Essays on Complex Emergencies:

AN EXAMINATION OF THE CO-EXISTENCE OF VIOLENCE AND DEMOCRACY IN LIBERIA

— and —

THE COMPLEX EMERGENCY IN DARFUR: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CATASTROPHE

by

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Abstract

Essay 1: Violence and Democracy in Liberia

While recent violence in Liberia involved a reaction against the hegemony of the Americo-Liberian minority by the indigenous majority, an examination of the co-existence of violence and democracy in Liberia demonstrates that its underlying causes were considerably more complex. In this context, violence and democracy cannot be understood as a simple binary distinction, but as different aspects of the same process of political justification.

Keywords: Liberia; violence; democracy; Americo-Liberians; warlordism

Subject Terms: Complex emergency; violence and democracy; indigenous political systems

Essay 2: Darfur: A Multidimensional Catastrophe

The complex emergency in Darfur has often been described as resulting from ethnic conflict between Arab and indigenous populations. However, a consideration of relevant historical, political, economic, social, and ecological factors shows that, while the causes of this complex emergency were multidimensional, all may be ascribed to the failure of the Sudanese government to deal with such factors effectively. This conclusion has important implications regarding future international responses to similar complex emergencies.

Keywords: Darfur; conflict; humanitarian crisis; land tenure; drought; mechanized farming

Subject terms: Complex emergency; famine; protracted war
Acknowledgements

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This project is dedicated to the founder of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). As founder and chairman of AKDN, Aga Khan’s vision and leadership has inspired and stimulated the active involvement of ordinary citizens, community organizations, universities, NGOs, and governments around the world to focus on issues of the developing world. The result is a rich journey that is helping to bridge the gulf between East and West, North and South, the developing and the developed world, and between urban and rural settings. In this journey, we have learnt a deep sense of personal and intellectual humility, not to dilute our identities, but to enrich our self-knowledge.
To the Aga Khan
Peace be on him
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Essay 1:

An Examination of the Co-Existence of Violence and Democracy in Liberia

Liberia is a country located in West Africa that has been embroiled in a violent civil war. This conflict has broken the interior of the country into a collection of warring factions that seem only to offer further violence and destruction to the Liberian people. In addition, for most of the 20th Century, Liberia has been at the epicentre of violence that has cost thousands of Liberians their lives. Hence, it has only been since 2006 that Liberia’s government, people and society are experiencing a certain degree of calm and stability with a significant reduction in violence and wanton destruction.

Liberia has been in upheaval caused by violence and civil war since 1989 and thus might seem a paradoxical country in which to examine questions of democracy. Liberia is Africa’s oldest republic; it became independent in 1847, facilitated by the American Colonization Society (ACS) as a haven for “Free People of Colour” from the United States. Many scholars have characterized the violent disruptions that Liberia has experienced as due to the country’s lack of democratic institutions and enduring patterns of dictatorship. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the historical significance of the relationship between violence and democracy in Liberia, in relation to the country’s potential for future democratization. In particular, the struggles for power and leadership which occurred in Liberia as a result of the breakdown of traditional structures may be viewed as constituting one of the primary causes for the country’s subsequent failure of democratization. On this basis, it has also been asserted that current struggles relating to democracy in Liberia directly result from the socio-economic policies and political structures enforced by the Americo-Liberians, who first immigrated to the country in 1822. However, a closer examination of the issue demonstrates that the causes underlying such recurring patterns of instability in Liberia are likely to be considerably more complex than suppositions regarding a simple, binary opposition between the Americo-Liberians and indigenous populations are likely to discern. In attempting to achieve greater comprehension of the relationship between violence and democracy in Liberia, multiple contributing factors thus need to be considered.
To comprehend the co-existence of violence and democracy in Liberia, it is therefore essential to consider the historical interactions among various national interest groups with opposing desires and objectives. The social, political and economic structures instituted in Liberia represented the immediate outcome of these interactions, as did the subsequent evolution and deterioration of those structures. This paper will first offer an overview of relevant factors concerning Liberia's social and historical background as a means of determining how and why violence and democracy have co-existed in the country and the ways in which this pattern of co-existence has evolved as these factors have changed. Then, a brief review of the previous literature on this topic will be offered, as well as a further examination of the problem in relation to the opinions of other scholars. Finally, after a consideration of the relevant historical, social/cultural, political and economic factors, several underlying causes for the co-existence of violence and democracy in Liberia will be suggested.

Overview of Liberia

During the colonial period, Liberia was the only independent republic in Africa. The country's name derives from the English word 'liberty,' since it was founded as a political entity by freed slaves from the United States. In 1818, the ACS established a settlement in the region which is now called Liberia, and the first group of freed slaves arrived there in 1822. Initially, the colony was named Liberia and the capital Monrovia, to honour U.S. President James Monroe. In 1847, the country was officially designated as the Republic of Liberia. Thus, Liberia was never actually a colony of any foreign power and was always at least nominally independent of external colonialist influences (Beyan, 2005, pp. 85-88; www.everyculture.com, n.d.).

In 1822, 16 ethnic groups were living in the region: the Gola, Kissi, Mandingo, Vai, Gbandi, Kpelle, Loma, Mende, Gio, Mano, Bassa, Dei (Dey), Kru, Belle (Kuwaa), Krahn, and Grebo (cited as Glebo). (The political systems of these groups will be discussed below in the section concerning the Historical Dimension.) In contrast to these indigenous peoples, the freed American slaves who settled in the region are generally referred to as Americo-Liberians (Ballah, 2003, p. 56).

Americo-Liberian Immigration

The highest immigration levels to Liberia from the United States occurred during the years immediately preceding and following the US Civil War. However, in absolute terms the numbers of immigrants remained small. As Table 1 below shows, the yearly average peaked at 698 in 1831-1832, with secondary peaks of 573 in 1849-1854 and 559 in 1865-1868. Although
ACS-sponsored immigration had consistently averaged 50 and above in preceding years, after 1893 that rate declined to fewer than 10/year. However, some black Americans did immigrate to Liberia independently, without ACS support, even after the highest immigration levels had ceased.

**Table 1.**

**Rates of Emigration, USA to Liberia, 1820-1892**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years (inclusive)</th>
<th>Number of Years</th>
<th>Number of Emigrants</th>
<th>Average per Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1820-1825</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826-1830</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1,031</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831-1832</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,395</td>
<td>698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833-1847</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2,748</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849-1854</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4,01</td>
<td>573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855-1860</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1,846</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861-1864</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865-1868</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2,234</td>
<td>559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869-1872</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873-1892</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1,411</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>73</strong></td>
<td><strong>15,987</strong></td>
<td><strong>219</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: American Colonization Society Annual Reports, nos. 69-76; Maryland State Colonization Society Papers.

The population of Liberia grew quickly, reaching 2,893,800 by 1994; by 2004, it had reached 3.4 million. During these periods, the America-Liberians represented only about 5% of the total population (Gershoni, 1985, p. 22). Although English is Liberia’s official language, many Liberians are fluent in one or more indigenous language.

**Examination of the Problem**

During the 19th Century, the American missionary John Payne considered that the Glebo of south-eastern Liberia practiced “the purest of democracies” (Moran, 2006, p. 4). In 1847, 25 years after the first African-American (America-Liberian) immigrants arrived, Liberia affirmed its independence from the ACS, establishing an American style constitution, along with related democratic institutions. During this period, the America-Liberians retained a power monopoly over state institutions, and native Africans were not granted political rights until the 1960s (Liebenow, 1987, pp. 63-65).
According to Mgbeoji (2003), initially constitutional norms were followed in Liberia, as these were significant to the Americo-Liberian citizens. The observance of such norms enabled an open discussion of the party's goals every two years, while it also encouraged the socialization of new generations of citizens (pp. 7, 9). Levitt (2005) also suggests that, before centralized power within the executive branch, political corruption was strictly penalized. A number of Liberian presidents were impeached or required to resign for this reason, and the transitions of power in such cases were reasonably peaceful. Thus, when one considers this relatively long history of previous accordance with established democratic norms, the question arises: Why did Liberia, which differed so much from other African nations in this respect, ultimately collapse into violent civil war during the 1990s (pp. 182-183)?

In attempting to answer this question, scholars such as Kieh (2008, p. 55) and Sawyer (2005, pp. 18-19) argue that the explanation for this collapse may be that, following a military coup in 1980, the situation in Liberia deteriorated into absolute anarchy during the period from 1989 to 1996. This led to a complete breakdown in government control, followed by foreign occupation, with a resulting death toll of up to 200,000 people, most of whom were civilians. Even after a peace agreement and internationally supervised elections in 1997, the violence in Liberia did not end. Charles Taylor, who had started the war in 1989, had received 75% of the votes in what were broadly portrayed as "free and fair elections." However, within two years he was confronted by a new armed faction and spent his entire 5-year term as president trying to hold off these "rebels," without success. The rebel forces were able to occupy an increasing amount of territory, and Taylor was thus forced into exile in Nigeria in 2003. Then, a transitional government was constituted that agreed to hold new elections in 2005.

As Hirsch (2001, pp. 25-28) and Richards (1998, p. 68) remark, during the 1990s Liberia, along with its neighbour, Sierra Leone, was regarded by the rest of the world as a region of widespread havoc and destruction. Forces in both countries were accused of employing child soldiers and maintaining a style of "warlord" politics funded by "blood diamonds." Diamonds from Sierra Leone funded Charles Taylor's rebel forces in Liberia, as well as those of Foday Sankoh, in Sierra Leone itself. Virtually all of the diamonds produced in Sierra Leone, with a value of $300-$450 million/year, were smuggled via Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire (Hirsch, 2001, pp. 25-26), and this money helped to fuel the breakdown of institutional authority which occurred throughout the region at that time. Several hypotheses concerning the reasons for this regional breakdown in institutional authority will be considered in the following section.
Literature Review on the Issue of Violence and Democracy

Robert Kaplan (1994, p. 3), for instance, considers the wars in West Africa in terms of a "New Barbarism Hypothesis" which states that "ancient tribal hatreds" and other undeveloped cultural attributes in Liberia reflect the kind of ongoing social conflicts that elsewhere were resolved without violence by means of such forms of political organization as multiparty democracy. Following the 1980 military coup, the "tribalism" which already existed in Liberia appeared in a new form, when Samuel Doe, the leader of the coup, systematically filled Liberian government institutions with members of his own ethnic (Krahn) group. In response, during the 1980s other militant "tribal" configurations emerged and engaged in violent conflicts with other similar groups, on the basis of perceived "tribal" identities. Essentially accepting Kaplan's presuppositions, the Western media attributed this violence to "ancient tribal hatreds," despite the fact that these organized "tribal" groups had only recently been constituted (Alao, 1998, pp. 7-9).

Other scholars (e.g., Richards, 1998, pp. xvi-xvii; Moran, 2006, pp. 5-6; and Ellis, 2007, p. 20) criticize the "New Barbarism Hypothesis" for not recognizing the historical interconnectedness of violence and democracy in Liberia. For example, Liebenow (1969) argues that, in Liberia, "[t]raditional society [was] essentially concerned with consensus rather than conflict, even though intercommunal warfare was a fairly common event" (p. 52). In opposition to this view, Burrowes (1989, p. 7) maintains that Liebenow's thesis is essentially incoherent. According to Burrowes, Liebenow describes "warfare...as a 'fairly common event' in societies that relish consensus....What we are offered here are closed systems, both at the ethnic and national levels. It is not surprising, therefore, that violence becomes the primary form of articulation between [these] groups." For his part, Burrowes wishes to view the connection between violence and democracy in Liberia, not as a unique phenomenon, but rather in relation to a larger regional and international context.

However, Moran (2006, pp. 4-7) agrees with Liebenow (1987, pp. 63-66) that, during the 1830s and 1840s, the Glebo practised what Payne (cited in Moran, 2006) had earlier characterized as "the purest of democracies" (pp. 39-40), though it remains unclear exactly which aspects of the social arrangements among the Glebo Payne might have considered in such terms. Given the context of Payne's own experience, it appears that he was amazed by the checks and balances, separation of civil and religious power, and participation by people of all ages and both genders in the decision-making process which he observed among the Glebo. According to Alao (1998, pp. 4-5), Levitt (2005, pp. 20-21) and Moran (2006, pp. 6, 31) Glebo villages were governed by both a chief and a priest, who acted on the basis of the recommendations of a council of elders that included representatives from each of the local
patrilineal kin groups. As well, a women's chief and a council of female elders constituted another deliberative body that had veto power over many of the decisions made by the men. Younger men were also organized into military divisions according to age, and this offered another check on the power of the older men. Indeed, during the 19th Century, this warrior caste represented the primary governing institution in Glebo town, since a preponderance of its members functioned as lawmakers and judges. In this social context, according to Moran (2006), violence was considered a legitimate response, both in defending one's community and in fulfilling one's social role (pp. 39-40). Moran thus argues that the violence and social anarchy that have plagued Liberia during the past 20 years cannot be ascribed to ancient "tribal" animosities or the rise of charismatic authoritarian leaders as modern versions of traditional chiefs. Rather, violence and democracy are interconnected aspects of Liberian history that have recurred in conjunction on numerous occasions in the past (Moran, 2006, pp. 35-36, 46).

In contrast to Moran's (2006, pp. 35-36, 46) perspective, Levitt (2005, p. 28) argues that the social arrangements which existed in traditional Liberian society are basically irrelevant to present circumstances. Instead, Levitt maintains that the political structures established by the settlers essentially institutionalized conflict between Americo-Liberian and indigenous interest groups. In attempting to establish democratic institutions on the basis of the models with which they were familiar, the Americo-Liberians inevitably provoked conflicts with members of the indigenous population, and then, in response to such conflicts, behaved in an increasingly authoritarian manner toward them.

This resulted in a vicious circle that perpetuated violence between these groups. Thus, according to Levitt, "it can be argued that Liberia's legacy of violent conflict is inextricably linked to its traditions of nationalism and authoritarianism" (2005, p. 8) and had little or no relationship to patterns of conflict which had existed within and between indigenous groups in the period before Americo-Liberian settlement. Burrowes (1989), on the other hand, argues that the political conflicts which took place in Liberia were not unique, but resembled those which occurred elsewhere in the region. Burrowes also questions why, if the conflicts in Liberia had only resulted from an imposition of authoritarian rule by the Americo-Liberians, their partial relinquishment of power did not enhance democracy in the country to any notable degree. On this basis, Burrowes maintains that the concept of an "Americo-Liberian ruling class" (p. 7), like that delineated by Levitt, must be viewed as rather questionable.

It has frequently been suggested that the "problem" of violence and democracy in Liberia develops from a power struggle between two essentially static groups: the colonizing settlers and native Africans (Ellis, 2007, p. 41). However, the terms of debate concerning this problem have been limited by the assumption that the existence of democracy can be determined merely by the
presence of elections and western 'democratic' institutions (Sharansky, 2004, pp. 72-75). Thus, both the absence of a democratic tradition among the America-Liberian settlers, as well as among indigenous Liberians, has often been used to call into question whether either group was truly "ready" for democracy. Other, similar analyses claim that the people of Liberia desire and anticipate "strong leaders," who can rule strictly and provide a source of social, religious, political, and economic patronage for other citizens of the country (Kieh, 1988, pp. 35-36). In contrast to such views, Richards (1998) argue that indigenous democratic traditions have consistently been ignored by those who have uncritically accepted a model of political change which assumes that rural Africans inevitably expect their leaders to be patrimonial dictators, or big men"; that their societies value forms of authority which are directly imposed through violence; and that they dissolve into disorder and anarchy, whenever such authority is removed. According to this model, acts of political struggle, whether these take the form of mass protests or economic activism, are understood as essentially impulsive and individual, rather than as reflecting genuine political beliefs and values (pp. 34-37).

Still other scholars propose further solutions to the problem. Reno (1995, pp. 111-113), for instance, argues that recurring violence in Liberia primarily resulted from competition for resources, and that it had few, if any, cultural implications. Due to intense competition in global markets, nations’ incentives to limit resource extraction may diminish and even vanish. Countries that place restraints on such extractions see that their competitors benefit, not only from the profits that accrue from their exploitation of their own resources, but also from the stronger military forces which they may be enabled to develop, as a result. Innes (2004) suggests this strengthening of a nation’s opponents may be viewed as threatening its own survival, and thus the benefits of such restraints may be outweighed by the perception of greater costs (p. 22). Still others, including Sawyer (2005, pp. 19-21), Leibenow (1987, p. 71) and Kieh (2008, p. 20), argue that, due to the absence of an industrial sector in many post-colonial societies, political institutions become the principal means for the accumulation and distribution of wealth. These scholars thus propose that democratic values and institutions in Liberia, like those in many other developing countries, never represented anything more than a superficial facade.

**Understanding the Problem**

Kieh (2008, p. 21) share the view that the concepts of violence and democracy are seldom used in the same context, since Westerners, at least, are likely to interpret these two concepts as polar opposites. For instance, it is often assumed that democracy generally follows, rather than precedes, a period of social breakdown or civil violence, and that democracy consists of nothing more than “free elections” and personal freedom of expression. Hence, if such a
democratic environment exists, why would violence be necessary? Radu (2006, p. 403) argues, for example, that in the 1990s and continuing into the present century, wars in African countries can be explained as resulting from their lack of democratic institutions. Resolutions of such conflicts typically are held to necessitate a process of “democratization”. The final goal of this process is “free and fair” elections, implying that such elections constitute an ultimate test of whether or not democracy is working and previous conflicts have actually been resolved. As Sharansky (2004, pp. 72-75) cogently remarks, “a society that is not free but in which elections are held should never be considered democratic.... [E]lections are not a true test of a democracy. They are an instrument, one that can be applied well or badly.” Thus, the mere existence of elections in a previously troubled society should not be regarded, as it often is, as a rampart against further eruptions of war.

In attempting to address questions concerning violence and democracy, Beyan (2005) explores Liberia’s historical and geographical location on the horn of West Africa, as a nation that was nominally constructed on an ideological foundation of individual liberty, but which also simultaneously profited from slavery. Liberia’s establishment as an American colony contained a number of different ironies. For example, American slave-owners viewed the repatriation of free slaves with trepidation, since they now would be independent and self-supporting. Therefore, Evangelical Christians formulated plans to “redeem” these heathen Africans by sending missionaries and establishing Christian communities in Liberia (pp. 1, 50).

According to Liebenow (1987, pp. 33-38), it is important to recognize that Liberia’s population contained a number of indigenous groups (often referred to as “tribes”). These groups did not constitute organized, persistent, or self-contained political units, but instead reflected individuals’ assessment of their regional and occasionally religious identities. Even though the kinship practices of all of these indigenous groups were based on patrilineal descent, intermarriage made it possible for many Liberians to belong to more than one “tribal” association (Levitt, 2005, p. 4). Despite the fact that “tribalism” has been invoked as an explanation for the violence that later occurred in Liberia, a consideration of specific regions demonstrates that historically there was more conflict within ethnic groups than between them. Any understanding of the relationship between violence and democracy in Liberia must acknowledge the existence of such historical conditioning factors.

An examination of the above research suggests that, in terms of theoretical discourse on this issue, violence and democracy in Liberia should not be viewed as polar opposites, but rather as different aspects of the same process by which political legitimacy is created and maintained. Liberian history can thus be comprehended as an ongoing interaction between violence and democracy, as this plays out on both the local and national levels. This point also has crucial
implications in terms of global foreign policy in the 21st Century, since the establishment of democracy (by force, if necessary) is often currently viewed as a solution to regional insecurity and the threat which that insecurity poses to strategic resources (Barnett, 2003, pp. 196-198).

This analysis involves an examination of the terms “violence” and “democracy” in the context of political discourses that can be constructed, challenged, and transformed by a variety of actors, at both the local and national levels. Actors at both levels must also refer to international definitions of democracy, since they are necessarily connected with outside powers by mutual political and economic interests. Unfortunately, some scholarly literature on political change in Africa displays a propensity to view the transition to representational democracy as uncomplicated, and considers that transition as an inherent “good” that benefits all sectors of society. Moreover, democracy is often characterized as something with which Africans are unfamiliar, a modern introduction from the West. The focus of discussion thus centres on whether or not Africans are prepared for democracy, normally defined merely in terms of their capability to hold “free and fair elections.” Underlying this argument is the consistent presupposition that African kinship structures, ethnic relations, and political institutions are antithetical to more modern democratic structures (Lipset, 1988, pp. 246-250). Not only does this approach deny the democratic potential of indigenous political arrangements, but it also hinders understanding concerning the significance and function of democracy, in general.

**Historical Dimension**

In order to determine the effects that previous political relationships and institutions may still have on the process of democratization in Liberia today, an examination of Liberian history is required. The nascent Maryland County in Liberia was named after the state of Maryland in the United States. In 1810, approximately one third of the population in the American state of Maryland was of African origin. In 1820, legislation was passed which granted a legal basis for the American government to dispatch freed slaves to Maryland County, Liberia. These immigrants took possession of some coastal land by means of bartering guns and clothes with the native Africans. By 1830, 12% of the residents of the American state of Maryland were “free people of colour.” Due to the perceived threat which these people posed to white slave-owners, the American government formally authorized the ACS to establish a colony for freed slaves at Monrovia (Beyan, 2005, pp. 62-64, 85). During that period, British and French colonial interests were also active in West Africa, though the region which became Liberia was not directly under the control of either power. However, in the period after 1880, the political independence of Liberia was increasingly menaced by British and French colonial interests and even lost a substantial amount of territory to the neighbouring British and French colonies.
In this context, it should be noted that the founding of a democratic republic in this region by such a small number of former slaves, who never exceeded 12% of the country's total population, represented an achievement which historically was virtually unprecedented.

Pre-settler Indigenous Political Systems

While it is difficult to briefly summarize the traditional political institutions that existed in all of the 16 indigenous groups that were present during the initial period of Americo-Liberian settlement, their basic structures can be outlined. Two general patterns of governance existed among these groups: a system of centralized authority, predicated on the role of chiefs, and a decentralized system of kinship organizations, age-cohort associations, and secret societies. While the division between these patterns of governance was not entirely clear-cut, in broad terms it may be said that the Gola, Kissi, Mandingo, Vai, Gbandi, Kpelle, Loma, Mende, Gio, and Mano maintained the former system of governance, while the Dei, Belle, Bassa, Kru, Krahn, and Glebo maintained the latter (Levitt, 2005, pp. 21-25).

Centralized governance among the former groups was based on a patrilineal system, in which the hierarchy of political authority reflected family lineage. As Levitt (2005, p. 22) and Ballah (2003, pp. 56-57) says: "the rank ordering of the lineages relative to the core lineage constituted the structure of authority in the society." In contrast, the latter groups lived in decentralized societies, in which family lineage did not ensure political empowerment, while age-cohort associations were much more significant, in this regard. In these societies, councils of elders represented the primary decision-making authority in virtually all areas of political, economic, cultural, and judicial concern.

However, well before the arrival of the first Americo-Liberian settlers, recurring conflicts among these groups, primarily over their competing interests in the slave trade, had become frequent. As a result, as Levitt (2005) maintains, "traditional structures of governance and authority lost cultural significance and recognition" (p. 25). The new political alliances which then emerged "created hybrid political institutions of authority" (Levitt, 2005, pp. 25-26) and several groups which had previously possessed decentralized systems of governance adopted hierarchical arrangements. The frequent migrations which had also influenced interactions and exacerbated conflicts among the array of groups in the region also undermined traditional structures of governance. Thus, in this regard, "the emergence of the settler community...was not new; rather it was one of the successions of political developments and foreign migrations into the region" (Levitt, 2005, p. 25). The overall complexity of the interrelationships between all of the
groups involved, both settler and indigenous, was therefore considerably greater than some scholars have maintained.

**Violence and Democracy**

During the 19th Century, frequent wars occurred in Liberia. Violence against neighbours and kin was regarded as a legitimate reaction to instances of infringement on farmland, for example. Success in war also represented a way for young men to enhance their social status. This violence constituted an integral aspect of local political affairs, and it was definitely not unregulated (Levitt, 2005, pp. 4-6). Indeed, such controlled violence often functioned to maintain the legitimacy of local political authority. Thus, although it has sometimes been argued that the massive disruptions occasioned by the civil wars completely destroyed these local institutions and weakened the values that supported them, Nisbett (as cited in Moran, 2006, p. 43) for instance, reports that these basic structures of governance were still in place in 1998. Moreover, he states that he was astonished by the "democratic" aspects of governance that he observed, especially in relation to the empowerment of women. Upon his return in 2004, Nisbett's earlier experience of the democratic qualities of local Glebo governing institutions was reinforced, and this assessment accords with those made by earlier observers of Liberian society.

However, Fox (1868, as in Moran, 2006, pp. 43-44) maintains, in contrast, that the democratic practices that observers noted among the Glebo merely reflected the weak inherited elements of an uncontrolled democracy. In his view, the aspects of democratic governance that may have still existed were outweighed by impulses of hatred and revenge. Under such circumstances, despite the fact that democratic forms of governance might nominally continue to be observed, Glebo society as a whole offered little personal security to its members. Fox thus believes that the violence inherent in the individual autonomy offered by this form of democracy entailed too great a sacrifice, in terms of personal security.

In contemporary analytical discourse concerning democracy, women's and young people's organizations are generally regarded as interest groups that operate outside and in addition to actual government structures. This perspective suggests that Payne, on the contrary, considered that such organizations represented integral elements of government. While all of these elements did not possess equal power, and all individuals did not have equal rights, this system provided structures through which the voices of social subordinates could be heard and their grievances redressed. Since democracy also involves a set of values and attitudes, Payne recognized the sense of personal autonomy which he observed in the Glebo community as essentially democratic (Ake, 1993, p. 243).
Piot (1999, pp. 2, 7) argues further, that “cultural differences” are inevitable and fixed, and that Africans are therefore incapable for Western style democracy, that Africans are not inherently non-individualistic, as has often been assumed. Hence, although Western sources often assume that violence against civilians in Liberia reflects a "lack of regard for human life." Ellis (2007, pp. 20-22) argues instead that such violence did not reflect the attitude that its victims were worthless. Rather, it reflected the belief that any individual, regardless of his or her rank in the community, could potentially become a conduit for vast power. Here, we can identify the mutually interconnections between violence and democracy more directly: if all individuals in a society can be viewed as equally powerful, then all can be considered equally dangerous (p. 46).

Social and Cultural Dimensions

In order to demonstrate the ongoing effects of past attitudes toward power and leadership on the relationship between violence and democracy in Liberia, the social and cultural dimensions of the issue also require examination. From the outset, it is apparent that relations between Americo-Liberians and the indigenous population were strained, and this resulted in a rapid disjunction between the development levels of the two respective groups (Sawyer, 2002, p. 119). In terms of education, the Americo-Liberian settlers also represented a relatively privileged group, in comparison to the native Africans and these social and economic divisions have persisted (Sawyer, 2002, p. 119).

Educational System

Sawyer (1992, pp. 119-121) and Liebenow (1987, pp. 84-87) discuss the educational system in the settler society in relation to attempts to socialize native Africans into the “arts of civilized life”. Although the colonial government took responsibility for education as early as the 1830s, by independence only 16 schools had been established. While some indigenous children living close to the Americo-Liberian settlements that possessed these schools received some education, most children who lived elsewhere did not (Gershoni, 1985, p. 24). During the 19th Century, most education focused on the promulgation of Christianity, rather than other, more practically beneficial subjects. As Lipset (1981) comments, the socio-economic advancement of a culture through education is essential to its development as a democracy. Moreover, a society’s educational system represents only one among many basic conditions, such as economic development and the overall wealth of society, required to sustain democracy (Lipset, 1981, pp. 108-109).
According to Bratton and Mattes (2001), people's perceptions are not simply conditioned by the cultures to which they belong; instead, education plays a major role in helping them to assimilate and interpret new ideas. In addition to its social function, education thus plays a very personal role. In this regard, the meaning of democracy, for example, could be conveyed by enabling citizens to achieve an in-depth, individual understanding of their civil and political rights. Such understanding comes through education, and its extent is directly proportionate to an individual's amount of schooling. Thus, the more knowledge people have, the more sophisticated their perceptions of democracy become (pp. 453-454).

However, in general, people's perceptions of democracy remain inextricably tied to the political sphere, and popular attitudes regarding democracy may vary accordingly. Some might think that democracy primarily involves the right to vote freely, while others might view it in terms of the relative merit of potential leaders. For instance, Bratton and Mattes (2001) provide the example of a focus-group interview conducted in Zambia in 1993 and 1994, in which participants were asked the question: 'What does democracy mean to you?' The participants' answers all related to politics. However, the authors qualify their conclusions by stating that attitudes toward democracy in African countries also reflect individual and public perceptions regarding the performance of specific governments. For a person educated in economics, the principal indicator of a government's performance is the state of the national economy. If such knowledge were more prevalent among voters, a government could garner their support, if it performed well in this regard. As Bratton and Mattes demonstrate, a given individual's perceptions concerning democracy depend more on his level of education than on factors relating to age, gender, or social status (p. 454).

Ethnic Factors

Kieh (2008) describes another cultural problem relating to a widespread superiority complex among Americo-Liberians. Because they were light-skinned and saw themselves as better educated than native Africans, they often believed that they were also better qualified to govern. The local residents, for their part, felt exploited by the settlers, whom they viewed as wanting to rule over the legitimate owners of the land (pp. 25, 127). As Liebenow (1987, p. 24) and (Mgbeoji, 2003, p. 5) show, the settlers generally banded together and set themselves adamantly apart from the “tribal” Africans, who commonly came to refer to Americo-Liberians as “white” people.
Political Dimension

As the above discussion shows, a number of scholars, including Mgbeoji (2003), agree that relatively sophisticated political structures were clearly evident among the native African populations in Liberia. Moreover, Mgbeoji suggests that the complexity of these domestic political structures in pre-colonial Liberia challenges traditional classification schemes. Because native Africans in Liberia had developed forms of governance that differed from Eurocentric forms, this led many Americo-Liberians and Europeans to believe that such political structures were dysfunctional (p. 8).

The True Whig Party

The initial political hegemony of the settlers was maintained through a monolithic political organization constructed in 1867, the True Whig Party (TWP), which denied membership and power to native Africans. This influential organization exerted great control over Liberia’s politics and economy. Its members considered that what was good for them was equally good for the TWP and consequently for the country. In effect, contrary to the notion that the occurrence of sporadic elections necessarily entailed the existence of democracy, Liberia was actually a dictatorship, governed by a few aristocrats, who only imitated the superficial structures of American democracy (Mgbeoji, 2003, p. 9).

Ellis (2007) explains that due to the Americo-Liberians’ sense of their own superiority over native Africans, even the benefits of this nominal democracy were only experienced by a few Liberians. The Americo-Liberians constituted an effective oligarchy that strictly ruled the country. Whenever the oligarchs were confronted by rival groups, they were quick to resort to violence. Those in power were merely interested in the development of institutions that would allow them to maintain their monopoly on power. As a result, the development of long-term solutions to political conflicts was effectively prevented (pp. 43-44).

The hegemony of the Americo-Liberian oligarchs who had ruled Liberia since its inception thus hindered any progress toward democratic power-sharing among various interest groups, while the needs of the majority of Liberians were almost ignored by the established institutions of government. As Mgbeoji (2003) demonstrates, the authoritarian nature of the Americo-Liberian oligarchy led many native Africans to despise these so-called western democratic systems, since they viewed them as tools for their own oppression. Since, for their part, the oligarchs were determined to hold onto power, the country was quickly immersed in a series of violent conflicts (pp. 5 and 8-10). Although conflicts between ethnic groups were not absent in the pre-immigration period, these later conflicts were unprecedented in extent and ferocity.
For the reasons noted above, Bienen (1993) argues that democracy in Liberia functioned mainly as a means for the Americo-Liberian oligarchs to maintain power. Discussing violence and leadership in Africa, Bienen asserts that periodic violence represents a tool which African leaders can use to preserve their hold on power. This is especially so in societies and political systems which are inherently fragile. In such situations, political conflicts often reflect ethnic divisions. Moreover, the scholar demonstrates that it is easier for a privileged aristocracy to pursue its own interests by means of existing ethnic and demographic (i.e., communal) ties, rather than through ties derived from class, such as collective income levels (p. 271). Moreover, Bienen (1993) notes that, while many African countries experience a quick turnover in leadership, in others (e.g., Zaire) leaders may retain power for long periods of time. Nonetheless, despite such relative stability in leadership, such countries often remain unstable, due to a history of weak institutions of governance (pp. 272-273).

Comparison Between Liberia and Mozambique

One example of this instability resulting from the breakdown of authority in a fragile post-colonial society occurred in Mozambique, in the period after Portuguese devolution. Since 1975, when Mozambique became independent after Portugal was forced to relinquish its colonial possessions in Africa, the country has been governed by the socialist Frente de Libertacao de Mozambique (Frelimo). Immediately after attaining power, Frelimo faced "an externally instigated counter-revolution" (Sidaway & Simon, 1993, p. 15), supported by South Africa and what was then Rhodesia, and this resulted in an extremely violent and destructive civil war. Frelimo was unable to retain control over large areas of the country, due to its loss of popular support in many rural regions. The party’s doctrinaire imposition of centralized structures of governance and its attempt to make people in these regions conform ideologically, rather than increasing their political and economic options, had alienated many who might otherwise have supported it. As a result, in 1992 the government introduced a program of local government reform, as well as policies intended to produce broad decentralization in the country’s system of governance. However, because the Frelimo government feared the possible consequences of sharing power with opposing political groupings, this devolution of control to local institutions was ultimately reversed in 1997 by legislation which limited the number of areas where such local institutions could be established and rendered them subordinate to the central government. Even to the extent that such decentralization was put into practice, however, it did not serve to genuinely strengthen local democratic institutions. Instead, in the context of a top-down, socialist system of governance, this process tended to enhance the power of government ministries, rather than the autonomy of local populations.
The situation in a former colony like Mozambique thus differed significantly from that described above, in relation to Liberia. While the conflict in Mozambique was initially provoked by outside forces, the Frelimo government proved unable to deal with it effectively, as it had alienated many of its potential supporters through its heavy-handed attempts to impose a specific ideology on them, without considering their needs or interests. However onerous the native African population may have felt the hegemony of the Americo-Liberians to be, they nonetheless were not nearly as oppressed as the populations of countries ruled by either colonial powers such as Portugal or socialist liberation movements like Frelimo. In this regard, it should be noted again that the establishment of a democratic republic in Liberia by a relatively small number of freed American slaves, regardless of the actual limitations of that republic in relation to democratic ideals, set Liberia dramatically apart from the oppressive colonial and post-colonial regimes which surrounded it.

Subsequent Political Developments in Liberia

Since independence, only one Liberian leader, William Tubman, has remained in power for more than 20 years (see Table 2). Although some improvements occurred during Tubman's time—for example, the possession of property as a prerequisite to vote was eliminated—his government was staffed entirely by Americo-Liberians. While superficially Liberia might appear to possess a democratic system of government, it is easy to determine that, before Samuel Doe's coup in 1980, all of Liberia's leaders have belonged to the TWP. This represents a system of personal rule qualified by aristocratic oligarchy (the TWP) which, since the late 19th Century, has primarily served the interests of a minority. Liberia thus was governed by a succession of Americo-Liberian oligarchs, who monopolized all of the governing functions of the Liberian state—if necessary, by violence.

Bienan (1993) contends that such violence in Africa has had a "strong communal component" while, to a lesser extent, it has also reflected class issues (271). As described more fully below, under the class system founded and maintained by the ruling oligarchy, indigenous Liberians were officially defined as members of a lower class (Ellis, 1999, pp. 47-48), and such class and ethnic divisions ultimately produced extreme levels of violence. Organized urban-rural revolutions, such as peasant revolts, have been few and far between in Liberia; the rice riots of 1979, which undermined Tolbert's regime, represent the only historical example. This rarity of victorious popular revolts would appear to confirm Bienan's opinion that communal violence was generally not successful in eliminating the ruling class in post-independence Africa. However, in the case of Liberia, in particular, such an assertion appears to be reasonably well-supported, since Samuel Doe's coup did effectively eliminate a portion of the Americo-Liberian aristocracy. Nevertheless, this shift in ethnic power relations was still insufficient to resolve existing class
conflicts (Ellis, 2007, p. 50). As mentioned earlier, Burrowes (1989) cogently asks in this regard why, if the violence in Liberia had essentially represented a reaction against the hegemony of Americo-Liberian elites, their partial loss of power did not at least assist in the resolution of such conflicts. While Burrowes uses this discrepancy to question the reality of an “Americo-Liberian ruling class” per se, it might also be argued that such causal discrepancies merely show that the presuppositions on both sides of the debate have been rather too simplistic (p. 7).

Table 2.

List of Liberian Leaders, Years in Power and Political Party

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Leaders</th>
<th>Years in Power</th>
<th>Political Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William D. Coleman</td>
<td>1896-1900</td>
<td>True Whig Party (TWP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garretson W. Gibson</td>
<td>1900-1904</td>
<td>TWP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur Barclay</td>
<td>1904-1912</td>
<td>TWP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel E. Howard</td>
<td>1912-1920</td>
<td>TWP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwin Barclay</td>
<td>1930-1944</td>
<td>TWP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles D.B. King</td>
<td>1920-1930</td>
<td>TWP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William V.S Tubman</td>
<td>1944-1971</td>
<td>TWP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Amos Sawyer</td>
<td>1990-1994</td>
<td>Liberian People’s Party (Interim Government)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses Blah</td>
<td>August 2003- October 2003</td>
<td>National Patriotic Party (NPP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf</td>
<td>2003- Current</td>
<td>Unity Party</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Mgbeoji (2003) explains, Doe’s regime was simply a matter of new leaders and parties filling established roles; the primary difference was that Doe led a military regime. The suffering and adversity experienced by the people of Liberia were not alleviated by this regime change, but rather increased. Doe’s coup was not motivated by any desire to enforce social change, but rather to destroy personal foes and advance his own ethnic compatriots. Therefore, this violence did not have any positive impact in terms of strengthening democratic institutions, or enhancing the freedom of Liberian citizens. Samuel Doe, who ruled for 10 years and was the first leader of the country, did not belong to the TWP. However, even though Doe’s reign broke the previous cycle of elite rule, this obviously did not put Liberia on a path toward healing. Instead, quite the opposite occurred: during this period, violence and war were widespread in Liberia (pp. 12-13). As mentioned earlier, Doe, a member of the Krahn group, exacerbated ethnic tensions for
his own purposes, distributing political patronage, government positions, and military promotions primarily to other Krahn. Even though such ethnically defined political affiliations were a relatively new phenomenon, in this way they were used to promote the interests of particular leaders. The violence in Liberia thus did not represent an end in itself, nor did it result from a resurgence of "tribalism." However extreme its manifestations were, it was essentially a means to achieve other, more rational ends. However, the state's sponsorship of such extreme forms of violence prompted many potential victims to organize and obtain weapons for their self-defence, thus perpetuating the continuing cycle of violence (Allen, 1999, p. 368), and for this reason it may certainly be viewed as counterproductive.

Warlordism

Beyond the instances of violence described above, the ongoing existence of contending armed factions in Liberia has enabled the perpetuation of warlordism. Such warlords have generally been political, rather than military leaders, though figures such a Doe and Taylor did emerge from the army. Warlords typically seize property, either for personal gain or, like Charles Taylor, in order to fund the purchase of weapons and support their allies. Warlordism both exacerbates existing conflicts and depletes the resources of a country. Warlords often exploit such resources for their own advantage, while disregarding the future welfare of the country as a whole. Conflicts between warlords arise when they fall into competition for such resources, and the effects of the resulting violence may be felt far beyond the warlords' own immediate spheres of influence (Allen, 1999, pp. 371-373; and Hirsch, 2001, p. 96).

Liebenow (1987, pp. 248-249) believes that the warlords' thirst for personal gain has effectively destroyed any progress toward democracy in Liberia. Thus, in this sense, violence and democracy in Liberia have become inextricably, but negatively linked. With his military coup, Doe introduced the country to authoritarianism by extremely violent means. Having overthrown the previous regime, he ensured the fraudulent election of the National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL) and generally suppressed all of his potential rivals. Mgbeoji (2003) further states that Doe wished to ensure his absolute authority over the Liberian army by any available means, including violence, ethnic discrimination, and other abuses of power (p. 17).

The patterns of violence which have occurred in Liberia may thus be viewed from individual, social, cultural, and political perspectives. Some scholars (e.g., Ellis, 2007, pp. xxv-xxvi) view the incidence of violence in Liberia as entirely determined by the country's past, in which state violence was frequently perpetrated against the country's indigenous peoples. According to this viewpoint, this violent history became ingrained in Liberian society and served to perpetuate existing conflicts among antagonistic groups. On the basis of past atrocities, warriors
felt that they were justified in performing similar atrocities on others. Hence, in Liberia modern political structures and relationships continue to be influenced by this history, and the process of democratization has been blocked by people's adherence to these destructive patterns of behaviour.

However, although a consideration of the country's violent history might appear to support this thesis, the conditioning factors behind the recurring cycles of violence in Liberia remain considerably more complex than Ellis acknowledges. As shown above, in Liberia violence had several traditional social functions that ultimately became dysfunctional due to a variety of internal and external influences. It is not enough to demonstrate a connection between the country's violent past and its present failure to develop resilient democratic institutions and practices. Instead, in order to be fully comprehended, the relationship between violence and democracy in Liberia must be examined in terms of a wider variety of historical, social/cultural, political, and economic factors than has previously been done (Ballah, 2003, p.56).

Right to Vote

Gershoni (1985) demonstrates that, in the period following World War II, the Americo-Liberians attempted to address the possibility that national liberation movements elsewhere in Africa would assist indigenous populations in Liberia in challenging the Americo-Liberian regime. As Gershoni (1985) says:

Unlike the colonial governments, the Americo-Liberians considered Africa their homeland and identified themselves with other inhabitants of the continent. Since they had no country of their own to return to, it was essential to prove to both African liberation movement leaders and Liberian Africans they were not a foreign minority ruling in colonialistic fashion, but rather the founders of the first independent republic on the African continent. (pp. 103-104)

Therefore, in 1946, the Liberian government granted all citizens (including women) the right to vote, while the system of provinces in the country was simultaneously abolished. Nevertheless, the Americo-Liberians still maintained control over all levels of government and their acquisition of voting rights did not result in indigenous Africans attaining any degree of genuine political power, as "Americo-Liberians continued to be overrepresented in the Liberian legislature" (Gershoni, 1985, pp. 103-104). Such attempts on the part of the Americo-Liberian minority to ameliorate conflicts with the indigenous population through democratic means thus continued to fail, due to the unwillingness of the Americo-Liberians to relinquish their control over the country's political and economic institutions.
Economic Dimension

A New Constitution

As the Americo-Liberians continued to settle in Liberia in 1825 the ACS ratified a new constitution that closely followed the model of the American Constitution. Because, as slaves, the Americo-Liberians had been denied any sort of social, political, or economic freedom, they intended to ensure their freedom in Liberia through a constitution that detailed the rules under which they would govern the region. The new constitution excluded the native Africans from participation in Liberia’s economic and political activities, as well from the democratic process as a whole (Morrow-Wilson, 1971, pp. 57-58). As Boley (1983, p. 15) shows, as the Americo-Liberian oligarchs increased their political power, they also systematically eliminated the indigenous population’s economic rights, as well as depriving them of land-ownership rights. The Dukor Contract of 1822, although it only pertained to a very small area along the coast, exemplifies the sort of “negotiations” over land which occurred between local Africans and the new settlers, whereby the indigenous chiefs were forced to sign away their land. Without economic freedom, the native Africans could hardly be expected to participate in developing the country’s democratic institutions, even if they had not been prevented from doing so by other means. As Ndulo (2007, p. 213) explains, whether or not the Liberian government resorted to violence in order to preserve minority rule, its perpetuation of Liberia’s failing political institutions nevertheless achieved the same purpose. Although the Americo-Liberians represented only approximately 5% of the population and were centered primarily in the coastal region, they dominated the country’s economic institutions (Somah, 2005).

However, during the latter part of the 19th Century, the central government “had neither the military forces nor finances to safeguard her territories beyond Monrovia’s 40-mile ‘constitutional zone’ (Leopold, 1991) and thus was unable to enforce its economic policies on the native African population outside this area. Insofar as these policies were enforced, they only compelled obedience and did not accede any rights to those who were obliged to obey them (Gershoni, 1985, p. 31). Taxes could only be collected in areas where government authorities had sufficient power, and even in these areas often no attempt was made to enforce such laws, as it was essential to maintain good relations with the majority indigenous population. Thus, in a number of areas, particularly those outside of the constitutional zone, native Africans were able to preserve their traditional systems of governance (Gershoni, 1985, pp. 31-32).

As Gershoni (1985) remarks, this represented another significant difference between the situation of the Americo-Liberians and the Creoles of Sierra Leone. After Sierra Leone became a British Colony in 1808, "the Creole community lost its power to initiate and apply decisions

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concerning the local African population” while “Liberia continued to act as an independent republic within the narrow strip of its constitutional zone” (Gershoni, 1985, pp. 31-32).

**Firestone Plantations Company**

According to McLaughlin (1966), between 1822 and 1926 Liberia received little foreign investment. This contrasted strikingly with the situation of another of its neighbours, the Belgian Congo, where large amounts of foreign investment provided employment and reinvestment incomes, as well as the necessary capital to build infrastructure, schools, and hospitals, while Liberia’s economy lagged far behind (pp. 45-46). This was partly due to the fact that Liberia owed $1.7 million on a loan which it had “received in 1912 from a consortium of American, French, British, and German bankers” (McLaughlin, 1966, pp. 52). In 1926, the Firestone Plantations Company, which by then had become a dominant player in the Liberian economy and wished to maintain this dominance, persuaded the government to substitute this loan with a mutually advantageous loan from an American source (McLaughlin, 1966, pp. 52-53). This had the effect of decreasing European influence on Liberia, as well as attracting foreign investments. At the same time, Firestone was granted a 99-year lease on over 1 million acres of rubber trees. While the terms of this lease were eventually changed and the area covered by it gradually decreased (McLaughlin, 1966, pp. 52-53), some scholars suggest that indigenous farmers continued to be forced from their land to make way for the planting of more rubber trees and that they were then compelled to work on these plantations without pay (Kieh, 2008, p. 81; Azikiwe, 1970, pp. 150, 177-178).

However, regardless of such facts, both Wieschoff (1947, p. 51) and Mclaughlin (1966, p. 83) maintain that the Firestone Plantations Company treated its indigenous workers reasonably well. For example, while the minimum daily wage received by Liberian agricultural workers was $.08 in 1963, at Firestone the minimum wage was already set at $.25/day by 1953, and by 1964 this had increased to $.64/day, on a 6-hour working day (Mclaughlin, 1966, pp. 98-99). From a current perspective, it thus is not easy to determine whether or not the Americo-Liberians who managed the Firestone plantations actually mistreated indigenous workers. Perhaps any foreign corporation in Liberia would have been subjected to similar criticism, regardless of its behaviour toward its workers. Given the absence of viable alternatives (apart from the production of iron ore which had been initiated by the Republic Steel Company in 1951 and accounted for considerably fewer jobs), it may be argued that the overall effect of Firestone’s industrial activities on the Liberian economy was beneficial, even though these activities also enabled the Americo-Liberian minority to maintain its hold on the country’s political and economic institutions.

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Open Door Policy

In 1944, Tubman established an Open Door Policy that invited foreign enterprises into Liberia to exploit natural resources, including iron ore and timber. Simultaneously, an economic development program was initiated to improve Liberia's infrastructure and raise the standard of living of the native African population. As Tubman declared at the time:

We shall continue to encourage foreign investments and the granting of foreign concessions in cases where Liberians have not reached the place where they are capable and competent to explore and exploit the potential resources of the country. We shall continue to guarantee protection to investors and concessions; however, it must be on the basis of mutuality. (Marinelli, 1964, p. 93)

Nevertheless, the Americo-Liberians maintained control over this program, just as they continued to direct Liberia's other political and economic institutions. In this way, as Gershoni (1985) says, the "Americo-Liberians succeeded in incorporating Liberia into the new political and economic order that arose in post-colonial Africa", even though their political and economic power remained undiminished. In such a context, indigenous African interest groups did not succeed in forming any effective opposition movements until the 1970s and did not achieve any significant degree of political power until the 1980 coup d'état "ended...Americo-Liberian rule and the indigenous Africans finally took power" (Gershoni, 1985, pp. 103-105).

After Samuel Doe's assassination in 1990 and the subsequent forced abdication of power by Charles Taylor 2003, Liberia's first democratically elected female president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, stated in a 2006 address before a Joint Session of the U.S. Congress that true democracy cannot take hold in Liberia until the country's economy is stabilized. As President Sirleaf declared, Liberians "have the right to a government that is honest and that respects the sanctity of human life. They need and deserve an economic environment in which their efforts can succeed. They need infrastructure and they need security. Above all, they need peace" (Johnson-Sirleaf, 2006, pp. 5-6). As many former Communist countries, such as the Soviet Union and Poland, have demonstrated, democratization of a country's economy often precedes democratization of its political system. On the other hand, it can be argued that, if political democratization does not take place in Liberia, no democratization of the economy will ultimately be possible.

Chances for Governance Reform

In recent years, Liberia has experienced intervals of conflict followed by the establishment of governmental power-sharing arrangements among the leaders involved in such
conflicts. When these power-sharing arrangements fail as they inevitably do, this results in a return to conflict. The fundamental reason for this failure of sustained governance in Liberia has been the absence of any willingness to reform dysfunctional government structures. As we have seen, all of Liberia's governments have been characterized by an excessive centralization of constitutional power in the presidency. The President's ability to appoint those who formulate and implement the law means that the President effectively constitutes the rule of law (Sawyer, 2005, p. 21).

Political conflict in Liberia therefore has often involved a process of internal struggle to change Liberia's centralized constitutional power-sharing arrangements. The lack of political reform has exacerbated existing social and developmental inequalities, resulting in violent conflicts. Recurring cycles of conflict, followed by negotiated power-sharing, followed by elections leading to further conflict, clearly indicate the need for reforms in governance. Undemocratic power-sharing arrangements among leaders create a problem for the democratic process in Liberia that elections alone clearly are inadequate to solve. As Sawyer (2005) indicates, extensive governance reform that decentralizes the constitutional authority of the President and allows multi-party involvement in the democratic process may well be necessary (p. 22).

The current President of Liberia, Johnson-Sirleaf, strongly advocates democratic rule and expresses her intention to liberate the country, politically and economically; thus, according to the President: “Democracy is sacred” (NDI, 2007, p. 1). In her Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative speech (EITI, n.d.), the President firmly stressed the duty of government to remain accountable and transparent, declaring that this duty is crucial for the welfare of the Liberian population. Under Johnson-Sirleaf, the Liberian government is therefore attempting to implement a more equitable and responsive form of governance, specifically with regard to the extraction of natural resources. These changes are intended to ensure that local communities have a sense of participation in the decision-making process in this area, as well as benefiting from the revenues accrued. Although Johnson-Sirleaf admits that much remains to be done in Liberia, these attempts at greater transparency in the management of resources and revenues bode well, both in terms of governance reform and the future economic development of the country. However, as Johnson-Sirleaf recognizes, this transition from authoritarian to democratic rule ultimately will not be successful, if it neglects the complex influences of the country's historical and cultural background (EITI, n.d., pp. 1-4).

Analysis

This essay has examined the violence that Liberia has endured, in order to reach a better understanding of the relationship between violence and democracy. In this regard it is clear that
the problem of violence and democracy in Liberia does not reflect a power struggle between two static groups, the Americo-Liberians and indigenous Africans. It is clear that not all Liberians identify the encounter between these groups as the central moment in Liberian history, nor do they view it as a model and exemplar for all successive relations between local communities and the state. The existence of a variety of unruly versions of local history clearly confirms that other historical discourses are possible in relation to such issues. In terms of such discourses, the binary distinction between "civilized" and "native"—like the similar distinction between "violence" and "democracy"—may ultimately be viewed as false. Similarly, in rural communities like the Glebo, institutions of governance are not inevitably associated with the imposition of authority by the central state, but instead with local family ties and kinship responsibilities. In this context, people can display kindness and generosity to other community members, but they can also resort to violence in ways which may be socially functional within local communities but exceedingly dysfunctional at a societal level. Again, conceptual dualisms fail to grasp the full complexity of the situation (Sawyer, 1992, pp. 48-55).

A close examination of such issues makes it quite apparent that ordinary Liberians are fully aware that their social and political identities are shifting and complex. In this context, democracy can thus represent a means to allocate power equitably but, in a modern context, its failure can also lead to vast destructiveness. Current attempts at governance reform will not succeed, unless they take into account a range of complex historical, social, cultural, political and economic factors. It is clear that the co-existence of violence and democracy in Liberia derives from ongoing national ambivalences in relation to all these factors, and this may ultimately explain why this problem has not yet been resolved.
References


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The Complex Emergency in Darfur: A Multidimensional Catastrophe

During 1983 and 1984, Darfur experienced a failure of life-sustaining harvests which led to severe famine. This ongoing famine was exacerbated in 2003, when conflict broke out in West Darfur between the state-run Sudanese military and state-supported rebel groups. It is important to ask several questions concerning the Darfur famine: What were the underlying causes of the conflict in Darfur and how did its consequences relate to famine? What caused the famine that exacerbated the complex emergency that ultimately occurred?

The perceived characterization of the crisis in Darfur as an ethnic conflict involving Arab and Black Africans obscures a more complex issue (Iyob & Khadigala, 2006, p. 149). This paper will demonstrate that, since the causes of the complex emergency in Darfur were multidimensional, no single factor can be fully explanatory in relation to this catastrophe.

In order to understand the salient complexity of the Darfur emergency, a variety of factors will be examined. First, the paper will provide a brief description of the Sudan conflict to illuminate the complex situation in Darfur. Thereafter, an examination of the problem will highlight the implications of this protracted situation. The scholarly review section will offer different theories on famine that may have influenced the course in Darfur. The remainder of the paper is comprised of five parts. The first part provides an understanding of the problem in Darfur. Second, from a historical perspective, it is clear that the uneven development among the regions of Darfur may have created inequalities between the Arab and African ethnic populations. A third factor in such inequalities was the elimination of traditional farming and the incorporation of mechanized farming schemes. Fourth, although drought is always a serious problem in Darfur, when it is not addressed appropriately, it contributes to famine. Finally, the Sudanese government's strategy of diverting international aid and humanitarian relief to further its aims in the conflict may also have exacerbated the famine. Although there may be other underlying causes which exacerbated the famine in Darfur, this paper will only review the above-mentioned factors. It is clear that the Darfur crisis must be considered within the context of political instability in the country. Moreover, this crisis was not an isolated phenomenon; rather, it was embedded within a broader context of
uneven regional development. The crisis in Darfur was also rooted in government manipulation and neglect. As a result, recurring incidents of drought and desertification encouraged competition for diminishing resources. The Darfur crisis thus demonstrates an interrelationship between a wide range of complex historical, political, economic, social, and ecological factors. For this reason, a new perspective on this complex emergency is essential, in order to understand such emergencies elsewhere and to prevent similar catastrophes from occurring in the future. After reviewing these factors, this analysis will suggest that the complex emergency that gave rise to the famine primarily resulted from the failure of the Sudanese government to manage such factors in an adequate manner.

The Sudan Conflict

The civil war in Southern Sudan has lasted for more than 20 years. Although a cease-fire in 2004 between the government and the rebel groups in the south seemed to be promising, a second related conflict in the Western region of Darfur broke out. The situation in Darfur is often explained by tensions between the Arab populations and the African farmers over economics and farming land. Current tensions that arose from successive droughts and modifications to farming restrictions were exacerbated by the unequal distribution of profits from oil revenues. The uprising of the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) in 2003 reflected grievances of the African population regarding the Sudanese government’s failure to provide adequate support during recurring droughts and famines. Popular support for the SLM/A and JEM also reflected ethnic tensions between the Arab population and dominant sedentary farming communities, such as the Fur, Zaghwa, and Masalit. The government’s failure to respond to these tensions adequately ultimately led these groups to rebel against it. The government reacted to this threat by forming an Arab militia, the Janjaweed, which systematically targeted the African population (Buchanan-Smith & Jaspers, 2007, pp. 559-560).

The Janjaweed militia was primarily recruited from members of the Arab population, and the majority of their victims belonged to 15 or more non-Arab groups, including the Fur, Zaghwa, and Masalit. Many members of the Janjaweed allegedly came from Chad. Among the initiating causes of the conflict between these populations was an increase in violence between farmers and herders, when recurring droughts forced herders to occupy farmers’ lands. Although the resulting violence was not based on ethnic identity per se, it contributed to the subsequent uniting of nearly all of the Darfur Arabs under a pro-Arab ideology exemplified by the National Islamic Front (NIF). Successive Khartoum governments continued to support pro-Arab political groupings, including the NIF and the Umma Party, and it was during this period that the Janjaweed militia was first constituted (De Waal, 2007, pp. 69-71).
According to the Darfur Humanitarian Profile (2008), the numbers of people who have been affected by the Darfur conflict are, by region: Northern Darfur: 1,340,869; Southern Darfur: 1,628,275; and Western Darfur: 1,301,235, for a total of 4,270,379 affected individuals. Of this total, it is estimated by UN officials that 300,000 have died as a result of the collective effects of war and famine since 2003.

Examination of the Problem

Sudan is a Third World country where development has been catastrophic. Internal conflicts have led to the establishment of parallel structures of power that challenge the sovereignty of the Sudanese state. The origins of the current conflict in Darfur involve both its colonial and post-colonial history. During the colonial period, the self-interest of the colonizers resulted in uneven development among the various regions of the country. Since achieving independence in 1956, Sudan has been beleaguered by armed conflicts. The southern regions of Sudan experienced civil war in 1955-1972 and again in 1983. By 1991, the conflict had spread from the south to other areas of the country, resulting in a "network of internal wars" among various ethnic groups (Keen, 2008, pp. 74, 77-79; and Shanmugartam, 2008, p. 5).

Recurring famines have also exacerbated the scale of the humanitarian emergency. Widespread famines in 1988, 1992, and 1998 resulted from shortages in food supply (De Waal, 1989, pp. 25, 65, 76, 80). Protracted wars have not only destroyed rural livelihoods and killed livestock, but also obliterated crops, damaged irrigation systems, and forced farmers to abandon their land. Thus, more than 20 years of conflict in Darfur increased people's vulnerability to famine, while also destroying the assets which might have alleviated that vulnerability (De Waal, 2007, pp. 28-30).

Chronic droughts have also contributed to severe food shortage in many areas. The drought and famine of 1998, when many poor people bartered their livestock for grain, demonstrates the devastating effects which the conflict has had. As in the 1985 drought and crop failure, these effects were greater in the east; although an estimated 8.5 million people were affected in the whole of Sudan, approximately one third were in Darfur (Daly, 2007, pp. 227-228).

Literature Review on Famine

According to the most common-sense view, famine is caused by shortages in food that leads to starvation and death; hence, the solution to this problem involves providing people with food. However, theorists have differing opinions of this apparently common-sense view (Keen,
2008, p. 100). For instance, the theory of famine held by the Sahelian herders is similar to that of the people of Darfur. Their definition of famine arises from their actual experience and does not reflect changes in food availability or death rates, nor does it merely reflect the occurrence of death from starvation (Fouad, 1988, p. 133; and Richards, 1992, p. 4). A similar view is also shared among people in India where, for example, Rangasami states that higher death rates per se are not a necessary condition for famine (1985, p. 1747).

However, Sen (1981, pp. 39-40) assert that mass starvation is a necessary condition for famine. This view may derive from that of 19th Century English-speaking Indian scholars, who opposed the idea that a state of famine could exist, even in the absence of starvation. Since the English verb "to starve" initially implied "to die," the use of "starvation" as a synonym for famine entailed death as a necessary consequence. Conversely, De Waal (1989) argues that the English understanding of famine deviates from accepted academic theory, further stating that the view of famine as mass starvation reflected the 19th Century debate surrounding Malthus (p. 10). Although Malthus agreed with this common view of famine, he rejected the common-sense idea of providing food as a remedy, since he argued that population must always eventually outstrip food supply, regardless of any measures that might be taken to prevent it (De Waal, 1997, pp. 19-22; and Keen, 2008, p. 100).

Malthus's theory regarding the inevitability of insufficiencies in food supply (Dreze & Sen, 2002, p. 196) was challenged by Sen. Sen rejects the common-sense view of famine as shortage of food supplies. In particular, the scholar emphasises the significance of supporting entitlements, such as cash distribution, in the relief of famine. Sen defines such entitlements as the ability to command food through legal means in a society. In Poverty and Famines (1981, pp. 39-40, 45-51), Sen suggests that starvation results from the inability of some people to obtain sufficient food, not from a shortage of food per se. Sen's argument thus do not concern the total amount of food available in an area, but whether or not individuals can exercise their claim to that food. What factors in a society determine whether people get their share of food or fail to do so? Sen believes that the network of entitlements in a society determines whether an individual receives food or not.

When trade and selling labour are means of acquiring essential commodities, an individual's ability to attain those commodities is not only contingent on his or her possession of sufficient property to exchange for them, but also on existing market conditions. As these can change swiftly, Sen viewed such changes as one of the principle causes of famine. Sen's thesis that poverty and market forces are contributors to famine has been widely acknowledged by other scholars (Watts, 1991, p. 18; and Sen, 1981, pp. 50-51).
In *Hunger and Public Action*, Sen and Dreze (1999, pp. 154-155, 162-165) discuss the role of public policy in the political sphere in the protection of entitlements. According to Sen and Dreze, when entitlements disintegrate and states fail to take adequate steps to protect such entitlements, famines may be expected to occur. Hence, Sen and Dreze claim that transporting food to an area where food is scarce may have a positive effect by, for example, bringing down food prices. Certain types of (undemocratic) states may frequently neglect such forms of famine relief (Dreze & Sen, 1995, pp. 22-23; Dreze & Sen, 2002, pp. 44-46; and Watts, 1991, p. 24).

However, Keen (2008, p. 103) argues that Sen’s and Dreze’s opinion concerning the negligence of undemocratic states fails to consider the connection between politics and famine. Moreover, Keen suggests that Sen’s and Dreze’s analysis provides very little consideration of the role of violence in famines. In addition, Sen and Dreze claim that, since the assumption of a causal relationship between famines and violations of legality is mistaken, the millions of people who die in a famine typically die in a “legal” and “orderly” way. However, Keen claims that the relationship between violence and famines in Africa demonstrates that this view is incorrect. Moreover, according to Keen (2008, p. 103) and Watts (1991, pp. 24-25), the possibility that states and political groups might promote famine and then actively hinder relief for their own purposes is not addressed by Sen and Dreze. Keen (2008) emphasizes the importance of this issue because there seems to be a tendency for the international humanitarian system to treat complex emergencies as technical problems or as natural disasters, while adding political violence to this picture renders it considerably more complex. Hence, the human rights abuses that may occur in situations of mass disfranchisement and counterinsurgency are seldom acknowledged (p. 103).

In this regard, Keen’s (1994) study of the causes of famine and the international community’s response to famines reveals the need to address both the political function of famines in specific contexts and the role of war in exacerbating famines. Although Keen’s work takes a perspective contrary to Sen’s, it also supplements Sen’s work by showing how powerless ethnic groups in conflict areas can be manipulated by powerful interests. Keen’s key insight is that famine may benefit certain social entities within an affected country, including specific ethnic groups, merchants, and political elites, at both national and local levels. Thus, the prevention of famine relief may serve significant political and economic purposes for such groups by, for example, functioning as a weapon in internal conflicts through preventing food delivery to rebels, displacing their supporters, and destroying their means of economic support. Famine can also enhance the exploitative profits of grain and livestock traders, as well as those of certain corrupt military and civilian leaders (p. 255).
Presenting a case study of famine among the Dinka in southern Sudan, Keen demonstrates that famine can be viewed as a process involving the forced transfer of assets from one powerless social group to a range of beneficiaries. In this way, Keen underlines the fact that famine entails far more than a large number of starvation deaths. The entire famine process also includes such factors as population displacements, loss of assets, impoverishment, political disempowerment, disturbances in people’s way of life, and general malnourishment, and all of these factors may be vigorously encouraged by those who stand to benefit from famine. Keen demonstrates that historically the Dinka were not impoverished. In fact, it was their assets, such as cattle, grazing land, labour, and the discovery of oil reserves on their land that exposed them to exploitation, while their political powerlessness provided them with no protection from it (Keen, 1994, p. 255; and Duffield, 2002, pp. 92-94). Keen (2008) explains this powerlessness on the basis of the fact that, during past wars, many Dinka had been enslaved. Thus, the Dinka felt that, as social inferiors, they “had no rights,” despite the existence of a nominally democratic government. Confirming this attitude, the Dinka were also under-represented in government institutions, both locally and in Khartoum. This was partly due to the fact that elections in the South had been hindered by the war, partly because the Dinka were victims of systematic discrimination, and partly because Dinka migrants who had been displaced by famine were not viewed as belonging to the constituencies of local officials and legislative bodies in the North. For these reasons, the Dinka were more strongly affected by the famine than were other groups (p. 114).

Moreover, responding to Sen’s definition of entitlements, Edkins (2002) states that the definition itself tends to exclude violence from discussion. The scholar suggests that, for Sen, studying the causal factors of famines does not involve a consideration of relationships among people, but rather those between people and commodities (pp. 14-16). For instance, the 1972-1974 and 1983-1985 famines in Tigray, Ethiopia, clearly shows the risks involved in failing to consider the political factors which may underlie such famines. Although the Ethiopian government represented the famine as due to a combination of drought, environmental degradation, and overpopulation, it was also caused by a series of failed governmental actions which had destabilized the country’s fragile economy. For instance, the government sponsored raids on rural areas which supported rebels, while also blocking relief aid to those remote areas, and these actions had the effect of strongly exacerbating such environmental problems (Harrison, 1988, pp. 40-43; and Keen, 2008, p. 103).

During the 1983-1985 famine in Tigray, a report in The Times (London) cited a “confidential Ethiopian government report” verifying “that more than three quarters of the people in the famine stricken province of Tigray are failing to receive food aid”. Thus, less than one quarter of the total relief aid was actually being delivered to them, during a period when it is
estimated that 1500 individuals were dying per day. During the same period, the relief aid which the Ethiopian government received from various international agencies totalled approximately U.S. $75 million (Smith, 1987, p. 33). Most of this relief ended up in the hands of military personnel. The Ethiopian government also tripled its foreign currency reserves by obligating aid workers to convert their money to the local currency at an exorbitant rate of exchange. In fact, relief aid was used as an enticement for people to remain in the north, so they could then be transferred to the south, where labour was needed on state farms (Harrison, 1988, pp. 42-43; and Keen, 2008, p. 104).

Dreze and Sen (1995, pp. 76-77) similarly to Keen (2008, p. 104) further assert that the delivery of famine relief aid may also be hindered, not only because a government is non-democratic, but also for various other reasons, such as the actions of particular interest groups. The interests involved in withholding relief may be military, political, or economic. Hence, when such obstacles are present, targeting those who need relief most may become a difficult process. Military interests include efforts made to starve populations in either rebel-held or government-held regions. Political interests include providing or withholding food aid for political benefits. In order to understand the economic interests involved in withholding relief, as well as the economic background of famine, in general, it is necessary to consider price changes. Dreze and Sen (1995) state that price fluctuations may lead to famine, due to speculative interests that attempt to profit from such fluctuations by hoarding food supplies as a means of raising prices. It is frequently argued that such economic interests, like those of the military and political actors in the process are more likely to flourish under non-democratic conditions of governance (pp. 76-77).

However, Rangasami (1985, pp. 1748-1750) and Edkins (2002, pp. 14-15) argues, famine has not been eliminated in countries such as India, despite a democratic form of government. Rangasami's examination of famines, during both the colonial and post-colonial periods, has three key points. First, in her study of famines in the Netherlands during the Nazi occupation, Rangasami argues that famines involve a lengthy process which also contributes to impoverishment and loss of assets. Second, Rangasami argues that this process has certain beneficiaries. During famines, grain prices usually go up, while the value of labour, land, and livestock goes down, since people are desperate to sell what they have for food. Rangasami argues that, when desperate people sell their possessions cheaply in order to buy grain at inflated prices, speculators may reap economic gain. Rangasami thus concurs with Sen and Dreze (1995, pp. 76-77) that famines do not merely result from a shortage of food, but may also reflect a variety of problems relating to equitable food distribution.

Third, Rangasami argues that states tend to intervene in the later stages of famine, once this economic process has run its course. Although India was the primary focus of Rangasami's
research, a consideration of other famines also supports her view of famine as the result of a competitive process. For instance, although the Great Famine in Ireland has often been depicted as a natural disaster, it also resulted from political actions. Many landlords benefited from the famine by seizing possession of lands that were left unoccupied by evictions and emigration. This allowed their landholdings to be consolidated, while the willingness of landless people to work as labourers also increased landowners' profits (1985, p. 1748).

Like Rangasami, De Waal (1989) also rejects the idea of famine as a shortage of food. Challenging the common-sense view of famine as the result of food shortages, De Waal also doubts the effectiveness of trying to solve the problem by merely providing food to affected populations. According to De Waal, the 1980s Darfur famine should be understood merely as an interruption in people's established way of life through the imposition of hunger, destitution, and eventually even death. De Waal thus argues that effective famine relief must not only provide food, but must also provide clean water and medical services. He demonstrates that such comprehensive assistance was more helpful in Darfur during the 1980s than simply providing unreliable quantities of food relief (pp. 76-77).

De Waal also elaborates on two contrasting models of famine mortality. According to the first model, impoverishment leads to starvation, which leads to death, usually through diseases caused by malnutrition. According to the second model, a combination of drought, social disruption and economic crisis can create a public health emergency. De Waal states that in the 1984-1985 Darfur famine, mortality resulted primarily from increased exposure to infectious diseases, rather than from any increased susceptibility to infection due to malnutrition. Thus, De Waal claims that the idea that insufficient food is the most pressing issue during a famine may be incorrect (1989, pp. 76-77).

There were two key components to the 1984-1985 Darfur health crisis. The first was the unusual collective migration of people and animals, which escalated their exposure to infection. The second was the lack of adequate amounts of potable water caused by the drought. These factors led De Waal to assert that greater human mortality was not linked to impoverishment per se. De Waal thus disputes Sen's view of poverty and impoverishment as the leading causes of famine death in Darfur, stating that it did not matter how rich or poor a famine victim was; rather, the critical factor was where one was. Moreover, De Waal argues that, during the same period in Darfur, severe malnutrition that increased people's susceptibility to disease was rare. De Waal further argues that mortality from starvation and the general health crisis will both be significantly greater in famine situations; hence, his analysis has important implications for the ways in which relief aid should be provided. First, aid should be aimed at assisting people's own survival techniques; therefore, direct food or cash distribution that allows them to stay in their homes is
preferable. Second, in order to reduce famine-related deaths, the general health crisis must be dealt with as well (De Waal, 1989, pp. 186-193).

As the above discussion shows, in order to comprehend the nature of the social, political and economic problems which famine produces, it is essential to consider a variety of theories regarding famine, especially in relation to the actual causes of famine deaths. Because specific famines occur in specific circumstances, whether during peacetime or in the midst of war, such theories must indicate which approaches to famine relief may be most effective in particular cases. Despite the evident contrasts among them, the theories concerning the causes of famine and appropriate methods for famine relief which have been discussed here may all be viewed as lending support to the argument that famines, in general, and the Darfur famine, in particular, must be viewed from a multidimensional perspective.

**Understanding the Problem**

In order to understand the causes and effects of the Darfur famine, it is essential to analyze the abusive social system that creates this complex emergency. Hence, one may ask: What is a complex emergency? According to the definition generally accepted by international providers of crisis aid, complex emergencies are humanitarian crises that arise from extensive violent conflicts, such as civil wars (Keen, 2008, p. 2). Macrae (1998) agrees that complex emergencies are conflict-generated and thus maintain that a correct understanding of such emergencies requires that they be considered as distinctly different from natural disasters.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) defines a complex emergency as a humanitarian crisis in a country or region where there is a total or considerable "breakdown of authority" due to internal or external conflict. However, this definition assumes that the presence of any "authority," no matter how repressive, is preferable to such a "breakdown." Moreover, in attempting to justify international humanitarian interventions, the determination of when such a "breakdown of authority" has occurred can be fraught with difficulties. For instance, during the 1994 Rwanda genocide, UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali asserted that all authority in Rwanda had collapsed. However, on closer consideration, it becomes apparent that the genocide in Rwanda did not result from the collapse of state authority, but rather from the imposition, with brutal efficiency, of another form of authority on the Tutsi victims. Such a crisis requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency. According to OCHA, complex emergencies involve widespread violence and loss of life, extensive damage to societies and economies, the need for multifaceted humanitarian assistance, and the presence of hindrances to the provision of such assistance, due to political or military constraints. Furthermore, these hindrances represent significant security
threats to humanitarian aid workers. In relation to all of these characteristics, the Darfur crisis thus fits OCHA's definition of a complex emergency quite well (Keen, 2008, p. 2).

However, another key problem with OCHA's definition is that it tends to assume that international interventions to deal with complex emergencies will inevitably be inadequate. In terms of the specific circumstances in Sudan, it is clear that widespread poverty, as well as geographical factors, raise considerable obstacles to the imposition of state authority. Hence, the term "breakdown of authority" provided the Khartoum government with a false excuse for not addressing such factors, but instead, for more than two decades, acting in ways that exacerbated ethnic tensions. In terms of OCHA's definition, the "breakdown of authority" in Sudan may thus be viewed as resulting from the Khartoum government's deliberate negligence and not from any dissolution of government control (Keen, 2008, p. 2).

As discussed above, the analyses of famine offered by scholars like Sen, Rangasami and De Waal were not developed in relation to famines that were correlated with civil wars, such as that which occurred in Darfur; however, these analyses nevertheless have important implications for reducing the consequences of famine, even in the context of a civil war. Although the perspective taken by Dreze and Sen minimizes the role of violence in famines, the entitlement process which they outline may be usefully employed to trace the means by which a civil war may lead to famine. For instance, this may occur through a war's impact on both the direct entitlements and market entitlements of affected populations (Watts, 1991, pp. 24-25). Similarly, De Waal's (1989) analysis of the Darfur health crisis identified a causal connection between the large-scale collective migration of people escaping famine and the resulting increased mortality. De Waal's analysis thus reveals the dangers of restricting people's ability to move freely by concentrating relief operations in refugee camps or other centralized locations (pp. 76-77).

In contrast to both Dreze and Sen and De Waal, Rangasami views famine as a competitive process in which force is fundamental. Her analysis is thus especially relevant to wartime famines, such as that which occurred in Darfur. Thus, the differing theoretical perspectives of all of these scholars may be usefully employed in understanding the specific circumstances of the Darfur famine. If we are to understand famines which occur in correlation to such violent conflicts, we must first recognize the causal mechanisms of famine per se. In doing this, the respective roles of markets, asset transfers and disease must all be taken into account. We must also become aware of the ways in which violent conflict and natural disasters may potentially interact, while nevertheless maintaining a clear distinction between complex emergencies and natural disasters. Otherwise, relief responses to such emergencies may be rendered ineffective (Edkins, 2002, pp. 13-15; and Rangasami, 1985, pp. 1748-1751).
Historical Dimension

A consideration of the background history of the region can help us to understand the underlying cause of the present crisis in Darfur. The population of Darfur is divided into three primary ethnic groups. Northern Darfur includes Arab and non-Arab people, mainly Zaghwa. The central area of the region is inhabited mostly by groups of non-Arab sedentary farmers, the Fur and Massalit. The south is dominated by Arabic-speaking nomads, the Baggara. While all of the aforementioned groups are Muslims, still no part of Darfur is ethnically homogenous. It is also important to note in this regard that the term "Arab" represents a cultural, rather than a racial, identity. It is only recently that Arab and African ethnic identities have become polarized, in reaction to political and ideological disagreements on other grounds (Van-Ardenne et al., 2006, p. 12).

Jok (2007) explains that, until 1916, Sudan was an independent sultanate. Darfur was especially prosperous during the 17th and 18th Century period of the Keyra Fur sultanate. During the 19th Century, due to its geographical location, Darfur became a thriving commercial trading hub, especially in commodities such as ivory and ostrich feathers (pp. 7-8). Flint and De Waal (2005) agree that the Kingdom of Darfur, due to its ongoing trade relationships throughout the Mediterranean area, was one of the most significant commercial powers in the Sahel. During Napoleon’s occupation of Egypt in 1799, correspondence was often exchanged between the French general and the sultan of Darfur. At this time, Darfur’s trade with Egypt was five times greater than that of its chief commercial rival on the Nile, the Kingdom of Sennar. Despite its previous profitability, the ivory trade ultimately failed, after its natural sources had been depleted by excessive hunting. Hence, merchants turned to the slave trade, instead (p. 8).

Slave Trade

Although slavery was never absent from Sudanese society, it became more prominent during the Turko-Egyptian period. In fact, one key aim of the 1821 Egyptian conquest of Sudan was the acquisition of slaves for conscription into the Egyptian army. Subsequently, as a consequence of the Egyptian government’s sponsorship, the slave trade attracted both foreign and indigenous traders, who brought considerable numbers of slaves into Sudan. During the 1840s, southern Sudan became particularly dependent on the slave trade, partly due to the fact that Islam appeared to encourage an ideological division between Muslim populations, who could not lawfully be enslaved, and non-Muslim populations, who could (Sidahmed & Sidahmed, 2005, pp. 12-13).
Sidahmed et al. (2005) explain that the increasing importance of the slave trade during the 19th Century, in the period preceding the British conquest of Sudan, had significant effects on the country's social and economic structures. The southern tribal groups who fell prey to slavery became even more insecure and vulnerable. Due to the presence of such resources, Darfur became a particularly attractive area for foreign and northern Sudanese slave merchants. As well, slave labour was increasingly employed in agricultural production, particularly in North Darfur, enabling the region to expand its wealth. During this period, government control was essentially absent in much of South Darfur, and this allowed the slave trade to flourish unrestricted. Between 1869 and 1876, acting in accordance with the British anti-slavery mandate, the Egyptian government employed Englishmen in attempting to extirpate the slave trade in Sudan. Finally, after the British reconquest in 1898, the Sudanese slave trade was effectively eliminated, although social remnants of this practice (e.g., in terms of ongoing discrimination against the Dinka) have persisted to the present day (pp. 12-13).

During World War I, the Darfur sultanate allied itself with the Ottoman Empire. In 1917, with the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, the Sultan was captured and killed by the Khartoum expeditionary force, and Darfur became part of Sudan under the colonial rule of the British Empire. After the sultanate was defeated, Darfur was increasingly transformed into a lawless society. It is clear that the historical consequences of the defeat of the sultanate include the complexity of the political and ethnic conflicts which persist in Darfur today (Flint & De Waal, 2005, p. 10).

Colonial Neglect

During the years of colonialism, from 1917 to 1956, the development of Darfur was largely neglected. While Sidahmed and Sidahmed (2005, pp. 23, 33, 35) claim that the development of some areas of Darfur, especially the North, was encouraged by the British, the South, East and West were consistently neglected. According to O'Fahey (2007) "population of Darfur has grown from 1.5 million in 1956 to 2.8 million in 1983 to 6.5 million in 2007." This suggests a growth rate of 4.5%, far above the normal growth rate of 2.3% to 5%. It is worth noting that, if O'Fahey's statistics are correct, the population of Darfur grew most in those areas which were least developed (1-3). Not only did the lack of development in these areas contrast starkly with the North, but investment funds for such development were also not forthcoming. Among the primary reasons for this lack of investment was the fact that civil war broke out in 1955, a year prior to Sudanese independence, and continued until 1972.

Furthermore, in 1969 the Nimeri regime adopted a radical pan-Arab ideology, seizing all banks and foreign companies and implementing a pro-Soviet foreign policy. Development was
also impeded by another civil war, which broke out in 1983 and lasted until 2003. In 1989, the NIF fomented a coup against Sudan’s first democratically elected government, which had succeeded Nimeri in 1985. The new NIF regime, under Omar al- Bashir, introduced Sharia law and applied it to every Sudanese citizen, regardless of ethnicity or religion. In 2003, SLM/A initiated its first military action against the NIF government, declaring its objective to be the restoration of a democratic Sudan. Throughout all of these political changes, the successive rulers of Sudan never treated Darfur as economically important, nor did they encourage any significant economic development in the region (Sidahmed et al., 2005, pp. 23, 33, 35).

**War Between North and South**

Sidahmed et al. (2005) explain that, when Sudan gained independence in 1956, political power in the country was transferred to the minority Arab elites in the North. This power imbalance led the South to revolt against the North in what was known as the first North-South war, which lasting until 1972 and recurred in 1983 (pp. 26-27). The grievances of the marginalized people in the South included being denied what they viewed as their fair share of national wealth and power (Iyob & Khadigala, 2006, p. 134).

The civil war between North and South Darfur also reflected the conflict between the dominant elites, who claimed an Arab identity, and the marginalized ethnic Africans of the South. The economic and political inequality that was imposed on the South thus exacerbated existing ethnic tensions. The three regions of Darfur (North, South and West) experienced different forms of ethnic interaction with the central government in Khartoum, but excessive military force and political suppression was indiscriminately employed by government forces against all three regions. This failure at the national level to treat all regions equally has exacerbated the chaos which may be seen in Darfur today. In particular, Khartoum’s inclination to support Arab interests in any local conflict indicates that its primary concern was, not attempting to still the conflicts raging in Darfur, but rather dealing with its protracted civil war with the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), which was occurring simultaneously (Jok, 2007, pp. 113-114; and De Waal, 2007, pp. 1039-1040).

**Land Tenure**

**The Transformation of Sudan’s Agricultural Sector**

According to Kebbede (1999), the citizens of pre-colonial Sudan practiced communal forms of land ownership in relation to pastures and water sources (traditional tenure). Chiefs
distributed land and other resources to all community members and also settled disagreements between groups (p. 114). In the 18th Century, sultan Mohamed Teyrab established a system of land tenure called Hakura. Even today, certain families, such as residents of the Dor village (Flint & De Waal, 2005, p. 4), possess title documents to their land under this system. Moreover, as Kebbede (1999) explains, within the context of these traditional tenure practices peasant farmers and pastoralists maintained self-sufficient and sustainable agricultural economies (p. 114).

However, since the end of the colonial period, the land rights of rural small farmers and pastoralists have been destabilized, as new modes of production have forced changes in this system of communal ownership of resources. These new modes of production favoured private ownership, transformed land into an exchange value, and emphasised production geared towards external markets. All of these factors benefited the economic interests of only a few beneficiaries. Several new taxes, including a hut tax, an individual tax and a livestock tax, were imposed upon farmers and pastoralists. In order to pay these taxes, people were forced to produce cash crops, sell their livestock or even work as labourers on colonial farms (Kebbede, 1999, p. 114).

On the other hand, as Johnson (2003) points out, the local system of chiefs and land rights had evolved throughout the colonial period and had become socially embedded in Sudanese culture. The British colonial rulers tailored these traditional structures to their own interests and formed new ones that bestowed juridical powers on chiefs. Today, for instance, local institutions that are strongly embedded in Dinka culture owe as much to British innovations as to indigenous traditions. Hence, existing indigenous institutions in Southern Sudan represent a combination of pre-existing and externally imposed land tenure arrangements. Although the function of such institutions was interrupted by the conflict, especially by means of suppressive controls over people’s mobility, in most areas of South Sudan, the Khartoum government was unsuccessful in imposing its land tenure policies in any sustained way. The indigenous institutions thus continued to maintain their roles (p. 12).

However, De Waal (2007) argues that the main challenge to the traditional land tenure system derives from movements of people which occurred during the 1990s. Both north to south migration in Darfur and the immigration of Chadians that was triggered by the desertification of Lake Chad have resulted in significant pressure on the remaining fertile land by increased populations. Such migration has necessitated changes in the traditional land tenure system, so that newcomers might become entitled to settle on free land, as long as that they respected local customs. A consideration of both of these arguments allows one to conclude that the traditional land tenure system in Darfur has been assailed by problems relating to both land ownership and land management. In this process, land may have become degraded through exploitation and
overuse. Hence, if residents of the area are to survive, land must be distributed more equitably and used more efficiently (pp. 29-30).

**Unregistered Land Act**

Kebbede (1999, p. 115) and Shanmugaratnam (2008, p. 32) discuss the substantial transformation in Sudan's agricultural development that occurred during the late 1960s, when the Sudanese government began subsidizing a shift toward large-scale, commercial, export-oriented agriculture. At this time, the state confiscated thousands of hectares of prime agricultural land from local farming and pastoral communities, in order to facilitate this shift to foreign markets. Under the 1971 *Unregistered Land Act*, many nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists also lost their grazing lands. This act effectively designates the state as owner of any unoccupied lands. On this basis, large landowners, politicians, military officers and foreign investors leased these nominally unoccupied lands and then employed capital-intensive mechanized and irrigated farming methods to them. During the 1970s the World Bank provided the Sudanese government with funding to clear more than 2 million hectares of nomadic grazing land. Shanmugaratnam confirms that the shift toward large-scale mechanized farming resulted in disruptions in self-sufficient, ecologically sound farming practices, as well as in pastoral production. Moreover, this shift caused a rapid decline in the welfare of rural populations, exacerbating conditions of recurrent drought and famine, as well as producing extensive environmental damage.

However, as Johnson (2003) points out, adoption of such new technologies has increased the land area planted with food crops in southern areas of the country. In fact, there has been an impressive growth in both the amount of land under cultivation and in numbers of livestock. Johnson further states that, not only has the implementation of new technologies been facilitated by local institutions, but that these institutions are also working well (p. 12). Similarly, Shanmugartanam (2008) argues that, although the Khartoum government claims all unoccupied land as government property, indigenous land tenure systems continue to prevail. If all of the land claimed by the state actually belonged to the state that would mean that 90 per cent of all Sudanese land would legally be state property. However, especially in the southern regions, where the indigenous land tenure system continues to prevail, this claim clearly has no validity. Moreover, the government’s claim of ownership over essentially all of the country’s land is purely theoretical, since in rural areas land rights continue to be regulated according to customary practices (p. 62).

Nonetheless, as the above discussion shows, this persistence of the traditional land tenure system owes more to the government’s ineffectiveness in imposing its policies than to any recognition of that system’s inherent value. Although, as Johnson (2003) maintains, new
agricultural methods may have increased food yields, this has not served to benefit local populations to any significant extent and has exacerbated existing inequalities. It would thus be difficult to argue that the government's inability to exercise its land claims effectively reflects any positive volition on its part to improve the welfare of rural populations. Indeed, it is clear that the Khartoum government has consistently attempted to undermine or destroy the traditional land tenure system, regardless of its beneficial aspects, while simultaneously attempting to impose its own policies, regardless of the harm to local populations and the environment which has generally resulted from them (pp. 12-13).

Large-scale Irrigation Schemes

Kebbede (1999, pp. 108,116) and Shanmugartanam (2008, p. 32) both argue that irrigation represents the necessary foundation for Sudan's agricultural development. All Sudanese irrigation projects are public ventures, controlled and administered by the state. In the period from 1956 to 1999, irrigation increased five-fold, and by 1999 large-scale irrigation systems provided water to over half of the cultivated land, consuming virtually all of the available production-enhancing water inputs. However, despite this dramatic expansion of irrigation, the traditional small-scale agricultural sector, which provides livelihoods to the majority of the rural population, only receives approximately 40% of this irrigation, and much of the land devoted to traditional agriculture also remains under pressure due to excess usage.

The Gezira Scheme

According to Kebbede (1999, p. 116) and Daly (1991, pp. 96-97), the Gezira scheme is one representative example of a state-controlled agricultural project. This project began operating along the Blue Nile in 1926, with the purpose of providing cotton to the British textile industry. The Gezira project covers over 840,000 hectares. The tenants can obtain leases for 17-hectare plots and can pass them on to the next generation, but they cannot sell or transfer these leases.

Daly (1991, pp. 96-99) and De Waal (2007, p. 9) states that the Gezira tenant system allows the government to control water, plough the land, decide what is to be produced, and market the harvested crops. Since the land is under government control, the government also decides how it should be cultivated. Such strict state control over all farming decisions, including the types of crops grown, the prices and quantities of inputs, the prices of outputs, and the timing of agricultural operations, hinders tenants from accessing more land and labour, so that their crops might provide better market returns (pp. 96-99). Moreover, Kebbede (1999) state that tenants under the Gezira system often suffer from indebtedness. In 1999 over 100,000 hectares
of land out of the 840,000 hectares covered by the system was not suitable for cultivation, due to mismanagement. Local agriculture specialists assert that, unless a more water-efficient system is introduced, this land will suffer from reduced productivity or eventually become completely useless for cultivation (118-119).

Also, Sidahmed et al., (2005) argue that a vast amount of the riverine land was flooded by the Gezira scheme, and many people thereby lost access to cultivable land and pastures. Irrigation schemes have further reduced traditional grazing areas, particularly during the dry season. This forces herders to graze their animals on semi-arid areas for prolonged periods, and this increase in human and cattle populations in such marginally productive areas inevitably leads to permanent land degradation (pp. 22-23, 84).

The Expansion of Rain-fed Mechanized Farming

According to Kebbede (1999), during the 1940s the British colonial administration started promoting privately operated, rain-fed mechanized farming. This policy was primarily introduced in order to supply the food needs of Allied Forces in Africa during World War II. Most of the land acquired under this policy was seized from traditional peasant farmers. The growth of large-scale, rain-fed agriculture continued through the 1950s and escalated at the beginning of the post-colonial era. During the 1970s, large-scale mechanized farming spread throughout most of the fertile areas of Sudan, including Darfur (pp. 115, 122-123). In 1968, the area covered by mechanized rain-fed farming amounted to approximately 422,000 hectares, but by 1989 the total area had grown to 2,950,000 hectares. In fact, during this period 3,500 large-scale farms came to cultivate more land than all of the small-scale farms combined (Sin, 1995, 17; as cited in Kebbede, 1999, pp. 115, 122-123).

Proponents of the mechanized farming system (UN, 2003; GPP, 2004 as cited in Shanmugaratnam, 2008, pp. 65-66) confirm that the introduction of this system marked a notable shift in farming technology, despite the fact that it essentially followed a centralized, top-down ideological model derived from Soviet agricultural practices. In Yirol, for instance, adopters of the system were able to expand areas cultivated and thus produce more food. As a result of this shift, by 1995 the average area of land cultivated per household had increased from 1-2 to 3-5 fedans. The resulting increase in grain production helped households to bridge the yearly 4-5 month hunger gap, and this possibly represents the most remarkable outcome of the switch to mechanized farming that has occurred so far. Excess grain could be saved for future consumption or shared with poorer community members. The expansion of mechanized farming in the Yirol area thus demonstrates the positive effects which technical improvements in food production can bring about.
However, despite such successes in the introduction of modern farming techniques, critics such as De Waal (2007, pp. 9, 31) and Shanmugaratnam (2008, pp. 62-63) maintain that, since there is no shortage of land in southern Sudan, such externally imposed changes in land ownership and cultivation methods may not be necessary. In fact, these authors state that, because the amount of available land is vast and is viewed as belonging to the people, farmers can essentially live and work wherever they wish. For example, the indigenous land tenure system among the Dinka is based on community membership. Members of the Dinka community thus have the right to use areas designated as commons and to occupy land for housing and farming. As a rule, Dinka chiefs allocate such land to individuals for housing and cultivation, and if a particular plot of land is abandoned, it falls into the hands of the chief, who then acts as its custodian.

Given the above description of indigenous land allocation, who then actually owns the land? The answers to this question tend to be contradictory. One interpretation asserts that the people own the land, while another maintains that the state is the ultimate owner. Those who share the latter opinion argue that the chiefs only manage the land on behalf of the state. Those who favour the former view hold that, while the state may own the land, it does so on behalf of the people. Yet a third view suggests that the chiefs are the real owners, because the land is under their de facto control, and only they have the authority to allocate it to members of the community. It is clear from these different views that the concept of land ownership means different things to different groups of people in Sudan. This also suggests, as De Waal (1989) argues, that when the meaning of land ownership becomes so complex, the problems associated with any system of land tenure that implies ownership become extremely difficult to resolve. Competition for land, water, and grazing rights can then become a major source of tension, and excluding certain people from such means of survival can be a potent weapon, once a conflict is underway. In this way, circumstances of insecure land tenure may easily lead to an exacerbation of famine (pp. 47, 49).

Considering the points made by the aforementioned authors, it can be argued that, although differing perceptions concerning land tenure may be a problem, the issue must nevertheless be understood from a local point of view. Shanmugaratnam (2008) remarks that, even though some critics argue that Sudan has plenty of land and that land is therefore not a problem, it is still generally agreed that land is not so abundant, as existing conflicts over land serve to demonstrate. It is thus important to recognize that not just the possession of land is in question here; one must also consider whether that land has accessible sources of the water essential to sustain human settlement, pastoralism or farming on it. Although farming may be rain-fed, a farm is generally part of a homestead that requires a suitable source of water. Another example of the fact that land tenure per se does not constitute the only factor involved in land
usage is that wetlands cannot be utilized for grazing during rainy seasons, no matter who formally owns them, so pastoralists must move their flocks elsewhere at such times. Other competing strains on land usage include the necessity of resettlement areas for people who have been forced to leave their lands, due to drought, war or for other reasons. Furthermore, conservation of forests and wetlands also imposes limits on the land available for other uses (p. 65).

**Drought**

Drought is a period of aridity that, when protracted, causes widespread harm to crops or prevents their growth. Insufficient rainfall and unfavourable weather conditions are natural causes of drought, while environmental degradation caused by overuse of farmland and deforestation may severely aggravate this problem. Inefficient government planning or a lack of early-warning systems may also worsen the effects of drought (De Waal, 1989, pp. 78-81; and Mahmoud, 2004, p. 4).

**Declining Rainfall**

According to data obtained from rainfall stations (Clift-Hill, 1986, as cited in De Waal, 1989, p. 81), the climate of Darfur appears to be getting drier (see Figure 1). Although such data have been recorded since 1916, rainfall records for the 1980s drought years in north Darfur appear to be unreliable, as during this period the government failed to systematically collect this data. However, elsewhere in the country 28 out of 29 rainfall stations measured significant declines in rainfall. As Kebbede (1999) also states, the climate change affecting Darfur was more complex than just a decline in overall rainfall, since large-scale weather patterns have also shifted. Wet seasons are now both shorter and more unreliable, and there are also longer rainless periods (p. 85). Such lengthy gaps in rainfall cause plants to die. Instead of a savannah pattern of many lighter showers, the regional climate has shifted to a desert pattern of infrequent but heavy storms (Fouad, 1988, p. 139; and Davis, 2002, pp. 5-6). Also, De Waal correctly states: "Just as famine is not (or is not just) mass starvation, drought is not just a shortage of rainfall" (1989, p. 78).
What Constitutes Drought?

De Waal (1989) argues that droughts cannot simply be described as more or less long or more or less severe. Each drought, like each famine, has its own specific nature. Although severe droughts may recur, they do not do so in a cyclical fashion, nor do they generally occur repeatedly within a single generation. (The recurrent Jebel Si droughts and the resulting Buz and Kadisa famines represent an exception to this generalization). Darfurians do not consider drought and desertification as two separate issues; rather the ongoing process of desertification is seen as the materialization of persistently recurring drought (p. 81). As we have seen, Sudan suffered from drought and famine during the 1980s. In particular, from 1982 to 1986 the harvests were poor and food scarcity was common. During this period, an estimated 10 million lives were endangered, while approximately two million Sudanese residents had to flee their homes in search of food (Kebbede, 1999, p. 22).

Why Was There a Drought?

De Waal (1989) states that the drought and famine which occurred in 1913-1914 were interpreted in an apocalyptic manner, as resulting from God's wrath. For example, after rainfall had steadily diminished for 20 years, people in Dar Zaghwa believed that the world was coming to an end. On the other hand, few people referred to the 1980s drought in apocalyptic terms. For
example, in Nankose people merely complained that limited rainfall had delayed planting and weeding and did not attribute the drought to any metaphysical agency. Instead, they often blamed both the drought and famine on the Sudanese government's actions or inaction. While a large number of people compared the 1980s famines to that of 1913-1914, this comparison had a political aspect, as the 1913-1914 famine contributed to the fall of the existing government. Throughout the affected region, the 1980s famines were thus blamed on the evil intentions or corruption of the Sudanese government (p. 79).

Regardless of the fact that regional drought has been a naturally recurring phenomenon in central Africa, regions with strong economies and sustainable political structures have generally responded to it effectively, by regulating water storage and usage, while other regions, like the Sudan, have not been so successful. It is clear that the Khartoum government was either incapable or unwilling to take effective action in response to the recurring drought and desertification in Darfur. A relationship between this government ineffectiveness with regard to the recent droughts and famines in Darfur and the conflicts in which it was simultaneously engaged seems likely. Clearly, drought may have contributed to such conflicts, while these conflicts, in turn, may have exacerbated the effects of drought and increased the likelihood of famine. Thus, within the political context pertaining in Sudan, drought, conflict and famine may all be viewed as interrelated, each factor acting as a catalyst to the others (Mekonnen, 2006).

A consideration of African famines, De Waal (1989) demonstrates that, in frequently drought-impacted regions such as Darfur, rural societies generally can withstand such droughts. Local populations in such regions learn how to sustain themselves on wild foods and may turn to other economic activities, like selling wood, in order to survive. However, when external forces are imposed upon them, such societies frequently become marginalized, in terms of both their economic and political security, and this renders them less capable of dealing with natural catastrophes such as drought. It can thus be argued that the Darfur famines were not simply the result of inadequate rainfall, since similar droughts had often occurred before (in 1913-14, 1945, 1949, 1969, 1973 and 1989-90), yet famine did not result in all such cases (pp. 104-105).

**Manipulation by the Sudanese Government**

**International Aid**

According to Sidahmed et al. (2005), Sudan's relations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) date back to 1977/1978, when the country's debt problem became unmanageable and it signed a 3-year agreement with the IMF, under which it received $260 million of debt relief.
The principal conditions for this loan included the completion of ongoing irrigation projects and rehabilitation of existing agricultural schemes (Jok, 2007, p. 70). Sidahmed et al., (2005) state that, by 1980, the World Bank (WB) had approved another $65 million loan, in addition to $11 million from the European Economic Commission (EEC). By 1983, Sudan had become the largest debtor country in sub-Saharan Africa, receiving vast amounts of financial aid, developmental assistance and food aid (p. 104).

By 1984, Sudan failed to make its loan payments to the IMF, and in 1986 the country was therefore disqualified from further loans. At that time, the country’s IMF debt amounted to $220 million. Under these circumstances, Sudan would have not been allowed any further IMF loans, but international aid continued to arrive at a rate of $900 million/year. This was the outcome of a “shadow agreement” that permitted foreign investors and world organizations to continue to conduct business in Sudan (Sidahmed et al., 2005, p. 104). Moreover, Sidahmed et al., (2005, p. 104) state, and Shanmugaratnam (2008, p. 9) agrees, that among the consequences of this “shadow agreement” were the indirect financing of the war and the resulting famine. During 1987/1988, the Khartoum government allocated $449 million to national security and $230 million to the armed forces; throughout that period, development assistance amounted to approximately $950 million/year.

Unequal Project Development

Jok (2007) demonstrates that many agricultural projects seemed to benefit the North, rather than the peripheral regions. For instance, the Jonglei Canal project, which was designed to increase water supply to the North, was built from resources extracted from the South, for which that region received no dividends. Environmentalists argued that ethnic groups, such as the Dinka, who inhabited the development area, would lose their pastures, while desertification of the region would increase. Opponents of the project also argued that, not only would the North receive increased water flows, but it would also obtain a better irrigation system than southern communities possessed (p. 72).

There is little credible evidence to support the Sudanese government’s contention that its policies were not intended to benefit specific regions at the expense of others or that it did not deliberately act to obstruct the distribution of relief aid (Duffield, 2002, pp. 85-86). Arguments in support of the actions of the Sudanese government are mainly made by government officials. According to Mowjee (2006, pp. 8-9), Sudanese government officials maintain that aid agencies have exaggerated the extent of the crisis, in order to attract funding, even though independent sources (UNEP, 2007, p. 115) fail to confirm such claims, but instead demonstrate that the crisis was far worse than the Sudanese government has ever been prepared to admit. Thus, it is
difficult not to view the further contentions of Sudanese government officials as anything but self-serving. For example, such officials also argue that the government cannot be perfectly transparent with regard to aid funds, since the government does not have a clear idea concerning how aid agencies obtained that money. Moreover, since Sudan has signed international money-laundering conventions, the government is entitled to know how aid agencies obtain money, and, if it cannot trace and monitor that money, it cannot fulfil its commitment under those conventions. It is interesting to note how all such arguments have the same effect; that is, they enable the Sudanese government to conceal potentially embarrassing information from outside scrutiny.

However, regardless of their possible validity, such comments illustrate that the Khartoum government is highly critical of international aid agencies and dislikes their criticisms intensely. The Sudanese government does not have sufficient revenues to address the famines independently, and it views aid agencies' interventions as a constant reminder of this failure. Taken to an extreme, this attitude has led the government to accuse aid agencies of spying for Western governments. For their part, the aid agencies believe that the local communities which benefit from their assistance do not accept this government propaganda (Mowjee, 2006, pp. 8-9).

According to Jok (2007), throughout the current conflict the government of Sudan has obstructed international and humanitarian relief aid in order to advance its interests, rather than helping those who have been marginalized due to the famine. The government has employed a variety of strategies to hinder the delivery of food, water and sanitation to affected populations (pp. 70-71). However, Van Ardenne et al. (2006) claims that one of the reasons that the Sudanese Government employed such strategies to prevent the distribution of aid to certain groups was the rising political opposition against the government among indigenous Darfur tribes. If the government had allowed rebels in the Darfur region to receive aid, this could possibly have strengthened those rebels and conceivably resulted in the overthrow of the central government (pp. 30-33).

The Oil Industry and the Issue of Famine

Oil exploration in Sudan began in 1959; however, no significant oil find occurred until 1980, when Chevron (now Chevron-Texaco) discovered oil in the Upper Nile region. In 1982, additional discoveries were made in Southern Kordofan, and oil exploration is now occurring in Southern Darfur, as well. The North-South civil war, which partly resulted from competition for control of the oilfields, prevented most oil production until 1996. The political instability in Sudan during the civil war period and thereafter led Western oil companies to withdraw to safer venues. Instead, other national oil companies, primarily Chinese, began to develop these oilfields, in partnership with the Sudanese government. In 1999, Sudan became an oil-exporting nation. By
2006, Sudanese oil production was estimated at 400,000 barrels/day and was forecast to increase to 500,000 barrels/day within the near future. Based on a value of USD 67 per barrel, the latter production estimate equates to profits of USD 33.5 million/day, which corresponds to 14% of the 2005 projected gross domestic product (GDP) for Sudan (UNEP, 2007, pp. 139, 142; and De Waal, 2007, p. 19). With oil prices currently ranging much higher, projected profits will be comparably greater, as well.

Environmental Factors

Due to the fact that plans for oil development tend to receive strong political support, and public opinion is generally not consulted, over the last 40 years the Sudanese government has not paid much attention to the environmental issues associated with oil development projects, and this has had a negative impact on the environment. UNEP (2007) reports large-scale harm to pastoral land from drilling run-off and chemical pollution. As UNEP states, if the oil exploration process is not carefully managed, it can have even more devastating impacts on the Sudanese environment in the future, mainly through deforestation and the disruption of natural drainage patterns (pp. 149-152).

Oil and China

China is Sudan's principal foreign partner in oil development, and China is also the main supplier of arms to Sudan. Chinese arms were thus used extensively by both sides during the north-south civil war. China's commercial relationship with Sudan reveals China's determination to achieve energy security by doing business wherever it can, in order to obtain oil. According to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), in recent years China has become Sudan's key ally. Although other UNSC members have attempted, by threatening to apply sanctions to Sudan's oil sales, to pressure the country's predominantly Arab regime into discontinuing support for militias that attack the African population in Darfur, China has consistently threatened to veto such actions. According to Wang Guangya, China's ambassador to the UN, "China has a long tradition of friendly relations with Sudan"; however, the primary motive for China's behaviour in this situation appears to involve defending its own national interests by maintaining a flow of oil that the proposed sanctions would interrupt (Goodman, 2004, p. A01). In this way, China's active participation in Sudanese oil development projects has indirectly supported the conditions that caused and sustained both the Darfur civil war and the famine that resulted from it. Furthermore, by providing the Sudanese government with financial support and arms supplies, China helped to remove any incentives that government might have had to resolve the country's internal conflicts equitably.
Analysis

An examination of the relevant literature indicates that the complex emergency in Darfur resulted from the interplay of a number of different factors. In attempting to understand the underlying causes of the Darfur famine, this paper has considered several historical factors, as well as the issue of land tenure, the problem of drought and the manipulation of relief aid by the Sudanese government. According to this analysis, it appears that, among the principal causes of the famine, the actions of the Khartoum government must be viewed as most significant. The government’s denial and neglect of the crisis, as well as its overt manipulation of relief aid, have had severely negative consequences, in terms of the catastrophic events which have subsequently occurred in Darfur. Despite some scholars’ assertions that the conflicts in Sudan were caused by existing ethnic tensions, the Sudanese government’s manipulation of those tensions may be viewed as having exacerbated the complex emergency which had already resulted from its other destructive actions (Daly, 2007, pp. 227-228; and Mahmoud, 2004, pp. 3-5).

The multidimensional catastrophe in Darfur thus demonstrates the ways in which famines may be embedded within a context of unequal regional development, and how competing political and economic interests may exacerbate the effects of famines. In the Sudan, the government’s systematic neglect of development in Darfur was crucial in setting the stage for the famine that ultimately occurred. On the basis of the existing land tenure system, the government encouraged development in those areas which provided it with political support, while systematically depriving other regions of the country. When another severe drought occurred, the government first denied its importance, and then failed to devote adequate resources to it. Finally, it blatantly manipulated international relief aid, in order to deprive its rebel opponents of resources, but this led to a large number of unnecessary deaths among the affected population (Usman, 2006, pp. 406-407, 419; and Mahmoud, 2004, pp. 3-4)

In a world of abundance, why does famine continue, and what averts the right to food from becoming a political priority? If the right to food is to be considered as a legal right, then we must insist on this right, and the continuation of famine is clearly a lack of justice.
References


