

COMPREHENDING THE ETHNIC DYNAMIC OF THE LIBERIAN CIVIL CONFLICT

by

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ABSTRACT

This research project aims to provide an account of the ethnic dynamic of Liberia that seems to be missing or is not readily available from accounts of the Liberian civil conflict. It is an attempt to move out of the fog created by arguments that ethnicity is not linked in Liberia to any discourse of political conflict. For example, the Liberian conflict has been characterized variously as a result of warlord politics (Reno 1998) where William Reno argues that warlords pursuit of commerce is the critical variable in the conflict, a drama of peripheral modernity (Richards 1995), and the instrumentalist contention that ethnicity is manipulated purely for political and socioeconomic purposes (Outram 1999). These explanations have not taken into account the fact that the ethnic group as the fundamental social organization of especially African-Liberian society and ethnicity as the fundamental essence of African-Liberian identity intensified as African-Liberians were excluded from the Liberian identity developed by the American-Liberians to the exclusion of the African-Liberians.

Adopting an interlocking theoretical approach of primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism, in conjunction with an ethclass paradigm I argue that the Liberian conflict has a combination of primordial, instrumental, and constructive dimensions in which antagonisms and politics have both contributed appreciably to the tragedy at various historical epochs. A cross-theoretical analysis, then, of ethnicity keeps in view the multiple forms of ethnicity that work interdependently to explain Liberia's complex ethnic dynamic.

The research projects finding suggest that there are a number of precipitant conditions that when linked to ethnicity or ethnic differences can lead to and cause ethnic violence to erupt. Some of the precipitant conditions that are highlighted throughout the dissertation are acute social uncertainty and difference, ethnocentrism, contest over the state and distribution of political power, the unequal distribution of values and resources, exclusionary national ideologies, discriminatory socioeconomic systems and the distribution of membership in the political community.

DEDICATION

Me kyerew saa nhoma yi ma me Papa Owura Kwame Ofosu Asiedu ne me Maame Owura yere A Ofosu Asiedu a won aye me hwesodee m'abrabo nyinaa mu. Won aye me "kra mu kra," na wohyee me humhum den wo bra na nneema aye me den.

Se anye won afutuo, banbo, denhye, odo ne won nkruranhye a, wonde pegyaa me wobre a na adesua yi aye me den a, anka mengyendi se me ba aweiye pa me. Maame ne Paapa, Mede moka daa.

This Dissertation is dedicated to my Dad, Dr. A. Ofosu Asiedu and my Mom, Mrs. A Ofosu Asiedu, who have been my mentors through life. They have been my own "soul out of my soul," and kept my spirits up when things have been bleak. Without their constant prodding, guidance, support, love, and their enthusiasm in lifting me up when this dissertation seemed interminable, I am not sure it would ever have seen its completion. I would forever be indebted to them.

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I would be remiss without thanking Dr. J. Busumtwi-Sam, whose enthusiastic supervision helped a great deal in seeing to the completion of this dissertation. With his enthusiasm on the subject, his inspiration, and the lengths at which he went to explain things succinctly and simply, helped in making the subject matter fun for me. Time after time, his easy grasp on the intricacies of sub-Saharan African politics at its most fundamental level helped me in the struggle of my on comprehension.

Finally, thank you to Dr. Sandra, J. MacLean for agreeing to be the external examiner your feedback, comments, and suggestions during the defense of this dissertation was invaluable and very much appreciated.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACS	American Colonization Society
AFL	Armed forces of Liberia
INPFL	Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
PRC	Peoples Redemption Council
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
TWP	True Whig Party
ULIMO	United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia



LIBERIA

INTRODUCTION

Central Research Question

The central theme of this research project is to comprehend and delineate the nature and "ethnic dynamics" of the Liberian civil conflict. The key research question in this project is to identify the conditions under which ethnicity becomes the principal source of conflict. I subscribe to Banton's contention that ethnic differences by themselves do not necessarily cause conflict, nor do two individuals come into conflict with each other simply because they differentiate themselves ethnically (Banton, 1986, pp.14-15). However, when an ethnic group pursues policies and practices that might be perceived as antithetical by another ethnic group, some degree of conflict may ensue. Thus, to comprehend ethnicity in Liberia, one must study the conditions that transform ethnic differences into protracted conflict.

A variety of precipitant conditions that are identified and addressed throughout the project are (i) contests over the state and the distribution of political power, (ii) the distribution of values and resources, and (iii) the distribution of membership in the political community. James Busumtwi-Sam points out that these variables should be seen as historically contingent factors that, when present in any particular combinations, can generate and sustain (ethnic) conflict (Busumtwi-Sam, 2002, pp.94). What is being implied here is that ethnic crisis can be averted if political systems are made more responsive to creating a conducive environment for the effective interactions of all ethnic groups. This

should contribute to empowering ethnic groups to mediate their differences non-violently and ultimately participate in the process of needs fulfillment. It is, thus, the manner in which polyethnic identities and differences are treated in relation to Busumtwi-Sam's variables by those in political power that would ultimately decide whether or not differences erupt into virulent conflict and become civil war. This project is therefore particularly concerned with using the variables to understand the ethnic origins of the Liberian conflict, the conditions that sustained it, and the key forces within it.

On December 24, 1989 the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Charles Taylor invaded Liberia by attacking military outposts in Nimba County from Cote d'Ivoire, marking the start of Liberia's civil conflict. However, although the civil war began in 1989, its etiology lay in the events of 1980 and its aftermath, when Samuel Kanyon Doe, an ethnic Krahn, seized power in a bloody coup in April 1980 by toppling the tenured American-Liberian government that had ruled Liberia since 1847. Indeed, one could actually make the argument that Liberia's civil conflict has its origins in the eighteenth century when the country was formally constituted.

Given the volume and quality of the extant research on Liberia's civil conflict, any claim to break new theoretical or explanatory ground here would be highly presumptuous. Insofar as this project has any originality, it lies in the change of emphasis that it seeks to impart to the analysis of the conflict under consideration and the nature of the ethnic dynamics underlying the conflict. Thus, this project evaluates qualitatively and extends empirical knowledge about the ethnic dynamic and causes of the Liberian civil conflict. I do not try to deny the existence of other relevant factors, but my attention in this project is

solely focused on the extent to which ethnicity acts as an elementary marker in Liberia's civil conflict.

Objectives and Justification

The objective, then, is to try to demonstrate the centrality of ethnicity in studying African conflicts. Ethnicity is an important variable in African politics; however, it is by no means the only variable. Subsequently, in contextualizing the importance of ethnicity, the project tries to counter the omissions and neglect of ethnicity in the literature as it relates to conflict in Africa. Simply put, Liberia's civil conflict cannot be understood without reference to ethnic maps and aspirations.

My contribution, then, versus how others have treated the conflict is by highlighting the importance of the ethnic factor. What does this mean? I am not in anyway arguing that ethnicity alone is a sufficient cause or condition for the conflict. What I argue in this research project is that it works equally and in tandem with other factors such as relative deprivation, political collapse, state failure, and economic mismanagement to mention just a few of the numerous factors that are present and have been dealt with extensively in other scholarly analysis on the Liberian civil conflict. Thus, the project does not in any way suggest that ethnicity is the only variable but what it seeks to accomplish is remedy a deficiency in the literature both in terms of the Africanist scholar and the African scholar.

To achieve this objective this project focuses on the case of Liberia. I treat Liberia as a single case study which is generalizable it is not "*sui generis*" that is a "unique case" rather what I study can be applied to other African countries due to the heterogeneous

nature of ethnicity in Africa. The Liberian conflict has been usually described as a resource war, warlord politics, or a socioeconomic war. However, although socioeconomic factors and all these other factors play a role, one cannot fully understand the Liberian conflict without comprehending the role of ethnicity.

Busumtwi-Sam argues that, "the complexity of issues and participants evident in [Liberia] and other African conflicts does not necessarily invalidate efforts to characterize them by the feature (such as ideology, resources, or ethnicity) that appears dominant at any particular phase in the conflict" (Busumtwi-Sam, 2002, pp.93). Categories such as these, Busumtwi-Sam continues, provide useful shorthand for analytical purposes, and may simplify policy prescriptions for conflict resolution. The danger with such an approach, however, lies in an oversimplification that presents only one facet of a multidimensional reality, and assumes clear-cut distinctions among the issues of conflict (Busumtwi-Sam, 2002, pp.93). Hale further avers that scholars have felt a need to categorize works in a simple way because the "reality" of each scholarly conceptualization of ethnicity is often so complex and finely differentiated from other such notions that to treat each one on its own terms in a comprehensive literature review would require far more text than audiences would want to stomach (Hale, 2004, pp.459-460).

Compartmentalized templates tend to lose sight of the multidimensionality of protracted conflicts and ignore the historical records. For example, control over mineral and forest resources by warlords dominates certain accounts of the Liberian civil conflict. However, while gold, diamond, mining, timber, and rubber certainly played a part in sustaining the civil conflict in Liberia, the conflict etiology has a longer history in "black

colonialism" (American-Liberian) that predates the period when such resources became a part of the conflict¹. Conflicts become protracted and apparently intractable over time precisely because of such complexity and multidimensionality. Liberia's civil conflict, then, is neither purely warlord, ethnic, ideology, nor is it purely resource oriented. While all these factors are indeed implicated to varying degrees in the Liberian civil conflict the factor at issue in this dissertation is the ethnic factor.

The ethnic basis of Liberia's civil conflict can only be mastered and transcended if and when it is fully comprehended. This means that we must accept as axiomatic Adebayo Adedeji's proposition that until the etiology of protracted conflicts has been fully comprehended and addressed, they cannot be mastered and that the mastery of conflicts is imperative to achieve lasting peace and good governance in any country (Adedeji, 1999, pp.7). Subsequently, unless we are willing to face the elementary fact of ethnicity, we cannot talk seriously about the Liberian civil conflict in other terms. Ignoring ethnicity serves to create a false illusion that Liberia, as a "quasi civic state"² is purely civic and thus devoid of ethno cultural factors. Mgbeoji contends that, even today, "the majority of Liberians identify much more with their ethnic group than they do with the modern state of Liberia" (Mgbeoji, 2003, pp.30).

¹ The tendency to assume clear-cut distinctions is evident in for example in Reno's *Warlord Politics* where he cites greed for profit and power as *the* essential cause of the Liberian civil war. For more see Reno, Williams. 1998. *Warlord Politics and African States*. Lynne Rienner Pubs. Boulder Colorado.

² The term "quasi civic state" is derived from and heavily influenced by Robert H. Jackson's *Quasi-States*. By "quasi civic state" I am referring to the lack of or perpetual weakness and precarious nature of civil society as a constant feature of Liberia's political landscape. For more on "quasi civic state" see Jackson, Robert, H. 1990. *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Presently, as the Liberian conflict simmers, its effects continue to be felt and persist, and the country is yet to return to sociopolitical normalcy (the existing peace can be described as being precarious at best). Since 1999, rebels calling themselves Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)³ had been fighting to oust the government of Charles Taylor. Taylor, with increasing pressure from the US and following an agreement brokered by Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, stepped down on August 11th, 2003 as Liberia's president and left the country for Nigeria.

So far, Nigeria has refused to extradite Taylor to Sierra Leone, where the Special Court on Human Rights for Sierra Leone indicted him for war crimes on June 4, 2003. Notwithstanding the ouster of Charles Taylor, the domestic security situation in Liberia is still unsettled. Thus, if the ethnic dimensions are not seriously addressed the existing unrest may smolder and erupt into intense violence again. Liberia thus faces the plight of being pushed deeper into a state of continuous conflict. It seems remarkable that this has not been brought up prominently in the extensive research on Liberia's conflict.

The Need for African, Generated, Context-Specific Research

This project is important because non-Africans conduct most of the research on African ethnic conflicts. Some occidental research tends to assume that African countries are ill prepared and do not possess endogenous conflict management models that can duly address their deeply divided ethnic conflict situations. Such an assumption, however, regardless of its inherent benefits, unduly circumscribes African-prescribed approaches to

³ LURD is an ethnic mixture of Liberian Mandingos led by Sekou Conneh and ethnic Krahns.

dealing with endogenous conflicts. Thus, the limited or non-existent involvement of "African researchers" in undertaking such research severely minimizes its local relevance or applicability, and as a result, much of the research conducted has very little or no policy impact.

Central to understanding this problem is the disconnection between research output and policy-making structures. Some African scholars who for instance have criticized the conflict resolution models being used in Africa on the grounds that they are based on, or follow too closely, Occidental models of conflict resolution, rather than African-generated models, and have thus questioned the relevance of Occidental models to Africa's peculiar condition. As Ikechi Mgbeoji presciently noted, the erroneous conception of Africa as a monolithic entity devoid of history holds sway as virtually all the international [conflict] institutions and their sponsor governments uncritically prescribe [similar] solutions for different African conflict situations. This attitude, Mgbeoji contends, is reductionist and simplistic as a solution to the crises that afflict most African states in a continent of fifty-three different states peopled by [ethnic groups] that speak more than 400 different languages (Mgbeoji, 2003, pp.38-39). Subsequently, some policy prescriptions are dispensed without regard for the specific character of the "ethnic conflict" they are diagnosed to treat. Osaghae, in explaining this African policy malady, observes that, "in the formulation and implementation of policy, very little consideration is given to (independent African scholarly) research, other than that undertaken directly by foreign donors at their behest" (Osaghae, 2001, pp.25).

Osaghae further argues that this situation must count as one of the shortfalls of conflict management in Africa that, even in those countries that have experienced the most devastating ethnic conflicts, there are no research institutions dealing with such conflicts (Osaghae, 2001, pp.25). Although the chance is probably very small that research results directed by "African researchers" will directly or indirectly inform the policies on the part of those who can make a difference in the building and rebuilding of Africa's conflict torn societies, this objective remains extremely important. It may be considered an exaggeration to hold the insufficiency of African-generated research as responsible for the prevalence of conflict. However, the basic state of conflict management, according to Osaghae, which leaves violent repression and confrontation as the current centerpiece of conflict, can be attributed to that absence (Osaghae, 2001, pp.25).

Whilst it is necessary under some conditions to conduct generalized research that seeks general findings and that draws general conclusions, specifically targeted micro-level research projects with a local focus and input might have more immediate policy relevance. African researchers can provide an insiders prescriptive perspective that can be essential to developing local approaches to conflict resolution, providing a more nuanced understanding of the underlying factors, reasons, and possible solutions to a society's division. More emphasis on African-directed research approaches to ethnic conflicts and dispute management is therefore urgently required. African researchers, then, should be given the funding, means, and incentives to undertake such work and their results made available to those who can improve the situation for those affected by Africa's conflicts.

This, however, does not necessarily imply that Occidental approaches to the African experience are altogether ineffective. What is under question here is the seemingly universal applicability that is granted Occidental-directed research. There is no doubt here that conflict theories depend heavily on Occidental scholarship. On the other hand, testing these theories in non-Occidental contexts, without reworking them from top to bottom, translates them into a universal template that they are not.

This project is thus of the position that Occidental approaches, although necessary and significant, are not sufficient on their own to facilitate and consolidate durable peace in Africa. A harmonization of both Occidental and African approaches to conflict prevention, management, and resolution which are conditioned to African specific needs and circumstances is probably a more feasible alternative and each approach can indeed be very useful in supporting and strengthening each other. Thus it is probably always important to question the reliability of solely Occidental generalizations about the African experience on its violently divided societies. Johnston emphasizes the notion that although the spectacle of states collapsing amid appalling human suffering might impose a superficial picture of commonality on Africa's experience of ethnic conflict in the post-Cold War world, closer examination reveals a continuing narrative of variety and contradiction (Johnston, 1998, pp.129).

It is therefore always pertinent to question generalizations regarding conflicts of violently divided societies. Can one set of generalized research adequately explain the violent conflicts of Africa's polyethnic societies? Or is there a standardized response formula that is perfect for intervening in all violently divided societies? Does one size actually fit all of

Africa's conflicts? According to Schnabel, generalized research into violent societies equips us with a basic general understanding that can only inform general responses. On the other hand, specific research into context specific conditions of a particular societal division and ensuing violence allows the alteration of the basic knowledge to produce an understanding and response that fits each specific conflict situation (Schnabel, 2001, pp.196).

It bears repeating here that the state of conflict research in African divided societies leaves much to be desired. The spread of Liberia's civil conflicts has been a political emergency of enormous proportions. Violence emanating from such conflicts is a terrible scourge that is placing unimaginable burdens on the peoples of Africa socially, politically, and economically. It has virtually decapitated the development of African societies. It is an issue that seems to be getting attention from the international community; however, much more needs to be done. The resolution, then, of Africa's "ethnic problem" emerges as a *sine qua non* of its development. As Welch puts it, "the ethnic heterogeneity of African states is frequently cited as a basic problem to modernization" (Welch, 1960, pp.77).

However, as stated earlier on in this introduction, the emphasis on ethnicity in this project is not an argument against the familiar problems that are usually pointed to in the case of African conflicts, such as the failure of economic development, political instability, and state collapse, but one that focuses on the re-anchoring of ethnicity in its rightful place in African politics. Indeed, Chabal and Daloz's argument is that since all African countries (with a few exceptions, such as Lesotho or Swaziland) are polyethnic societies, the only appropriate political order is one which accommodates a political framework grounded in this multiethnic reality (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, pp.62). In other words, politics must be

based on, rather than avoid, the ethnic dimensions of contemporary African states. This is so, according to Chabal and Daloz, not primarily because of the necessity of the essentialist ethnic condition of the African but because of the necessity of devising a political structure which is both legitimate in the eyes of the polity and accountable in its operation (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, pp.62).

Therefore, this project is important because it focuses directly on the ethnic dynamics of Liberia's civil conflict. Ethnicity has not been considered to be the predominant causal variable in various theoretical insights into Liberia's conflict. Although most scholarly research on the Liberian conflict utilizes taxonomies that are clearly ethnic, and in fact, discusses some consequences of the conflict as a rather peculiar ethnic situation: political mismanagement, class conflict, socioeconomic structures, and assimilationist-type analyses (a version of the melting pot approach) have been the standard frameworks of most scholarly research. Additionally, there seems to be general agreement that competition for political power and the material resources to which such power gives access does far better as a general explanation of the Liberian civil conflict.

Richards, for example, acknowledges ethnicity in the Liberian conflict. However, he argues "ethnic tension is ... seen as an *opportunity for*, rather than as a *cause of*, rebellion in Liberia" (Richards, 1995, pp.141). This, according to Osaghae, might be due in part to the fact that conceptually, two development paradigms, modernization and dependency theory, (as well as the international development aid industry,) which were largely advocated and advanced by the West, have largely dominated social science research in Africa. Both have been highly critical and dismissive of ethnicity seeing it as a by-product of a pre-modern past

(part of traditional African society), which was bound to wither away as African societies became more industrialized, and others in the pre-capitalist economy were drawn into the capitalist way of life (Osaghae, 2001, pp.26).

What is meant here, at an immediate and relatively superficial level, is that ethnicity in Africa confounds expectations of modernization. Indeed, this leads one to query, whether Africa's modernization, and for that matter, Liberia's, should necessarily come at the expense of ethnicity. In the relationship between ethnicity and development, is ethnicity necessarily a hindrance or an obstacle to be overcome by the policies of modernization and dependency? Subsequently, if the objective of the conflict researcher is to discern the causes of protracted conflicts in Africa, the causes, issues, and motivations about which the conflicting groups are fighting should not be presumed. Doing so practically forecloses further investigation. Apparently such advice has gone unheeded in the literature of modernization and dependency theorists (Busumtwi-Sam, 2002, pp.93). As Ronen suggests, rather than viewing ethnicity as an obstacle, we should see it as a potentially useful factor in the process of development (Ronen, 1986, pp.7). We could also see ethnicity as a neutral factor and then proceed to examine its effects on development.

According to theorization of modernity and dependency, the conflict emerges from the long-term effects of factors such as poor resource management, inequitable distribution of resources, and socioeconomic deficiencies and less from purely ethnic factors. The ethnic dynamic is thus usually relegated to the margins of the conflict by researchers who consider it a by-product of other pertinent factors. However, even though some researchers on Liberia reject ethnicity as the "master variable" and may reject ethnicity altogether as a valid

category for assessing the conflict this project acknowledges the sociopolitical capital of ethnicity and recognizes its sociopolitical effects and importance.

Consequently, this project criticizes such explanations as limited, not totally accurate, and not adequately reflecting Liberia's historic reality even though they continue to remain highly influential in academic discourse. In subscribing to Wimmer's argument, this project goes a step further beyond this debate by radicalizing the dependency and modernist position. Wimmer's argument, expressed as succinctly as possible, centers around the following three propositions: i) ethnic politics is not merely a by-product of modernity or industrialization; rather modernity *itself* is structured according to ethnic principles, because ii) modern institutions of inclusion (citizenship, democracy, and social justice) are systematically tied to ethnic forms of exclusion. Correspondingly, iii) ethnic conflicts and xenophobia/racism are integral parts of the modern order of nation-states (Wimmer, 2002, pp.1-5).

As a corollary of this, the argument that ethnicity is a wholly dependent variable to be explained away in terms of elite manipulation and competition for scarce resources should be reexamined. Variables such as language, religion, and culture that are key components of ethnicity should be given more attention. The roots of the ethnic complex (i.e. conflict) then can probably be better understood if more attention is accorded these variables. For example, while highlighting the importance of Liberia's ethnic divisions, Outram prefers to analyze the conflict in terms of economic inequalities, regional differences (probably related to ethnic differences), status inequalities, and the instrumentalist

contention that ethnicity is manipulated purely for political and socioeconomic purposes (Outram, 1999, pp.165).

However, such explanations of the Liberian civil conflict do not hint at all the passions, especially the nonrational, that motivate, for example, the Gio, Mano, Mandingo, and Krahn into killing each other based on their ethnicity. As Connor points out, such explanations can be faulted primarily for their failure to acknowledge and reflect the emotional depth of ethnic identity and the mass sacrifices that are made in its name (Connor, 1994, pp.74). It is worth noting at this juncture that recognizing the sense of belonging that permeates the ethnic bond will help in comprehending the ethnic dynamics of the Liberian civil conflict.

This project's prime interest lies in assessing the extent to which, contrary to Outram's contention, the ethnic factor functions as a major driving force behind Liberia's "civil conflict" rather than serving as merely a manipulated by-product of other pertinent variables. As Connor has aptly noted, ethnicity is a mass phenomenon, and the degree to which the leaders are true believers (as in their actual sense of identity and belonging to a particular ethnic group) does not affect its reality but may affect their political actions. The question is not the sincerity of the leaders (i.e. propagandists), but the nature of the mass instinct (the psychological and emotional hold of the ethnic constituency) to which the leaders appeal (Connor, 1994, pp.76). For example, Charles Taylor, the erstwhile leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and former president of Liberia, is unquestionably more a manipulator of ethnicity than a believer in ethnicity, but his NPFL fighting force made up of members of the Gio and Mano ethnic group was certainly

motivated by ethnicity. Connor maintains that political leaders, unlike scholars, have long been sensitized to this sense of common kinship that permeates the ethnic bond and blatantly appeal to it as a means of mobilizing the ethnic masses (Connor, 1994, pp.74).

Conflicts examined under the rubric of the constructivist approach, instrumentalist approach, elite theory, socioeconomic class, relative economic deprivation, and class-consciousness, for example, no doubt throw significant light on how these variables have affected Liberia's conflict. However, relegating the ethnic dynamic to the margins as an ephemeral phenomenon constitutes a fundamental flaw in their respective approaches. As Turton points out, "neither the constructedness nor the instrumentality of ethnicity can be explained unless we are prepared to see it as an independent as well as a dependent variable in human affairs" (Turton, 1997, pp.18-19). Even if ethnicity is an effect or byproduct of the instrumentalist paradigm, as has been argued by Outram, it does not mean that it should be ignored or that it can be eliminated altogether.

In trying to explain this discrepancy, Connor points out that, to adherents of these approaches, entire ethnic groups are equated with the socioeconomic class or class-consciousness approaches. In effect, what should be clearly described as ethnic consciousness becomes equated with class-consciousness or socioeconomic class (Connor, 1994, pp.74). Connor does not deny the presence of class-consciousness or socioeconomic class as affective elements; he just holds that "the greater saliency of ethnicity occurs because it can combine an interest with the affective tie" and it is easy to see that, once the affective side of ethnic affiliations is recognized, those affiliations will also become "a strategic site" (Connor, 1994, pp.74). When it is clear that people give preference to members of their own

ethnic group, members of that ethnic group will appeal to other members for such preference.

Connor's study depicts ethnicity as the major cause of some of the most intense conflicts dividing African societies and proposes the accommodation of ethnic requirements as a remedy. In this circumstance, the roots of the present conflict in Liberia can be attributed mostly to ethnic affinity that came to be pegged to "elite political entrepreneurship" and not *vice versa*. It is under these circumstances that this project is of the position that representations of political power expressed in an ethnic register should not be depicted as marginal or merely instrumental but should be considered as the necessary accompaniment to a "strategic political project" (mainly that of the American-Liberian) by Liberia's "warring factions".

Central Thesis

The plight of Liberia, then, in large measure could be viewed in the disconnect between African-Liberian indigenous values and institutions in the process of American-Liberian development and nation-building on one hand, and the implications and consequences of an increasingly American-Liberian focused context in which African-Liberians were disadvantaged, impoverished, marginalized, and incapacitated on the other. As argued by Conteh *et al*, the inability of the American-Liberian leadership, throughout most of the first republic, to understand and appreciate the fundamental differences between American-Liberian values and African-Liberian values and norms, and accordingly create a

common Liberian identity, subsequently rendered the Liberian order unstable and contributed its share to the civil conflict (Conteh, *et al*, 1999, pp.106).

The experience of Liberia suggests that the diagnoses of the conflict should be sought in the history of inter-ethnic group relational dynamics within Liberia, and the history and management of such ethnic group differences. The key goal here, then, in the review of that history would be to evaluate how ethnic group differences are managed or mismanaged. Liberia's list of problem areas must therefore place ethnic differences in the same category of importance such as dictatorial or authoritarian systems of government (poor governance), uneven development, and flawed economic policies all of which are literally closely connected in a chain of cause and effect.

Thus, although the causes of the conflict might seem outwardly to have emanated from some of the just mentioned factors the contribution of the ethnic character should not in any way be underestimated or misrepresented. Relative deprivation, class-consciousness, dependency relationship, and economic or political crises with ethnic undertones are causes that can be categorized as either precipitant or facilitating factors. This project then strives to show that Liberia's conflict is really a result of the inability of its leaders to marry these factors (inter-elite conflict, dependency relationship, and class-consciousness to mention just a few) with the ethnic factor.

These should be seen as precipitating routes through which ethnic conflicts can be diffused or can escalate. Political mismanagement, for example, more than anything else manifested itself in the unsuitable handling of the socio-ethnic dynamic, which in turn ultimately exploded into murderous conflict. It should then be understood that political

mismanagement, dependency relationships, and class-consciousness are contexts for the expression of ethnicity. Thus the contexts in which ethnic expressions are found are manifold. Fenton indicates that contexts are sufficiently different so as to give an entirely different understanding, force, and function to ethnicity based on the sociopolitical and socioeconomic site of their emergence (Fenton, 2003, pp.179-180). Horowitz subscribes to the notion that in severely segmented (i.e. by ethnic division) societies (which almost every African country is), ethnicity finds its way into a myriad of issues: development plans, land policy, tax policy, and educational controversies. Characteristically, issues that elsewhere would be relegated to the category of routine administration assume a position of central importance on the political agenda of ethnically divided societies (Horowitz, 1985, pp.8).

This essentially explains the reason why Liberia's ethnic conflict is often characterized as if it were a manifestation of some other factors: the stresses of modernization, a fractured political system, or warlordism masquerading in the guise of ethnicity. According to Horowitz part of the explanation for the many shortcomings in fully comprehending ethnicity is the episodic character of ethnic conflict itself. It comes and goes, suddenly shattering periods of perceived tranquility. The suddenness then of the phenomenon helps explain the lag in understanding its specifics (Horowitz, 1985, pp.13).

The categorization of the ethnic factor as a manipulated by-product is a result of the domination of Liberia's political development from its inception in the 1820s to the 1980s by the settler American-Liberian population and their marginalization of the "ethnic" native-Liberians. Subsequently, by focusing the country's development and politics on the class dynamics and hegemony of the American-Liberians, very little room if any is left for

ethnic analysis. Later events, however, (the 1980 Samuel Kanyon Doe coup, and the perpetual political instability thereafter), depict how mistaken non-ethnic research has been.

Osaghae contends that ethnicity has always been a critical variable, which was masked by class, caste, and even racial dynamics of Liberia (Osaghae, 1998, pp.131). The present conflict has, therefore, brought about a rethinking of conventional wisdom on Liberia, leading Osaghae to argue that the time has come to search for other approaches (Osaghae, 1998, pp.131). Osaghae's assertion has a lot of merit because it suggests that ethnicity has played a much more critical role in Liberia's development and politics than most of the existing researchers are willing to admit.

The subject of ethnicity leapt onto the political center stage due to structural changes within the Liberian political system brought on by the Doe coup, which subsequently ended American-Liberian rule. These structural changes promoted, or highlighted, ethnic differences by challenging the collective identity of the Liberian masses, and effectively encouraging them to act forcefully on the basis of ethnicity, and also by creating an ethnically-based political opportunity structure for would-be leaders of all kinds of "political-ethnic" movements.

All dimensions, then, of Liberia's nascent ethnopolitical disputes, most of which had previously been suppressed under American-Liberian rule, were thus played out when the Doe junta came to assume power. According to Osaghae, intra-African-Liberian struggles for state power, for example, were given full vent, a Muslim-Christian division took on political relevance which was previously unknown because the country was presented by the American-Liberians as a Christian country (Osaghae, 1998, pp.152).

The disappearance of the old American-Liberian political structure, in short, created a strategic vacuum that was effectively filled by a new set of actors marching under the flag of ethnicity. In the end, however, economic and political failure only produce the likelihood of crisis, they do not determine whether that will necessarily take the form of ethnopolitical conflict. The outcome in Liberia was largely determined by the fact that ethnicity continued under American-Liberian rule to be the fundamental way in which people could identify themselves as political beings. Consequently, with the elimination of American-Liberian rule, there were few, if any, alternative avenues for the warring factions to find support or identities except through their ethnic membership. The Liberian civil conflict points to the fact that "ethnic conflict" can be a response to different stimuli. In the Liberian case it is the extreme complexity of historic and cultural circumstances as well as the playing out of political entrepreneurship, which fueled the ethnic dynamics of the conflict. This zero-sum political game made conflict almost inevitable in Liberia's resource-limited political environment.

Method and Organization of the Project

This research project consists of three main chapters and a conclusion. Chapter one looks at the literature on ethnic conflict employing a cross-theoretical approach to ethnicity. The chapter essentially suggests that in the case of Liberia we should not be searching for a unitary theory and explanation of ethnicity. The cross-theoretical approach seeks to provide an analysis of ethnicity that integrates primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism in attempting to comprehend Liberia's ethnic dynamic. A cross-theoretical approach is being

adopted essentially because at different historical epochs, ethnicity in Liberia has shown signs of being primordial, socially constructed, and instrumentally manipulated.

Chapter two delineates how the conceptual framework in the first chapter applies in the context of Liberia by showing how the different ethnic groups have been formed primordially, constructively, and also instrumentally. Chapter two also looks at the main ethnic groups directly involved in the conflict, specifically the American-Liberians, the Krahn, the Mandingo, the Gio, and the Mano. The chapter examines the most important features of the ethnic groups and the vitality of ethnicity in Liberia.

Chapter three outlines Liberia's historical development, placing the ethnic dynamic in its proper historical context. The present conflict is therefore seen as being rooted deep in Liberia's history. As Chabal and Daloz point out, this is crucial, "for it seems to be the enduring fate of Africa to be "explained" in terms which are so ahistorical as to be risible, a lowering of analytical standards which would be rejected out of hand if it were applied to societies of the Occident" (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, pp.18).

Chapter four, the concluding chapter, draws conclusions and connects the thread between the arguments presented in the preceding chapters.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

Students of ethnic conflict broadly agree that there is very little consensus on the specific causes or precise definition of “ethnicity” and “ethnic conflict”. Scholars also tend to agree that we are only at the initial stages of understanding the phenomenon of ethnicity. This is because ethnicism, as explicated by Adedeji, is not simply a question of objective data such as language, culture, and religion. Ethnic identity, Adedeji continues, is more a question of perception than an absolute phenomenon and the identity can be perceived by the ethnic group themselves or can be attributed by outsiders (Adedeji, 1999, pp.8). As Enloe has asserted, a great deal of confusion about ethnicity stems from its variety⁴. Even if we apply criteria of cultural bond, a link of common ancestry, communal association, self-identification, location within some larger political unit, “ethnic group” remains a fuzzy concept. An overview of the current literature on ethnicity would thus aid in contextualizing the extent and significance of the problem at hand.

A solution to this problem would be to minimize its explanatory parameters arbitrarily so that it is precise in meaning and manageable in analysis. However, this notion, although appealing, would reduce immensely the utility of ethnicity as a concept for

⁴ For an in-depth explication of Enloe’s analysis on the conceptual clarity on ethnicity read Enloe, Cynthia, H. 1973. Ethnic Conflict and Political Development. Little, Brown & Comp. Boston, Massachusetts.

unraveling civil conflict. Despite its dangers, a more inclusive explanation seems more desirable. Ethnic groups live in political systems in which many inquiring voices and perspectives coexist and more often than not conflict; over the course of time they advance and retreat; and we discern and evaluate their importance in the context of varying degrees of strengths and weakness.

Thus, a number of theoretical explanations have been offered, including primordial, instrumentalist, and constructivist perspectives as the causes of ethnic conflict. However, due to the complexity of Liberia's ethnic dynamic this project does not commit itself to a specific theoretical approach. The complexity of the ethnic factor in Liberia's civil conflict would illustrate the difficulty of applying mono-causal analyses. If one could map out a standard sequence of ethnic definition in Liberia it would follow a pattern which starts from primordial roots and then progresses through a constructed period with the arrival of the American-Liberians culminating in an instrumental phase where manipulation and conflict ensued within a highly disintegrative setting. Consequently, I argue that a cross-theoretical or interlocking approach better accounts for the totality of the Liberian case and thereby provides a more solid building block for comprehending the civil conflict.

Furthermore, I think an interlocking approach is important to my research first because I think ethnicity in Liberia is complex and not clearly defined and at different historical stages one could assess ethnicity as either primordial, instrumental, or socially constructed, that is, fixed, fluid, and contingent. Secondly, an interlocking approach brings an element of multidimensionality into the study of the conflict and eliminates simplification. It also allows me to develop my argument that ethnic identities can be the subject of political

calculation and reflection or ethnicity could be defined by sentiment and affect rather than by rationality and calculation.

Primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism, for that matter, operate as a synthesis of separate explanatory domains of the causes of ethnicity. Hale argues that ethnicity is "Janus-faced," with both a constraining primordial element, a flexible constructed element, and a manipulated instrumental element (Hale, 2004, pp.461). Generally, any specific case of ethnicity would probably be a combination or a blend of more than one of these types. Osaghae points to the notion that unlike most countries in Africa, the ethnic situation in Liberia has involved not only primordially rooted African-Liberian ethnic groups, but also the "primordially derooted American-Liberian group which, for this reason, is not usually described in purely ethnic terms (Osaghae, 1998, pp.132).

Consequently, no single model can be employed to resolve these questions since Liberia is not a conceptually obedient case. One cannot simply look at the writings of Adedeji, Connor, Reno, Horowitz, van den Berghe, and Richards to mention but a few researchers and decide which one is singularly right in accounting for the specific reasons or causes of the conflict in Liberia. None of them holds the monopoly over the right etiology of the Liberian civil conflict. There is therefore merit in considering, and applying, the various approaches of these scholars in conjunction with one another.

As I understand the admonitions of conflict theorists, like Horowitz (1998, 1993, & 1985), Reno (1998), and Stack (1986), we should not analyze conflict structures in abstract isolation but in relation to socioeconomic and sociocultural contexts. Ethnic conflict is a complex phenomenon; thus there can be no "cookie-cutter approach" to it. Furthermore, it

is difficult to classify or pigeonhole these scholars within one primary approach. Horowitz, for one, could fit all the theoretical approaches under consideration in this project, except for probably as a strict primordialist.

The objective here, then, is not to try to have "untidy Liberian realities" conform to "tidy ideal theoretical types" but to use a combination of ethnic paradigms to explain and make sense of an intrinsically "untidy Liberian ethnic reality". Given the concerns of this project that means identifying and characterizing the locus, weight, and role that ethnicity plays within Liberia's civil conflict. It is thus possible to deduce a cross-theoretically-valid explanation in comprehending the ethnic basis of the Liberian conflict from a primordial, cultural, historical, instrumentalist, and constructivist interpretation of ethnic politics.

A cross-theoretical or interlocking analysis of ethnicity keeps in view the multiple forms of ethnicity that work interdependently to explain Liberia's complex ethnic dynamic. Interlocking templates need one another, and in tracing the complex ways in which they help secure each other, we learn how Liberia's ethnic dynamic results in conflict. These different approaches provide the theoretical basis for my interpretation of Liberia's ethnic conflict. To understand the ethnic dimensions of the Liberian civil conflict, a review of the literature that provides the theoretical and empirical context for its study is thus paramount.

Primordialism

The primordial paradigm suggests that ethnicity has its basis in psycho-biological drives that condition people to be part of affective and solidaristic closed groups. It takes ethnicity as a fixed characteristic of groups and individuals. Van den Berghe, a prominent

exponent of primordialism, states that ethnicity is extended kinship. Because ethnic and racial ties activate deep biological and affective thrusts, a primordialist concludes that ethnic groups are more basic and primordial than social groups organized on the basis of class (Van den Berghe, 1981, pp.27). One sees oneself, so to speak, in other group members. Primordialism, then, implies that the group is, in large part, biologically self-perpetuating, shares fundamental values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms and its members identify themselves and are consequently identified by others as constituting a group distinguishable from other groups of the same order.

Geertz sees the "primordial tie," the longing not to belong to any other group, as the, critical defining characteristic of ethnicity (Geertz, 1963, pp.109). According to him "dormant ethnicity is a socio-biological constant or given"; such dormant ethnicity does not require any explanation "for it is simply always there" (Geertz, 1963, pp.109). Subsequently, the idea of primordialism implies limits on our free agency, contrary to instrumentalist notions that we are self-made, and constructivists notions that identities are defined relationally. Primordialism claims, then, that an individual's deepest attachments, his/her primary form of belonging, are inherited, and not chosen. It is the ethnic group that defines the individual, not the individuals who define the ethnic group. This feature, according to Horowitz, it can be hypothesized, is what leads individuals to submerge their own identities in the collective identity, and to favor in-group members and to make sacrifices for them (Horowitz, 1998, pp.16).

Clifford Geertz, in his widely referenced work, explicitly writes not so much about the actual "givens" of life but the "assumed" givens, implying a critical element of perception

that mediates between the category and the individual (Geertz, 1963, pp.109-112). Association and osmosis rather than rational deliberation or reflective endorsement characterizes and determines many of the values, norms, and beliefs that inform one's ethnic experience. As Lake and Rothchild write, whether rooted in biological traits as suggested by van den Berghe or centuries of past practice, which in effect limits the ability of the group or individual to change them, one is invariably and always perceived in ethnic terms, for example, [as Krahn, Mandingo, Gio, or Mano] (Lake & Rothchild, 1998, pp.5). In this view, ethnic divisions and tensions should be considered "natural".

Thus, ethnicity can mobilize the powerful sentiment of common kinship. Ethnic identity has historic origins and is resistant to change. Consequently, it is usually older and more fundamental than identities based on class or citizenship. Primordialism looks to those associations and influences that inherently shape ethnicity. While biology should not be discounted as a phenomenon that relates to human beings, constructing a theory of ethnicity solely on a biological template could be problematic. It should however be pointed out that Van den Berghe is virtually alone in this literature in explicitly advocating a biological template for primordialism. He argues that humans have evolved a nepotism instinct that now seizes on any major phenotypic differences between people to produce group formation (Van den Berghe, 1981, pp.27-29).

It seems certain that socially induced beliefs and behavior are far more prevalent than biology in the development of the primordial approach to ethnicity. As Stack argues, it is more likely the socio-psychological nature of the primordial perspective that forms the basis for a generalized sense of ethnic group consciousness (Stack, 1986, pp.3). Wimmer, for

example, argues that since ethnic status is given at birth and thus cannot be changed some see the struggle for group prestige in ethnically heterogeneous societies as inevitable as soon as uneven development fosters rivalry between ethno-groups (Wimmer, 2002, pp.100). Donald Horowitz (1985), who has presented probably the most extensive and detailed comparative study of ethnic conflict to date, follows this line of reasoning, which is identified with primordialism.

The primordial paradigm, then, helps explain the *nature* of group identities and identifies fundamental *characteristics* of ethnicity, but not how, when, or under what condition differences can result in conflict. There are numerous examples of severe deprivation and repression that do not end up in rebellion or conflict of the overt kind because the repressed ethnic group does not mobilize for political action. There are very few pure primordialists like Harold Isaacs or Clifford Geertz around anymore, because it has been argued that ascriptive ethnic traits, although persistent, are not immutable "givens" but can and do mutate over time. It would be thus difficult for any contemporary scholar on ethnicity to defend a pure primordialist case *tout a fait*, and this is not being done in this dissertation. However, primordial scholars like Isaacs and Geertz, must undoubtedly be credited with demonstrating that ethnicity is a powerful and enduring sociopolitical force.

I do subscribe to Robin Cohen's argument that it would be foolhardy for any social scientist to ignore the simple fact that many individuals strongly believe that ethnic allegiances are part of their core identity and have to be defended on a life-or-death basis. In the process of coming to these beliefs one can argue that primordialism is itself being socially constructed (Cohen, 1999, pp.10). Once such social construction has been imagined

or taken effect, ethnicity certainly seems primordial, and it becomes virtually impossible to conceive of any prior identity. Essentially, after ethnic group identity systems crystallize they become (apparently perceived by many) fundamentally entrenched even when faced with major social upheaval.

Social identities, Cohen argues, differ not in that some are socially constructed while others are not. Rather, there is a marked incapacity to deconstruct seemingly primordial identities which, for the participants, take on the appearance of a God-given truth or a life-or-death struggle (Cohen, 1999, pp.11). As Henry Hale further remarks, "like geologists, primordialists do not argue that the subjects of their studies are eternal; instead, one can certainly point to a period in time during which both groups and stones were created" (Hale, 2004, pp.460). The self-avowed primordialist Stephen Van Evera further avers that, "ethnic identities are not stamped on one's genes"; but once formed, ethnic groups tend strongly to endure (Van Evera, 2001, pp.20).

Constructivism

The constructivist paradigm has emerged in opposition to primordialism. The fundamental question on the primordialist-constructivist debate boils down to whether ethnic identity is essentially fixed or malleable. So, what generalizations can be made about constructivism? To start with the obvious, constructivists are interested in how sharply defined ethnic identities especially those that primordialists take for granted as given are "constructed". This is precisely because ethnicity is not deemed to be primordial; it is malleable and its trajectory is susceptible through policy instruments. Fredrik Barth contends

that the defining feature of ethnicity is not the specific elements of culture or kinship that differentiate it from other ethnic groups, but the mere fact that the boundaries are perceived and persist. The membership criteria and the membership itself of ethnic groups tends to change over time as people come and go and invent and develop new traditions and ways of life, but the ethnic group itself nevertheless endures as a way of structuring social life (Barth, 1969, pp.9-11).

Constructivism is thus concerned with human agency and social structure as causal concepts. Heather Rae points out that constructivists pay attention to the importance of normative or ideational structures as well as material structures; indicating that identities constitute interests and actions and that agents and structure are mutually constituted (Rae, 2002, pp.22). Constructivists, in a sense, view ethnic identity divisions as a relational product, rather than a given. James Fearon and Alexander Wendt argue that constructivism is concerned with showing the socially constructed nature and relational dynamics of ethnic groups. Rather than taking ethnicity as a given in social explanations, as primordialists tend to do, constructivists are more interested in problematizing it, in making it a "dependent variable" (Fearon & Wendt, 2002, pp.57). Consequently, ethnic identity is important under certain conditions and not others. The boundaries of ethnic identities are contextual; they shift overtime in relation to context-specific issues and under social, economic, and political circumstances at a particular point in time. The identities are fluid; they are dependent on the context.

At a basic level constructivist are interested in the causal processes of socialization through which ethnic groups and group members acquire their identities and interests. At a

more substantive level, constructivists are concerned with the constitutive conditions of possibility for certain modes of subjectivity. According to Fearon and Wendt some of these conditions are historical, in the sense that understandings of what it means to be a member of an ethnic group may change over time, and thus are culturally relative rather than reducible to primordial biological givens (Fearon & Wendt, 2002, pp.57). Thus, for constructivists, the primordial defense of ethnicity is but a façade masking a much less well-defined foundation.

Busumtwi-Sam sees constructivism as a **mid-point** between primordialism and instrumentalism stressing the dynamic, contingent, and culturally based condition of ethnicity (Busumtwi-Sam, 2002, pp.97). It is the **mid-point** because it rejects aspects of both arguments of primordialism and instrumentalism while simultaneously accepting some elements of their position. Constructivists are thus basically arguing that ethnic identities can be fluid but they can also be hardened. This is what I discovered in my research in terms of the ethnic groups in Liberia. For example, in terms of the American-Liberians their fluid identities that of being slaves and then freed slaves becomes hardened when they come to settle in Liberia.

Why does the American-Liberian identity become hardened upon their arrival in Liberia? This is probably due to the fact that groups are formed relationally you end up having American-Liberians because you have African-Liberians so you cannot understand the ethnic dynamic without showing this relationship and this is what I have done in my research. So American-Liberian ethnic identity would not have emerged had they not come to Africa and encountered a different other the African-Liberian. In 1980, 1985, and 1989

the African-Liberian ethnic actors did not just emerge out of a vacuum from nowhere there was a history of discrimination and oppression suffered at the hand of American-Liberians. After 1980 we start seeing a history of African-Liberian on African-Liberian ethnocentrism. Identities are thus always relational in the context of Liberia and this relational aspect is what social construction is all about.

That is the idea of ethnicity is fixed but the terms that define the group may change over time. It stresses the mutually constitutive relationship between primordialism and instrumentalism suggesting a view of ethnicity that is contingent, partly indeterminate and partly fixed. Consequently, a reliance on biology alone undermines the primordial approach and a similar reliance on individual utility alone, the notion that people simply pick and choose their identity based on the circumstance at hand, also undermines instrumentalism so that primordialists and instrumentalists are only marginally equipped to explain ethnicity. Social constructivism is thus an appealing idea that is currently in vogue. Most scholars on ethnic conflict could be labeled as constructivists. Constructivists are of the opinion that ethnic attachments play a role to some extent in most ethnic conflicts; however the tendency to identify ethnicity as the cause of the conflict is often unwarranted. It is the mobilizers, the elites and leaders who adopt ethnicity as their *action repertoire* who constitute the important independent variables. However, many constructivists do agree with the notion that ethnic identity becomes salient once created.

Lake and Rothchild thus argue that certain types of what might be called pathological social systems, which individuals do not necessarily control, cause conflict (Lake & Rothchild, 1998, pp.6). In their view, it is the social system, not individuals, that

breeds violent conflict, and it is the socially-constructed nature of ethnicity that can cause conflicts to spiral out of control. From a constructivist perspective, then, understanding the social construction of identities and interests could be the kernel to understanding ethnic group action within a given polyethnic political system. However, ethnic identity and attachments are no less real for being socially constructed, and may elicit intense loyalty. Ethnic conflict is usually the result of fear of the future, lived through the past, real or perceived.

Primordial critics of the constructivists approach argue that ethnicity, after all, is not constructed out of a vacuum, there must be something there, real or perceived, that bonds ethnic identities in the first place. Construction, after all, requires some kind of a foundation or building blocks and once these building blocks are in place ethnic identity become enduring. In order for elites to be able to manipulate ethnic support, there must be some characteristics that seem to define the membership of the ethnic group and make it somewhat cohesive and receptive to elite ethnocentric ideas. Elites and ideas cannot do everything; there must be some building blocks. These blocks are often described as "primordial" or "objective" characteristics by ethnic and cultural theorists, and they include such traits as language, religion, cultural values, and shared myths, especially concerning collective origins, as well as traditions fashioned by circumstances⁵. Less well known, or even systematically overlooked, especially by those taking the constructivist perspective, according

⁵ The ethnic theorists would include, among others, Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

to Andreas Wimmer, is that successful mobilization of an ethnic constituency also depends on grassroots support (Wimmer, 2002, pp.98)⁶.

Instrumentalism

The instrumentalist paradigm conceives ethnicity as a resource available to elites in furtherance of their objectives. To instrumentalists ethnicity is entirely fluid, ethnicity is not based on history, and it is not based on phenotypic or biological distinctions. To instrumentalists people simply pick and choose their identities based on the political, social, and economic circumstances at hand in order to further their interests. This is in contrast to the primordial view of ethnic groups as being profound and organic basis of social and cultural difference. In this light, ethnicity as a source of conflict has little independent standing outside of the political process in which collective ends are sought. Thus conflict is largely stimulated by elites and leaders who may not be "elite" in the usual sense who mobilize ethnicity in pursuit of their own utilitarian ends.

The implication here is that, had it not been for the elites, who create ethnic divisions, ethnic conflicts would not appear in a society. Lake and Rothchild point to the notion that ethnicity may be a powerful and frequently used tool, but according to instrumentalists, this does not distinguish ethnicity fundamentally from other political affiliations (Lake & Rothchild, 1998, pp.6). Ethnic identity is claimed rather than imposed; the emphasis is on the manipulation and malleability of ethnic identity by elites.

⁶ For an in-depth explication of grassroots support during the mobilization phase see Andreas Wimmer (2002).

Instrumentalists are thus of the opinion that ethnicity acts and serves as a conduit through which elites can channel aspirations for political power.

Notwithstanding the preceding arguments of instrumentalists and constructivists, ethnic conflict researchers, particularly those of the instrumentalist persuasion, should not assume or imply that participant ethnic groups in such conflicts are ignorant dupes of elites. Typically, instrumentalists tend to exaggerate the element of individual choice and underplay the extent to which ethnic group objectives cause and help perpetuate ethnic differences. Essentially arguing that individuals can change their identities relatively easily, even once identities appear "crystallized" in society is a bit preposterous. While not denying the fact that some ruling elites definitely do abuse ethnicity for their own ends, there are also political elites who work vigorously on behalf of aggrieved ethnic groups; consequently, the latter cannot be labeled ethnic manipulators. Hameso argues that the assumption that ethnicity is elite-manipulated or does not exist is, in and of itself, elitist and amounts to the patronizing assumption that people are ignorant and that they are easily manipulated. This also undermines the ethnic constituency, which such elites claim to represent (Hameso, 1997, pp.102).

One could summarize these approaches to ethnic identity by saying that, for primordialism, ethnic identity is simply there, for constructivists it is a by-product of the social system. Social realities are as influential as material realities in determining ethnic identities and ethnic group behavior and for instrumentalists it is a deliberate and conscious creation of political actors. The Liberian conflict is an almost ideal case for addressing some of the principal questions that researchers of ethnicity ponder. Those who espouse a

primordialist contention of ethnic identity have ample evidence to support their position. Alternatively, the constructivists and instrumentalists also have abundant information that substantiates their conceptions that ethnic identity is essentially an artificial phenomenon that is often employed by ambitious leaders who manipulate and instrumentalize ethnic identity.

On a final, theoretical note, it is important to emphasize that there is no necessary contradiction between primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism in their application in this project. Each of these paradigms offers something to aid an understanding of the Liberian conflict. An overemphasis, then, on any single perspective misrepresents the nature of ethnic conflict and the culture of politics in Liberia. It is therefore the argument of this project that neither the perceived constructedness nor the instrumentality of the Liberia's ethnic dynamic can be explained unless it is examined in conjunction with or alongside primordialism.

The analysis of Liberia's conflict must therefore take account of its instrumental (situational/utilitarian), constructed (meaningful/contextual/contingent), and its primordial (cultural/affective/ascriptive/inherited) aspects since its effectiveness as a means of advancing and understanding ethnic interests depends on Liberia being seen as a combination of these theoretical approaches. Smith contends that *ceteris paribus* instrumentalism and constructivism prevent a proper recognition of the fundamental significance of primordial ethnic communities in providing a model and basis for the subsequent development of countries (Smith, 1998, pp.8). What Smith appears to be arguing (whether he would put it in these terms or not) is that the taxonomy of "primordialism",

“constructivism”, and “instrumentalism” does not and should not reflect empirically separable academic approaches to ethnicity, rather they function in symbiosis. At various stages, then, in this project the analysis will shift from either a primordial, to a constructivist, or to an instrumental perspective. Hopefully, the shifts will allow for a broader view of the effects of ethnicity on Liberian politics without detracting from the project's main goal - comprehending the ethnic dynamics of the Liberian civil conflict.

Finally, in conjunction with the primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism paradigm, I also use Osaghae's ethclass analysis framework for the study of the American-Liberians as an ethnic group. I apply Osaghae's ethclass paradigm (Osaghae, 1996, pp.2) because the nature and make-up of the American-Liberians in Liberia is a function of complex interactions between their domestic environment in Liberia and their external environment in the United States from whence they originated as freed slaves. A full analysis of Osaghae's ethclass paradigm is undertaken in the next chapter when we analyze the ethnic dynamic of the American-Liberians.

This chapter has laid out the basic theoretical definitions and process being applied in this project. The cross-theoretical ethnic approach being applied in this project is cognizant of the impact and range of primordial ties, the effects of contingent social, economic, and political factors, and instrumental manipulation in helping to crystallize ethnicity in Liberia. The next chapter starts out by developing the project's conceptual framework and then applies the interlocking approach in looking at the ethnic configuration of Liberia.

CHAPTER TWO

Conceptual Framework of the Project

Defining of Concepts

For a clearer interpretation of the sources of the Liberian civil conflict, this section provides the definition and explanation of the concept of ethnicity pertaining to the theoretical analysis selected for the dissertation, as delineated in chapter one. A "conceptualization of ethnicity as a dynamic, multifaceted and interactive cluster of changeable self-validated attributes of individual-cum-collective identities" (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, pp.56) is pertinent given the interlocking theoretical approach being applied in the study. In establishing a conceptual framework for ethnicity within the context of Liberia this research project draws on Anthony Smith's brief working definition of ethnicity. Smith defines ethnicity as a named human population with a myth of common ancestry, shared memories, and cultural elements; a link with a historic territory; a measure of solidarity that persists over time, inclines toward ethnocentrism, and in certain situations are hostile to and desire to dominate others (Smith, 1993, pp.29).

It is important to make clear here that ethnic groups do not just possess shared memories and common ancestry; ethnic communities elaborate these into the notion of a

community founded on these attributes. We can minimize analytical problems in Liberia's case by relating the interlocking approach suggested in chapter one to Smith's definition.

Smith's definition integrates primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism. Primordialism talks about hardened boundaries between groups that are fixed and static. Instrumentalists suggest the boundaries are non-existent, they are only created as a result of strategic interest, so that, for instrumentalist ethnicity is totally fluid and mutable while constructivists are saying it is both. According to Busumtwi-Sam, constructivism in occupying the middle ground, stresses the relational, contingent, and contextual nature of collective identities (Busumtwi-Sam, 2002, pp.97). These identities, Busumtwi-Sam continues to argue, are not created in a vacuum but are constructed and reconstructed through historical practice within specific institutional contexts (Busumtwi-Sam, 2002, pp.97). Ethnic group identity, then, depicts elements of fixity, continuity, and fluidity.

One could thus argue that this research project is closer to the constructivist view on ethnicity. There is this historical construction of ethnic boundaries, which are real, people do actually think of themselves in that way, as bound by ethnic constants but at the same time, people do also instrumentalize their identities at different times in defense of their interest. Subsequently, in adopting an interlocking theoretical approach this dissertation; takes the middle ground. Smith's definition draws upon these elements. It acknowledges the historical origins of ethnicity, the construction of myths, the creation of a "we-they" differentiation, it also acknowledges that ethnicity can be strategically called upon. You cannot simply compartmentalize ethnicity into one thing or the other; at different historical epochs, we experience changes in ethnic group position and objectives.

Liberia's Ethnic Configuration

The five most populous ethnic groups in Liberia before the beginning of the conflict, in descending order, are the Kpelle, Bassa, Dan, Kru, and Grebo. The Mandingo are itinerant Liberians who ended up supporting the hinterland groups dominated by the Krahn during and after the Doe years. Bowen aptly advances the idea that it is the composition and number of ethnic groups and their relationships to power, not diversity *per se* that strongly affects political stability (Bowen, 1996, p.11). The main groups involved in the ethnic conflict were the American-Liberians (the settler community), Dan, Krahn, Mandingo (part of the hinterland) Kru, Mano, and Gio (also part of the hinterland) ethnic groups.

In the case of Liberia, an ethnic compromise could have been achieved had all ethnic actors in relating to each other formulated aspects of their long-term interests in a shared symbolic nationality. As Wimmer posits, every group in this way tries to interpret the ethnic compromise in ways that seem to justify their own demands, to validate their own actions, and to represent their own private vices as public benefits (Wimmer, 2002, pp.34). Thus, although each group perceives the political landscape as being made up of different ethnic groups they share a common destiny in it. For example, ethnic groups could have been encouraged or promoted as groups that provided, at least initially, the societal needs that eventually the Liberian State was to provide.

As Wimmer argues, this process of adoption and interpretation does not rely on a conscious attempt at convincing or even deceiving others. Rather, it is due to the mechanisms of ethnic perspectivity the selective way in which habitual schemes organize perceptions of the ethnic world (Wimmer, 2002, pp.34). It should be mentioned here that

prior to the arrival of the African-American settlers from the United States, the sociopolitical structure of the disparate African native ethnic groups in the geographical space later known as Liberia was fully established. As Mgbeoji observes, with particular reference to Liberia, it is hardly in doubt that there were various types of pre-existing political structures among the ethnic groups in that region (Mgbeoji, 2003, pp.8).

The political structure was primarily based on kinship cemented by complex social ties. These were autochthonous political structures and not Eurocentric political units. According to Mgbeoji, the diffuse nature of political authority, built as it were on linguistic, cultural, religious, and historical peculiarities, was alien to the American-Liberian Eurocentric conception of statehood (Mgbeoji, 2003, pp.8). Although the complexities and varieties of domestic political structures in pre-colonial Liberia defy easy categorization, Mgbeoji indicates that most Liberian native groups had morphed political structures with indicia of statehood that were different from Eurocentric models (Mgbeoji, 2003, pp.8). In effect, the prevalent notion of the Americanized African as the bearer of civilization for the uncivilized natives was as erroneous as it was conceited.

American-Liberian

Although the settler community (American-Liberians) does not fall under the classic definition of an ethnic group (extant analyses, in general, do not treat the American-Liberians in ethnic terms) it could be argued that they perceived themselves as such. Additionally, the fact that an argument can be made that the American-Liberians as an ethnic group were more creatively invented during the formation of Liberia than the African-

Liberian ethnic groups does not in and of itself make them any more or less genuine, or legitimate, than the African-Liberians. The American-Liberians are essentially an amalgam. They are "artificial" in that prior to their resettling in what was to become Liberia they had little or no sense of collective consciousness. Horowitz, contends that groups such as the American-Liberians are akin to some of the most clearly identifiable and cohesive actors in contemporary politics, ethnic groups like the Ibo of Nigeria and the Malays of Malaysia (Horowitz, 1975, pp.119).

It seems somewhat inappropriate then to use the frequently employed "primordial" conceptualization to describe the American-Liberians and other groups that are products of fusion and fission, or for that matter, groups which have only recently become more ascriptive. This, however, does not preclude the fact that such groups have metamorphosed through what can be described as an ethnicization process into what can be construed as ethnic groups. Osaghae argues that, at a conceptual level, because the American-Liberian group is not primordially rooted in terms of culture and language as the African-Liberians groups are, most analysts prefer to treat them as a class rather than an "ethnic group" (Osaghae, 1996, pp.2).

This, however, raises a theoretical problem since class and ethnicity can be considered as competing categories of social advancement to their members. If American-Liberians are theorized or categorized as a class and African-Liberians as ethnic groups you end up with two sets of divergent analytical variables. Conversely, if the African-Liberians and the American-Liberians were examined under solely class concepts, it would be difficult to adequately analyze the relations among the African-Liberian groups. To resolve this

conceptual difficulty this project uses Osaghae's co-analytical ethclass interlocking approach (where both forms of collective identity can interlock and intersect) (Osaghae, 1996, pp.2). By adopting Osaghae's ethclass model then, this project does not have to approach the problem in terms of mutually exclusive propositions where adoption of a purely class model of analysis would imply a rejection of the ethnicity model and *vice versa*. As stated earlier in the preceding chapter on theory Liberia's realities are too complex to be fitted into a single conceptual mold, which is perhaps probably the case in all countries.

The ethclass approach is formulated to analyze situations in which there is an intersection of ethnic and class categories (or, rather, ethnic and class boundaries coincide), as the American-Liberian case suggests. Along this formulation the American-Liberians can then be analyzed as a *de facto* or designated ethnic group in addition to being a class. This can be substantiated further by Ronen's description of ethnicity as a type of cultural segmentation that may also intersect class and territorial segmentation, classifying types of ethnicity according to the various intersections between ethnic, cultural, class, and territorial segmentation (Ronen, 1986, pp.2). We can also borrow a leaf from Osaghae's analysis of the South African case, which treats the white South Africans as an ethnic category (keeping in mind the ethnic distinctions that exists among white South Africans) as well as class and race in relation both to themselves and the black South Africans (Osaghae, 1996, pp.3).

It is, however, important to indicate that unlike the South African case, the American-Liberian settlers in Liberia are black, not white. From the perspective of the ethclass approach then, it does not necessarily matter what kind of ethnic groups are in question. The crucial characteristic of an ethnic group, at least in its narrowest sense, is that

its members perceive themselves to be, and are perceived by others to be, generally more related to each other on average than to the members of other groups. For example, the American-Liberians spoke the same English language, shared a common Christian religion, especially one of the Protestant denominations, and memories of a common slave ancestry⁷, and so forth, all of which can be commonly considered to be attributes of ethnicity. Thus, in the context of inter-group relations, based on the ethnonyms to which the American-Liberians subscribed, the American-Liberians were ethnically as well as culturally different from the African-Liberian ethnic groups. The bonds of ethnicity were therefore stronger than the bonds of class, and the American-Liberians clung tenaciously to the subtle differences that set them apart from the African-Liberians, the savages in their midst.

Furthermore, as an ethnic group, the American-Liberians do actually meet all of Smith's six requirements for a group to be classified an ethnic community (Smith, 1993, pp.28-31). According to Smith, the group must first have a name for themselves. The Liberian settlers from the Americas refer to themselves and were referred to as American-Liberians. This, according to Smith, is not trivial; a lack of name reflects a poorly developed sense of collective identity. Secondly, there should exist a belief in a common ancestry. American-Liberians enjoyed a strong belief in a common slave ancestry. Thirdly, members of the group must share historical memories, often myths and legends from their past. American-Liberians shared in a long history of slavery in the Americas and were imbued with feelings of an enlightened people with a mission of bringing Christianity and civilization to the African-Liberians (Smith, 1993, pp.28-31). Fourthly, the group must have a

⁷ For further analysis of how ethnicity, on the basis of a myth of common ancestry, can take various forms. See Horowitz, Donald, L. 1985. Ethnic Groups in Conflict. University of California Press, Berkeley California.

shared culture. American-Liberians shared in a common culture of English language, Christian religion and Occidental values, and a political system modeled after that of the United States from whence they came. Fifthly, the people must have an attachment to a specific piece of territory, although Smith suggests that such an attachment could be real or perceived. American-Liberians as freed slaves felt a strong attachment to Liberia as their motherland. Liberia symbolized to them a place from which their ancestors had been taken forcefully against their will into slavery. Finally, Smith notes that a people in a group have to think of themselves as a group in order to constitute an ethnic community, that is, they must possess a sense of common ethnicity. American-Liberians were definitely self-aware of what constituted them as a collective group (Smith, 1993, pp.28-31).

Although it can be shown that American-Liberians are the offspring of a number of unrelated slaves from the United States the myth of a common slave ancestry should be seen as a very potent characteristic that binds them and ultimately defines American-Liberian ethnicity. As Busumtwi-Sam points out, such myths allow a group to overlook internal differences, exaggerate external differences with other groups (for example, the African-Liberian ethnic groups), and mobilize members for collective political action. Indeed, processes of myth-making have been present in every case of protracted conflict in the contemporary period (Busumtwi-Sam, 2002, pp.99). The American-Liberian belief in a common slave ancestry can thus be argued to be more important than genetic ties, which may exist, but are not essential under these circumstances. This also sets them apart from the numerous African-Liberian ethnic groups.

It is therefore not *what is* (the fact *per se*) as Connor depicts, but *what the people believe is* (the perception of the fact) that is of ethnic importance (Connor, 1994, pp.75). The relevance then of such a consideration in defining American-Liberian ethnicity should not be denied. Furthermore, Enloe uses the term ethnicity broadly to mean a cluster of reinforcing beliefs and values, which sustains a community while simultaneously separating it from others (Enloe, 1973, pp.1-20). Thus, American-Liberians under Enloe's definition can be referred to as an ethnic group because of the reinforcing beliefs and values that sets them apart from the African-Liberian ethnic groups. This is similar to Busumtwi-Sam's description elsewhere of the racialization process as an important component of the sociopolitical reproduction of difference (Busumtwi-Sam, 2004, pp.4). The process of ethnicization is widely understood and accepted in this sense in popular discourse. American-Liberian ethnicization refers to the formation of social boundaries that aim to protect the presumed integrity of an American-Liberian ethnic, cultural, and sociopolitical heritage. (For further analysis of how ethnicity, on the basis of a myth of common, ancestry, can take various forms, see Horowitz 1985).

It is also important to emphasize here that the American-Liberians have been critical ethnic actors, even in conflict situations where African-Liberian ethnic groups were involved. Osaghae contends that the so-called 'tribal' wars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as well as the civil war are cases in point. American-Liberians can usually be found behind these wars, in what Osaghae describes as divide and rule tactics (Osaghae, 1998, pp.133). According to Osaghae another point worth emphasizing about the American-Liberians is that closer association with African-Liberians through intermarriage

although on a limited basis produced partly indigenous American-Liberians and others who affiliated themselves with African ethnic groups and cultures (Osaghae, 1998, pp.133).

In many respects, American-Liberians re-created an American society in Liberia. The American-Liberians held on to "distinct cultural markers" which differentiated them from their African-Liberian counterparts. This included but not limited to Western dress, literacy and fluency in English, Christianity, freemasonry to which only they belonged, common slave ancestry, having Anglo-Saxon names, architecture (a style from buildings in the southern American states from which most of them came), and generally retained American manners. Many of these ethnonyms later contributed to the creation of Liberian political culture. Ethnic identities thus tend to crystallize or, in Horowitz's language, "condense" around symbols or cues. Horowitz points to the fact that visual cues have a considerable reliability and relative immutability, especially if they are bodily cues. Yet, the cues need not be visible (Horowitz, 1975, pp.120). In addition, Enloe concludes that ethnic type cleavages tend to be explicit and visible, to be linked with symbols and myths, to have a high intensity of identification, and tend to be persistent and enduring (Enloe, 1972, pp.125-134).

All these ethnonyms went to establish that the American-Liberians were indeed an ethnic category in relation to the African-Liberians. It is thus crucial from the perspective of this project that the ethnic groups we encounter are always established on the basis of real or assumed kinship relationships. Ethnicization, then, under this context is a discursive practice that occurs when, intentionally or otherwise, ethnic meanings are extended to previously ethnically unclassified relationships, symbols, events, groups, issues, or social practices. This, according to Busumtwi-Sam, occurs through processes of *re-articulation*: a process of

redefining identities and interests through a reconfiguration and recombination of familiar ideas, values, and symbols in hitherto unrecognized ways (Busumtwi-Sam, 2004, pp.4). That is constructed identities.

Implicitly or otherwise, then, the American-Liberians were thus drawing distinctions between themselves and the other (African-Liberian ethnic groups). With their ethnonyms (ethnic markers) they were separating and distancing themselves from the other (African-Liberian ethnic groups). American-Liberian ethnonyms and their principle of ascription ultimately produced for them the image of a bounded, particularist set of a solidary people. But even as ethnicization contributed to a sense of American-Liberian ethnic solidarity by placing a strong value on the "we", it simultaneously had a profoundly destructive effect of not facilitating the development of crosscutting ethnic networks (resulting in boundary formation rather than boundary crossing) by emphasizing the "they" of the African-Liberian ethnic groups. Thus, deliberately or otherwise, the American-Liberians set a process of veiled ethnicization of social relations in motion (it can be argued that their relationship with the African-Liberians was subsumed in an ethnic rubric) that enhanced ethnocentrism and eventually culminated in a virulent conflict. Bonds of ethnic association and common interest that could have transcended ethnic divisions were shattered from the outset further inhibiting constructive cooperative engagement between Liberia's ethnic groups.

It is undoubtedly true that the search for sociopolitical and cultural roots or other forms of identity, which is of prime importance in the construction of ethnic history, can involve a great deal of "myth-making". The American-Liberian nationalist pedagogy of history, for example, invoke(s) the imagery of the "civilized pioneer" bringing the torch of

enlightenment to the "uncivilized native-Liberian" hordes. For example, Anderson asserts that the two distinct groups in Liberia are the aboriginal tribes (defined in a pejoratively in terms of native Liberians being backward), natives emerging from savagery and the highly cultured American-Liberians, the "ruling class" (Anderson, 1952, pp.2). This unfortunate misconception, which held sway in the American-Liberian first republic, gave rise to the erroneous notion that the history of Liberia began only after the arrival of the American-Liberian freed slaves.

In other words, the denial by the American-Liberians of an African-Liberian pre-American-Liberian history served to rob a large segment of the African-Liberians of the sense of their own history, competence, and confidence necessary to confront the challenges of a new state. As Mgbeoji laments, this sense of inadequacy and inferiority to the "civilized West" was particularly acute in Liberia where the American-Liberians disdained anything and everything African. Having been fed a diet of shame and disdain for their African heritage by their American slave masters, they believed in the omniscience of American ideologies, institutions and way of life (Mgbeoji, 2003, pp. 28). Subsequently, in living out their "civilized dreams", the American-Liberians became more American than their former slave masters, making a fetish of their exposure in the United States (Mgbeoji, 2003, pp.29).

Consequently, in the eyes of the American-Liberians, the African-Liberian, by virtue of being uncivilized was never thought of as having anything of value worthy of inclusion in the corpus of a Liberian common identity and political culture. Conteh *et al* argue that this perception, of necessity, renders official Liberian history parochial and distorted. As a parochial record of Liberia's past, it entailed principally an account of the triumphs and

problems of the American-Liberians as they labored to develop the Liberian nation. As a distorted history, it grossly misrepresents African-Liberian ethnic groups (Conteh, *et al*, 1999, pp.111). Thus, from the outset, the values of the American-Liberians and those of the African-Liberians were not only different, but also antithetical. Throughout the American-Liberian period of nation-building the expressive symbols created by the American-Liberians were themselves far from creating a sense of shared national identity that would respond to Liberia's heterogeneous ethnic reality.

The role of defining symbols for national identity and participation was thus the domain and privilege of the American-Liberian ethnic group. This draws attention to a critical aspect of the ethnicization process; that is, the ethnically-specific set of value-standards of group formation. Seeing these as ethnonyms of separation or ethnic formation clearly differentiates the American-Liberians from the African-Liberians. In this way, as Hlophe argues, whenever groups (and only groups) pursue ethnonyms with the aim of creating their own unique boundaries, and not merely a clique or class structure, and continue to interact with "out-group" members along these ethnonyms deemed not shared by the "others" in the sociopolitical arena, irrespective of cultural categories they may employ to define these ethnonyms, then they constitute an *ethnic* group (Hlophe, 1973, pp.241).

Ethnicization is also manifest in the tendency to use American-Liberian cultures, values, and practices as the norm or barometer by which to evaluate African-Liberian ethnic groups and ultimately treat them differently. A firm grasp of the idea of "a people of American nationality" was thus firmly set in the consciousness of African-Liberian ethnic

groups. Thus, Busumtwi-Sam asserts that what we commonly call "*ethnocentrism*" is a critical component of the [ethnicization] process (Busumtwi-Sam, 2004, pp.5). As an addendum, then, since such relationships are often competitive and conflictual, contestation is a central feature of ethnicization. Thus, power and politics, in the broadest sense, both internal to the groups and in their external relations with "others," are basic to the formation and preservation of ethnicities.

American-Liberians were thus composed of those Liberians who claimed a slave ancestry that linked them to the United States. Hence, American-Liberians did not include African-Liberian ethnic groups who were the original inhabitants resident in Liberia. "American-Liberianess" remains a paramount method of identification; the behavior as an ethnic group is shaped by, among other things, maintaining a historical myth of themselves as the descendants of freed slaves. Slave ancestry was thus a primary component to American-Liberian definitions of their ethnicity. An important component, then, of American-Liberian ethnicization is the concept of group or self-transcendence, which would suggest a primordial perspective. Hale avers that real-world primordialists and constructivists agree that identities are constructed (i.e., that beliefs about primordiality are formed) during some identifiable period in history and that their symbolic content can vary to some degree over time (Hale, 2004, pp.461). Primordialism under these conditions works as a description of the extraordinary force that is contained in American-Liberian ethnic sentiment. According to Stack, aspiring to the regeneration of the community, the leaders and educators aim to rediscover the self within a wider community and fulfill individual potential in the distinctive social whole (Stack, 1986, pp.5).

It is important not to underestimate the significance of the American-Liberian ethnicization process and cultural developments. It fulfilled a range of important different functions which the American-Liberians required that could not be satisfied simply by the doctrines of rational choice theorists with its basis in 'cold' reason, for example, universal norms, and utility. Grosby argues that, (ethnicity), particularly when yoked to a distinctive communal history or religion, partakes of the sacred in characterizing the community as 'primordial', immortal and life-giving, manifest in images of fatherland and motherland, and of celebrations of its fertile soil (Grosby, 1995, pp.143-148). If an ethnic group is to take hold among a people, it needs a positive sense of belonging, identity, achievement, and pride. Many of the American-Liberian myth-making and beliefs directly contributed to the creation of Liberia's political culture, which was, in turn, crucial to the establishment of an exclusive American-Liberian identity and the origination of a fundamental social and identity conflict. Political participation in the Liberian government was defined almost exclusively along ethnic lines.

Thus, the quality of American-Liberian ethnicity can be considered to be instrumentalist and constructivist while that of the African-Liberian can be seen as primordial (in the sense that members share certain fundamental inborn attributes that are deemed to be more cohesive and culturally defined). American-Liberian ethnicity created myths that came to be of central importance to an American-Liberian artificially constructed ethnic identity. A relevant characteristic that is found in American-Liberian "ethnic constructivism" helps to explain not ethnic feelings themselves, but the way it is shaped for common action, in other words, the underlying realities of ethnic activism. The historical

accuracy of the myth, then, is obviously irrelevant; rather it is the sense of "common kinship and origin" that permeates the American-Liberian ethnic bond, which is of importance.

Efforts have been made to demonstrate, for example, that American-Liberian ethnicity is no more than a class alliance using the banner of "shared slavery in the United States" to mask the interest of the American-Liberian petty bourgeoisie. American-Liberians are thus, above all, a rational class alliance, and though they may employ selectively ethnic symbols, this is for decorative rather than substantive purposes. However, while class may indeed be a powerful form of association, it is not powerful enough to overdetermine or rival the kind of ethnic consciousness or association formed by the American-Liberians. How can this be explained? One possible answer offered by Michael Hechter is that there is something rudimentarily and inherently more potent, and qualitatively distinct, about ethnic ties over and above ties based merely on common material interest (Hechter, 1986, pp.19-20). This, in fact, is actually what primordialists claim.

Furthermore, according to Welsh, such class-based arguments, however, fail to give appropriate weight to the significance of the emotional intensity or affection that accompanies and indeed undergirds ethnicity (Welsh, 1996, pp.485). Especially, where in the case of the American-Liberians, they shared a thriving culture, which was based on a combination of religion, language, customs, institutions, dress, music, and norms coupled with a strong myth of a common slave ancestry leading to a measure of ethnic solidarity. American-Liberians, in effect thought of themselves as a group that had a sense of their own common ethnicity. For American-Liberians slave ancestry offered a common ground and provided a means to construct a sense of ethnic unity. Common slave ancestry is thus an

essential part of the ethnic history of American-Liberians and, in a sense, allowed American-Liberians to develop or construct their own ethnicity.

The symbols and imagery of slavery, depictions of the middle passage with slave cargo of tightly packed men, women, and children stuffed spoon-like in the hulls of slave vessels, for example, evoke more than rationally-calculated behaviors. The emotive value of slavery is therefore a very powerful, painful, and unwanted reminder of a nightmarish past. Simply put, American-Liberian ethnicization cannot be understood without slavery. Slavery shaped Liberia's economy, its politics, its culture, and its fundamental principles. From its inception, then, Liberia's history was founded on the assumption that the society was made up entirely of freed slaves. The power of the freed slave, represented by the predominance of the freed slave in Liberia's leadership, gave it a large hand in shaping Liberia's political culture and the values central to American-Liberian society. It is no accident then, that American-Liberians penned the founding statement of Liberian nationality, "the love of liberty brought us here," which only has meaning for the American-Liberians (because native Liberians were not free slaves from America). Consequently, their freedom became the central ideology of Liberian nationhood.

The American-Liberians, it could also be argued, adopted an essentialist approach in the construction of themselves as an ethnic group. Ashcroft *et al* posits that in analyses of "culture and ethnicity" it is a (generally implicit) assumption that individuals in a group share an essential cultural and ethnic identity. This has been a topic of vigorous debate within post-colonial theory (Ashcroft *et al*, 1998, pp.77 & 78). Furthermore, when we are being ethnocentric we look for certain "indicators" as indicative of difference (culture, language,

religion, name, etc) and use these essentialized markers to construct a boundary of differentiation between "us" and "them". Busumtwi-Sam adds that essentialist (absolutist) notions of culture are used to represent what in essence can be considered ethnic differences (Busumtwi-Sam, 2004, pp.5).

The American-Liberians practically developed and employed this thinking to create the idea of inferiority amongst the African-Liberian ethnic groups. They were thus able to exercise hegemonic control over the latter by effectively controlling the dominant modes of public and private representation as a "superior ethnic group". The purpose, then, of adopting an essentialist construction was, in part, to ethnically entrench this mode of representing the African-Liberian as an "Other" to the "Self" of the dominant American-Liberian "ethnic group". Consequently, American-Liberian forms of ethnicization informed ethnocentric perceptions of superiority-inferiority among the African-Liberians that fuelled a we-they mentality, which ultimately provided a context of maintaining power and privilege in Liberian society.

Consequently, since access to political power came to be determined and defined by "American-Liberian ethnic considerations" the democratic republican system of government they instituted presented a façade, an illusion of democratic stability that was unlikely to be sustainable over the long haul. The American-Liberian democratic first republic was never really consolidated. The process of evolution from an ethnic to a civic nationalism never really took off in Liberia, since it was never really pursued by the American-Liberians. The irony is that the Liberian State lacked essential elements of the indigenous cultural and moral values and integrity that should have been part of the *sine qua non* of its internal legitimacy. It

is thus obvious that the American-Liberians were wary of the growth of a more pluralistic sociopolitical environment, hence its preference for what can only be described as an illiberal democratic culture⁸.

As Morten Boas points out, because the American-Liberians so often portrayed themselves as embodying the idea of the Liberian state, so to speak, American-Liberian rule became inherently authoritarian; that is, an arbitrary American-Liberian government that used the law and other coercive instruments of the state to further their own purposes, to monopolize political power and to deny or restrict the political rights and opportunities of the African-Liberian ethnic groups (Boas, 2001, pp.700). Given this particular mindset of the American-Liberians and their parameters of governance, it was definitely a Herculean task for the African-Liberians to make any significant inroads in Liberia's political development or future.

Stable ethnic relations, as Lake and Rothchild point out, can be understood as based upon an equitable "contract" between contending groups. These contracts specify, among other things, power-sharing arrangements, rights and responsibilities, political privileges, and access to resources of each group (Lake & Rothchild, 1996, pp.49). Contracts of this nature usually could be found in formal constitutional arrangements or informal understandings between the contending groups. Since nothing of this sort existed between the American-Liberians and their African Liberian counterparts, conducting Liberian politics from the outset through peaceful political channels was difficult.

⁸ By illiberal democracy I am referring to an authoritarian democratic system.

Channeling American-Liberian nationalism in a preconceived direction (that of exclusive American-Liberian citizenship), effectively gave rise to the existence of a firmer basis of nationalism based on ethnicity than might otherwise have been the case. The result was a heightened awareness and consciousness among Liberia's various ethnic groups of their "ethnically differentiated identities". On this basis, as indicated by Horowitz, we could expect ethnically differentiated superiors (in this case, the American-Liberians) to exercise a formidable impact on the definition of Liberia's group boundaries. The more rigidly ranked the system, the greater the influence of ranked superiors and an increased probability that the system would disintegrate into ethnic rivalry and ultimately conflict (Horowitz, 1975, pp.131).

In the absence of genuine political pluralism and multi-party elections, the democratic system developed by the American-Liberians, who ruled the country continuously from 1884 to 1980 through the *de facto* single party, the True Whig Party (TWP), had the effect of blocking any parties that transcended ethnic lines. Although many scholars would probably place political parties in a political as opposed to a purely civil society role it is still pertinent to highlight the conception here of the dual roles of political parties. As Varshney has argued, they constitute an important component of civil society in a multiparty democracy but not in a one-party democracy (Varshney, 2002, pp.4). In the latter, as was the case with the American-Liberian TWP, the TWP was effectively an appendage of the state, thus losing its civic functions.

The "democratic republican system" in Liberia, modeled after that of the US, was distinguished from the latter by one key feature. In Liberia, unlike the US, there was no

universally accepted modicum of social, economic, and political consensus that functioned at some level about containing and managing existing societal tensions or the legitimacy of the state itself. Furthermore, robust, sturdy institutions, popular legitimacy, and structured competitive politics did not underpin the Liberian State. This could be seen or understood in some academic circles as a problem of governance or institutions. The American-Liberians thus set government policy unilaterally since there were no checks and balances that served to safeguard or stabilize group relations ensuring that no group got exploited by the other. Barclay is therefore right in stating that, in practice, democracy in Liberia over a protracted period was more symbolic and superficial than real and substantive (Barclay, 1999, pp.301).

By resorting to democratic symbolism manifested through rhetoric espousing the virtues of democracy as enshrined in the Liberian constitution the American-Liberians were able to practice what can only be described as low intensity⁹ democracy. The American-Liberians succeeded in this venture by declaring a multiparty political system while in reality maintaining a single party system spearheaded by the TWP. The American-Liberian directed government thus became a tool for the legalized extortion of the African-Liberian ethnic groups. Mgbeoji contends that, for the efficient exploitation of the African-Liberians, the American-Liberians operated outside the minimum requirements of due process of law and legitimacy of governance; if the need arose, violence was liberally employed (Mgbeoji, 2003, pp.33). As Liebenow further laments, this, then, is the crux of the Liberian sociopolitical paradox. Liberia was founded so that the American-Liberians who, on the

basis of their phenotypic features alone, had been denied the rights and privileges of full participation in American society could enjoy the benefits of freedom in their ancestral continent (Liebenow, 1987, pp.5), while denying these rights and privileges to the African-Liberians.

Subsequently, when either a minority or majority ethnic group organizes itself and seeks to shape the state in its image by claiming and defining cultural ownership of the political community, ethnic groups that are left out of the developing process tend to define themselves in exclusionary terms. This usually leads to polarization of the political community in deeply divided societies and if not effectively managed can result in conflict. This means that defining national identity in the development of a deeply divided society is an exceedingly difficult enterprise. As Parekh vigorously argues, national identity cannot, and should not be ethnically and culturally neutral, as national identity then satisfies none of the ethnic groups involved and lacks the power to evoke deep historical memories. However, neither should national identity be biased towards a particular ethnic community as national identity then de-legitimizes and alienates the other ethnic groups (Parekh, 1999, pp.73).

This indicates that the presence of some procedural elements of liberal democracy, whether republican or parliamentary, does not necessarily mean that all political systems are the same, much less that they are legitimately democratic. Liberia was not just different, in some small ways, from the American system it modeled itself after; it was for all intents and

⁹ By practicing low intensity democracy I mean establishing democracy in one sense of the term while blocking it in the other. Thus, one could debate the merits of the American-Liberians establishing liberal democracy where in reality the political structure of liberal democracy was not actually in place. Opportunities for political participation especially opportunities to oppose, compete, and dissent were absent as American-Liberians sought to hold on to power and promote their own interests.

purposes the antithesis of it, antidemocratic. For example, the rule of law had limited practical utility, in a system of American-Liberian legality where American-Liberian demands were of overriding importance. The American-Liberian system was antidemocratic in this sense because the political system it developed to build its new civilization was intended as an exclusive American-Liberian political preserve. American-Liberians dominated the internal representation of the Liberian State, its institutions, and policies of the state and, importantly, monopolized the legitimate use of force.

Therefore, the political culture and basic definition of the “collective nation,” with its supporting ideological pedagogy, were those of the American-Liberian ethnic group. An important point to note here is that initially (1822-1960) African-Liberians, particularly those in the hinterland, were governed indirectly and did not possess Liberian citizenship rights, which were exclusive to American-Liberians. Care was thus taken to protect these exclusive rights by, among other actions, restricting educational opportunities available to African-Liberians (Osaghae, 1998, pp.140). As Ndulo has observed, when the rules of the political game are not universally accepted and respected, the political process becomes controversial and a source of (ethnic) conflict rather than an (all-inclusive) mechanism for resolving strife (Ndulo, 2002, pp.145).

The anthem, flag, oaths, hymns, monuments, calendars, ceremonies, heroes, and martyrs, which can all be considered ethnonyms, appealed to one American-Liberian slave ancestry. The country's national ode reads: "The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here," blatantly implying that all Liberians were descendents of slaves and beneficiaries of the good will of the American Colonization Society (ACS). In effect, the African-Liberian ethnic

groups who originally inhabited the geographical and cultural space of Liberia were not deemed good enough to be Liberians. For example, national public holidays like Pioneers day and Matilda Newport day, honoring the settler equivalent of American Revolutionary War heroine Molly Pitcher, have no meaning to the African-Liberians. Even the country's name, Liberia, is testament to the freedom of American-Liberians as freed slaves from America, and Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, serves as a reminder to the American-Liberians of President Monroe of the United States who was sympathetic to their cause. Mgbeoji points out that the spiritual and genetic core of the new Liberian state was rooted in convoluted American ideals, with only artificial linkage to its geographical location (Mgbeoji, 2003, pp.4).

As Conteh *et al* have depicted, even the constitution and laws that regulated Liberia's political system had implications of the manifest destiny of the American-Liberians to succeed on a messianic mission to perpetually control the affairs of state (Conteh, *et al*, 1999, pp.110-111). For example, African-Liberians were depicted as profoundly inferior to the American-Liberians. American-Liberians perceived themselves as being civilized and the African-Liberians as being uncouth, backward, and uneducated. As the African-Liberians responded to American-Liberian exploitation against them, they came to be seen as highly dangerous. There were several policies like the apprenticeship program implemented to try to change African-Liberian culture and "civilize" them. As the African-Liberians resisted, increasing exploitative policies were used against them. Consequently the implications of American-Liberian manifest destiny was an implicit and sometimes explicit underpinning of these policies. The historical past thus played a prominent role in the

inculcation of values and loyalty to the American-Liberian republic through the construction of American-Liberian nationalist pedagogy in history teaching, museums, monuments, and memorials in the country. Liberia, in effect, had little or no open, distinct, inclusive national identity, civic culture, or cohesive political institutions from its outset. It was, therefore, not representative of, or responsive to, the demands and expectations of the majority African-Liberian ethnic constituencies.

This initial non-inclusiveness of the "native-Liberians" (Africans) by the American-Liberians could be construed as an early warning signal that ethnic feelings were poised to become a critical factor in shaping the sociopolitical development and landscape of Liberia. Thus, one can deduce that the absence of American-Liberian and African-Liberian relatedness signified that the American-Liberians were going to use state power to dominate the other African-Liberian ethnic groups. It can therefore be argued that the issue of how the American-Liberians created a closed and genuinely exclusive form of American-Liberian nationalism is key to understanding how nascent political disputes ultimately escalated into ethnic conflict.

This provides us with a sense of the early beginnings of ethnic antagonism and the impact of American-Liberian policies on inter-ethnic relations within Liberia. Basically, there was no such thing as a legitimate "Liberian citizen" since there was no structural incorporation of the separate entities: American-Liberian, Gio, Krahn, Mandingo, Mano and so on to constitute an amalgamated one. Thus, since the founding of the Republic of Liberia in 1847, common national symbols and social categories, which could cut across parochial affiliations and loyalties of the American-Liberian and the African-Liberian masses, were not

initiated. A fundamental need for the development of a sense of an inclusive national community at its founding was that at the very least a substantial segment of the diverse Liberian population will come to feel that their vital interests were linked with that of the state and that their well-being would be manifested by membership in it. A basis for the later organization of ethnic resistance against an American-Liberian defined concept of a "Liberian" was thus provided very early in Liberia's development. Subsequently, the resentment against the American-Liberians, which contributed to their military overthrow in 1980, can be said to be symptomatic of their being perceived as a rival ethnic group by the "native-Liberians".

The following sections will examine the primary African-Liberian ethnic groups that were directly involved in the conflict. As Osaghae points out, one good way of going about understanding the actual character of the war and the manner in which ethclass explanations can suffice is to analyze the ethnic character of the warring factions and the patterns of their involvement in the war (Osaghae, 1998, pp.154). Notwithstanding Osaghae's view, it should be made clear at this juncture that there is very little definitive integrative research that deals with African-Liberian ethnic group life in a comprehensive way. Liebenow notes that it has only been in the past four or five decades that efforts have been made to conduct serious research in anthropology, history, economics, and political science which deal with the African-Liberian ethnic groups (Liebenow, 1987, pp.33). There is thus a danger that any treatment of the African-Liberian ethnic groups that sets them apart from the American-Liberian ethnic group might create an impression of greater homogeneity among the

African-Liberian ethnic groups than is actually the case. It is important to bear this caveat in mind.

African-Liberian Ethnic Configuration

In turning to the African-Liberians, we encounter ethnic groups similar to those found in other African countries. However, the almost undivided attention given to American-Liberians as the kernel to studying Liberian politics and society has prevented in large measure a serious political and sociological undertaking of African-Liberian ethnic groups. According to Osaghae, the result is that very little is known of intra-African-Liberian relationships and conflicts, as only those of American-Liberians were considered worthy of attention (Osaghae, 1998, pp.136).

The history, especially of the hinterland ethnic groups such as the Krahn, Gio, and Mano is difficult to ascertain since hardly any written ethnographic records were kept of them, even indirectly, until the twentieth century. Ellis notes that the main source used by modern authors to reconstruct the earlier history of the forest peoples has been oral traditions. This has occasionally been compared with contemporary accounts by a few American-Liberian settlers or by European and American missionaries living on the coast (Ellis, 1999, pp.37). In addition, Ellis contends that, although it is possible to trace the broad history of Liberia's various ethnic groups some centuries back, many of the fundamental concepts operative today, and indeed the name Liberia itself, date from the arrival of the first American colonists in the territory in 1822 (Ellis, 1999, pp.37).

Consequently, one gets the feeling from the literature that before the 1980 coup, conflict in Liberia arose mainly from an overarching complex of fundamental differences between the American-Liberians and the African-Liberians, which was the primary ethnic cleavage. Thus, the erroneous conception of African-Liberians as a monolithic entity devoid of history held sway during this period. American-Liberian and African-Liberian differences would have included socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and sociocultural inequalities. Under these circumstances, analysis of the post-1980 civil conflict, which has mainly involved African-Liberian ethnic groups, has been adversely handicapped. However, subsequent to Doe's 1980 coup, ethnic differences among the African-Liberian ethnic groups became highly salient. Especially for the Krahn and Mandingo on the one hand, and the Gio and Mano on the other. Outram suggests that, ethnic identity became highly salient and was marked by intense disdain and hostility (Outram, 1999, pp.167).

The deficiencies in a thorough undertaking of the African-Liberian ethnic groups notwithstanding, African-Liberian ethnic groups differ in culture, degree of political cohesion and organization, and in their ability to resist American-Liberian domination. These groups are often said to be primordially-rooted or longstanding ethnic groups. According to Liebenow ethnic group membership among the African-Liberians has been a conscious state of "belonging," which has permitted ethnic groups to identify with each other and differentiate themselves from other ethnic groups on the basis of a broad configuration of factors (Liebenow, 1987, pp.38). Among the factors is language, the common occupation of some historical "homeland", recognition of a set of mutual interests that are worth defending against both external and internal threats, and similar customs.

The African-Liberian ethnic groups can be divided geographically into coastal ethnic groups such as Gbandi, Kru, Loma, and Vai and hinterland ethnic groups such as Krahn, Gio, and Mano, many of which, according to Osaghae, "did not effectively become Liberian until the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s" (Osaghae, 1998, pp.137). Coastal African-Liberian ethnic groups, who are closer in proximity geographically and in terms of contact and alliance to the American-Liberians, saw themselves as the logical heirs to the American-Liberians and showed a sense of superiority over hinterland groups.

Since the compiling of a complete ethnography of the African-Liberian ethnic groups would take too much space we will be focusing on those ethnic groups that were directly involved in the civil war. The African-Liberian ethnic groups at the center of the civil conflict were the Gio, Mano, Mandingo, and Krahn. There is a danger, however, that the treatment in this brief section of these four ethnic groups may create the impression of greater similarity among them than the facts presented actually warrant. The reader should therefore bear this caveat in mind.

Krahn and Mandingo

The Krahn, Samuel Doe's ethnic group, is one of the smallest of Liberia's sixteen formally recognized ethnic groups. According to Ellis, the Krahn are generally reckoned to compose only 5 percent of all Liberians and occupy one of the densest forests in Africa in Grand Gedeh County (Ellis, 1999, pp.31). The Krahns are the predominant ethnic group in Grand Gedeh County, while the Gio and Mano who came to be their feared adversary after the Doe coup are the predominant group in neighboring Nimba County.

At the time of Doe's rise to power, which also elevated the ethnic prominence of the Krahn, Ellis notes that the Krahn had a reputation for being a rather nominal (in terms of ethnic importance) group, having had little opportunity for higher education (Ellis, 1999, pp.31). It is significant, then, that of the twenty-seven cabinet members constituted by the People's Redemption Council (PRC), ten were from the Krahn-speaking part of Liberia, the same ethnic background as Doe, five from the Kru-speaking part, seven from the Dan/Gio-speaking region, and four from the Lofa-speaking parts of Liberia.

From the make up of the PRC one could argue that the single most important development was the fact that the newly constituted bureaucracy was not representative of the entire country, but rather took on ethnic hues. Liebenow contends that the elements of a "new Krahn ethnicism" were thus discernible in the immediate post coup period itself, when the quickly constituted PRC had a disproportionate representation from the Krahn ethnic group in particular and the southeastern African-Liberian ethnic groups in general (Liebenow, 1987, pp.267-268). A narrow ethnic base of influence that would become more pronounced could be discerned from the newly constituted PRC. One could make the argument that it is not the unequal representation of the different ethnic groups in the PRC *per se* that led to the politicization of ethnic differences. It was only when Doe started favoring his own Krahn ethnic group to the cost of the other groups constituting the PRC was a fertile ground for the politicization of ethnicity prepared.

Ostensibly, the Krahn saw the coup and the end of American-Liberian hegemony in terms of Krahn ascendancy in sociopolitical status. After all, their native son was the leader of the PRC and *de facto* head of the government of Liberia. Along with the Krahn, after the

1980 coup the Gio and Mano constituted the majority in the People's Redemption Council (PRC) and held the highest offices of power and influence in the PRC. However, Osaghae contends that by 1984 allegations of Krahn domination were rife all over the country. More importantly, the supremacist arrogance of the Krahns, who were of the position that every important political appointment should go to them, fuelled such allegations (Osaghae, 1998, pp.148).

Under the PRC Doe's Krahn ethnic group allied with the Mandingos who made up roughly 4 percent of the population, gained relative political ascendancy over other African-Liberian ethnic groups by dominating political appointments in the Liberian bureaucracy, the public services, and the officer corps of the army, and other security agencies. It is believed that Doe and the Krahns sought this alliance because Mandingo merchants controlled important sectors of Liberia's domestic economy. Consequently, Doe needed the economic clout of the Mandingos to prop up his predominantly Krahn regime. Subsequently, the Mandingo were able to use their economic power and influence to gain political power which other African-Liberian ethnic groups thought was undeserved. Thus, the Mandingo came to be vehemently resented by other ethnic groups for their access to the pathways of political power. Members of the Gio and Mano ethnic group who had played a significant role in the 1980 coup increasingly felt alienated by Doe's support for his co-ethnics and the Mandingo.

Most African-Liberian ethnic groups viewed the Mandingo as outsiders and not Liberians because the Mandingo was considered as foreigners from Guinea where the Mandingo are one of the most prominent ethnic groups rivaling the Fula ethnic group in

terms of sociopolitical influence. However, Augustine Konneh notes that the Mandingo have had a historical presence in Liberia dating back to the 18th century (Konneh, 1996, pp.150). The Mandingo began to arrive in what is presently known as Liberia from their Upper Guinea ancestral homeland in the 1800s. Perhaps most significant, according to Konneh, is the fact that Doe came to rely heavily on Mandingo support to compliment the support of his own Krahn ethnic group as his own base of support among other African-Liberian ethnic groups deteriorated by the mid-1980s (Konneh, 1996, pp.152).

Especially, Krahn alienation by the Gio and Mano made the Mandingo, who had a major presence in Nimba County, an important group to be aligned with against ethnic rivals. The cost of the Mandingos aligning with the Krahn, when most other ethnic groups were excluded from participating in the Doe government, festered resentment that fed the rage of the Gio and Mano of Nimba County and other African-Liberian ethnic groups. Additionally, Doe construed criticism against his government as attempts by other ethnic groups to oust his own ethnic group from political power. Mgbeoji contends that Doe purported to be the leader of the Krahns, and was so perceived by members of other ethnic groups. (Mgbeoji, 2003, pp.35).

Such resentment, ultimately, led to the killing of many members of the Mandingo ethnic group and in turn probably led to the formation of United Liberian Movement for Democracy (ULIMO). ULIMO was an alliance between ethnic Krahn, mainly former Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) fighters loyal to Doe, and Mandingo after the capture and execution of Samuel Doe in 1990 by Prince Yormie Johnson, a Gio who was formerly aligned with the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). However, due to ethnic differences between the

Krahn and Mandingo ULIMO spilt into ULIMO-J, a Krahn ethnic faction led by Roosevelt Johnson, and ULIMO-K, a Mandingo/Muslim ethnic faction led by Alhaji Kromah.

Osaghae suggests that Krahn-Mano/Gio relations date far back. Unfortunately, there has been no study of these relations, but oral accounts, which are considered not reliable, talk of conflicts between the two groups dating back to the early 19th century (Osaghae, 1996, pp.81). Conteh *et al* also adds that, up until 1983, the Gio/Mano-Krahn enjoyed a state of uninterrupted ethnic association. The ancestors of the ethnic groups it is believed took oaths to remain perpetual allies (Conteh, *et al*, 1999, pp.117). Stable ethnic relations as explicated by Lake and Rothchild can be understood as based upon a "contract" between groups (Lake & Rothchild, 1998, pp.13).

Although we are not privy to the details of the agreement of association between the Krahn and the Gio and Mano such an agreement would have been the nature of their ethnic contract. The agreement might have spelt out especially the cultural relationship between the Krahn and the Gio and Mano in channeling their relations in a peaceful direction. Cultural-sharing arrangements like the Poro (men) and Sande (women) exist between the Krahn and the Gio and Mano. Osaghae points out that these groups promote inter-ethnic group unity through common cultural practices and a system of dependence on other ethnic groups for the observation of certain ethnic rituals (Osaghae, 1998, pp.138). That solidarity lasted through the first phase of American-Liberian indirect rule and President Tubman's unification policy.

The cordial relationship was dissolved during the 1980s as a result of differences over the approach to the pursuit of the common good of the Krahn ethnic group on the one

side and the Gio/Mano on the other after the 1980 coup leaving a legacy of ethnic fear and distrust. Lake and Rothchild have noted that ethnic conflicts can arise if groups cannot credibly commit themselves to uphold mutually beneficial agreements they might reach (Lake & Rothchild, 1998, pp.13). In other words, by renegeing on the ethnic association negotiated by their ancestors, Doe and the Krahn were signaling to the Gio and Mano their intentions to exploit their relations. As Liebenow avers, the direct corollary to Krahn ascendancy in this "new Krahn ethnicism," unfortunately, was that particular ethnic groups were again being singled out for abuse based on their ethnicity (Liebenow, 1987, pp.268).

In October 1985, Liberia held its first ever multi-party elections. The 1985 elections are widely believed to have been rigged by Samuel Doe, the eventual winner, significantly reducing any opportunity for a peaceful beginning to democracy. The rigged election secured for Doe the presidency of Liberia at head of Liberia's new civilian government. What becomes discernible at this stage is Doe's, and in association, the Krahn's quest to reestablish the single-ethnic group dominance reminiscent of the American-Liberian first republic (1847-1980). A new form of ethnicism was thus emerging which ostensibly constituted a direct threat to any idea of creating a national identity which transcended ethnocentrism. The irony here is that ethnocentrism leads like to favor like leading in other words, to a broader concept of ethnic and ethnic interest.

This fact was not insignificant in sparking what was perceived, real or otherwise, to be an attempted coup in 1985 led by Thomas Quiwonkpa, a Gio led attempted coup. Quiwonkpa, Doe's former second in command and ally, staged an unsuccessful coup in 1985 to rectify the stolen election, which was believed to have been won by Jackson Doe, a Gio

with no relation to Samuel Doe. Following Quiwonkpa's failed coup, Doe increasingly centralized his government and the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) among the Krahn. In retaliation for supporting Quiwonkpa's attempted coup Doe's predominantly Krahn AFL executed an estimated 3000 Gio and Mano ethnic group members in Nimba County. Subsequently, the dispute between Doe and Quiwonkpa over many policy issues, the perception that the presidency has been stolen from Jackson Doe, the Gio candidate during the 1985 elections, and Quiwonkpa's abortive coup in 1985 led to ethnic atrocities being meted out against the Gio and Mano by Doe and the Krahn.

The entire Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups were held responsible for the Doe government's atrocities on other ethnic groups, specifically the Gio and Mano of Nimba County. This resulted in the death of thousands of the members of the Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups who were singled out for terminal retribution by the Gio and Mano for Doe's atrocities during the Nimba massacre. The Nimba County massacre is thus viewed as the event that most deeply affected the Gio and Mano and led to the bloody internal civil war. By the late 1980s the tragedy of Doe and his Krahn ethnic group was becoming the tragedy of Liberia. The likelihood of a civil conflict driven by ethnicity, given the overt ethnicization of Liberian society and politics, was thus imminent.

Gio and Mano

The Gio and Mano of Nimba County are two linguistically related groups who faced severe ethnic atrocities during Doe's reign of terror, 1980-1990. The sociopolitical fortunes of the Gio and Mano ethnic groups were tied to Quiwonkpa, Doe's erstwhile second in

command; thus Quiwonkpa's demotion and execution after his failed coup led to a decline in the sociopolitical positions of the Gio and Mano ethnic groups. Osaghae contends that it was the struggle for supremacy between Doe and Quiwonkpa especially that mobilized the Krahn against the Gio-Mano, a division which was to inform the civil war (Osaghae, 1998, pp.147).

In the aftermath of the failed coup, the AFL who by this time had been purged of all Gio and Mano soldiers and therefore could not be described as anything other than a Krahn army, were sent to Nimba county, Quiwonkpa's stronghold, where they indiscriminately killed Gios and Manos. The number of Gio and Mano ethnic group members that were killed during this Krahn retribution was estimated to be 3,000 (Adebajo, 2002, pp.20). Mgbeoji further suggests that there is also anecdotal evidence that the Krahn-dominated army butchered 600 Gio/Mano civilians who were seeking refuge in a church compound in Monrovia (Mgbeoji, 2003, pp.19). The attempted Quiwonkpa 1985 coup and the bloody aftermath from both the Krahn and Gio-Mano ethnic groups is believed to be the proximate cause of the civil war that broke out in December of 1989. Adebajo indicates that this single incident, more than any other, set the stage for the exploitation of ethnic rivalries that would eventually culminate in the brutal civil war (Adebajo, 2002, pp.30).

The next chapter focuses on the intellectual heritage of the historical underpinnings of the Liberian civil conflict and its connection to the basic comprehension of the ethnic dynamics of the conflict. A historical profile of Liberia is also important for discerning the proximate causes of the country's conflict.

CHAPTER THREE

Historical Underpinnings and Evolution of the Conflict

Knowledge of the originating conditions is essential in comprehending the ethnic dynamics of the Liberian civil conflict. Although Liberia's intractable civil war began in December 1989, its antecedents lay in the country's origins in the nineteenth century; thus, a historical background through its fault lines is pertinent to this project. The distorted nature of Liberia's history, which is a major cause of contention, is a critical factor in Liberia's civil conflict. The permissive, proximate, and triggering causes of the conflict can be found in the *longue duree* of Liberia's political history. It therefore helps to think about the historical fault lines of the Liberian conflict in terms of remote/underlying causes, proximate/intermediate causes, and triggering/catalytic events.

Remote/Underlying Causes

Remote causes in the case of Liberia's civil conflict are the broad historical factors that set the conditions that are necessary for a conflict to develop but do not necessarily determine the conflict. They are aspects of the conflict that are usually considered to be present under the surface although there may be some expression of grievances, and real or imagined suffering or negative sentiments during this remote phase. Michael Brown describes this phase as being "permissive". Brown denotes different kinds of underlying

causes, such as cultural or perceptual, socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and structural. While the presence of these variables makes some polyethnic societies more prone or predisposed to violence than others, it does not in any way determine or forecast when or how ethnic differences may escalate into violent conflict (Brown, 1996, pp.12-13 & 22). Understanding the historical context, then, does not mean that one is limited by it. On the contrary, to the extent that one understands that problems are linked to things that happened in the past, it becomes possible to move beyond those limitations to a new definition of the current situation. If one is unaware of past associations, however, they become much more limiting and problematic.

A non-historical undertaking of Liberia's political development would thus prevent this project from probing very far beneath the surface of recent events. Furthermore, as a theoretically informed, empirical research this project requires a careful scrutiny of Liberia's historical evolution as it relates to its ethnic constitution. As Johnston illustrates, any review of post-Cold War ethnicity in Africa should not confine itself to a current crisis. Specifically, it should not fail to note the current move by most Africanists to emphasize the continuity and weight of the historical experience in understanding Africa's contemporary conflict situation (Johnston, 1998, pp.130).

A historical account is thus an important component in understanding the preservation and kindling of later ethnic animosities. In a sense a historical analysis constitutes a backdrop against which the recent conflict events can be examined because it shows that the American-Liberian stranglehold on power literally foreclosed democratic means of power change, which made violent ethnic conflict more likely. Both socio-

politically and socio-economically, the American-Liberians decided to tread an alienation path with far-reaching implications in the long run.

The historical context notwithstanding, it is also imperative to note that while analysis of root causes necessarily involves an understanding of the historical factors, dating back to the American-Liberian period 1847-1980, it is equally pertinent to concentrate on the coup and post-coup years as the proximate cause and triggering effect that led to the eruption of civil war on account of ethnic animosities (discussed later in this chapter). Permissive causes, in fact, provide the way in which proximate causes may interact to create virulent civil conflict. The Doe coup transformed a traditionally supremacist American-Liberian hegemony into dominance by a single African-Liberia ethnic group: by 1985 Krahn hegemony had replaced American-Liberian hegemony. The Doe coup and post-coup period are examined later in the paper.

Thus, the underlying, proximate, and the catalytic cause continuum serves as the structure of this chapter as we work through Liberia's conflict evolution. The American-Liberian legacy cannot be ignored for it obviously defines and shapes Liberia's existing society from which has emerged the present ethnic conflict. However, it alone does not sufficiently provide an explanation. Thus, a sound historical approach should be able to explain and relate pre-1980 realities to post-1980 realities in a logical and meaningful manner.

The era of American-Liberian "political colonialism" initiated, and "native-Liberian political post-colonialism" under the Doe regime consummated, a dynamic process of ethnic strife that eventually resulted in ethnic conflict in Liberia. The reality in Liberia is therefore different from that of Western states, as has been discussed by Smith. Liberia's nationalism

has been more ethnic (exclusive) than civic (inclusive) (Smith, 1989, pp.149). Unlike the West, however, where ethnicity is normally subsumed under citizenship, the evolution from an ethnic (exclusive) nationalist mentality to that of a civic (inclusive) nationalist mentality has not been achieved in Liberia over time. An argument could and can perhaps be made that this is the crux of the civil conflict. The precipitation then of Liberia's ethnic conflict becomes incomprehensible if it is divorced from American-Liberian colonial rule of the first republic (1847-1980). In effect, the inept, explicitly divisive strategies and policies pursued by the American-Liberian authorities to mismanage diversity made the onset of the ethnic conflict inevitable.

For example, in Liberia the mainland and the hinterland were deliberately kept in mutual isolation from each other (emphasis was placed on their differences) so that there was essentially very little or no chance of a sense of a "pan-Liberian identity" emerging. Dunn points out that there was a cleavage between coastal indigenes who had longer contact with the West in pre-Liberia and with American-Liberians after the creation of the state in 1822) and hinterland indigenes (who had less experience of contact with the West) (Dunn, 1999, pp.98). Having been associated with the American-Liberians longer than the African-Liberian ethnic groups from the hinterland and having enjoyed some carrots (a limited amount of privilege), there was a feeling of superiority on the part of coastal African-Liberians in relation to their association with the hinterlanders. Osaghae actually notes that, given this setting, intra-African-Liberian conflicts of the 1980s were expected to be between the coast and the hinterland, but this did not turn out to be the case ostensibly because of the marginalization of coastal groups in the government (Osaghae, 1998, pp.137).

The coastal-hinterland divide definitely served as a stumbling block that prevented the coastal African-Liberian groups like the Grebo, Kru, and Vai from joining forces with the hinterlanders like the Gio, Krahn, and Mano to challenge American-Liberian ethnic hegemony. American-Liberians took advantage of the coastal-hinterland divide by working to make both the coast and the hinterland dependent on the American-Liberian dominated government. As Banton contends, ethnic groups are crystallized in polarization because the political structure renders impossible the kind of bargaining that might otherwise modify the differences between ethnic communities (Banton, 1986, pp.23). Another important reason for the coastal-hinterland divide which prevented them from jointly opposing American-Liberian hegemony was that most African-Liberians did not become Liberian citizens until the 20th century, some as late as 1960. Furthermore, the African-Liberian elite were highly factionalized along ethnic lines. African-Liberian ethnic groups were therefore not monolithic. Common national symbols and unifying social categories, which would cut across parochial affiliations and loyalties of the American-Liberians and Indigenous-Liberians, were not implemented from the outset.

One does not need a crystal ball to discern the fact that when a country is comprised of different ethnic groups with different outlooks on national issues, the definition of that country's national identity would have to be opened-up to the confluence of interpretations of the various ethnic groups. Coincidentally, Liebenow indicates that being a Gola, a Grebo, a Krahn, or a Kru has often meant more to the individual than being a Liberian (Liebenow, 1987, pp.4). Liebenow highlights the fact that, although the sociopolitical and geographical boundaries of the disparate African-Liberian ethnic groups are far from precise,

at the core each group represents a distinct language, a different political authority system [with indicia of statehood], and a unique way of organizing social, religious, and cultural data relevant to their survival as an ethnic group (Liebenow, 1987, pp.4).

The obvious hurdle, then, that should have been tackled from the outset by the American-Liberian founding fathers was the forging of a pan-Liberian society in the face of ethnic heterogeneity on several levels. However, parochial loyalty was encouraged and very often used by the American-Liberians to entrench their political ascendancy through a policy of "divide and rule". Conteh *et al* indicate that this policy, of necessity, rendered Liberian history parochial and distorted. As a parochial record of Liberia's past, it entailed principally an account of the triumphs and problems of the American-Liberians as they labored to develop the Liberian nation. As a distorted history, it grossly misrepresented African-Liberians (Conteh, *et al*, 1999, pp.111). The result of such a policy was that the Liberian State was not able to secure a monopoly of legitimacy over ethnoregional opposition movements.

As elucidated by Conteh *et al*, between 1904 and 1980, portions of the organic law (the Constitution of Liberia), a number of national symbols and the values of the Liberian political system were still dysfunctional with regard to the creation of a common national identity and, of necessity, to the development of African-Liberians' meaningful participation in the distribution of decision-making (Conteh, *et al*, 1999, pp.113). This exclusion clearly demonstrated the dogmatic refusal of the American-Liberians to incorporate the entire polity in the country's national identity development. Such isolation led to ethnic consciousness among the "African-Liberians" and thus increased the possibilities of an eventual ethnic conflict. Nnoli contends that the inevitable consequence here was the greater salience of the

ethnocentric component of ethnicity and, therefore, ethnic consciousness and conflict (Nnoli, 1998, pp.19). Under such a scenario the "African-Liberian" ethnic groups became susceptible to the manipulations of the American-Liberians who readily exploited the prevailing ethnic sentiments.

An example here will suffice to illustrate this American-Liberian manipulation of ethnicity in Liberia. American-Liberian manipulation of ethnicity took the form of the manufacturing and fostering of jealousy of the coastal native communities relative to the hinterland native communities, leading to interethnic hostility and eventually conflict amongst African-Liberians as well. The American-Liberians seized every available opportunity to spread the myth that "coastal native-Liberians" were intrinsically different from and better than "hinterland native-Liberians", creating a kind of "house slave-field slave dichotomy". The underlying American-Liberian interest in such a policy was to essentially undermine any eventual possibility of future "African-Liberian nationalism".

Such American-Liberian calculations can be viewed or construed as a purely instrumental manipulation of ethnicity, showing how ethnic identity can be shaped to serve the political needs of American-Liberians. American-Liberian actions of turning coastal and hinterland African-Liberian ethnic groups against each other could be understood according to the standard conception of instrumental rationality as a rational means to an end of American-Liberians dominating the Liberian political system. However, portraying African-Liberian ethnic groups as mindless robots who can easily be manipulated into assuming fictitious identities and sacrificing their own and other lives for the purposes of a minority

group of skillful self-serving American-Liberian manipulators represents an extremely simplistic and condescending view.

Historically, a sense of ethnic supremacy (this had partly to do with the overwhelming attention given to American-Liberian versus African-Liberian division) was used to develop, construct, and sustain a political oligarchy comprising the descendants of the Pioneers (those who returned from the Americas to form Liberia in the 1800s). Under what can be described as American-Liberian colonialism, rules were established that gradually closed off entry into "American-Liberian society" and exit from "African-Liberian society" which created essentially "barricaded ethnic identities"¹⁰. This made it virtually impossible, even if they wanted to, for African-Liberians to subscribe to the national creed being developed by the American-Liberians. While the policy ramifications of an emphasis on "American-Liberian ethnicity" are manifold, such a strategy ultimately ignored the hard questions of negotiating relations among the full complex of Liberia's diverse ethnic groups (African-Liberian and American-Liberian) that should have been attempted within an American-Liberian model of nation-building and citizenship.

The question of identity of which ethnicity forms a large part would be central to the comprehension of Liberian society. Partly because, as Chabal and Daloz indicate, African identities incorporate a communal notion of the individual, this means that the individual remains firmly placed within the family, kin, and communal networks from which they are issued (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, pp.52). Classical Occidental political analysis on citizenship,

according to Chabal and Daloz, usually rests on the notion of the discrete, autonomous, and self-referential individual, which does not seem relevant to Liberia or much of Africa for that matter (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, pp.46). The African vision of citizenship is both more inclusive and more extensive than it is in the Occident. It is more *inclusive* in that it contains multiple aspects of relationship between the individual and their ethnic community *vis-à-vis* the state. It is also more *extensive* in that it projects with varying degrees of intensity into the other realms of the individual's existence, which would include social, religious, economic, and cultural markers. Thus, ethnicity would remain of immediate practical importance to the definition of identity and citizenship in Liberia.

Chabal and Daloz argue that, whatever social changes have ensued in post-colonial Africa they have not (so far at least) resulted, as they have in the Occident, in the gradual and seemingly permanent erosion of the ethnic in favor of the individual (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, pp.52-53). The boundaries between the individual and his/her ethnic community in Liberia are porous, or at least not as firm, as in the Occident in ways which are obviously political significant. The individual and his/her ethnic group remain subjectively intertwined, to the extent that one's personal identity will necessarily reflect a degree of the collective (kin, clan, cultural, and ethnic). This, then, has profound bearing on defining citizenship or the construction of it in the Liberian context. Ignoring the diverse African-Liberian ethnic groups culminated in the deepening of collective grievances and feelings of exclusion among particularly African-Liberian ethnic groups. Indeed, American-Liberian ethnic particularism

¹⁰ "Barricaded ethnic identities," unless indicated otherwise, refers to involuntary isolation of African-Liberian ethnic groups from belonging to a pan-Liberian sociopolitical community. By barricading the African-Liberian ethnic groups from entry and participation the American-Liberians were in a sense providing the basis for much of the conflict that came to plague Liberia.

from the outset delegitimized all avenues for an inclusive form of citizenship that would have encouraged a sense of belonging among African-Liberian ethnic groups.

Such a division, then, denied legitimacy to the Liberian State and weakened its effectiveness as an embodiment of civic national identity, values, and institutional capacity. American-Liberian domination was particularly ominous because it implied the existence of societal stratification that determined who got what in the political, economic, social, and cultural life of the country. Resources at the disposal of American-Liberians went exclusively to leading families of American-Liberians, the Christian Church, benevolent societies (Free Masons/Eastern Star, United Brothers of Friendship/Sisters of the Mysterious Ten) and the all encompassing political machinery of the American-Liberians, the True Whig Party (TWP). The point to this is that we see ethnicity being defined by the American-Liberians very early in Liberia's development process as the principal bargaining chip in the competition for the allocation of centrally distributed resources. Ethnicity thus determined the specific place a group occupied within the Liberian polity. Subsequently, ethnicity (although always not the case) became the primary way in which Liberians identified themselves as political beings. This was continued during the second republic where we encounter members of the Krahn ethnic group benefiting from the economic and political largesse of the Doe regime.

This condition set the terms for ethnic identity, organization, and action for the American-Liberians and the African-Liberians. It is therefore important not to overlook or underestimate the state's role during the American-Liberian first republic and the Doe-led second republic in the generation and reproduction of exclusive social networks structured

around ethnicity that culminated in conflict. Analysis of the relationship between the state and ethnicity in this regard reflects viewpoints concerning the role of the state in creating or resolving ethnic problems. Ronen has argued that the state itself is the cause of ethnic conflict. Ethnicity, in his opinion, usually becomes a political problem when "groups are crystallized in polarization because the political structure renders impossible the kind of bargaining required to otherwise modify the boundary between ethnic communities" (Ronen, 1986, pp.2).

This proposition, then, should be considered a very accurate indicator of ethnic trouble. Social, religious, ideological, cultural, and political connections among members who share a barricaded identity are dogmatically and hysterically defined and defended, as are disconnection from others. It is fairly clear from Howe's account that many academics believe that the American-Liberians displayed some of the worst traits of the antebellum US South. Victims of American slavery subsequently became the victimizers of the "Liberian natives" (Howe, 1996/97, pp.147). Economic exploitation of human and natural resources without adequate compensation were common features of the American-Liberian political system. A form of compulsory labor was imposed on the African-Liberians, who were compelled to work as field hands, such servitude, which was analogous to slavery, was only ended in 1930.

This system perpetuated a virtually exclusive American-Liberian polity, to the detriment of the Liberian natives. American-Liberians unilaterally dictated the terms and direction of "*citizenship*" and that change was a linear progression from "*uncivilized African-Liberian*" to "*civilized Americanization*". It was occasionally possible for

African-Liberians to "pass," that is gain entrance into American-Liberian society through an apprentice system and thus be eligible to become Liberian citizens. The apprentice system was established to integrate African-Liberians into American-Liberian society. "In 1838, the settlers' enacted an apprenticeship law which enabled American-Liberian families to keep sons and daughters of African-Liberians in their homes" (Gershoni, 1985, pp.27). These apprentices went through what can only be described as an ethnicization process of learning the American-Liberian way of life. "After the period of apprenticeship (until the age of 21 for boy and age 18 for girls) they became "civilized" [and were admitted into American-Liberian society]" (Gershoni, 1985, pp.27).

Becoming "civilized" involved completely severing all ties with their previous traditional beliefs and practices and the severing of ties to their African-Liberian ethnic groups¹¹. As Busumtwi-Sam has noted, a particularly potent basis of collective identity formation in Africa has been at the intersection of ideology, nationalism, and ethnicity. Some of the most intense and protracted civil conflicts are generated when nationalism, disguised in the language of (ethnic) universalism, excludes certain (ethnic) groups from complete participation, while simultaneously promoting their assimilation (or extermination) (Busumtwi-Sam, 2002pp.98). This seems to be the case, with the American-Liberian apprenticeship policy. A fundamental flaw, then, of the apprenticeship program conceived by the American-Liberians is that it did not result in a genuine integration of the African-Liberians nor did it culminate in substantial sharing of power with the American-Liberians.

¹¹ For more on the apprenticeship program and the American-Liberian failed attempts at integration see Gershoni, Yekutiel. 1985. Black Colonialism: The Americo-Liberian Scramble for the Hinterland. Westview Press, Inc., Boulder Colorado.

American-Liberians had rather clear regulations and guidelines about how outsiders, i.e. African-Liberians, could become "civilized" insiders. African-Liberians, then, clearly had to pass certain American-Liberian defined criteria in order to receive citizenship rights. In fact, Michael Hechter indicates that this is one of the most potent selective incentives that can help cement ethnic solidarity from generation to generation (Hechter, 1986, pp.20-21). However, other than a few persons of native descent, who upon acquiring prescribed qualifications were allowed entry into the American-Liberian generated sociopolitical system, the bulk of the people of Liberia were excluded. The Liberian State in effect had become the focus of American-Liberian political identity, leading to the persistent neglect of the African-Liberian ethnic groups, which incidentally led to the highlighting of ethnic as well as other (communal and religious) cleavages. Chazan indicates that in societies that are deeply divided such a policy choice can result in the withdrawal or self-enclosure of excluded ethnic groups (Chazan, 1986, pp.145-147). Linear models of relationships among and between deeply divided ethnic societies are therefore not usually helpful or constructive in helping to crystallize an inclusive idea of citizenship. The apprenticeship policy, it could be argued, served in the end to hinder integration of the American-Liberians and the African-Liberians.

Given a situation like Liberia where people are purposefully left out, entire ethnic communities can, consciously or otherwise, if only temporarily, disengage from the state. Subsequently, the top-down direction of citizenship submerged, and to some extent eliminated, African-Liberian identity since the African-Liberian ethnic groups were supposed to strive to be like the American-Liberians. This gross imbalance of representation eventually resulted in the 1980 coup in which President W. Tolbert and several members of his

government, the symbols of the Americas (as they were called), were summarily executed. Of all those officially executed by Doe's military junta immediately after the coup only one was African-Liberian, supporting the notion that this was an African-Liberian ethnic revolution. As Chazan points out, exclusion breeds diversity and nurtures many different variants of ethnic articulation (Chazan, 1986, pp.146). In Liberia's situation the ethnic articulation that ended up being manifested happened to be a virulent one.

American-Liberian citizenship as state membership was thus inherently ethnic, because Liberian citizenship understood under such a scenario was subject to the countervailing pressures of ethnicization. Rather, had the American-Liberians envisioned a dynamic process of "*citizenship*", driven by multiple relationships among themselves and the African-Liberian ethnic groups, which resulted in multidirectional change, everyone could have changed perhaps amicably in this dialectical process.

Although this would have been highly unusual at the time not just in the case of Africa, following Liberia's formation, its American-Liberian founders should have opted for more pragmatic approaches and reconciled with Liberia's ethnic reality. With hindsight reconciling Liberia's ethnic reality as a deeply divided society would have been the prudent thing to do. Whether there was a stated ethnic policy or not, or indeed if there ever was a consensus among the American-Liberian political leaders about ethnicity, is of less importance. From the very start, however, the American-Liberians did not pursue a pragmatic approach towards ethnicity. As Kymlicka indicates multiethnic states (such as Liberia), which represent the majority of nation-states, cannot survive unless the various national groups have an allegiance to the larger community they cohabit (Kymlicka, 1996,

pp.13). In the absence of the development of civic citizenship, if a particular ethnic group felt aggrieved because the state in which they lived discriminated against them, and believed that redress was impossible, there was ultimately a potentially high probability that an attempt to seize the state could be effected.

As Chirot points out, the issue of how to create open, inclusive, and genuinely democratic forms of nationalism is critical in understanding how to diminish and avert violence generated by ethnic conflicts (Chirot, 2001, pp.6). Ethnic identity *per se*, then, is not immediately violent because political systems that allow both exogenous (open) and endogenous (closed) avenues for ethnic expression will probably be much less prone to ethnic conflicts since they will probably have the mechanisms in place to address the grievances of disaffected ethnic groups.

If states ignore this issue and pursue radically exclusive policies it could alienate various ethnic groups (this was the case with the majority of African-Liberian ethnic groups) and consequently lead to social and ethnic unrest. Indeed, as Deng points out, it is the reaction to the injustices of such discrimination that engenders violent ethnic conflicts. Ethnic conflicts in Africa are generally provoked by gross injustices, real or perceived (Deng, 2002, pp.359). Though not anticipated when the project began, it can be argued here that the lack of pre-existing cross-cutting networks of civic and social engagement between the American-Liberians and African-Liberians stands out as a significant proximate cause that accounts for the difference between ethnic peace and violence.

To use Hutchful's phrase, "a viable civil society is animated and sustained by widely shared beliefs and attitudes, shared moral visions concerning relations among individual

citizens, the community of citizens, and the state" (Hutchful, 1995-96, pp.56). Such attitudes and beliefs, he further explains, deal with significant issues such as resolving conflicts, setting out the parameters of dissent and deviance, and determining the rules of the game for the pursuit of particular interests, mainly private matters, dealt with transparently in a civil forum (Hutchful, 1995-96, pp.56). Many associations in Liberia are exclusively concerned with the welfare of their own ethnic constituency; consequently, they have not helped in the crystallization of a generalized conception of absolute gains that tends to transcend the relative gains of ethnic group aspirations. Perhaps, such relative gains aspirations of the various ethnic groups helped transform Liberia's relatively benign ethnic groups into rather effective political conflict groups.

Contrastingly, as Varshney has indicated, in countries where such networks of civic and sociopolitical engagement exist, tensions and conflicts are regulated and managed. Where they are missing, ethnic identities have led to endemic and ghastly violence (Varshney, 2002, pp.9). A pragmatic approach towards ethnicity is thus most likely to succeed in mitigating ethnic tensions if ethnic issues are addressed early in the development process. A rudimentary comparison of a case in which ethnic tensions were addressed in a country's development underscores the importance of providing for the concerns of various ethnic groups here. In Tanzania where ethnic instances are granted some form of political expression, ethnic conflict has remained subdued. As a result, Hameso points out that, although most Tanzanians still see their primary attachments as belonging to the ethnic group, it has been possible to graft on to this a pan-Tanzanian sense of national identity (Hameso, 1997, pp.126). Tanzanian politics, then, has not suffered from the debilitating

effects of extensive ethnic turmoil that is experienced in other settings in Africa. With such a framework, Hameso indicates that Tanzania's political concerns lie with broader notions of geographical balance and fair distribution of benefits and resources among its widely differing regions and cultures (Hameso, 1997, pp.126).

Tripp and Young delineate that the Nyerere regime (1961-1985) committed the ample political resources of the state to a developmental program of which nation-building was a cornerstone. Permeating the modernization program of TANU (Tanganyika African National Union) was a political culture of egalitarianism (Tripp & Young, 2001, pp.268-269). In ethnic and cultural terms, this implied a priority for regional equity in development policy. However, in Liberia's case, the American-Liberians chose to preserve their dominance by forbidding African-Liberians from forming independent civic organizations and developing a sense of shared Liberian political values. An environment such as that of Tanzania's in which political moderation prevailed was thus lacking in Liberia. The lack of such provisions in Liberia had devastating consequences by inadvertently encouraging ethnicity in sociopolitical competition, while the early introduction of a system of ethnic power distribution in Tanzania helped establish a moderate political climate.

In Liberia, in contrast, there were no legitimate exogenous or endogenous channels for expressing dissatisfaction that probably would have ultimately rendered violence unnecessary. Political opposition, in effect, coalesced instead around the only available symbols, the ethnicity of the African-Liberian population. Given a lack of such exogenous and endogenous channels, Liberian State politics can be seen to provide the context within which ethnic mechanisms dissipated into a virulent conflict. It is clear, then, that the end of

American-Liberian ethno-hegemonic power created conditions of uncertainty after the Doe coup. Rivalry for supremacy within the "new order", and virulent ambitions for political power in the absence of centrist control created conditions in which ethnic conflict could proliferate.

By condemning the native Liberian population as "uncivilized" people, who were fit only for social, economic, and political exploitation, the American-Liberians were effectively sowing the seeds of the Doe coup and the decade long civil ethnic conflict that began in 1989 with Charles Taylor's initial attack on Nimba County. The ethnic conflict is thus best seen and understood as the climax of the contradictions, which date back to the foundations of Liberia in 1822.

Proximate Causes: The Period of Incubation

Proximate causes of conflict are specific situational circumstances that can increase the likelihood of conflict, for example, the more intermediate or immediate contextual economic, social, and political dysfunction with ethnic undertones that existed in Liberia. Proximate causes according to Brown can generally be defined as rapid and unexpected changes in any of the underlying causes (Brown 1996, pp.571 & 576-578). Brown argues that proximate causes fuel escalation and are likely to determine if and when a conflict will turn violent (Brown, 1996, pp.576-578). Proximate causes are decisive in determining whether the threshold between non-violence and violence will be crossed.

In the mid-1970s, Liberia experienced devastating socioeconomic and sociopolitical crisis due largely in part to exogenous factors such as the Organization of the Petroleum

Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil crisis and endogenous factors, such as the price increase of rice leading to the rice riots of 1979, which led to hyperinflation. The 1970s according to Dunn also witnessed the initiation of a national discussion about social justice, and equity and the imperatives of democracy (Dunn, 1999, pp.92). Traditional issues, such as the American-Liberian-African-Liberian divide figured prominently at the discussions of the national question. Under these socioeconomic crisis circumstances, the Liberian government was increasingly unable to deal with societal demands. The African-Liberians for the socioeconomic problems the country was facing were blaming the American-Liberians as an ethnic group. To put it more prosaically, the African-Liberians interpreted the socioeconomic crisis at the time as the result of longstanding discriminatory patterns of sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and cultural ineptitude of the American-Liberians. The rigors of the economic and social crisis thus generated tensions that produced escalating sociopolitical mobilization based on ethnicity.

The rice riots, it could be argued, had the most adverse impact on the Liberian population. In April 1979, the American-Liberian government increased the price of a bag of rice, the main staple of Liberia's national diet, from \$22-\$30 a nearly 50 percent increase per bag of rice. A mass demonstration that ensued to protest this price increase degenerated into the violent Rice riots. In response to these crises, Barclay notes that the Liberian government adopted ill-conceived expansionary expenditure policies funded by external borrowing. Instead of palliating the deleterious effects of the crisis, the policies significantly magnified them (Barclay, 1999, pp.302). Consequently, disadvantaged African-Liberian ethnic groups saw unequal economic opportunities, unequal access to resources, and vast differences in

standard of living as all signs of a socioeconomic system that was unfair and illegitimate. The Rice riots in large part demonstrated the vulnerability of American-Liberian ethnic hegemony and the fact that by capitalizing on these events through sustained pressure by any group the American-Liberian sociopolitical and economic dominance could be toppled.

In short, the emergence of hyper socioeconomic pressures might be the causes of the Liberia's conflict however, hostilities escalated only because of the existence of permissive conditions, such as the inability of the American-Liberians to deal with problematic group histories of differences, between themselves and the African-Liberians.

These, developments, seriously weakened and impaired all institutions of Liberian society thus setting the stage for the catalytic event to come. The American-Liberian government thus became the target of antagonism and hostility. Thus, according to Liebenow, the groundwork for the popular acceptance of the Doe coup of April 1980 had actually been laid almost a year before the event. The rice riots clearly had raised the level of dissent (Liebenow, 1986, pp.176). The rice riots, then, created an enabling political opportunity environment for the coup to come.

The flash point of the conflict can be found in Liberia's recent political history. The political void reached by 1979, which led to the 1980 Doe coup, and Doe's actions, which transformed the American-Liberian ethnic hegemony into dominance by the Krahn ethnic group, is the subject of the next section.

Triggering Event-The 1980 Coup d'etat and the Doe Years

A flash point or a triggering event is an event that initiates change and marks the eruption phase of a conflict. The flash point event may be the first appearance of the conflict, or it may be a confrontation that catalyzes ethnic group differences and erupts, in the context of protracted, but latent differences, into conflict. The triggering event does not necessarily have to be a major event; however, in Liberia's case the flash point was revolutionary and eventually resulted in a virulent civil conflict. The 1980 *coup d'etat* orchestrated by master sergeant Samuel Kanyon Doe was thus the catalytic event, the flash point that led to the end of American-Liberian sociopolitical domination. Horowitz has alluded to the idea that when the cement ruptures in an ethnically stratified political system, the edifice usually collapses and when ethnic hierarchies are undermined, they may undergo fundamental transformations (Horowitz, 1985, pp.29). The result of the collapse of Liberia was the overthrow of the former "superordinate American-Liberian" administration by the "subordinate African-Liberian" Doe military junta. All the seventeen "revolutionaries" who executed the coup were African-Liberians, with significant ties to the hinterland. According to Osaghae the significance of this point lies in the fact that, in some ways, the coastal indigenous elite were regarded as "collaborators" with the American-Liberians (Osaghae, 1998, pp.145).

The Doe coup thus transformed Liberia's political arena from one dominated for decades by the American-Liberians into one involving mainly African-Liberian ethnic groups. Though the People's Redemption Council (PRC) was predominantly ethnic Krahn, it did have members from the Gio, Grebo, Kru, Loma, and Mano ethnic groups. The Doe

coup was thus in large measure an alliance of some of the least advantaged hinterland ethnic groups. However, there was a falling-out later between the Gio and Mano from Nimba County on the one side and Doe's Krahn ethnic group on the other side due to intense competition over the political field. Adekeye Adebajo points out that strategic positions of the army were filled by ethnic Krahns, most notably the Executive Mansion Guards, the 1st Infantry Battalion, and the Special Anti-Terrorist Unit. Krahns headed all four infantry battalions. Despite constituting only 5 percent of the Liberian population Krahns held 31 percent of cabinet positions in 1985 (Adebajo, 2002, pp.26).

The examination of the Doe coup also suggests that it was a critical transition period in Liberia's sociopolitical development and history. The main reason, according to Osaghae, is that it was under Doe that all dimensions of sociopolitical conflicts, most of which had previously been suppressed by the American-Liberians, were played out (Osaghae, 1998, pp.151-152). For example, inter-Africa-Liberian ethnic struggles for political power were given full vent for the first time. Muslim-Christian division took on political importance, which was previously unknown, since the American-Liberians presented Liberia as a Christian State. In addition to this, the virtual impossibility of the Doe second republic to gain political legitimacy due to "value differences"¹² further accentuated latent ethnic differences, which were already rife after the disappointment of the Doe coup. African-Liberians ethnic groups were particularly disappointed because they felt the Doe coup had the potential of rectifying the ethnic deficit. The Doe coup had the potential to help mitigate latent ethnic tensions by allowing for the establishment of an evenhanded or an inclusive

form of governance to address the needs of all ethnic groups in the state. However, this window of opportunity was missed.

The Doe coup of 1980 in effect pushed socio-ethnic difficulties to their zenith. African-Liberian discontent towards American-Liberian "supremist culture" was thus poised for what was believed and seen to be sociopolitical engineering. The spontaneous jubilation of African-Liberians following the 1980 Doe coup graphically symbolized the level of hostility and animosity that had welled up against the American-Liberian ethnic group. African-Liberian ethnic groups, Liebenow posits, took pride in the fact they had ended the exclusionary domination of the American-Liberians and that they no longer needed to feel ashamed of African-Liberian ethnic origins (Liebenow, 1987, pp.191).

Thus, the coup was depicted as possessing an ethnocentric underpinning. African-Liberians advanced and hoped for what could be described as an "Africanization" principle and demanded that African-Liberians be given preference over others (implicitly and explicitly, the American-Liberians) in the provision of sociopolitical opportunities. It is therefore not surprising that initially African-Liberian ethnic groups came to regard the Doe coup as the "birth of a new country" owned by them, rather than by the American-Liberians. Consequently, they sought changes in the American-Liberian generated name, flag, monetary currency, emblems, public holidays, and other symbols of the country.

¹² Value differences are differences in people's fundamental beliefs about what is good or bad, right or wrong when ethnic group values differ. Significantly, the resulting conflict is often very hard to resolve, as people are not willing to change or compromise their fundamental values and beliefs.

Renee de Nevers points out that "the euphoria experienced as the old regime [American-Liberian] passes from the scene produces a moment of cathartic national solidarity with cohesive benefits, but this [transitory] moment will not endure if underlying [ethnic tensions] are neglected" (de Nevers, 1993, pp. 75). To achieve such a change in sociopolitical direction, the Liberian State would have needed to be democratized, to be appropriated by Liberian citizens, and to be reoriented towards serving their interests rather than the interests of the military junta. This would have probably required a fundamental reworking of Liberia's social contract and or an outright revolution; after all, the Doe junta perceived themselves as such, revolutionary. At the time of the Doe coup ethnic tensions although rife it can be argued were still latent. There was, at this time, very little indication of the intensity of potential conflicts between ethnic groups that was to come. For example, there was little evidence suggesting that the civil conflict would polarize along alliances of Krahn-Mandingo versus Gio-Mano ethnic lines, a division which was to inform the civil war.

The euphoric period, then, provided a window of opportunity no matter how dim, that should have been utilized, even if obvious obstacles existed. Liebenow explicates that the Doe coup initially gained credibility on this account in large measure because the coup was being calculatedly interpreted as a victory over an oppressive system rather than a triumph of one ethnic group or groups over another. The Liberian public, particularly those in the media, was being admonished to avoid ethnic labeling in referring to fellow citizens (Liebenow, 1987, pp.191). However, the constant advice to avoid ethnic labeling, albeit well intentioned, could be viewed as mere rhetoric, a self-serving device for the People's Redemption Council (PRC). Furthermore, the make-up of the PRC was not broadly

representative of the country as a whole; its membership as described by Liebenow, was drawn largely from the southeast areas such as Sinoe and Grand Gedeh counties, which were part of the hinterland. The PRC was predominantly Krahn in terms of ethnic composition, with a sprinkling of Kru, Gio, and Grebo (Liebenow, 1987, pp.192). Ethnicity, thus, continued to be a crucial factor of the skewed ethno-social stratification system during Doe's tenure in office between 1980-1989.

Consequently, after the euphoric and popular reaction to the coup by the citizenry at large, the PRC, headed by Doe, failed in fulfilling their initial post-coup assurances of establishing a "new equitable Liberian society". There was no radical restructuring of the political system, the economy, or the society, under the PRC regime. The state was not in any way reoriented towards serving the interests of Liberia's citizens; rather, it continued to service the interests of a few elites and their ethnic group benefactors. Like the American-Liberian governments before them, the Doe regime became the sole embodiment of the social will and purposes of Liberia. Horowitz highlights the fact that instead of implementing policies of inclusion political procedures were initiated which established patterns of ethnic exclusion and seclusion (Horowitz, 1993, pp. 21 & 25). This consolidated the march towards *ethnocracy* or exclusionary rule, begun under the American-Liberians.

Directly correlated to this, is the fact that the present course of Liberian history probably could have been averted (although perhaps not the objective Doe had in mind) had the Doe regime performed a forensic evaluation of the politics of at least the Tolbert administration that preceded it and drawn appropriate conclusions from it. For one, they might have realized that re-installing hegemonic rule would be a negative political calculus.

Liberian society, especially from an African-Liberian perspective was changing and the changes needed to be addressed. Ethnicity among African-Liberians had become an effective and salient basis of group mobilization.

Subsequently, when the initial optimism of the Doe coup failed to translate into substantive sociopolitical and socioeconomic rewards for the various African-Liberian ethnic groups an intense disaffection was set in motion, which effectively radicalized relatively benign ethnic boundaries and identities. This ultimately led to the intensification of the struggle for state power, which ultimately resulted in a protracted ethnic conflict. Thus, events during the inter-coup period between 1982-1988 served as the proximate cause and triggering effect of the ethnic conflict that ensued in 1989. Indeed, Osaghae is apt in arguing that after 1985 when Doe turned himself into a civilian president in an election of dubious machinations, the situation deteriorated rapidly because the political arena was not expanded to accommodate the enlarged plurality of African-Liberian interest (Osaghae, 1998, pp.145). The inter-coup period, 1982-1988, in effect, resurrected old cleavages between African-Liberian ethnic groups.

Charles Taylor, an American-Liberian with close ties to Thomas Quiwonkpa (Doe's former ally and lieutenant during the early stages of the PRC) through marriage, and the leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), attacked military outposts in Nimba County from Cote d'Ivoire. Ellis is of the opinion that Nimba county was the place from which the NPFL chose to launch its attack, and for good reason, since it was considered the epicenter of Mano/Gio ethnic opposition to Doe's Krahn hegemony since

the early 1980s, due in part to the fact that Doe's main rival, Quiwonkpa, was a son of Nimba county (Ellis, 1999, pp.113).

Consequently, in order to gain Gio and Mano support, Taylor presented his attack as a continuation of Quiwonkpa's failed invasion of 1985. What this points to is the fact that American-Liberians remained critical ethnic actors in Liberian politics. However, since it was virtually impossible for them to compete politically as an exclusive ethnic group due to their loss of political dominance and small size, the American-Liberians forged ethnic alliances with African-Liberian ethnic groups, "especially the severely disenfranchised ones among them like the Gio and Mano of Nimba County" (Osaghae, 1998, pp.151). In fact, if Quiwonkpa's falling out with Samuel Doe and his foiled coup of November 1985 are highlighted as proximate causes of the civil war that started in 1989, then Charles Taylor's invasion of Liberia through Nimba County should be seen as its catalytic event. Moreover, Osaghae highlights the point that utterances by Taylor himself sometimes suggested continuity between Quiwonkpa's unsuccessful movement and his NPFL, which were both based on a Gio/Mano Nimba county support base (Osaghae, 1996, pp.93).

Thus, the Mano and Gio formed the basis of Taylor's NPFL support resulting in a Gio/Mano/American-Liberian ethnic alliance. Osaghae contends that this is most probable when it is considered that, apart from Charles Taylor and Earnest Eastman who are American-Liberian, the other leaders of the NPFL, Moses Duopu, Tom Woewiyu, Prince Yormie Johnson, and David Duayon were Gio from Nimba county (Osaghae, 1996, pp.93). The NPFLs began in the United States with support from American-Liberian groups who were in exile there after the Doe coup. The exiled groups, saw in Taylor's NPFL an

organization led by an American-Liberian that could restore American-Liberians to their former position of ethnic dominance. Exiled groups saw in the NPFL an effective outlet of their opposition to Krahn dominance in Liberia itself. However, after reports of NPFL atrocities against civilians in Liberia, many of the exiled American-Liberian groups who backed Taylor's invasion withdrew their support.

Taylor assured the Gio and Mano that in forming an alliance with his NPFL they would have the opportunity to revenge the atrocities meted out against them by Samuel Doe and his Krahn ethnic group. Nimba County, after all, was a hotbed of discontent, seething with rage, and hungry for revenge against Doe's Krahn dominated army. Adebajo contends that this manipulation of ethnic differences predictably led to NPFL attacks on Krahn and Mandingos in its march on Monrovia, and many Krahns were executed in the early stages of the war (Adebajo, 2002, p.42).

One could therefore surmise here that this is a clear example of the purely instrumental or manipulative role of ethnicity for utilitarian elite purposes, where a situational factor was taken advantage of strategically to meet Taylor's specific interest. This is clearly the view of some instrumentalists who claim that elites like Taylor do not merely steer the process according to existing ethnic juxtapositions, but more or less shape them in view of their own material interest, with wide latitude to foment violence and conflict (for more on this see Kasfir, 1979, pp.375-376). However, an exclusive focus on elite manipulation, without adequately examining the broader ethnic mass appeal that probably influences such elite leadership, would provide an incomplete picture (for helpful observations on elites and masses, see Wimmer, 2002, pp.97). Thus, notwithstanding

Taylor's instrumental or entrepreneurial intentions, it is equally important to note that the Gio and Mano of Nimba County resented Doe's Krahn dominated government and army and were seething with rage and had been seeking revenge for past horrendous atrocities on them in 1985 by the Krahn. The crucial question, then, is whether the Gio and Mano, disgruntled ethnic groups, were just waiting for an inspirational or charismatic figure like Taylor to lead them in carrying out their ethnic retribution on the Krahn and Mandingo, or were they just a vehicle (an unwillingly one at that) for Taylor's political ambitions? Furthermore, do the manipulative tendency of elites like Taylor discredit the whole idea of the ethnic dynamic of the civil conflict?

The objection is simply stated. The tacit assumption, as Ervin Staub points out, is that there are always potentially manipulative leaders whose activities seem to be dictated by personal interest alone. However, it is the combination of instigating conditions, ethnic characteristics, and the material and psychological needs they create in a polyethnic society that makes members of an ethnic group responsive to violence-generating conditions (Staub, 2001, pp.293). There is definitely an instrumentalist aspect to the conflict but there is also a substantive ethnic core to the conflict.

If one answers the first part of the question in the affirmative and the second part in the negative, then, how manipulated were the Gio and Mano? Could it not then be hypothesized, conversely here, that the Gio and Mano were in a sense manipulating Taylor who had the firepower they required into helping them carry-out the retribution they sought against the Krahns, in a sense using Taylor as a conduit for their terminal retribution against the Krahns? The ability, then, of elites such as Taylor to foment conflict is limited to an

extent by their followers definition of the conflict situation and what they are willing to fight over. But what if ethnic elites are themselves primordialists? In a conflict situation elites are usually members of their ethnic group and, like their co-ethnics, are affected by social and ethnic conditions. They may also carry unhealed wounds both as members of their group and in their personal history. For example, Doe killed Quiwonkpa who was related to Taylor through marriage after the failed coup of 1985. As Horowitz has stated, there is no necessary contradiction between the pursuit of individual self-interest and the utilization of a primordial cognitive frame" (Horowitz, 2002, pp.80). Is it not plausible, then, that whatever their motives political entrepreneurs like Charles Taylor and Samuel Doe who foment ethnic conflict are also, as Horowitz would argue, "thinking in terms of their ethnic bonds" (Horowitz, 2002, pp.80)? Leaving the fact that the Gio and Mano had come to detest the Krahn and sought retribution out of the equation would be analytically limiting and misguided. It certainly under-appreciates the import of the motivational forces, desire, and actions of the ethnic masses of the Gio and Mano.

As Wimmer posits, it is inappropriate to attribute the intensification of ethnic conflicts to the manipulations of the ethnic elite activists alone. The details of conflict escalation often indicate that many ordinary people define themselves as members of an ethnic group of solidarity, declaring neighbors of other ethnic groups to be their personal enemies when they perceive their own survival to be at risk (Wimmer, 2002, pp. 97). Such was the case with the Gio and Mano ethnic groups after the 1985 Nimba County massacres. Horowitz indicates that the constraints of the field in which group interactions occur limit what elites can do and what interests they can pursue. The strong perceptual basis of ethnic

affinities and disparities is under appreciated by instrumentalists (Horowitz, 1998, pp.19). The Liberian civil conflict, then, was not all driven by African-Liberian ethnic elite activists just seeking to add to their own political and economic fortunes. It is thus important to have an appreciation of the multifaceted nature of the ethnic drives of the conflict, particularly if one is interested in comprehending the ethnic dynamics of the conflict.

Ellis avers that Gio and Mano citizens in particular were joining the NPFL in droves and attacking Krahn whom they regarded, no matter how unjustly, as collectively responsible for the brutality of Doe, and Mandingo who had made themselves unpopular by profiting from Doe's rule and by acquiring land in Nimba County where they were deemed not to have hereditary rights (Ellis, 1999, pp.78). According to Outram, an important characteristic of an inter-ethnic conflict is that conflicting parties define themselves ethnically and pursue a program of ethnic liberation or of ethnic domination possibly including genocide (Outram, 1997, pp.355). In the context of the ethnic rivalry between the Gio/Mano and Krahn/Mandingo, this is clearly the sense you get when the motivation of the Krahn/Mandingo on one side, and the Gio/Mano on the other, is ethnic hatred for and vengeance against for the other which seems to be specific and direct. This suggests and reaffirms the ethnic praxis of the Liberian civil conflict.

These types of questions led to differences and hostilities between Taylor and Prince Johnson (a Gio from Nimba county) resulting in their split, which led to Johnson forming a splinter group that called itself the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). Osaghae suggests that in July 1990 Johnson broke away from the NPFL along with several hundred Gio and Mano to form the INPFL on the grounds of anti-African-Liberian actions

pursued by Taylor. Johnson perceived that the American-Liberians were treating the Gio and Mano like second-class humans; they were being asked to fight without being consulted on substantive issues (Osaghae, 1996, pp.94).

These sorts of splits among ethnic coalitions on both the Gio-Mano/American-Liberian side and the Krahn-Mandingo side resulting in the proliferation of ethnic factions could be explained by the fact that ethnic divisions characterized the Liberian civil conflict. Few, if any, of these ethnic factions proclaimed a pathology of political ideology most voiced instead some type of ethnic defensiveness. The factional splits, thus, indicate the significance of ethnicity in Liberia particularly among African-Liberian ethnic groups.

Gio and Mano political leaders who were initial members of the NPFL or who resided in NPFL held territory, prominent among them Jackson Doe who was believed to have won the 1985 rigged elections and who could pre-empt Taylor's ascendancy to political power, had gone missing. Prince Johnson, the leader of the INPFL, believed that the Gio and Mano were being used as pawns for American-Liberian political aspirations and they were not going to be party to that since the Gio and Mano at this juncture clearly had their own strong ethnopolitical ambitions.

Thus, the INPFL considered themselves as the legitimate political torchbearers of the Gio and Mano while simultaneously seeking retribution for Quiwonkpa's execution (it is alleged the AFL paraded his dismembered body through the streets of Monrovia in a ritualistic way and later cannibalized his body) at the behest of Doe. Adebajo highlights the fact that Johnson had taken part in Quiwonkpa's abortive coup in 1985

(Adebajo, 2002, pp.59). It therefore came as no surprise when Prince Johnson's INPFL captured Samuel Doe, the ultimate symbol of Gio/Mano hatred of the Krahn, tortured and killed him.

It can then be argued that Liberia's conflict is a late-twentieth-century response to American-Liberian colonial and African-Liberian postcolonial policies that relied to an extent on a hardened notion of "ethnic boundaries". The Doe regime essentially continued the political culture established during the American-Liberian first republic, which was characterized by clientelism, patronage systems, and co-optation. They lacked, in a sense, the sophisticated political management ability (but perhaps were - for the short term - sophisticated about staying in power) required in such a complex society and never showed themselves to possess superior democratic credentials over their American-Liberian predecessors.

The only significant change in the Liberian political culture was Doe's creation of a power base founded on a Krahn ethnic solidarity (Doe's own ethnic group), reestablishing and entrenching the idea that one's loyalty was to his/her own ethnic kin rather than to the country at large. Or rather it can be argued that the change was the group in power, but not the underlying political culture *per se*. Doe thus fortified the idea that belonging to a specific ethnic group determined access to rights, resources, and services that was supposed to be guaranteed by the Liberian state. Thus, Krahns came to dominate the Liberian political system, making ethnic identity highly salient. The Doe regime's within-group partisanship of the state apparatus in turn fueled the interethnic struggle to control the state, which heightened ethnic consciousness and increased the possibilities of violent ethnic conflict.

The Doe regime's disposition to favor kin over non-kin becomes even more important in Liberian sociopolitical affairs because people and groups of people have to compete for limited resources. The biggest danger, then, in Liberia arose from attempts by both the American-Liberian first republic and the Doe second republic, from their respective positions of power to claim ownership of the political culture and to identify it with aspects of their ethnic group's way of life. This ultimately became a "loyalty test" imposed on the other ethnic groups, with the effect of excluding them, or making them feel excluded from the Liberian political system and polity. Parekh perceptively argues that a distinction must and should be made between the common political culture, required for the stability and cohesion of any state, and the different "ways of life" which can and must coexist in a deeply divided society [such as Liberia] (Parekh, 1999, pp.66-75).

This, in effect, translated into a generalized distrust among other ethnic groups (especially the Gio and Mano) of the entire political process, which ultimately mushroomed the process of ethnic rivalry. It is thus safe to contend that since Liberia's population is not homogenous the emphasis of their governments on ethnic ties in administering the state led to conflict and the destruction of their economic and sociopolitical basis. Thus, while material interests is important to the conflict and should not be discounted, we should also look at the feelings, rightly or wrongly entertained, of being wronged or defrauded by members of other groups rather than basing them on simple competition for scarce resources.

This should be considered a defensive rather than an aggressive feeling. Conceptually, a group's feelings or interests are inherently a psychological

(or inter-subjective) political orientation, which is basically a matter of ethical judgement whereas resource inequality is an objective measure. By not distinguishing between the two, one confuses resource inequality with inequity in feelings (although the former can color perceptions of the latter). Simply using resource inequality to assess the degree to which groups think they are deprived, therefore, confounds equality with equity. Furthermore, resource inequality could be limited conceptually to measuring deprivation in terms of, for example, economic or political well-being, as opposed to other equally valid orientations, like social and cultural rights.

According to the core-periphery model, as discussed by Ausenda, in certain countries ethnic feelings build up between the dominant core and the periphery because core groups occupy the best political positions (Ausenda, 1997, pp.225). This does not apply to all ethnic situations; however, it seems to apply to a fair extent in the Liberian case. Furthermore, it helps delineate the salience of ethnicity in Liberia in relation to power. The original core-periphery model in this case involves a minority dominant core, the American-Liberians, and a numerically preponderant African-Liberian periphery. Indeed, Osaghae describes the pre-1980 situation as a core-periphery dynamic, one in which a superior group (American-Liberians) determined the authoritative allocation of values for one group (African-Liberians). The American-Liberians effectively monopolized the use of force, established the primary goals for society limited the means of these goals, and attempted to determine the ultimate outcome of the relationship, notably continued domination, integration, or separation of societies (Osaghae, 1998, pp.144). This exposition highlights the effects of ethnicization enduring beyond the period of the American-Liberians. Osaghae

further adds that the ethnic and cultural differences between the core and periphery model (unchanged by Doe) do not disappear and often provide the grounds for impending conflict (Osaghae, 1998, pp.144).

Subsequently, politics matter because the Liberian State controls access to political power. The Liberian State dominated the public sphere thus ensuring its centrality to the mode of material and non-material modes of production. As Osaghae explains, as the main determinant and allocator of development, the centrality of the state ensured ethnocracy and allied forms of exclusionary hegemonic rule became the cradle of the mostly zero-sum sociopolitical conflicts in the post American-Liberian era (Osaghae, 2001, pp.19). Subsequently, ethnic groups that control the state possess sociopolitical power and could thus not only guarantee their interest and welfare but also increase it. The Liberian State under these circumstances became an object of group struggle because it was the mechanism through which parameters of political competition were set between the various ethnic groups. Consequently, the struggle for state power became the main stake of Liberia's ethnic conflict. In effect, although the "ethnic particularism" of both American-Liberian and Doe administrations might have been a source of kin group based organizational cohesion an important limitation of it was their inability to generalize their support nationally.

As a result of this, ethnicity and ethnic conflict came to be at the center and not the margins of Liberian politics. Nnoli is of the position that under these conditions insecurity of individuals and ethnic groups who lack access to state power propels them to seek that power at all costs. Liberian politics became a war in which all is/was legitimate that brings/brought victory. Manipulation of ethnic sentiments, discrimination along ethnic lines,

repression, and suppression became legitimate tools of Liberian political struggle. In this way ethnic conflict not only arose, but also assumed an intense, violent and protracted character (Nnoli, 1998, pp.25).

The virtual lack of resources outside the control of government in Liberia made political conflict inevitable because control of government was seen as the only major source of wealth accumulation. Under such circumstances, the multiethnic character of Liberia made it even more likely that conflict would result in the violent politicization of ethnicity. More often than not, ethnic conflict gives rise to extreme consequences such as "ethnic cleansing" and genocide, as if the intention were not only the acquisition or retention of territory, but also the physical removal of a people from their territory. Contrastingly, the ethnic groups in Liberia did not aspire to be self-determining (i.e. they did not possess an ethno-nationalist character driven by ideas like self-determination or social engineering). Rather, they sought control of the political system. Connor indicates that ethnonational concerns, by their very nature, are more obsessed with a vision of freedom from domination by nonmembers than with a vision of freedom to conduct foreign relations with states (Connor, 1994, pp.83). It is control and domination of the political machinery and opportunities, not questions of autonomy or secession that dominate "ethnic dynamics" in Liberia. In short, in the context of Liberia it could be argued that ethnocracy did not presuppose ethnic group independence. It did, however, presuppose meaningful control of the ethnic groups.

Whereas most "ethnic conflicts" directly result from ethnic diversity, in the case of Liberia the ethnic dynamic was about getting more power, land, and other resources. In

other words, "ethnicity" can result in "conflict" when it includes aspirations to gain a greater stake in land, resources, and power. Ethno-nationalist sentiment is therefore not the sole requirement for ethnic differences to result in conflict. Horowitz refers to many types of violent ethnic conflict in all parts of the world, but he also points out that there are many less dramatic demands from ethnic groups that result in ethnic conflict (Horowitz, 1985, pp.3-6). His extensive analysis discloses that the scope of ethnic conflict extends from relatively peaceful political and economic conflict to separatist ethnic movements, military and guerilla organizations, sporadic violent conflict, and civil war.

Consequently, because the Liberian State was seen as setting the parameters of competition between the contending groups, the pursuit of state power became the focus of ethnic objectives. Thus, control of the Liberian political system and the exemption from control by others (i.e. ethnic groups) are among the terminal objectives that fuel the ethnic dynamics of the conflict. Consequently, in Liberia the control and exploitation of diamonds, timber, and other raw materials (these constituted Liberia's major resources controlled by the state) have become the principal objectives of the warring factions.

Diamonds, timber, and other raw materials can thus be categorized as precipitant or facilitating factors of Liberia's ethnic conflict. Keller contends that facilitating factors might include economic crises, the total collapse of national government and or the availability of massive amounts of weapons of war, as was the case in Liberia following the end of the illusory stability of the American-Liberian first republic (Keller, 1998, pp.277). The removal of the illusory stabilizing effect of the American-Liberian first republic in Liberia made it much more likely that violent ethnic conflict might occur.

Ndulo further emphasizes that in extreme cases of competition between rival groups, a group's survival is predicated on and ensured through acquiring state power. Ethnic-political conflicts in such cases become virtually inevitable (Ndulo, 2002, pp.143). However, it was the prior history of increasingly barricaded ethnic identities under American-Liberian colonial rule and in the postcolonial era (beginning with the military administration of Samuel Kanyon Doe) that turned this strife into an awful ethnic war.

Conclusion

The historical experience of Liberia clearly demonstrates the most alarming nature of "ethnic politics". Once launched, it becomes a cancer in the body politic and eats its way into almost all areas of the sociopolitical system. Eradication is then almost impossible and the country thus glides slowly but steadily into conflict. While the active conflict seems to have ended, ethnic enmity still simmers. Competition for social, political, and economic resources are thus inextricably bound up with the concept of ethnicity in Liberia.

An implicit element in this chapter (and throughout the research project is the importance of the objectification of political power along identity (ethnic) lines. This becomes very critical in understanding how the ethnic dynamic of the conflict is played out. Liberia's historical underpinning takes a form that is capable of hypothesizing the targets of ethnic violence and punitive discrimination at specific historical junctures of its development. A historical conceptualization is thus a useful point from which to analyze the dynamics of ethnicity in Liberia. Liberia's ethnic division and conflict are historically situated and can only be understood as such.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

The primary objective of this research project was to comprehend and delineate the ethnic dynamic of the Liberian civil conflict. The central research question of the dissertation has been to ascertain the conditions that lead to or generate conflict among ethnic groups. By itself, ethnicity is not a cause of violent conflict. As Lake and Rothchild posit most ethnic groups, most of the time, are able to pursue their interests peacefully through accepted and established political channels (Lake & Rothchild, 1998, pp.7).

However, there are a number of precipitant conditions that when linked to ethnicity or ethnic differences can lead to and cause ethnic violence to erupt. Some of the precipitant conditions that are highlighted throughout the dissertation are acute social uncertainty and difference, ethnocentrism, contest over the state and distribution of political power, the unequal distribution of values and resources, exclusionary national ideologies, discriminatory socioeconomic systems and the distribution of membership in the political community. However, notwithstanding these precipitant conditions, we still have a long way to go when it comes to understanding how such social and political factors emerge that make ethnic violence possible.

An important aspect of the introductory chapter is the fact that it highlights the problem of Western generalized research to Africa's conflicts and attempts to get beyond it

by suggesting a synthesis between African and Western generated scholarship. It was concerned with the ways in which the research of African conflict is approached and was principally a conceptual argument premised on the anchoring and ownership of the study of African conflicts by African scholars. That is the African scholar bringing local details, knowledge, and understanding of the conflict to the fore this is what CODESRIA the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa proposes by facilitating and promoting the African researcher. If mainly Western paradigms and theories drive the study of Africa's conflicts, then, the study of Africa's conflicts might be an invention of Western academia, which might ultimately serve Western interests and those of non-Africans. By suggesting African directed research I meant an African centered approach that conceptualizes Africa's conflict reality and situates the African researcher within Africa's conflicts. Such an approach would not only affirm African agency and serve the African interest, but it further authenticates the notion of African directed research.

The argument I present is significant for the study of Africa's conflicts because there is a tendency for the African scholar to be an appendage to the Western scholar due to, for example, lack of funding and thus limiting the policy relevance of African generated scholarship. Consequently, something seems to be missing if local research is excluded from the African conflict perspective. This is not an indictment against Western generated scholarship on Africa it just seeks a shift in emphasis or approach by arguing that the framework of established Western generated research should be applied to Africa's conflict situation provided that some modifications are considered. Simply stated, research of insiders and outsiders would be influential, beneficial, and complementary to the perspective

of Africa's conflicts. By doing so we can counter the bias that is evident in all social science research.

The availability and influence of African generated scholarship on Liberia's civil conflict to this research project it was limited, however it was sufficient enough to create a synthesized approach in conjunction with Western generated research in understanding the Liberian civil conflict. Although the bulk of my research is derived from Western scholarship the little coming from African scholarship helped immensely in my understanding of Liberia's ethnic dynamic. For example, Osaghae's ethclass interpretation of the American-Liberians as an ethnic group helped by providing an alternative account to Horowitz's classification of the American-Liberians as an artificial amalgam with bonds strong enough to be compared to some of the most clearly identifiable and cohesive ethnic actors in contemporary African politics such as the Ibo of Nigeria. Thus, although the African scholar Osaghae and the Western scholar Horowitz differ in their approach they share in a conclusion that depicts the American-Liberians as a group of people akin to most of Africa's numerous ethnic groups with very strong bonds.

Chapter one looked at the three broad approaches to the study of ethnicity and ethnic conflict, primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism. Due to the complexity of ethnicity in Liberia I did not try to impose a single approach on Liberia, rather what I prescribed was to employ an interlocking approach. A cross-theoretical or interlocking analysis of ethnicity keeps in view the multiple forms of ethnicity that work interdependently to explain Liberia's complex ethnic dynamic. Thus, all the three approaches on ethnicity are simultaneously implicated in the case of Liberia.

In Chapter two I provided a working definition for ethnicity, as it is understood in this dissertation using Anthony Smith's definition of ethnicity. Smith defines ethnicity as a named human population with a myth of common ancestry, shared memories, and cultural elements; a link with a historic territory; and a measure of solidarity (Smith, 1993, pp.29). Smith's definition integrates primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism as it was discussed in Chapter one. To the extent that primordialism talks about hardened boundaries between groups that are fixed and static, instrumentalists suggest the boundaries are non-existent; they are only created as a result of strategic interest so that, for instrumentalists, ethnicity is fluid and mutable while constructivists are saying it is both.

The chapter goes on to show how this conceptual framework applies in the context of Liberia in looking at the main ethnic groups involved in the conflict. Chapter two discusses the American-Liberians, the settler ethnic group made up of freed slaves from the United States who founded Liberia in 1822. The period between the founding of Liberia and the conferral of citizenship on the African-Liberian ethnic groups, some of which took place as late as 1960, is deemed very important in understanding the causes of fundamental social conflict. The identity crisis steadily grew in intensity and reached the scale of a fully-fledged civil conflict after the Doe coup of 1980.

Factors that prevented the creation of a pan-Liberian identity included, but was not limited to, the negative perceptions which the American-Liberians held of the African-Liberians and the implications of the manifest destiny of the American-Liberians. Consequently, the American-Liberians did not perceive the African-Liberian of possessing anything of value to add to the corpus of American-Liberian preferred identity by virtue of

the African-Liberian being perceived as uncivilized. By adopting an exclusive form of citizenship the American-Liberians created an environment in which segregated ethnic groups could relate to each other in an antagonistic manner.

Secondly, in adopting Osaghae's ethclass approach, we were able to establish the ethnic credentials of the American-Liberians. The ethclass approach is formulated to analyze situations in which there is an intersection of ethnic and class categories (ethnicity can then cross class boundaries and *vice versa*), as the American-Liberian case suggests. Along this formulation the American-Liberians could then be analyzed as a *de facto* or designated ethnic group in addition to it being a class.

We then turned to look at the African-Liberian ethnic groups that were active participants in the conflict. The problem we faced when encountering the African-Liberians was that the almost undivided attention given to American-Liberians as the kernel to studying Liberian politics and society had prevented in large measure a serious political and sociological undertaking of African-Liberian ethnic groups. The result, according to Osaghae, is that very little is known of intra-African-Liberian relationships and conflicts, as only those of American-Liberians were considered worthy of attention (Osaghae, 1998, pp.136). Consequently, one is left with the notion that prior to the 1980 coup, conflict in Liberia arose mainly from an overarching complex of fundamental differences between the American-Liberians and the African-Liberians, which was the primary ethnic cleavage.

The history, especially of the hinterland ethnic groups, such as the Krahn, Gio, and Mano, who were key actors in the conflict, was difficult to ascertain since hardly any written

ethnographic records were kept of them, even indirectly, until the twentieth century. The Krahn, Gio, and the Mano were the African-Liberian ethnic group that dominated the PRC after the Doe coup of 1980. The split between the Krahn-Mano/Gio is definitely one of the proximate determinants of the civil war.

Chapter three looked at the historical evolution of the conflict through the determinants of root causes, proximate causes, and triggering effects. Under remote causes we looked at the broad historical factors that set the conditions of the conflict but did not determine the onset of the conflict. That is, if these causes could have been militated the likelihood of conflict would have been remote at worst. The most pressing problem faced by the new republic from its inception was the gulf that existed between the American-Liberians and the African-Liberians on the issue of national identity.

Liebenow avers that this was not a simple case of one ethnic group dominating another. Rather, it was a relationship that ultimately subordinated sixteen or more African-Liberian ethnic groups to the Western-oriented ethnic group of the American-Liberians (Liebenow, 1987, pp.33). The American-Liberians did everything they could to prevent the African-Liberians from not only taking a seat at the Liberian table. Such restrictions placed on African-Liberians from becoming full citizen with equal rights only served to hinder integration of the two groups.

Under proximate causes we encountered the more immediate contextual, social, political, and economic dysfunction that existed in Liberia. In the mid-1970s, Liberia experienced devastating socioeconomic crisis due largely in part to exogenous factors such as the OPEC oil crisis and endogenous factors such as the increase in the price of rice leading

to the rice riots of 1979, which led to hyperinflation. Under these socioeconomic crisis circumstances, the Liberian government was increasingly unable to deal with societal demands. The socioeconomic inequities and gaps between the American-Liberians and the African-Liberians were very glaring leading to socially-induced turmoil. It is important to note, however, that discriminatory socioeconomic systems, whether they discriminate along class or ethnic lines, can generate feelings of resentment and levels of frustration prone to generate conflict.

It is important to note, however, that discriminatory socioeconomic systems, whether they discriminate along class or ethnic lines, can generate feelings of resentment and levels of frustration prone to generate conflict. The American-Liberians as an ethnic group took the brunt of the blame of the African-Liberians for the socioeconomic problems the country was facing. To put it more prosaically, the African-Liberians interpreted the socioeconomic crisis at the time as the result of longstanding discriminatory patterns of sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and cultural ineptitude of the American-Liberians. The proximate causes I argued, created an enabling political opportunity structure for the coup to come, and the fact that, by 1980, an end to American-Liberian hegemony was imminent.

Finally, under catalytic event, we looked at the event that initiated change and marked the eruption phase of a conflict. The flash point event may be the first appearance of the conflict, or it may be a confrontation that catalyzes ethnic group differences and erupts, in the context of protracted, but latent differences, into conflict. The triggering event does not necessarily have to be a major event; however, in Liberia's case the flash point was

revolutionary and eventually resulted in a virulent civil conflict. The 1980 *coup d'etat* orchestrated by master sergeant Samuel Kanyon Doe was thus the catalytic event, the flash point that led to the end of American-Liberian sociopolitical domination. The 1980 Doe coup it could also be argued was simultaneously the underlying factor that led to the triggering effect of Taylor's NPFL attacks from Nimba County.

What has become glaringly obvious in the process of researching and writing this dissertation is the fact that in polyethnic societies such as Liberia where ethnicity is highly polarized any workable solution would have to find ways of addressing the entrenched differences of the ethnic groups that constitute the country. For it is only when all the key ethnic actors have a viable seat at the sociopolitical and socioeconomic table of the country would ethnic peace prevail. The success, then, of developing a shared national identity in polyethnic societies, depends on the precise way in which state-development and social closure¹³ along ethnic group lines interact.

¹³ The search of ethnic compromise is connected to the process of social closure, to use a term of Max Weber used by Wimmer (2002). Social closure means excluding those who are not felt to belong, drawing a distinction between "us" and "them".

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