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Ethnopolitical Violence in the Liberian Civil War

by
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INTRODUCTION

Ethnic division is a source of both conflict and cooperation in all societies. Conflicts erupt and escalate when sparked by political power struggles and are underpinned by complicated political alliances in which ethnic identity and affiliations are key variables. The post-Cold War international system is experiencing an increase in the scope and intensity of conflicts underlined by violent and internecine ethnic rivalries. The former Yugoslavia, Somalia, South Africa, and Liberia are the more recent and notable cases. To a greater or lesser extent, many of the interethnic conflict situations that have either subsided or are ongoing have antecedents involving colonial rule or a foreign group.[1] While this historical legacy perhaps is a major contributory factor to many of the varied internal political, economic, and social issues, the roots of ongoing conflicts are often actions and policies established during colonial rule, even though the colonial power may no longer be directly involved in the conflict. Examples are power left in the hands of favored minorities; the divide and rule tactics of colonial administrators; and artificial borders that permanently separated members of the same ethnic group. Moreover, the "we-feeling" or *communauté de conscience* associated with each ethnic group, in times of crisis become further polarized and come into direct confrontation with that of other ethnic groups. One consequence may be violence or civil war. It is therefore essential, as armed conflicts continue to erupt, that the underlying factors that spawn ethnic polarization in African political conflicts be examined. This analysis is therefore an examination of first, situational factors of ethnic-based violence; second, social-structural imbalances as elements of ethnic polarization; and finally, the relationship of these factors to ethnopolitical violence in the Liberian Civil War.

Very often ethnopolitical situations develop out of politico-economic crises of the state and patterns of ethnic domination. In a sense, the eruption of ethnic clashes are predetermined and are neither fully foreseen nor completely intended by the participants. Unequal or competitive relations between ethnic groups help to shape a society's state and ethnic structures thereby affecting the domestic context from which civil war erupts.

ETHNIC BASED CONFLICTS: AN OVERVIEW

Ethnic differences permeate the psychological, social-structural, and cultural dimensions of human interaction.[2] The psychological dimension focuses largely on the problem of ethnic identity which includes the individual's orientation to, and the extent of their commitment to, factors related to ethnicity. At the sociological level, social networks define the individual's ethnic group; these are in turn related to frequency of contacts, rights and duties associated with ethnicity and the traditions of that group. At the cultural level are all factors of ethnic culture, which include among other things, traditions and history, which in turn are related to sentiments, codes of social action and individual conduct.

Based on the ongoing conflicts in many developing countries, it appears that the issue of allocation of resources is a more important source of conflict when the parties to the conflict occupy the same territory. This economic and psycho-cultural dimension of conflict has been expressed as a situation of social conflict usually accompanied by a felt or actual discrepancy in the power relations of the parties. In the language of relative economic deprivation it is a case of a discrepancy between value expectations and value capabilities.' In a similar vein, many other analysts view conflict as a struggle over values and claims to finite resources, power and status, where the goals of one rival are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate the other.[4] Such intergroup rivalry is based largely on the premise that one group had what the other wanted — the source of conflict could be land, more economic opportunities, and the like.

The delineation of national boundaries, in particular, has contributed to the exacerbation of conflicts between different ethnic groups. The growing centralization of state power to administer those arbitrarily created states has resulted in the ruling group within these new states enjoying automatically the advantages of control over foreign aid, trade, investments, and alliances in general. The social distance between ethnic groups often leads to a situation in which dominant groups frequently refuse other populations a fair share of the country's resources. The structure of inequality is aggravated during periods of economic austerity, as dominant groups attempt to maintain their advantageous economic, political, or social position. Widening inequality is sometimes accompanied by persecution, resulting either from a challenge against the dominant group; or the persecution could lead to a challenge by the oppressed group. In other words, ethnopolitical conflicts take a variety of forms. There are situations where ethnic groups are relatively equal in power as well as circumstances where they are ordered in a hierarchy of power. Ethnopolitical conflicts, according to conventional wisdom, will be more common and less amenable to control in the former case than in the latter. Another distinction is that in developing countries ethnopolitical conflicts often center around competition for political dominance, whereas in developed countries they often involve separatist movements by ethnic minorities and repression by the government.[5] A third distinction can be made among different types of violent ethnopolitical conflicts based on the goals of the participants in the conflict.

Accordingly ethnopolitical violence falls into four categories: 1) separatist movements (the Armenians in Azerbaijan, or the Basques in Spain): 2) rivalry for autonomy or political power or territorial control (such as the Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi. Albanians in Serbia, or the Zulu in South Africa); 3) conquest where violence occurs as part of a war between two or more nations where ethnopolitical differences are a major factor (examples are Bosnian Muslims and Serbs, and Croats and Serbs); and 4) survival where violence occurs as part of an attempt by a national government or majority groups to forcibly assimilate, harm, remove or drive out an ethnic minority (examples are Turks and other non-ethnic Germans in Germany, Copts in Egypt, or Shiite Muslims in Iraq, among others).

One of the older and best-known theories of intergroup rivalry has been labelled "realistic group conflict theory.*'[6] According to this position, intergroup conflict is motivated by a competition for a scarce external resource and group action is instrumental in winning this zero-sum contest. This theory obviously underscores a resource-denial strategy by one group against another, with the former group commandeering valued resources for its own group members. Such intergroup hostility will be non-existent if individuals in a society are not affected by such discriminating practices. The motivation to engage in realistic group conflict is undermined if people see that they have access to these resources despite their group membership. More often than not, the "ingroup" perpetuates a resource-denial strategy because of the benefits involved; at the same time the "outgroup" is confined in a helpless or ineffectual situation. The ingroup further ensures its security by repressive and other security measures targeted against the outgroup. The level of violence in conflict situations then becomes a function of intensity of motivation. Violence is directed toward the outgroup because important economic, power, or security goals are involved. That is, destructively violent conflicts (Liberia, Sri Lanka, former Yugoslavia, among others) involve strong motives, which supply the energy necessary for action. In all instances, economic inequality suffered by one group is the dynamic element in the conflict.[7] Political power can also be involved. The ingroup, or group in power usually institutionalizes violence which is manifested in violence by police and army and labelled "law and order."[8] Political power thus leads to a possibility of action through the legal machinery to establish a monopoly of violence in the hands of the ruling group. This strategy of power consolidation, which tends to erupt into ethnopolitical violence, is particularly applicable to many ethnopolitical conflict situations in Africa.

ETHNIC CONFLICT IN AFRICA

Since the period of decolonization in Africa some three decades ago, power political struggles between various groups within the new African states, consolidation of power within a state by a dominant group, and discrimination resulting from competition for scarce resources have been some of the key conditions of ethnicity as a factor in African armed conflicts. In many parts of Africa, the existing ethnic tensions have been exacerbated by a combination of artificial states and a transfer of power to a hand-picked ethnic group by departing colonial powers. The

consequence is that the ruling group tends to exclude others from power even though burdens of taxation are shared equally.

Actual and potential conflicts are common even among the most stable African nations. In Guinea with the death of Sekou Toure, the Susu and Fula overthrew the dominance of the Mandingo, a control that endured more than 25 years. In Nigeria, the Yoruba and Ibo feel the Fulani manage to dominate whatever government comes to power. In Cameroon, in 1984 northern Muslims attempted to overthrow the government of Christian president, Paul Biya, who is from the south and accused of representing those tribes.[9] Ethnic conflicts in African states are often couched in struggles between political parties. They are frequently the justification for the centralization of power within a single party, or for the establishment of military dictatorships. Dictators have often consolidated their power and legitimized their activities through the single party system. The outcome is frequently the consolidation of power within a single party system and within a single ethnic group resulting in attacks on other ethnic groups. The Idi Amin regime in Uganda, and the Amhara-dominated Ethiopian government were two blatant examples. In the case of the latter, competition for land produced state-sponsored colonization programs. In the early 1980s, it was reported that the Amhara-dominated government uprooted more than 20,000 Oromo residents in a single valley from the lands they had occupied for generations.[10]

Population pressure, scarcity of resources, the impact of the global political economy, and drought, among other factors aggravate long-standing ethnic tensions and can thus accentuate the effects of economic discrimination along tribal lines. In times of drought and famine ethnic conflicts are further aggravated when affected tribal groups attempt to move into new regions in search of pasture for their starving animals."[ ] For instance, in the spring of 1989 the killing of Senegalese farmers by Mauritanians in the Senegal River basin triggered explosions of ethnic violence in the two countries. In Senegal almost all of the 17,000 shops owned by Moors were destroyed, and their owners were deported to Mauritania. In both countries several hundred people were killed, and the two nations nearly engaged in war.[12] In drought stricken areas, famine relief is used by the dominant group as a political weapon resulting in unequal distribution and monopoly over the distribution. The dominant groups ensure that their groups receive assistance first. In the mid 1980s, the Amhara-dominated regime of Ethopia was widely accused of using food aid as a political weapon, preventing the distribution of food to areas suspected of collaborting with Eritrean rebels.

The economic/ethnic squeeze started in the 1960s when for the first time Africans dominated their own bureaucracies and controlled their own budgets. They controlled employment, designed development programs, and negotiated with foreign investors and governments. A decade later, by the 1970s the relative peace and optimism of the 1960s began to fade. The purchasing power of individual incomes has declined steadily as has per capita food production and consumption.[13] The reasons for this outcome are many and are due to the combined and interactive effects of the decline in commodity prices, the debt burden, inappropriate agricultural policies, and rising population pressure. Annual food imports continue to accelerate and nearly every African country imports food adding to the already significant debt burden. As scarcity of goods and services, and development costs continue to rise, and as populations increase and food production declines, dominant ethnic groups will continue to experience challenges to their control, and these groups may well resort to the use of force to maintain their economic position.

Conflict between language, religion, and customs of people from different ethnic groups has been — and probably will continue to be — a primary source of unrest in the African continent. The antecedents and dynamics of these varied conflicts that plague many societies have both internal and external dimensions.

Between group differences dominated by language or phenotypes (collective manifest characteristics), or physical attributes, serve as a common denominator of many of the ongoing and historical conflicts. In particular, many of the past and present armed conflicts in Africa are consequences of ethnic polarization in African countries. Generally, members of an ethnic group have a high degree of proximity to each other. That is persons maintain relatively close distance to each other in space and time, forming communities geographically distinct from other groups.

African states are characterized by dual and plural societies some of which enhance ethnic rivalries. Ethnically dual societies like Rwanda and Burundi now and again erupt into violence because each has a permanent Hutu majority and a permanent Tutsi minority. In Zimbabwe the potential for ethnic conflict is high because it has a permanent Shona majority and a permanent Ndebele minority.[14] These factors are inherent in such countries making violence and its accompanying displacement of persons contingent on such factors as, worsening social stratification, the increasing dissatisfaction of the minority group, and actual political threats from the minority. The substantial numerical margin between two ethnic communities in a dual society tends to subject the minority group to a position of permanent powerlessness. In the case of Burundi the occasional revolt of the Hutu against their situation results in serious violence.

Ethnic violence is also a consequence of conflicts based on multiple groups, such as the Oromo-Somali-Eritrean-Tigrean opposition to the Amhara dominance in Ethiopia. The Mbundu-Ovimbundu-Bakongo conflict in Angola also represents another case of violence emanating from multiple ethnic groups with disagreements over such key issues as the definition of the proper boundaries of the political community, or redefining the purposes and policies of a political community.[15] Civil wars and secessionist movements are the consequence. The social distance (in this case ethnic differences) between the dominant group and other groups, or the minority make for increased misperception and therefore psychologically easier to wreak violence on each other.[16] During the Ethiopian Civil War, the Amhara-dominated regime was often accused of massacring entire village populations, preventing the distribution of food to drought stricken areas controlled by Eritrean or other ethnic rebels.

Many African regimes, although controlled by dominant ethnic groups, nonetheless fall into the category of "weak regimes" because they have limited material resources to extensively co-opt insurgents, reallocate resources, and induce change. In most African countries, the rate of government expansion has shrunk significantly since the 1970s. At the same time the expectations of Africans have risen far beyond expectations in the past. The inability to meet the aspirations of the large number of educated and qualified citizens tends to aggravate the existing ethnic cleavages.

Conflicts erupt because ethnic groups or individuals from particular groups are irretrievably caught up in the daily process of comparing their power, wealth, or status position with those of other groups. Comparisons do not automatically produce conflicts. This circumstance occurs when the value system and the structure of the reward system are seen and perceived to be unjustly applied by the dominant group against the deprived ones. The conflict potential is higher if the reward system is very blatant in its manifestation of inequality. Since 1959 Burundi, for example, has experienced serious ethnic conflict between the numerically dominant Hutu and the socio-economically and politically dominant Tutsi.[17] The Ethiopian conflict also had undertones of inequality in terms of ethnic relations. The Military Administrative Council (The Derg) was composed of elites drawn largely from the Amhara ethnic group. The challenge of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) against the Ethiopian government was largely motivated by opposition to the seizure and redistribution of Oromo land among other Ethiopians.[18]

Manfred Halperin used the concept of emanation to underscore the sacred-ness of relationships like the tribe, ethnic group, nation, or religion in Africa.[19] All over the world, Africa included, individuals live out their entire lives submerged as emanations of another — it could be a political movement, a leader, a dogma, or ethnic group as in the case of Liberia. In other words, the traditional African, based on this notion of emanation, view themselves as an extension not only of a kinship group but of their entire ethnic community. This is also the relationship that motivates the mutual massacres between Hutu and Tutsi in Burundi and Rwanda, and the violence of Gio and Mano against the Krahn and Mandingo in the Liberian conflict. In such ethnic conflicts, so many willingly fight and die for the preservation of their tribe, such that the emotionally-based motivation surpasses any national cost-benefit analysis.

The reality of emanation means that everyone is not free of the constraints and stimulus of living within inherited relationships. As Ali Mazrui underscored in his analysis of tribal conflict in Burundi and Rwanda, no one trapped within a "sacred emanational container, however large or small its size, is capable of seeing humanity as a single species."[20] In other words, within each ethnic or tribal vessel, people to a large extent, think and act quite differently. The national integration problematique in African countries is that the inherited sacred tribal containers within most states are greater in number than in many other regions in the world; and the peoples within the containers are still far less integrated with other contained

peoples in their ethnic group. The reality and awareness of self-containment produces negative consequences of interethnic conflict when underlined by the zero-sum nature of politics manifested in **a** winner-take-all behavior of ethnic relations.

Certain forms of violence arise out of a perception of vertical political and economic dualism where one tribe monopolizes privilege in a country.[21] This perception is accentuated by the fact that the various indigenous cultures making up all but a handful of African states speak different languages, and are, or may be, products of different cultural histories. This sharpens the sense of distinctiveness from other groups, even when apeople are politicized and nation-minded. Interethnic conflicts and primordial distinctiveness are resuscitated by the stress and tension created by the struggle for educational, employment, and other opportunities. There are those rare moments when tribal groups see themselves as alien to one another, such that ethnic atrocities, or genocide are committed with ease resulting in a certain degree of dehumanization caused by a sense of cultural distance. When conflict erupts because of ethnic inequalities, manifesting violence between the group that monopolizes most economic and political opportunities and those who do not, the quarrel may be about who should exercise ultimate authority (those in power and others who are aspiring to), or about national directions and goals, or both of these issues. In any case, economic and political ideologies of the community are not in question.

The distinction between disagreements over concrete policies and disagreements over who holds power is important, though the two are often intertwined. Violent interethnic conflicts are often focused on the central issue of who shall rule the country, or who shall determine its direction, and not necessarily or very precisely on what those directions should be. The outburst of interethnic bloodletting has to do with power and control, and the focus on, and consciousness of, these fuel ethnic violence and mutual bloodletting. Indeed, it is not unusual for leaders of rival warring factions — which are usually ethnically based — to have been close colleagues in precisely the same national army prior to the outbreak of interethnic violence. The essay will now examine the specific example of the Liberian Civil War.

THE LIBERIAN CIVIL WAR

Liberia Under Americo-Liberian Hegemony

In 1822, Liberia became a haven for former American slaves. Unlike other settlements administered by European powers as colonial territories, it was never a *de jure* United States colony, and became an independent republic as early as 26 July 1847. The "Americo-Liberians," descendants of the former American slaves formed a distinct cultural and social minority that dominated all aspects of national life — political, economic, cultural, and social — for more than a century. By the early 1920s they had become the dominant elite of a society that also included 16 indigenous ethnic groups. As the unchallenged elite of Liberia, they introduced and

maintained political structures strongly influenced by those in the United States with a bicameral legislature and governmental authority divided between the three branches of government. The instruments of political control and domination were the True Whig Party formed in 1870. the Christian churches, and the Masonic Order. institutions to which the key political elites belonged. Liberia experienced a short - period of two-party democracy in the late nineteenth century after which the True Whig Party held a monopoly of power under successive presidents until the overthrow of the First Republic in 1980.[22] During the presidency of William V.S. Tubman — Liberia's first post-World War II president — in January 1944, the National Unification Policy was introduced to ameliorate the tensions between Americo-Liberians and the indigenous peoples. For example, amendments to the constitution were made that gave indigenous ethnic groups and women the right to vote, provided they owned real estate or other property. These conditions, no doubt. constituted a significant limiting factor to national integration, and the overall exercise of democratic rights by the indigenous people. In other words, the elite continued to monopolize political power, and challenges to presidential authority and control were crushed.

When President Tubman died in July 1971, he was succeeded by William R. Tolbert, who had been his vice-president for 19 years. The Americo-Liberian hegemony was soon plagued by economic and political problems. In 1973, Liberia joined the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and hosted its ministerial meeting in 1975. In March 1978, President Tolbert arranged a second meeting of ECOWAS, which successfully negotiated the differences between Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Senegal. In 1979, he spent an inordinate amount of money hosting the OAU Summit Meeting in Monrovia, the capital. These self-imposed economic burdens coupled with the effects of the sharp rise in petroleum prices and the declining world demand for Liberia's main exports (iron ore and rubber) affected Tolbert's ability to handle the domestic political crisis that ensued.[23]

Tolbert's political performance was no better than his economic performance. Economic difficulties were aggravated by widespread mismanagement and graft. His tolerance for criticism was short-lived as he became increasingly authoritarian, encouraging little or no political dissent or opposition. The long tradition of patron-client relations that had formed ihe basis of the political system continued, and the news media became the propaganda instrument for the government. General opposition to the regime, long suppressed but never extinguished, found expression in two main opposition movements formed in the late 1970s: the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL), subsequently renamed the Progressive People's Party (PPP), and the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA).[24] Tolbert's downfall was precipitated by a campaign to encourage local rice production by increasing its price to consumers. Thus, the government announced a 50 per cent increase in the price of a bag of rice in 1979. A demonstration opposing the increase was organized in Monrovia on 14 July 1979. It escalated into riots and looting and proved to be a watershed in Liberia's history. In response the government quickly subsidized rice prices, and legalized the PAL as an official opposition party under

the name of the PPP in December 1979.[25] In spite of these last minute reforms, the government never regained the upper hand. On 12 April 1980, a small group of soldiers, led by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe, seized the executive mansion, killed Tolbert, and overthrew the government. The consequence was the end of Americo-Liberian dominance, and the subsequent ethnic turbulence the country has witnessed.

Samuel Doe's Governance and Ethnic Polarization

The success of the April 1980 coup d'etat by mostly young non-commissioned officers spearheaded by Samuel Doe ended the long dominance of Liberian society by the True Whig Party and its overwhelming Americo-Liberian leadership. Ten days after the successful coup the People's Redemption Council (PRC), the new governing body with Doe as its chairman, ordered the summary execution of thirteen prominent officials of the ancien regime on a public beach in Monrovia. Many Liberians overwhelmingly of native background commended heartily the actions of the PRC and expressed joy at the overthrow of the Americo-Liberian oligarchy and the end of the True Whig Party's repressive rule. Along with the rejoicing were rising expectations that significant improvement would take place in both the political and socio-economic fortunes of the average Liberian citizen.

Contrary to popular belief, the 1980 coup d'etat in Liberia not only removed an Americo-Liberian oligarchy, but it also weakened the solidarity of the indigenous ethnic groups. It, in addition, shattered the established Liberian tradition of peaceful transitions of power. Initially, Doe sought national legitimacy and international recognition by forming a coalition cabinet that included civilian members, and representing various sections of society, and even including some former members of the Tolbert regime.

However, the PRC as the "guardian of the revolution," and Doe as the supposed liberator, did not live up to their rhetoric. To consolidate his power and secure his position, Doe increasingly installed many members of his own small ethnic group, the Krahn, in positions of authority while also increasing the security forces guarding him.[26] He and his lieutenants used their political positions to enrich themselves, and Doe's simple military status was exchanged for trappings of power, and symbols of prestige that he had ostensibly eschewed in the early days of his rule. Moreover, the Doe government inherited a foreign debt of $800 million and a budgetary deficit of $71 million. Increased domestic expectations after the toppling of the Tolbert regime, coupled with a decline in foreign business confidence and the weakness of the international iron ore market, placed further strains on the economy. Government spending on public order and defence increased from $21 million to $52 million between 1979 and 1981. and civil service salaries were also raised. Drastic attempts to reduce government spending culminated in a reduction of 25 percent in the wages of all government employees, except the armed forces, from December 1985.[27] Thus, the high expectations of 1980 slowly turned to disenchantment as Doe repeatedly dashed hopes for a better political and social order. Continued favoritism shown toward the Krahn aggravated ethnic tensions

and exposed the fissures among the indigenous peoples that had long been dormant under Americo-Liberian hegemony.

After refusing to obey the rules of the Constitutional Commission, Doe ended up rigging the general elections of 1985 to ensure his victory. The increasing insecurity after his dubious victory in the elections increased the level of political repression. Political parties were proscribed and their leaders arrested on trumped up charges: freedom of speech and political expression were further severely curtailed: more frequent intervention by the army in university campuses became the trend.

By 1985, even though there were few signs of overt violence by the Doe regime against any ethnic group, there existed a situation where the Krahn were disproportionately represented in government and other avenues of opportunity. This translated into denying individuals who belonged to other ethnic groups their human rights in economic and other opportunities. The increasing level of political repression coupled with the continued favoritism shown toward the Krahn, no doubt aggravated ethnic tensions and created a social gulf among the indigenous peoples that had long been kept closed by Americo-Liberian hegemony. The 1980 coup had merely substituted ethnic domination by one group for ethnic domination by another. The grievances and concerns remained the same, and had worsened in many respects.

Ethnic Identity and Bloodletting

The ethnic undercurrent of the civil war can be traced to the rupture between Doe and General Thomas Quiwonkpa, Doe's erstwhile military colleague. There-after, Nimba County, the home of Quiwonkpa, became the scene of activity directed against the Doe regime. The personal animosity between the two was further intensified when Quiwonkpa launched a coup attempt against Doe in November 1985 in which between 500 and 1000 people are thought to have died in Nimba.[28] Thus, the Quiwonkpa coup attempt served to expose the increasing ethnic polarization in Liberian society that had become a key element of political manipulation under the Doe regime. Although many prominent politicians from Nimba County were part of Doe's cabinet, a growing rivalry and ethnic separation developed between Doe's Krahn and Mandingo supporters and the people of Nimba County.[29] Even before the outbreak of the civil war, the other Liberian ethnic groups viewed a fight between the Krahns on the one hand and the Gios and Manos of Nimba on the other as a fight to the death.

Quiwoukpa's 1985 abortive coup presented the most serious challenge to Doe's Krahn-dominated government. The coup unleashed massacres by government troops that were not only extensive but had overtones of ethnic genocide. According to Gus Liebenow:

> Krahn soldiers, moreover, in one of the worst manifestations of the
> 'new tribalism' — were given almost carte blanche authority to carry
> out a brutal campaign against the Gio and Mano areas of Nimba

County, where the support for Jackson Doe and Quiwoukpa was the strongest. Charges of ethnic genocide toward the Gio were being raised against the Krahn within the military.'"

The complete violent ethnic polarization finally came toward the end of December 1989 when Charles Taylor and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) invaded Nimba County from neighboring Ivory Coast. President Doe did his best to repel the invasion, but the brutal counterattacks of his Krahn-dominated army served only to further alienate the inhabitants of Nimba County, and they went on to join the rebel forces in large numbers. Civil war took center stage underlined by ethnic polarization: the NPFL drew the bulk of its fighters and supporters from the Gio and Mano, while government soldiers, predominantly Krahn, were aided by the Mandingos.

Charles Taylor capitalized on the already existing ethnic polarization by invading Liberia through Nimba County and recruiting his fighting forces locally. He knew that this county would be most sympathetic to an anti-Doe rebellion.[31] Members of the Gio and Mano ethnic groups have long complained that they have been oppressed by members of Doe's ethnic group, the Krahn. Besides, Doe and his close supporters compounded the ethnic issues at stake when, as soon as Taylor announced the commencement of his invasion, they targeted villages in Nimba County for direct attack and punitive expeditions.[32] This increased the support in Nimba for Taylor's invasion and led to the core of his NPFL force being spearheaded largely by young people from Nimba County. Furthermore, in Monrovia, Doe fuelled the ethnic conflict when he gave carte blanche citizenship to all Mandingos in the county, some of whom were still citizens of neighboring Guinea. The Gios and Manos have refused to recognize them as Liberians. Besides, there is an age-old rift in Nimba County over the Mandingos. They, from a Muslim religious point of view, look down on the Gios and Manos as infidels because of either their adherence to African religions or to Christianity.

As a result of the crushing defeat suffered in Nimba County by July 1990, Doe's Krahn soldiers retaliated by murdering as many Monrovia-based Gio and Mano as possible. In turn the Gio and Mano retaliated when civilian Krahn and Mandingo peoples were summarily executed near Paynesville, east of Monrovia. One of the most reported instances of ethnic bloodletting occurred when at about the same time (July 1990), 30 Krahn and Mandingo soldiers burst into a church compound in Monrovia and without warning killed 600 people (mainly Mano and Gio) as they slept.[33] In other words, as the rebel forces took over large parts of the country and surrounded the capital, the fighting took on an increasingly ethnic character. By July 1990, the government army's ranks had been systematically purged of most soldiers who did not belong to President Doe's ethnic group, the Krahns. At least three-quarters of the government's troops, then estimated at about 7,200 were said to be Krahns.[34]

The massacres in Monrovia by the Doe regime, intensified when the NPFL started closing in on Monrovia. Government soldiers further expanded their targets

to include the Americo-Liberians and rampaged their settlements. The calculated slaughtering of Gios and Manos and Americo-Liberians by the Doe regime was to serve as a deterrent to the fast advancing rebel forces. Therefore, some of the killings were a grim portent that Liberia's vicious ethnic bloodletting was now engulfing a segment of society previously untouched: the Americo-Liberians or descendants of the freed slaves.

It could be argued that with the coup d'etat of 1980 and the end of Americo-Liberian hegemony. Liberia's structural imbalances became more pronounced under a repressive Doe regime, and was manifested in a high level of politicization. but a low level of national integration, in the context of a weak national economy. Moreover, the persistence of the unethical distribution of power and influence through ethnic favoritism led to challenges, forcing the Doe regime to maintain itself solely through the use of force. The "accelerator" to the ethnic-based civil war came when the Doe regime attacked Nimba County and massacred in the process many Gio and Mano.

CONCLUSION

Liberia's civil war was a contemporary manifestation of a historical legacy — the Americo-Liberian hegemony over the indigenous peoples — the end of which produced unwanted consequences related to problems of unsuccessful national integration. Under Samuel Doe. Liberia had become a country where the political dominance by one group, the Krahn, resulted in the legitimacy of government being challenged. The ensuing ethnopolitical violence between Krahn/ Mandingo on the one hand, and Gio/Mano on the other, became very calculated and deliberate, and not random. The victims on either side were carefully targeted by ethnic affiliation.

Before Doe overthrew the Americo-Liberian political hegemony, the major ethnic tensions revolved around relations between the Americo-Liberian elite and the rest of the indigenous population. But the ascension to power of an indigenous leader, and the ensuing general socio-economic deterioration, opened the political contest among competing indigenous ethnic groups. Thus, while the 1980 coup d'etat in Liberia overthrew the lengthy Americo-Liberian hegemony, it nonetheless eventually introduced a level of ethnic animosity not previously known, and it also destabilized the indigenous ethnic unity that had existed during the Americo-Liberian politico-economic dominance.

In sum, four factors seem to underlie the ethnopolitical violence of Liberia's civil war. First, the ethnic bloodletting — torture and killings — though modern in context, was largely a display of historical forces at work: the long absence of a democratic political culture among the various ethnic groups. Second was the difficulties of consolidating legitimate power in an environment of economic decline and general socio-economic deterioration. Third was the ease with which inadequate policies of national integration can degenerate into ethnopolitical violence. Finally, the difficulties of the ongoing peacemaking negotiations offer an

excellent example of the problems associated with protracted conflicts in an environment of ethnic insecurity coupled with general socio-economic deterioration.

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Endnotes

1. For details on the various aspects of current ethnopolitical conflicts, see Donald L. Horowitz. "Ethnic and Nationalist Conflict," in Michael T. Kalre and Daniel C. Thomas, eds.. *World Security: Challenges For A New Century* (New York: St. Martin's. 199^)pp. 175-87; and Ted R. Gurr and Barbara Harff, *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics* (Boulder. CO: West view. 1994).

2. See. for example. Marc Howard Ross. *The Culture of Conflict: Interpretations and Interests in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven. CT: Yale University Press. 1993); Ronald A. Reminick. *Theory of Ethnicity: An Anthropologist's Perspective* (Lanham. MD: Univerisity Press of America. 1983): and Jerry Boucher, et al.. eds.. *Ethnic Conflict: International Perspectives* (Boulder, CO: Westview. 1994).

3. For further details, see Ted R. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1974).

4. For a broad range of works covering this view, see Daniel Patrick Moynihan. *Pandaemonium: Ethnicity in International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press. 1993): Michael E. Brown, ed.. *Ethnic Conflict andInternational Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1993); Ted R. Gurr. *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts* (Washington. DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1993); and Lewis Coser. *The Functions of Social Conflict* (New York: Free Press. 1956).

5. Fordetails on the pursuit of these goals and its consequences, see David Levinson, "Ethnic Conflict and Refugees." *Refugees,* no. 93 (August 1993). pp 4-9.

6. For a more detailed analysis, see M. Sherif, "Superordinate Goals in the Reduction of Intergroup Conflicts," *American Journal of Sociology,* 63 (1958), pp. 349-56.

7. Intergroup rivalry also stems from land tenure and homeland issues, perceived differences, disparate allocation of power and resources, and effects of language and language policy, among others. For further explanations of intergroup rivalry, see Michael Harris Bond. "Intergroup Relations in Hong Kong: The Tao of Stability," in Boucher, et al.. *Ethnic Conflict,* pp, 55-78.

8. For further details on violence and state terror, see Ted R. Gurr. "The Political Origins of State Violence and Terror: A Theoretical Analysis." in Michael Stohl and George Lopez, eds., *Government Violence and Repression: An Agenda for Research* (New York: Greenwood, 1986), pp. 45-71.

9. See, for example. *Amnesty International Reports 1992 and 1993,* Country Entries: Cameroon, Guinea,and Nigeria, (London: Amnesty International Publications. 1992,1993). pp. 79-81; 83-86; and 203-5.

10. See. for example, US Committee for Refugees, *Beyond the Headlines: Refugees in the Horn of Africa.* Issue Paper. January 1988 (Washington, DC, 1988), p. 21.

11. For further details on the linkage between population, environmental degradation, and conflict, see John W. Mellor, "The Intertwining of En vironmental Problems and Poverty." *Environment.* 30, no. 9 (November 1988), pp. 8-13, 28-30; and Ruby Ofori. "Harvest of Sand," *West Africa.* 10-16 December, 1990, p. 3049.

12. This interconnectedness between environmental degradation and ethnic conflict is very well analyzed by Thomas F. Homer-Dixon. et al.. "Environmental Change and Violent Conflict," in *Scientific American.* 268. no. 2 (February 1993), pp. 38-45.

13. See. for example. "The Critical Decade," *West Africa,* 17-23 June, 1991. p. 982; and Michael Barratt Brown and Pauline Tiffen. *Short Changed: Africa and World Trade* (London: Pluto Press, 1992).

14. For an elaboration on dual and plural societies in Africa, see Al: A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (Boston, MA: Little. Brown, 1986) pp. 197-228.

15. On the political dynamics of ethnicity in Ethiopia and Angola, see respectively, Marina Ottaway, "State Power and Consolidation in Ethiopia.*' in Edmond J. Keller and Donald Rotchild, eds.. *Afro-Marxist Regimes: Ideology and Public Policy* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1987) pp. 25-42: and Keith Somerville, *Angola: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Frances Pinter, 1986)pp.71-79.

16. For an elaboration, see Milton Gordon, *Hitman Nature, Class, and Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

17. For further details, see Rene Lemarchand. "Burundi in Comparative Perspective: Dimensions of Ethnic Strife." in John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary. eds.. *The Politics of Ethnic Conflict Regulation* (London: Routledge, 1993) pp. 151-71.

18. Mariana Ottaway, "State Power and Consolidation in Ethiopia." in Keller and Rotchild, eds., *Afro-Marxist Regimes:* and Raymond W. Copson, *African Wars and Prosepctsfor Peace* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994) pp. 34-38; 128-30.

19. Manfred Halpern. "Changing Connections to Multiple Worlds: The African as Individual. Tribesman. Nationalist, Muslim. Christian. Traditionalist.Transformer, and as a World Neighbor. Especially with Israel and the Arabs," in Helen Kitchen, ed., *Africa: Erom Mystery to Maze* (Lexington. MA: D.C. Heath, 1976) pp. 9-44.

20. As quoted in Manfred Halpem. "Changing Connections to Multiple Worlds..." in Kitchen, ed.. *Africa: From Mystery to Maze,* p. 22.

21. For a detailed analysis, see Ali Mazrui "The Anatomy of Violence in Contemporary Black Africa," in Kitchen, ed.. *Africa: From Mysteiy to Maze.* pp. 45-76.

22. See Christopher Clapham. "Liberia." in Martin Gilbert, ed.. *Recent Histoiy Atlas* (New York: Macmillan, 1991).

23. For further details on President Tolbert's policies, see Harold D. Nelson, ed., *Liberia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: The American University. 1985).

24. See, for example, Abiodun Williams. "Regional Peacemaking: ECOWAS and the Liberian Civil War." in David D. Newsom. ed.. *The Diplomatic Record 1990-1991* (Boulder. CO: Westview. 1992) pp. 213-31.

25. Nelson, ed., *Liberia: A Country Study,* p. 66.

26. For further details, see Karl P. Magyar. "Culture and Conflict in Africa's History: The Transition to the Modern Era," in Stephen J. Blank, et al., eds. *Conflict. Culture, and History: Regional Dimensions* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1993) pp. 229-93.

27. Clapham, "Liberia,** in Gilbert, ed.. *Recent History Atlas,* p. 613; one source of statistics on Liberia is *Africa South of the Sahara 1992* (London: Europa Publications, 1991) 21st. ed., pp. 599-615.

28. See. Clapham, "Liberia," in Gilbert, ed.. *Recent History Atlas,* p. 614.

29. The population of Liberia in 1990 was approximately 2,595,000. The major ethnic groups are the Kpelle comprising 20.8 percent of the population, who occupy the central section of the country particularly Bong County. The Bassa (16.3 percent) in :he Buchanan region, and the Gio (8.2 percent) in Nimba County are the second and third largest groups. Other well-known groups are the seafaring Kru (8.0 percent) and the Vai (2.8 percent), who invented the Vai script in about 1815. the Krahn (5.2 percent), Gola (4.7 percent), Loma (5.3 percent), Kissi (3.4 percent), Mano (7.1 percent). Mandingo (2.9 percent), and Americo-Liberian (1.5 percent) who, among a few others, are all part of the political, social and economc equation in Liberia. For further details, see George Thomas Kurian. *Encyclopedia of the Third World* (New York: Facts on File, 1992) vol. 11, p. 1122.

30. J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy* (Bloomington. IN: Indiana University Press. 1987), pp. 302-3.

31. It was in Nimba County where the support for Jackson Doe (no relation to President Doe) and Quiwonkpa was the strongest. The latter had led the abortive coup against President Doe, while the former had been the presidential candidate of the Liberian Action Party (LAP) during the 1985 elections. The party and its candidate had appeared threatening to President Doe's candidacy.

32. For further details, see *West Africa.* 1-7 March 1993, p. 326.

33. "200 refugees slaughtered in Liberia church/" *Chicago Tribune,* 31 July 1990. Section 1, p. 2.

34. "Liberian Army's 'Reign of Terror'" *New York Times Iniernaiional.* 13 July 1990. p. A3.