liberia predates the seven-year civil war. However, alliances with other West African governments and support to the NPFL rebellion from within neighbouring countries gave the conflict immediate regional dimensions. The cross-border flow of refugees, along with fears of exported instability, heightened the involvement of neighbouring countries and made the displaced within and without the country an explosive political issue (Cohen & Deng, 1998: 112). The Liberian crisis had dominated the ECOWAS agenda, sidelining its main purpose of promoting economic cooperation across its membership.

The Ghana Dimension

The nature and character of Ghanaian patronage and later dissociation from Charles Taylor during his search for refuge and support should be situated in the context of: (i) the internal political circumstances in Ghana; (ii) the nature of Ghana's relations with Liberia; and (iii) Ghana's search for regional allies (Tijissen. 1998: 6). In December 1981, the democratically elected government of Ghana was overthrown by a radical army group calling itself the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) under the leadership of Jerry Rawlings. In immediate post-1981 coup statements, the new government stated its desire to chart a radical revolutionary course, both internally and externally. The first major action undertaken by the PNDC (which has an interest for the present work) was to re-establish diplomatic relations with Libya which had been suspended by the previous government because of official anxiety concerning 'Libya's international terrorist campaigns (January 1992). Initial responses from ECOWAS leaders were cautious but varied as a result of the violent nature of Rawlings' earlier four-month rule in June-October 1979 (Tijissen. 1998: 7-8).

During the early 1980's, Liberia had consistently accused the Ghanaian government of subversion. Liberia's initial reaction to Ghana's declaration of a 'Holy war' was the immediate recall of its Ambassador from Accra in protest against the resumption of diplomatic ties with Libya (W.A, 1982) Ghana-Liberia relations continued to deteriorate until Ghana's chargé d'affaires was eventually declared persona non grata in November 1983. This resulted in his eventual expulsion for 'activities incompatible with his diplomatic status' (November 1983). Liberia subsequently accused Ghana of backing an external invasion of the country in November 1985. It is in this context of Ghanaian-Liberian relations between 1982-1985, that Ghana's extension of patronage of Taylor's uprising should be situated. However, despite the facts surrounding these relations it is asserted that 'Ghana was one of the few supporters of the Doe coup in 1980. While it is probable that Rawlings was drawn to Doe because of their mutual alienation by other West African leaders, there is little doubt that their initial relationship benefited from the revolutionary ideas, which they both espoused. By the mid-1980's, however, a major ideological rift had occurred between both revolutionaries.

There is however a fundamental historical implausibility in this argument. Placing Ghana-Liberia relations in a historical context highlights the confusion surrounding the above point. Ghana's 'cautious optimism', to changes in Liberia was modified after the execution of TWP leaders, to reflect the general trend of hostility shown by regional states towards the PRC government. This resulted in endorsing both ECOWAS and the Organization of African Unity - OAU - criticism of the brutality of the take-over, and the initiation of ECOWAS' punitive measures embracing three sets of interrelated gestures. First, the Foreign Minister, G. Baccus Matthews was prevented from participating in the Extraordinary OAU Economic Summit in Lagos, Nigeria, in April 1980. Subsequently, the new Defence Minister was not invited to a meeting of ECOWAS Defence Ministers in May 1980.(Tijissen, 1998: 6). The height of collective regional abhorrence towards the new regime was reserved for the President. Samuel Doe was refused participation in ECOWAS' Heads of States and Government summit in Lome, Togo, in May 1980.

By the time Ghana's own revolution occurred on 31 December 1981, a conservative turn of events leading to major reorientations in foreign policy had occurred in Liberia. The Libyan People's Bureau was closed and the Soviet Union told to reduce its diplomatic staff. Liberia ultimately re-affirmed its traditional ties to the US. This led to an internal power struggle in the cabinet in which the radical faction of the PRC was purged. Liberia was subsequently selected by the U.S. as one of twelve international bastions against the spread of communism and was to receive support from a special security assistance programme.

Ghana's decision to support Charles Taylor, then, apart from the regime's stated democratic revolutionary credentials, can probably be inferred from the nature of relations between Ghana and Liberia. According to the Influential Weekly, West Africa, '... The present Ghana government has no love for ... Doe (W.A, 1990). During the 1980's, Doe perceived Ghana as unfriendly, frequently accusing Ghana of supporting 'dissidents' seeking to overthrow his regime'. It can be argued that, though the initial Liberian responses to Ghanaian changes were much more severe than the general regional response, they reflected widespread regional indignation with events in Ghana.

Byron Tarr and Prince Acquaah (Tijssen, 1989) asserted that, though Charles Taylor's initial feelers to the Ghanaian government were positively received, this altered over time, resulting in Taylor being incarcerated twice in Ghana. Diverse explanations have been offered. Though at this point, the essence of these imprisonments was lost on all major actors in this fledging struggle to lead the exiled opposition movement to resist the Second Republic, it is crucial for the later arguments and the subsequent escalations in the Liberian conflict that it comprehends the dynamics of this seemingly unimportant episode. The incidents are also particularly important in several contexts. They reflect: (i) the nature of regional politics and   alliances in addition to the initial introduction of the fledging Liberian opposition to Libya; and (ii) these incidents' influence on the character of ECOWAS' original response to the accelerating conflict.

With respect to Ghanaian rationales for breaking with Taylor, by 1987, Taylor had obviously become a political and security liability as a result of the increasingly attentive Ghanaian youth audience fascinated by the revolutionary charisma and romanticism of Charles Taylor's rhetoric. Situating such youthful political consciousness within the context of the internal political climate in Ghana in 1987, it can be argued that Taylor, in the eyes of the Ghanaian authorities, had become a political and security liability. According to a defected Ghanaian intelligence officer; 'there were a number of Ghanaian dissidents [willing to] fight alongside Taylor in Liberia. Rawlings was worried that if Taylor triumphed, Liberia would be used to launch armed attacks against Ghana (N.A, 1987).

There is the plausibility of yet a more substantive motivation for Ghana's change of strategy. Ghana's revolutionary rhetoric on the regional level and close alliance with Libya and Burkina Faso had led to consistent regional accusations against both Ghana and Burkina Faso for supporting regional destabilization efforts generally, and especially against Togo (W.A, 1987). Ghana's increasingly weak and isolated position in terms of regional criticism for harbouring dissidents and consistent condemnation had, by 1987, made her a regional pariah state. During an incident concerning

alleged Ghanaian complicity in an invasion of Togo, Nigeria, Togo's close regional ally during this period condemned Ghana as the 'scourge of international terrorism' (W.A, 1987).

The Burkinabe Factor

Report had it that in 1987 Taylor approached the Embassy of Burkina Faso in Accra and requested assistance to overthrow Doe ... Madam Mamouna Quattara, a client of Captain Blaise Compoare, received Taylor's written proposal (Tijssen, 1989: 8-9). Ghana chose to release Taylor into the custody of Blaise Compoare. Soon after these incidents, the Burkinabe Head of State, Thomas Sankara, was assassinated. Accordingly, 'Compoare, new leader of Burkina Faso, introduced Taylor to the Libyans'. Another perspective relates to Taylor's Accra sojourn and search for international backing. The late Thomas Sankara, leader of Burkina Faso ... secured Charles Taylor's release from Ghana. He was then deported and left for Burkina Faso where he stayed before going to Libya ((Tijssen, 1989: 9). The close relations between Ghana and Burkina Faso can be situated in the post-1982 period when Burkinabe infatuation with Ghana and Libya increased. In an increasingly unstable West African region in the early 1980's, it is believed that the conservative leaders of Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, and Togo were incensed by the Burkinabe Prime Minister's revolutionary rhetoric and close contacts with Ghana and Libya. Thus, through their French and Ivorien contacts, it was ensured that the Prime Minster was removed from power ((Tijssen, 1989: 8). A rapid change of fortune occurred when Sankarists took over power in August 1983. Thomas Sankara's government, characterized by pan-Africanist fervour and revolutionary rhetoric, alienated West African leaders who found Burkinabe and Ghanaian brands of radical pan-Africanism untimely. Most regional leaders believed that Ghana and Burkina Faso were instrumental in attempts to overthrow their governments. Other perspectives can explain the apparently hostile reaction of regional leaders to both Ghana and Burkina Faso.

Any analysis of the nature of international support for the NPFL should also consider the role of two other West African countries, apart from Burkina Faso and Ghana, in the initial organizing stages - Côte d'Ivoire and Libya. In addition, there was a motley group of individual West African nationals who came primarily from Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea and Sierra Leone. Understanding the rationales for Burkinabe patronage for the NPFL especially in the post-Sankara period is best understood through the prism of internal and regional politics. Apart from the earlier mentioned initial contact to the Libyans, the Burkinabes provided training facilities and troops estimated at 400 men, a position justified by Burkinabe leaders as

'moral duty' and 'moral support' extended to the NPFL (Tijssen, 1989: 9-10). A conceivable logic behind dispensing political and military patronage to the NPFL, could be NPFL complicity in the power struggles between Sankara and Compaore and an active NPFL role in the subsequent death of Sankara (Tijssen, 1998: 9) .

The Libyan and Ivorian Elements

        A critical analysis is also important for any appreciation of the dynamics of the unholy alliance comprising Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Libya for the NPFL insurgence. This has been characterized as 'a particularly strange alliance of forces' (Tijssen, 1998: 9) .There has been controversy concerning the entry of Libya into this typical West African crisis. The Libyan factor in the Liberian crisis has been interpreted by arguing that Blaise Campaore, who had close affiliation like his predecessor, Sankara, with the revolutionary government of Libya, influenced the Ghanaian authorities to release Taylor into his guardianship. This stands in conspicuous contradiction to the explanations presented by Prince Eric Acquaah (Tijssen, 1998: 9). Who claims that the late Thomas Sankara, leader of Burkina Faso, was instrumental in securing the release of Charles Taylor from jail in Ghana.

        The political foci of Ivorian motivation for supporting the NPFL are more varied and complex. The essence of such extensive patronage as encompassing personal, economic, ideological and military factors were critical to the Ivorien decision to provide sanctuary, weapons, conduit, finance and diplomatic support for the NPFL.

        One of the most critical factors for Ivorian extension of patronage to the NPFL could have been the Ivorian economic crisis resulting from the fall in commodity prices. By the early 1980's, a severe drop in commodity prices affecting especially cocoa and coffee created an urban crisis, which contributed to the growth of nationalist perceptions critical of Burkinabe migrants. The collapse of coffee prices was particularly critical for the Ivorian economy and national psyche. The resultant aftermath was a financial crisis in which growers did not earn enough to cover labour costs. This indirectly led to the rise of xenophobia against Burkinabés. The combination of these two issues: the contemporaneous fall in commodity prices and the increasing sense of xenophobia generated conditions of apprehension for Burkinabe men. In a desperate act of survival and realpolitik, both states chose to support the NPFL in the hope of diverting domestic attention from the critical internal crises faced by both governments.

Another crucial factor that is normally overlooked in the analysis of Ivorien support for the NPFL is closely related to what has been described as *'French appetite for African territory*' (Tijssen, 1998: 10). resulting from Paris' willingness to exercise military power to procure land in the previous century. French strategy for territorial possession resulted in the acquisition of parts of Maryland County in 1892, followed by more land around the Makona river in 1907 (Willi, 1973). Thus, when Liberian indigenes finally took over power in 1980, there were expectations for Liberia to pursue efforts at reclaiming territory lost in the previous century. The PRC's initial response was an understandable reluctance to pursue a narrow irredentist policy of reclaiming lost indigenous territory. This position was to change, however, as the internal situation in Liberia worsened. In a Liberia where the Second Republic faced increasing internal and international criticism over the failed re-civilization programme, added to the worsening economic and human rights conditions, there was a desire among policy makers to find an excuse to divert public attention and arouse renewed sympathy and support for the PRC by appealing to nationalist sentiments. Desperate to arouse nationalist backing for government's policies, the cabinet met to discuss 'modalities of militarily recapturing territories lost to France. The focus was on the Ivory Coast' (Posen, 1993).

Thus, to reduce a possible incidence of fighting a protracted border war at a time when Ivorien commodity prices had crashed, in the political and geo-strategic calculations of the Côte d'Ivoire government, backing an insurgency sympathetic to Ivorian aspirations to maintain their colonially inherited boundaries was found a much more prudent approach than dealing with the machinations of an increasingly erratic Liberian Second Republic.

Internal Causes
Long Years of Liberian-American domination of Liberia Politic
For 133 years after independence, the Republic of Liberia was a one-party state ruled by the Americo-Liberian dominated True Whig Party (TWP). The True Whig Party dominated all sectors of Liberia from independence until 1980. In the presidential election of May 1951, women and indigenous property owners voted for the first time, but the few thousand Americo-Liberians living in the coastal region still retained control of the government. The incumbent William V. S. Tubman, candidate of True Whig Party, was reelected without opposition. The government had suppressed the Reformation and United People's parties.

Under President William R. Tolbert's leadership during the 1970s, Liberia loosened its close ties with the United States. In 1974 it accepted economic aid from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and in 1978 it joined with other developing countries in a trade agreement with the

European Community. Domestically, emphasis was placed on bringing the isolated interior into national political life and on improving the economic conditions of the indigenous population.

In 1979 the country was paralyzed by riots caused by a proposed increase in the price of rice, the staple food. More than 40 people were killed in the violence. (Ellis, 1995: 167).

The warlords were wantonly exploiting their country's resources to keep themselves and their ragtag forces in weapons with virtual impunity, and in some cases complicity. The primary sources of revenue for these warlords were Liberia's diamonds, timber, rubber, gold, and iron ore. Timber and rubber are among Liberia's main export items. Liberia earns more than $85 million and more than $57 million annually from timber and rubber exports, respectively (Allen, 1999: 367-384). Alluvial diamond and gold mining activities also account for some economic activity.

Tensions among the Coastal Indigenous Liberians

Liberian history reveals a consistent inequality between coastal elites and indigenous populations, through a succession of exploitative arrangements. Writing on the political history of Liberia, Amos Sawyer traces the emergence of such inequality through "institutional arrangements in which a Western-style, unitary form of government prescribed by a written constitution was imposed upon a settler-derived patrimonial authority structure and the various forms of patrimonial and clientelist arrangements of the indigenous societies (Sawyer, 1992).

The emergence of autocracy, according to Sawyer, was sealed by the increasing personalization of authority in the president throughout the twentieth century. The postwar administration of Tubman and Tolbert perfected the sham of representative government; the state was run more as a family business (Sawyer, 1992). Doe's rebellion replaced political autocracy with military tyranny built around his ethnic group (Krahn). This did nothing to reverse the fortunes of other indigenous groups and soon made their conditions worse.

The Doe Factor

After the euphoric and popular reaction to the emergence of the military upon the Liberian political scene, the People's Redemption Council [PRC], headed by Samuel Kanyon Doe, failed to fulfill initial post-coup d'état promises of establishing a 'new society'. Instead of implementing policies of inclusion, political procedures were initiated which established patterns of ethnic seclusion. One result of this restrictive official strategy was the formation of a broad-based coalition of indigenous Liberians and foreign

insurgents under the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), which aspired to depose Liberia's Second Republic (Frempong, 2002).

Coup of 1980

In 1980 Tolbert's opponents, emboldened by a court decision recognizing them as an opposition party, openly called for his overthrow. Their leader, Gabriel B. Matthews, and a dozen others were arrested in March 1980.

On 12 April 1980, army personnel under the leadership of Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe staged a bloody coup. Doe's forces executed President William R. Tolbert. More than a dozen officials of the previous regime, mostly of Americo-Liberian descent, were publicly executed. A People's Redemption Council (PRC), headed by Doe, subsequently suspended the constitution and assumed fully legislative and executive powers. Americo-Liberian political domination ended with the formation of the People's Redemption Council. Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe was an indigenous Liberian from the Krahn ethnic group. The top coup leaders were Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe, who was announced head of State; Sergeant Thomas Weh-Syen, Vice Head of State; and Sergeant Thomas Quiwonkpa, "Strongman of the Revolution" as Commanding General of the Armed Forces of Liberia.

Political parties remained banned until 1984. Elections were held on 15 October 1985, in which Doe's National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL) was declared winner. The period after the elections saw increased human rights abuses, corruption, and ethnic tensions (Frempong, 2002).

Doe's government increasingly adopted an ethnic outlook, as members of his Krahn ethnic group soon dominated political and military life in Liberia. This caused a heightened level of ethnic tension leading to frequent hostilities between the politically and militarily dominant Krahns and other ethnic groups in the country. The Doe regime was an extraordinarily brutal one that not only disenfranchised many Liberians, it also effectively erased the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate political action.

Election and Coup Attempt – 1985

Thomas Quiwonkpa, a comrade of Samuel K. Doe in the 1980 coup, fell out with Doe. Some analysts suggested that both the power struggle and the personal conflict between Doe and Quiwonkpa were rooted in the cultural and traditional differences between the Krahn and Dan/Mano ethnic groups. General Quiwonkpa and close allies Prince Johnson and Charles Taylor, fled the country in November 1983 (Frempong, 2002).

General Quiwonkpa went into exile to the United States, and many of his supporters, mainly, decommissioned security personnel, took refuge in neighboring Cote d'Ivoire where they began training to engage the Doe dictatorship. When the Gios and Manos of Nimba County - led by Jackson Doe and General Quiwonkpa -- ran into political conflict with the Krahn ethnic group – led by the President Samuel K. Doe -- the conflict was quickly taken over by individuals in the United States who did not belong to these tribes (Ellis, 1989: 180).

Under pressure from the United States and other creditors, in July 1984 Doe's government issued a new constitution that allowed the return of political parties outlawed since 1980. The lifting of the ban on political activities on 26 July 1984 marked the beginning of a multi-party election campaign after more than four years of military rule in Liberia. Samuel Doe, the military Head of State, established a political party and presented his candidacy for the presidential elections. Doe's National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL) was a constituency composed of ethnic groups and individuals who were dependent on him, such as his own ethnic group [the Krahn] and the Mandingo people. Both groups were small and lacked political influence. Another component in his constituency was the Americo-Liberian minority, which had been ousted from power in the April 1980 coup (Frempong, 2002).

On 12 November 1985, former Army Commanding Gen. Thomas Quiwonkpa invaded Liberia by way of neighboring Sierra Leone. Quiwonkpa almost succeeded in toppling the government of Samuel Doe. Members of the Krahn-dominated Armed Forces of Liberia repelled Quiwonkpa's attack and executed him in Monrovia. Others were put on trial, and many were summarily executed. Doe's government launched a bloody purge against the Gio and Mano ethnic groups in Quiwonkpa's Nimba County, raising alarm about genocide against the Gio and Mano. Taylor, who was related by marriage to Quiwonkpa, benefited from the alienation of the Nimba population, which later became willing recruits to his cause. Mano-Gio perceptions of the Mandingo alliance with the Doe regime put Mandingos in the category of the enemy at the time of the attempted 1985 coup. After the failed coup attempt, the Mandingos were accused of complicity in the anti-Mano/Gio witch hunting. The Mandingos did not accept responsibility for the perceived persecution of the Mano and Gio people during Doe's regime. The ruling National Democratic Party of Liberia captured 73 out of 90 seats in the National Assembly election of 15 October 1985, but some opposition members refused to occupy their seats. The remaining opposition members were expelled from their parties in 1986. All of the vacant seats were captured by the NDPL in the partial election in

December 1986 (Sawyer, 1980: 19-21). Consequently, the National Assembly was without opposition in the end of 1986.

Discontinuation of America aids and support
American aids spending on sub-Saharan Africa were at high levels through the mid-1980s due to the global competition with the Soviet Union. As the competition with the Soviet Union began to fade, and as efforts to reduce the US budget deficit intensified, there were overall reductions in assistance to the region. Policymakers increasingly focused on human rights and economic reform performance in making decisions on aid allocations. Aid to some African countries that had been major Cold War aid recipients -- notably Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and Liberia, was sharply reduced. The reductions took place almost entirely within the security-oriented programs: military assistance and especially the Economic Support Fund (ESF).

Factionalization of Conflict
The factionalized nature of conflict along ethnic lines has had a marked effect on the patterns of displacement and the potential for re-establishing people's homes and livelihoods. Doe added to the brutal repression of his opponents by surrounding himself with appointees from his Krahn group, ensuring that future conflict (and revenge) would fall along ethnic lines. Rival power groups, at least initially, launched themselves from ethnic areas of support, starting a chain of violence and retribution that continues (Cohen & Deng, 1998: 110). In particular, the Gio-Mano groups were fertile grounds for Taylor's rebellion, having been the focus of reprisals following the failed coup attempt on Doe in 1985. Although not ethnically discrete, the main factions divide along the ethnic lines.

The Militarization of Civil Society
Although throughout its history, Liberia has experienced episodic violent insurrection, violence has increased as the norm for the settlement of disputes since the early days of the Doe regime. Prolonged U.S. military assistance clearly provided Doe with the hardware to take oppression to a new level of violence. Human Rights Watch (Cohen & Deng, 1998: 111), a U.S. organization, has prepared a series of well-documented human rights violations.   These reports catalogue the widespread involvement and targeting of civilian populations in factional and associated violence. Children, denied basic rights let alone those enshrined in international law (through the Convention on the Rights of the Child), have been schooled in the ways of the warlords. Alienated from traditional rural livelihoods, with unreal expectations of the urban society to which they drifted, the

uneducated youth have been an easy recruiting ground for lawless gangs posing as militia. Making a living through the barrel of a gun has become a norm.

The Civil War of 1989-1996

The Liberian Civil War, which was one of Africa's bloodiest, claimed the lives of more than 200,000 Liberians and further displaced a million others into refugee camps in neighboring countries (USDS, 1997). Elections were scheduled for 1991. But late in 1989, severe communal violence broke out after a failed coup attempt against Doe. Several hundred members of the Gio and Mano tribes, that had been ill treated by Doe, revolted in the northeast.

On December 24, 1989, a small band of Libyan-trained rebels led by Charles G. Taylor, invaded Liberia from the Cote D'voire. Taylor, Doe's former procurement chief, is an Americo-Liberian of both indigenous and Americo-Liberian ancestry. Liberian troops and provincial security forces were dispatched to Nimba County to counter the insurgency and indiscriminately killed Liberian civilians without regard to the distinction between combatants and noncombatants. In response to this insurgency, President Doe launched an unrelenting wave of violence against the inhabitants of Nimba County. Media reports and international human rights organizations estimated that at least 200 persons, primarily members of the Mano and Gio ethnic groups, were killed by troops of the Government of Liberia during the counterinsurgency campaign (Amnesty International, 1996).

When the cold war was over and Charles Taylor's band of rebels-- some of them children – clashed with Government forces and other ethnic militias in the streets, the resulting conflict was so frighteningly gruesome that for many it was almost impossible to understand. Between December 1989 and mid-1993, Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) was estimated to have been responsible for thousands of deliberate killings of civilians. As NPFL forces advanced towards Monrovia in 1990, they targeted people of the Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups, both of which the NPFL considered supporters of President Doe's government (USIRC, 1993).

Although the sources of the Liberian conflict were complex, on one level it represented an attempt by Americo-Liberians to re-establish themselves as the dominant political force in Liberia. The war in Liberia was not about tribes seeking dominance over one another. Charles Taylor led the invasion into Liberia in the name of trying to right the wrong for the Gios and Manos. This was the motivator for the two ethnic groups who joined the movement. When the Taylor rebels entered Nimba County, their home, the

conflict quickly drew in the Mandingoes, who are mostly Muslims. The Gio tribe soon formed their own separate rebel forces under Prince Johnson, and a bloody three-way civil war began (Minear, Colin & Thomas, 1996: 47-50). As the fighting escalated into civil war, three distinct factions became engaged in a national power-struggle: forces loyal to Doe, and two mutually opposed rebel groups led by Charles Taylor and Prince Yormie Johnson. Taylor, a former Doe aide, and Johnson had started their campaign under the same banner, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). Tribal affiliations played a key role in the split between the Krahn, to which Doe and most of his adherents belonged, and the Gio and Mano people, who formed the bulk of the rebel forces. Fighting between Doe's troops and the Taylor/Johnson axis began at the end of 1989. Johnson assumed the presidency temporarily during September 1989, after which it passed through several hands, settling for a time in those of Amos Sawyer, who managed to pacify some parts of the country.

Barely 6 months after the rebels first attacked, they had reached the outskirts of Monrovia and Liberia was marked by intermittent civil war. Although many Liberians were glad to see Doe's repressive regime removed, no group that emerged from the civil war was powerful enough to replace the Doe government. As a result, the Republic of Liberia was plunged into a state of chaos. Despite a cease-fire agreement signed in Bamako, Mali, in 1990*, the civil war never really ended.

Prince Yormie Johnson formed the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). Johnson's forces captured and killed Doe on September 9, 1990.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) intervened and succeeded in preventing Charles Taylor from capturing Monrovia. Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) was formed in Gambia under the auspices of ECOWAS in October 1990 and Dr. Amos C. Sawyer became President. Sawyer was backed by a Nigerian-led peacekeeping force, known as ECOMOG (ECOWAS Monitoring Group). Taylor refused to work with the interim government and continued the war. The war spilled over into Sierra Leone in 1991, when Foday Sankoh led a mixed group of Liberians and Sierra Leoneans into Kailahun in eastern Sierra Leone. President Momoh's troops attempted to train a fighting force from among the 250,000 Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone (USRC, 1992:1). The ex-Liberian Broadcasting Corporation head, Alhaji Kromah, organised Mandingo Muslims and Krahn refugees in Freetown to form the United Liberation Movement of Liberia (ULIMO) (Le, Monde, 1992: 6).

The Krahns and Mandingoes became the direct targets of Taylor's NPFL group. In neighboring Sierra Leone, refugees of these two tribes led other tribes in organizing the ULIMO faction and returned to Liberia. It was

this group in 1992 that helped the West African ECOMOG peacekeeping force stop the takeover of Monrovia by Taylor's NPFL rebels.

With the escalation of violence that began in August 1992 it seemed as if even the limited peace Liberia possessed had been completely shattered. The re-emergence of overt civil war threatened to return Liberia to the state of terror and brutality that prompted Africa Watch monitors to call Liberia a "human rights disaster.(African Watch, 1990:1). By 1992, several warring factions had emerged in the Liberian civil war [all of which were later absorbed in the new government].

In January 1993 a security buffer around Monrovia was re-established by forces of the West African Peace Monitoring Group. The authority of the interim government never extended beyond Monrovia's suburbs. ECOMOG defended the city, which became a civilian safe haven with as many as a million people at some points (USCR, 1992: 9).

Taylor and his NPFL guerrillas – mostly from the Gio and Mano peoples who are historic rivals of the Krahn – kept fighting. To complicate matters further, at least three new guerrilla formations appeared as both Taylor's NPFL and its main opponents split into factions. A peace accord signed in the Beninois capital, Cotonou, in 1994 was quickly forgotten.

During the first week of April 1996, the failure of the Council of State to resolve internal power struggles led to a resumption of fighting in Monrovia. In April 1996, the Liberian Council of State sent police-militia to arrest Prince Johnson on murder charges. As a direct result, fighting erupted in Monrovia between 'government forces' and LPC, AFL and ULIMO-J fighters loosely allied under Johnson and based at Barclay Training Centre. Johnson's forces took 600 civilians as 'human shields'. Some 1,500 people were killed in the clashes that lasted seven weeks (Kpatindé, 1996).

The Length of Conflict

All of the above factors have been exacerbated by the duration of the conflict, which effectively dated back to the Doe power coup of 1980. In particular, the repeated failure of multiple peace agreements has thrown the country into a debilitating cycle of violence. The internally displaced despair of regaining their former lives, and refugees have lost confidence that conditions will allow them to return. Liberia appeared to be following a pattern of chronic instability set by other sub-Saharan countries such as the Sudan, Angola, and Rwanda, where civil conflict establishes a self-generating equilibrium. In essence, the economic interests in sustaining the conflict, embodied in well-armed militia, outweigh any counter forces (Scott, 1998: 112).

Conclusion

These several factors – external and internal – explain the depth of the Liberian Civil War which current Africa States should beware of in order not to experience such a gruesome internal conflict again even though they have been several conflicts.

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