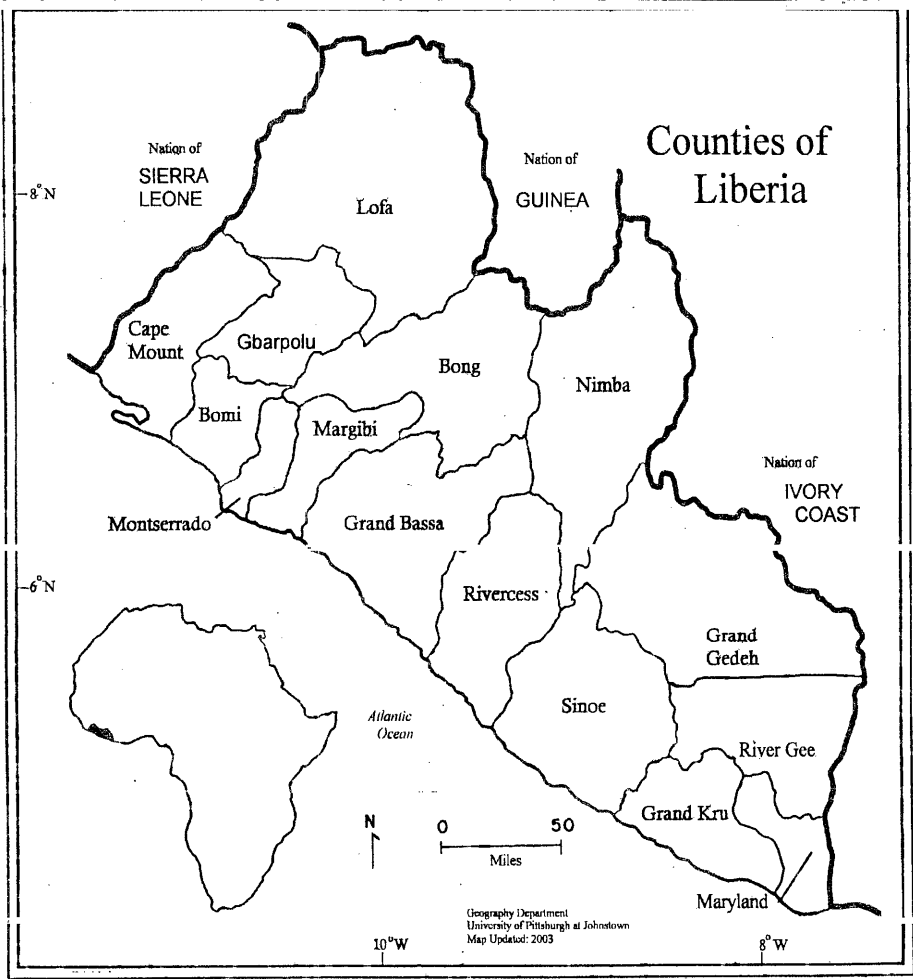


LIBERIAN STUDIES JOURNAL



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# LIBERIAN STUDIES JOURNAL

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*The Liberian Studies Journal* is dedicated to the publication of original research on social, political, economic, scientific, and other issues about Liberia or with implications for Liberia. Opinions of contributors to the Journal do not necessarily reflect the policy of the organizations they represent or the Liberian Studies Association, publisher of the Journal.

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James S. Guseh, Editor  
Liberian Studies Journal  
North Carolina Central University  
1801 Fayetteville Street  
Durham, North Carolina 27707  
Email: JGuseh@nccu.edu  
Phone: 919-530-5201

All Book Reviews should be mailed to:

Emmanuel O. Oritsejafor, Co-Editor  
Liberian Studies Journal  
North Carolina Central University  
Durham, North Carolina 27707  
Email: EOritsejafor@nccu.edu  
Phone: 919-530-7589

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# **Social Dimensions of Large-Scale Land Acquisition Rights in Liberia (1900-2009): Challenges and Prospects for Traditional Settlers**

**Jeffrey S. Makain\* and Rev. Momoh S. Foh\*\***

## ***Abstract:***

As concerns and tensions breed for land ownership rights, tenure systems and acquisition of large-scale land rights for investors by the Liberian Government, there is growing awareness being created among the public in post war Liberia about how land has been acquired over the years and the strength of its legitimacy.

The research examined the impacts of large-scale land rights acquired by investors for production of agricultural commodities, forest or provision of environmental amenities (excluding mining).

The researchers purposively selected two existing large concessions and adopted the case study method. The participatory rural appraisal methods was employed (key informant interviews; focus group discussion, community fora) and desk review for the array of qualitative and quantitative data obtained.

\* Jeffrey S. Makain is Associate Professor/Dean of the College of Agriculture and Integrated Development Studies at Cuttington University.

\*\* Rev. Momoh S. Foh is a lecturer at the College of Agriculture and Integrated Development Studies at Cuttington University.

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Findings from the research revealed that traditional settlers cannot effectively protect themselves when there are conflicts over land rights because the Government has eminent domain over all lands; traditional settlers are not consulted during policy formulation for investors; traditional leaders represent the interest of communities but, are indifferent when investors enter their communities to begin implementation without their participation in the initial processes of investment program or project planning.

The research concludes that there exist considerable levels of vulnerability; high potential for displacement of large number of communities and population as concessions expand their operational areas. Apparently, the Government is reluctant to address and resolve disputes and conflicts over land rights especially when large-scale investors are involved.

**Key Terms:** Social dimensions; Land rights; Vulnerability; Displacement; Livelihood; Traditional Settlers; Americo-Liberians; challenges; prospects

## **1.0 Introduction:**

As concerns and tensions breed for property rights, land ownership, tenure system, as well as government levying property taxes to raise revenue, continue to claim public attention, there is growing awareness being created among the public for ownership rights. This public concern is highly associated with how property has been acquired over the years and the strength of its legitimacy.

Major concerns emanating from the current awareness creation is centered on acquisition of use or ownership rights to large areas of land for production of agricultural commodities, forest, or provision of environmental amenities (excluding mining), and the associated volatile global commodities prices, politically motivated demand for bio-fuels, population growth and urbanization.

The Liberia Civil Society Organizations (LCSO) had this to say about these concerns *'we are tired of rhetoric; there is urgent*

*need to arrest the embarrassing trend in increasing awarding agricultural and forest concessions without delivering promised jobs, revenues and the New Day'* (Daily Observer Newspaper, Liberia: Tuesday October 6, 2009 edition).

In the wake of this public awareness creation, claims from various stakeholders; wave of press reports; and pending documents for large-scale land acquisition submitted for government consideration, several questions come to one's mind. These questions are centered on key livelihood issues like:

1. Are there significant differences existing in the history of land acquisition, use and tenure?
2. Is there any significant link between land ownership and the formal political system?
3. To what extent are disadvantaged groups capable of mobilizing to make claims or protect existing informal rights?
4. What is the role of the state and traditional rulers in relation to land tenure (ownership, regulation and dispute resolution)?

In order to find answers to these questions, the researchers examined:

1. The role of government and traditional rulers on land rights and tenure;
2. The political and economic setting and land rights in Liberia;
3. Concession specific social issues related to land rights in Liberia and
4. Current social issues and debates related to land rights in Liberia.

According to the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) Brief 39 (November 2009), land issues are often an underlying cause of conflict, especially in protracted crises, and are thus central to understanding how complex emergencies function, and how humanitarian agencies should respond. Land and property disputes tend to increase in the post-conflict period, particularly in the context of large-scale returns of displaced populations. Yet despite the importance of land in these contexts, humanitarian actors have tended to regard land issues as too complex and politically sensitive.

In (2005) the Humanitarian Response Review (HRR) identified land and property as a major gap in the humanitarian response system, and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) subsequently launched various initiatives aimed at improving preparedness and contingency planning around land issues.

As the (H P G) and the United Nations (Habitat for the Cluster Working Group on Early Recovery) seek to inform and build upon these initiatives, the World Bank keenly assesses these initiatives beyond mere relief to include advocacy, protection and attention to livelihoods especially, when there is persistence in granting of large-scale land-use rights in most developing countries.

In the context of protection and attention to livelihoods, relationships between land and conflict can be viewed from these perspectives: Territorial acquisition and defense playing a key role in conflict; belligerents often seeking to control land or natural resource that lie beneath it by dispossessing the populations that live on or use that land. Experiences have shown that land dispossession has often been the cause of rural resistance and insurrection. In other contexts, local tensions around access to and control over land have been manipulated politically to co-opt people into national conflicts. Land is also used by belligerents for personal enrichment or to reward their proxies or allies, like in Colombia, where paramilitaries have forcibly displaced the peasantry in order to acquire their land, in Darfur, where the government lured landless pastoralists into allied militia with the promise of expanded access to land

and water. Land is also used to extend patronage (HPG Brief, 39 p. 2). The most common form of land conflict is often played out at the local level between communities (along borders, between clan's men, pastoralists and farmers), frequently in the context of a state that has little interest in seeing a resolution, or where the state has collapsed and is powerless.

This research employed the World Bank's context of protection and attention to livelihoods in Liberia for two reasons. First, the increasing trend of acquiring large-scale land-use rights for concession companies that tends to dispossess the population that live on or use the land in the name of investment for national development. Second, the Government of Liberia reluctance and slow response to resolving emerging conflict and major socio-economic issues (cooperate responsibilities of companies) affecting traditional communities' members.

Findings from selected case studies will stimulate strategic changes, policies and reforms on large-scale land acquisition rights; help to develop a model appropriate for land reforms and investment policies in other countries; enhance better understanding of the existing social, political and historical situation in Liberia with reference to the way in which land rights are assigned and land related investments can be made; and better understanding of the likely social, economic issues and current debates in Liberia.

In this regard, the research adopted the case study method for two existing large concession companies based on the following criteria: land size; crop and size of investment in different geographic location for detailed case studies. As per social issues, the researchers find them as cross-stitching along all the selected companies, but, how the economic aspects affect the Government Poverty Reduction Strategies for sustainable livelihood requires critical analysis beyond the scope of this research. The selected crops were rubber and rice (Liberia's staple food), among major large-scale land investments in Liberia. On the basis of these criteria this research focus was on the Liberia Agriculture Company (LAC) in Grand Bassa County in the South for rubber and the Agri-

culture Development Agency (ADA) Commercial, Inc. in Lofa County in Northern Liberia, for rice.

Briefly, (LAC), is the second largest rubber plantation next to Firestone Liberia, which occupies about eighty-one thousand three hundred and fifty (81,350) acres of land. At the moment, it is facing increasing resistance from local communities in Districts No. 3 & 4 in Grand Bassa County for its expansion. This is an interesting case study for this research, considering the social dimensions of its past as well as the evolving issues in its expansion drive.

The ADA Commercial, Inc. acquired concession rights in Foyah District, Northern Liberia for mechanized cultivation of rice (Liberia's staple food) in 2008 for fifteen thousand (15,000) hectares of land with the goal of producing sufficient rice to stabilize the Liberian rice market and export. The company operated on 1,700 hectares of land in 2009. Experiences shared on the company's one year operation and its strategic geographic location on the northern end of Liberia bordering with Sierra Leone and Guinea is apparently posing key social, economic and environmental challenges and threats to local residents. Local residents emphatically stated that cross-border labor migrants posed serious challenge in having access to available jobs with the company; the mechanize farming system has extensively encroached on smallholder farmers' farmland and deprive them of available low land crucial to their sustenance and support of the Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategies. That is self-sufficiency in cultivating their own crops as well as generating income to make them accountable and sustainable at the local level. Also, they envisaged major environmental degradation in the short-run if extensive mechanized farming continues in the undulating savannah fragile terrain and silting of available low land in the company's operational areas, that provides the best option for subsistence farmers.

The methodology for assessing the companies selected are informed by the principles of the reflection of peace practices matrix on effecting sustainable change, linking the action of both "key people" to "more people" with the aim of gathering sufficient infor-



mation and effecting change at the levels of all stakeholders including the individual, the community, the national government and investors. At the macro-level, the assessment primarily looked at the 'power play and intentions' of political influences in large-scale land acquisition processes.

The researcher reached out to all levels and aspects of the communities involved. The overall assessment has been participatory, transparent, open, independent, non-attributive, culturally sensitive and positively affirming while at the same time highlighting areas that need improvement.

The research design primarily looked at qualitative and quantitative indicators. Four methods were considered: desk review of relevant resource materials; key informant interviews; focus group discussions and case studies in target communities. In the application of these techniques, the primary focus was on the following: Do the enterprises, government or other stakeholders' envisaged social benefits from the investment, if so, what and to which social group(s)? Are the intended benefits likely to be realized? Are there major negative impacts already evident or perceived from the investments, if so, to which group(s)? Are there major social risks likely to emerge in the future (example, significant negative impacts to poor groups or conflict risks)? Consequently, the research utilized data obtained at four levels: national government policy making level; regional (include requisite ministers/designates, concessions chief executives); district levels (include executives, civil society organizations; prominent citizens and concessions officials) and the community members who are directly or indirectly affected. Generally, key informant interviews were conducted at these various levels; focus group discussions held with people of varying social, economic, professional and occupational backgrounds and community forum.

## **2.0 Power and Land Rights:**

The political economy of Liberia cannot be well understood without making reference to the historical setting of Liberia Prior

to and after independence. That is, who owns the land is intricately linked to the political structure and organization of Liberia.

According to Guannu, Joseph S. (1997), prior to the arrival of the European explorers between the 14<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> centuries along the Coastal belts of West Africa including present day Liberia, several tribal groups lived and trade with these European merchants. Prominent among the local commodities sold were: mallaquata pepper / grain pepper; gold; diamond and later slaves. Through these interactions, the British and French named coastal Liberia the Grain Coast before 1822.

Prior to 1822, few Liberians traveled outside of Africa (example, the Kru tribe found in Egypt during the construction of the Suez Canal; Central America, during the construction of the Panama Canal (Ibid. p.16). These evidences through oral and written history clearly revealed that present day Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ghana or the Coastal Belts of West Africa were occupied by tribal groups ruled by Kings and Queens before the arrival of the agents of the American Colonization Society in the 1800s. In fact, in 1725 the French were offered Cape Messurado for growing sugar cane where Monrovia is now situated, but this was not realized.

The question who owns the land is clearly answered from evidences of the American Colonization Agents' request for purchase of land in late 1821 in Cape Mesurado or Ducor where they arrived on December 11. According to Guannu, Joseph S. (1977), the first piece of land bought on the soil now called Liberia by the settlers (Free African Slaves Descendants / Pioneers) sent by the American Colonization Society (ACS) in search of lands to settle free slaves from America was on December 15, 1821, at the end of the Ducor conference. The African Kings who placed marks on the Ducor document were King Kaanda Njola, a Gola, from Sao's Town or Beasao; King Long Peter, from Klay, also a Gola; King Kai / Peter a Dei ruler near Stockton Creek; King Jimmy, from the St. Paul River; King Bah Gwogro / George, Old Kru Town, some parts of Sinkor. Those who witnessed the sale were John S. Mill and John

Craig. There is still doubt about the balance payment for the land (Ibid, p. 31). This clearly indicates that the Settlers (Free Slaves from America/Americo-Liberians) never bought any land in the hinterland.

In fact, the conclusion of the Ducor contract infused disputes among the Africans who according to their customs, no one even the king have the right to sell the land that belongs to their community. However, the issues were resolved in favor of the settlers based on two reasons: fear of the American gun boat shelling villages, and the division among African Kings on the land issues. Thus, lands for the settlers and or the American Colonization Society were and is still not part of the hinterlands incorporated and now called the Republic of Liberia. This clearly signifies that the settlers had no land prior to settling in Liberia.

Prior to independence, as the settlers solidified their positions on pieces of land occupied along the coastal belts as colonies, they unified themselves into commonwealth to resist threats from hostile kings opposing them and began promulgating Laws to govern the commonwealth and the envisaged republic, patterned after America. Land laws were prominent among many laws instituted in the 1800s. These laws gave the government of the commonwealth and later Liberia, supreme power and eminent domain over all lands and land acquisition rights. Consequently, the groups of people who controls and lead the government have supreme power and eminent domain over all lands and land acquisition rights.

Apparently the literate minority (settlers group–Americo Liberians), with formal education and the source of political and economic power had dominated and controlled the leadership of Liberian government since the 1800s. The settlers with comparative advantage of formal education tried to put into practice what their slave masters have instilled in them. That is, Africans are an inferior race, had no culture or religion and uncivilized. Thus, they granted citizenship only to those they considered civilized (natives – children of tribal women born by men of the settlers' group who had

become educated and have adopted one of the Western Christian denominations and abandoned the traditional ways of life). Thus, only Liberian citizens and benevolent organizations such as missions may own land in fee simple. Consequently, no one may legally purchase land from aborigines (tribal groups). Land can be purchased only from the government. In this regard, the Government of Liberia is the sole custodian of the acquisition rights and transfer of all land undeeded, including tribally occupied land that is public land (Clower, Robert W., et al. 1966). Even though, citizenship was collectively conferred on natives in 1904, there has not been any major change in the political and economic structure, land tenure and land use system in the republic.

In addition, land guarantee was collectively conferred on the natives (Africans, aborigines/indigenous or original occupants of the land); for land occupied by tribes or leased to concessionaires, unoccupied but earmarked as forest reserves, residual (unearmarked, unimproved, unleased, undeeded public land) in districts and counties. Meanwhile, tribal land legally part of public land is reserved for tribal use purposely for tribal towns, tribal farms, fallow land, bush occasionally used, native authority forest reserve and communal forest. This is because Article V, Sections 12, 13 and 14 of the 1847 Constitution clearly specified who can own land in Liberia. Consequently, land ownership and transfer under the customary system of the tribes subsumed by the formal Land Laws of the 1847 constitution negates legitimacy of any tribal or customary transactions for land.

Excerpt of Article V Section 12: states clearly “No person shall be entitled to hold real estate in this Republic, unless he is a citizen of the same. Nevertheless, this article shall not be construed to apply to Colonization, Missionary, Educational or other benevolent institutions, so long as the property or estate is applied to its legitimate purposes”.

And excerpt of Article V Section 14 finally states that: “The purchase of any land by any citizen or citizens from the aborigines

of this country for his or their own use, or for the benefit of others, or estates in fee simple, shall be considered null and void to all intents and purposes”.

### **2.1 Social Structure, Political Organization And Land Rights:**

By the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after fifty years of Americo-Liberians settlement, much of Liberian political and social organization was fixed: the leading families of Americo-Liberians (probably between ten and fifteen thousand persons in the 1870s) occupied the coastal strip and ruled a hinterland of tribes they had learned to subdue and treat harshly. Special taxes and coercive sanctions were imposed on tribal people, special regulations were used to control; tribal residence and migration, compulsory recruitment to work on private farms and public projects was imposed on tribal men, and extra-legal exactions of money, rice and services were imposed on hinterland communities. Tribal people were thus set apart and treated as a subordinate and inferior group. Discrimination against tribal people hardened into a policy as well as a habit of mind. In law as well as in fact, two distinct social classes were created: Americo-Liberian and natives (Ibid, pp. 6 &7).

Thus, politicians and the government under the pretence of alleviating poverty and high unemployment amongst their constituencies are going ahead using the available authority to assign large-scale land rights to investors based on government's eminent domain (County Development Agendas 2009). Consequently, land rights granted to concessions for agricultural purposes (rubber, oil palm, rice, forest products such as timbers and the extractive industries) seem to be a disregard for the sustenance of livelihood for local community dwellers who are most affected by unfriendly environmental practices and unequal distribution of the country's wealth and social immunities. For example, Firestone-Liberia's poor working and living conditions and recruitment of traditional laborers were codified into laws that have not yet been revised. The company continued to provide low wages since the establishment of the world's second largest rubber plantation in Liberia. (Ibid, p. 158-9).

## 2.2 The Case Of Liberia Agriculture Company (Lac):

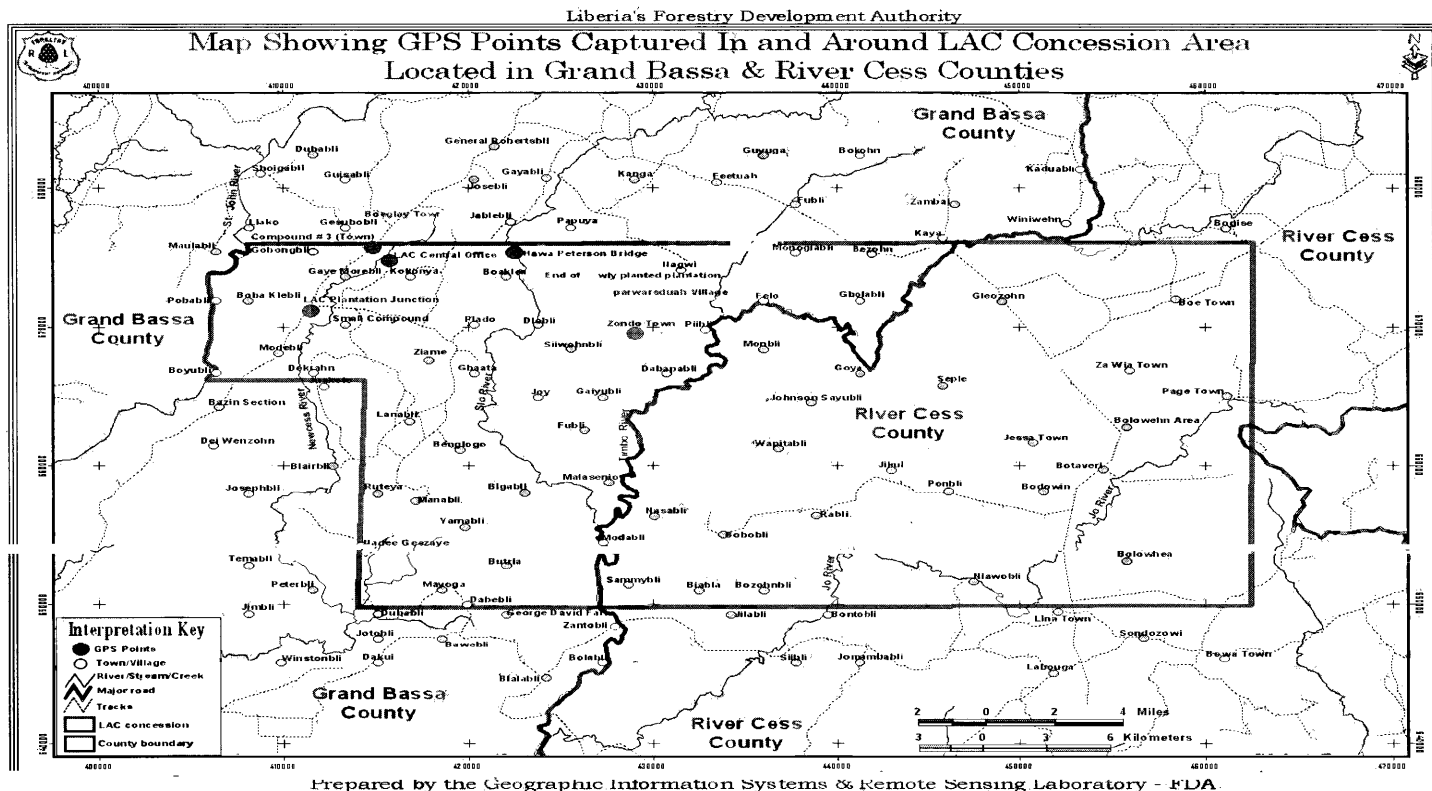
### 2.2.1 Background:

According to “An Act Approving the Concession Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Liberia and Liberia Agriculture Company” and quoted by a “Petition from the Citizens of Grand Bassa County living in Districts Number 3 and Number 4, through the Resilient Council of Elders (RCE) of Grand Bassa County; and Citizens of Rivercess County living in Momweh Statutory District, through their elders”: *On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March A. D. 1959, the Government of the Republic of Liberia (the “Government”) and Liberia Agriculture Company (LAC) entered into a Concession Agreement (the “Agreement”) whereby the Government granted LAC certain concession rights.*

In accordance with the Agreement, the Government made available to LAC 600,000 acres of land from which it was supposed to select its Concession Areas (Figure 1). Article II of the Agreement provides, inter alia, that *the two areas within which the Company (LAC) may operate under the Concession, herein called the “Concession Areas”, are shown on a map of the Republic attached hereto and made a part hereof and consist of:*

- a) The land lying between the St. John’s River and the Cestos River South of Compound No. 3 in Grand Bassa County and including approximately 300,000 [acres]; and
- b) A section of the lands situated along the Tappita-Webbo Road and including approximately 300,000 [acres].

Figure 1: The Liberia Agriculture Company Concession Areas:



The Company has established eighty one thousand three and fifty (81,350) acres (32,540 hectares) of Rubber plantation in District No. 3 in Grand Bassa County, the fifth populous County in Liberia (2008 National Population Census). Grand Bassa County is predominantly Bassa speaking people – the second largest ethnic group in Liberia. Unfortunately, however, the (RGE) of Grand Bassa County and the elders of the citizens of Momweh statutory District petitioned the Agreement in 2004 thus opening grounds for claims to rights to land in District No. 4. The ensuing land dispute between GOL and the RGE of District No. 4, Grand Bassa County climaxed, on November 7, 2007, with the death of the Belgian National, Mr. Bruno Michaels. Following the incident, twelve Bassa tribesmen in the LAC concession area were arrested and charged for the murder of Mr. Michaels. These developments delayed the two years expansion plans of LAC for the two-phase establishment of 12,500 acres (5,000 hectares) of Rubber plantations in the concession areas of the two Bassa communities prior to the escalation of the dispute between GOL and the resilient citizens of Districts No. 3 and No. 4 of Grand Bassa County which led to the death of Mr. Bruno Michaels.

Prior to this incident, LAC entered District No. 4 across the Sloh River in 2005, evicted people from their lands and villages without adequately compensating them and even failed to resettle about (150 farm families) with average family size of seven (estimated 1050 people) who were displaced from their homes in seven settlements, all in pursuit of making financial gains for LAC from the expanded Rubber plantation. In spite of strong resistance from the people, LAC still established 2,500 acres (1,000 hectares) of Rubber plantation on settled fallow lands. The continued resistance from the resilient traditional Bassa indigenes further frustrated LAC's plans to develop 7,500 acres (3,000 hectares) of small-holder Rubber plantations for the people with funding from the French Development Bank (Agence Francaise de Development – AFD).



### **2.2.2 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD):**

Key informant interview and focus group discussions were held with sub-groupings from individual men and women designed to understand the background and customs of the traditional Bassa communities residing in the concession areas.

According to Rev. Dr. Abba G. Karnga, Chairman, RGE, during a key informant interview, settlement of the Americo-Liberians into Liberia in 1822 created the situation where the ‘Indigenous Natives’, who were the original owners of the coastal lands, “40 miles limit of Liberia”, were dispossessed of their lands and confined to the hinterland or ‘Land of the Natives’. Consequently, the Americo-Liberian dominated governments of succeeding years further deprived the ‘Hinterland Indigenous Natives’ (HIN) of any ownership rights to land thus denying the HIN the power and authority to the legal ownership of land in Liberia. And so the Americo-Liberian settlers issued legal land deeds (the legal instrument for owning land under Liberian Law) to themselves under the constitutional seal and authority of the sitting President, who was also a member of the “Americo-Liberian Settler Group” (ALSG). This same simple process of owning land in Liberia was denied to the HIN who instead had to adopt the long and difficult customary process – beginning with the traditional local chiefs of villages and clans onto the Paramount Chief of the Chiefdom, and then to the District Commissioner, County Superintendent and to the Land Commissioner for verification; these processes were all to be concluded at the expense of the HIN requesting to own land. This process thus denied the HINs the right to legally own land in Liberia. Therefore, LAC used the power and authority granted to it by GOL’s 70 years concession land rights to expand its Rubber plantations without proper consultations with and respect to indigenous communities or even pay adequate compensations for the destroyed crops and people displaced. He further claimed that all efforts to negotiate with GOL and LAC to arrive at a peaceful solution to

the problem have failed with the continued insistence of LAC on its right to exercise the power and authority of the Concession Agreement and forcibly evict the people of communities around the concession areas who are referred to as “Squatters” who had no right to be compensated. As a result the RGE are resolved to stand up and speak out for the HINs of the Bassa communities around the concession areas in their claim that, “Truth is powerful and there is no fear, the truth will tell them. We will not sit to see LAC forcefully evicting our people from their settlements. The naming of our people as ‘Squatters’ is an insult and disregard to us as well as our ancestors who are buried in the land”, he concluded.

The General Secretary of LAC Workers’ Union, Mr. Jeremiah Dahn claimed that LAC had done no wrong considering that ‘investors are governed by the Laws of the host country’. The land law was not written by the HINs so there is no reason for any land dispute since LAC was brought into the concession areas by the Clan Chief, Corporal Wee, upon Presidential request on account of the ‘Concession Agreement’ between the GOL and LAC. He insisted that the RGE should have resorted to the Law rather than being self-opinionated. This is because Liberia has no minimum wage rate for labor; the removal of Kokoyan and Sherman Town was with the consent of the people, although Zondo Town was blessed not to be removed due to the many educated people from the town who were in high positions at that time. He also confirmed that LAC had surveyed its concession area in the hinterland about 88 miles from the sea coast as provided by law so that LAC could establish its plantations anywhere in the concession area in the hinterland. He therefore asserted that the people were not so much against the expansion policy of LAC as they were against the implementation procedure, and unsatisfactory compensations for crops destroyed in Division 3, the reason for the dispute. There was contradiction as Mr. Dahn admitted that there was cause for the dispute since the conditions for LAC expansion were decided only between

the RGE, the Legislative caucus of Grand Bassa County and the Statutory District Superintendent of District No.3 without the participation of the people affected by the resettlement. Mr. Dahn then said that this development led to the death of Bruno Michaels. However, a committee headed by a resident Justice of Peace, Mr. Joe Paeger, to negotiate the peaceful expansion of LAC consequent on the review of the conditions and benefits for workers and for the community and their dependants was appointed by the District Commissioner.

Prince Kennedy: a daily hired tapper of LAC revealed that he taps and collects latex from 450-500 rubber trees producing ten (10) gallons of latex each day, working twelve (12) hours per day, seven (7) days per week for a monthly pay of USD\$60 –80 from which USD\$23 is deducted for hospital bills and cost of one bag of rice with no other benefits from LAC. Prince was discouraged by the small monthly pay that leaves him with no savings to realize his dreams of returning to school. Thus, he is stuck with an unrewarding hard work for want of something to do. Prince's experience was confirmed by other tappers.

### **2.2.3. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and community forum:**

Focus group discussion and community forum were held in Zondo, Kparwarsduah, Wayson and Boeglay in the LAC Concession area revealed the followings:

While LAC has built hospital and schools in 12 identified communities, the relocation program with the destruction of crops (the people's livelihood) without due consultations with, and payment of compensations to the people was a failure of the GOL and LAC to meet their corporate responsibilities to the communities which led to the killing of Mr. Bruno Michaels on November 7, 2007 near Zondo by unknown persons. They also stated that during the outbreak of hostilities between LAC and the communities the GOL tacitly supported LAC and thus forsaking its responsibilities leaving LAC and the communities to resolve the issues. The communities will, therefore, continue to resist LAC and refuse to be

seen as ‘Squatters’ on their ancestral land. The communities interviewed confirmed that they saw the concession agreement for the first time when the research team showed it to them at Zondo. Therefore, details of the concession agreement were only known to GOL and LAC both of whom manipulated the agreement for their personal benefits. Hence, the GOL must seriously consider decentralizing and changing this pattern – for the so called unrealistic expectations of the communities should be blamed on the dubious and non-participatory top to bottom approach in drawing up the concession agreement. It was further revealed that the way forward on policy making to establish concessions should be participatory rather than imposing it on the people.

## **2.3 The Case of Agricultural Development Agency (ADA) Commercial, Inc.:**

### **2.3.1 Background:**

The second case study was completed to understand further the social dimensions of ‘Large-Scale Acquisition of Land rights for Agricultural and Natural Resource-Base Use in Liberia. The study revealed that the Government of Liberia (GOL) and ADA Commercial Inc. signed a Concession Agreement in June 2008 to cultivate 37,500 acres (15,000 hectares) of land in the Foya District in Lofa County and the rest in Gbeiden, Nimba County. Operations began in Foya District in 2009.

Foya District home of the Kissi, an offset of the ‘Mende’ Language group, is one of the 16 indigenous languages in Liberia and the dominant tribe of Foya. The town has a population of about 71,362 people; lies about 66 kilometers from Vonjama, the capital of Lofa County, and serves as an important trade link between Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. The people of Foya District are predominantly subsistent rice farmers who also cultivate cocoa, coffee, oil palm, cassava, maize, groundnuts, sweet potatoes and vegetables. Like the Bassa ethnic group, the Kissi people had well

organized traditional social and leadership structures with well defined clan group boundaries and rule of law with distinct roles at every level of the system. But with the advent and settlement of the Americo-Liberian settlers, these structures were destroyed as the Government extended its control of political power and dominance over the hinterland in the same way as it did everywhere in Liberia.

Follow-up investigations from various stakeholders and interviews with Key Informants the following were revealed:

The Concession Agreement signed in June 2008 between the ADA Commercial Inc. (the 'Investor') and the Government of Liberia (GOL) was without the participation of the indigenous natives who originally owned the land but was merely presented to the local people in its concluded version, all validated and signed by H.E. the President. It was only after this exclusive transaction between the GOL and ADA commercial Inc. that the Foya District Commissioner, who was himself not involved in the transaction, set up a team to work with ADA Commercial Inc. to identify land for the investment. The (1,700 hectares) of land identified included (48 hectares) of land legally deeded to Paramount Chief Momoh Taylor and his family. He willingly allocated the land to the investor, to provide them ample time to seek clarification from the GOL on the terms and status of the 120 years Concession Agreement and the ADA Commercial inc. operations in the Foya District.

### **2.3.2 Key Informant Interviews:**

From Statements of Mr. Victor Bengtson, Project Coordinator of ADA in Foya, the following conclusions were deducted from the broad perspective of ADA:

Following the 2009 harvest, ADA realized the first phase of the Project such that the second phase would commence in 2010.

All the 2009 harvests from the (1,700 hectares) would be used for seed multiplication to expand the Project to other towns in Foya District.

Environmental concerns would not be determined as the concession agreement did not make such provision since ADA investment prioritizes profit making.

The company claims it was misrepresented by a long term multinational company so; most of the benefits included in the agreement could not be afforded. Therefore, the agreement needed urgent revision.

The concession agreement was done between GOL and ADA Commercial Inc without the involvement and participation of the communities in the concession area. So that such benefits as health insurance, job training and functional literacy were not clearly provided for. However, ADA might help to address some of these issues in the next phase of the Project implementation.

Electricity has, however, been installed in Temesadu Town where wells and pit latrines are being sunk.

The estimated (500 people) already employed are generating income that has made considerably contributed to the reduction of crime rate in the Foya District.

***Statements From Lofa County Superintendent, Hon. Galakpai Kortima, Foya District Commissioner, Hon. William Kamba, and Foya District Paramount Chief, Hon. Momoh Taylor, gives the local Government perspective as follows:***

ADA Commercial Inc. is a Rice Investment Company that was complementing GOL's efforts at promoting one of the four major pillars of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) for national development, especially as the Project is helping farmers in their rice production efforts.

Although the community was aware that the GOL owned, controlled and granted land use rights for all public inhabited lands in Liberia, yet they expected consultations at least at the community leadership level before ADA's arrival considering that about 95% of the communities occupying the scarce farmland were subsistent rice farmers who depend on the same land for their livelihood (Galakpai, G. December 2009).

***Deductions From Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant interviews:***

The County Superintendent, Hon. Galakpai Kortima affirmed that the Lofa people and Kissi communities did not participate in initiating the ADA Concession Agreement and were thus neither involved nor did they consent to the coming of ADA to Lofa and that all attempts for the Lofa Superintendent to meet the ADA management to harmonize situations had failed. But the appointment of the new project Coordinator, Mr. Victor Bengtson, had changed situations somehow, as positive news was received of the manager's concern to help address some of the burning issues affecting the people.

The District Commissioner, Hon. William Kamba, confirmed Hon. Kortima's claim of the non-participation of the indigenous natives although the community people had agreed to give over the dry lands and continue farming the wet lands. However, ADA's sudden take over of the wet lands without any compensations or alternative farmlands for the people was the major cause of the conflict, especially when there was no GOL representative to intervene and resolve issues. This put a lot of pressure on the local authorities who are themselves not consulted in the initiation of the agreement. As a result, local efforts to resolve issues were down played leaving the local authorities uninformed about situations in respect of labor conditions and community benefits. Subsequently, local authorities were accused of meddling into ADA Inc. affairs. The change of management, however, promised some positive developments in the 2010 production year.

Paramount Chief Momoh Taylor adopted the principle of 'obey and report' by complying with GOL request to honor the Concession Agreement to ADA even though they were not consulted. They were, however, demanding that the agreement be harmonized such that the terms were satisfactory to, and acceptable by, all the stakeholders and ensure that ADA Commercial inc. does not take any more lands than already offered or fail to honor their promises to the communities, including the adequate payment of resettlement compensations to the displaced.

The Foya City Mayor, Mrs. Agnes W. Saa, confirmed the non-participation and non-involvement of the Foya District elders and communities in initiating the Concession Agreement between the GOL and ADA and hence their concern about the terms of the agreement and the forceful displacement of the people. They were, however, trustful of promises made for the 2010 production year.

A Ministry of Finance Local Revenue Agent, Mr. Eric Fallah, one of the District Commissioner's appointees to review the ADA Agreement, also confirmed that only the GOL authorities and the President developed the ADA concession agreement without the involvement of the local authorities and communities. However, they did welcome the ADA investment in Foya District for helping produce rice and create job opportunities in the area; however, they are concerned about the payment of royalties and improving the social facilities of the communities in addition to the taxes paid to the GOL.

Other officials, including retired Foya District Education Officer, Mr. John F. Kendor, an Officer of the Intofawor Farmers Cooperative, Mr. Saah Haillie, and the Acting Manager of the Foya Oil Palm Corporation, Mr. Philip K. Banquando and cross section of business entrepreneurs confirmed claims of non-involvement and non-participation of local community officials in preparing the ADA agreement. This situation was regrettable as the traditional land owners should be informed of any investments on their land. Although they respected and honored the GOL's decision for ADA to invest in their area, they were yet expectantly hopeful that the recommendations of the District Commissioner's Review Committee for providing such facilities as health, education, sanitation, wells fitted with hand pumps and infrastructure improvements, including the return of the low land to the farmers, would be adopted in the 2010 production year.

***2.3.3 Community forum held with local residents of diverse Backgrounds including Ex-Combatants in Five (5) Communities: Quoimai, Kpongomah, Kpandu-Kenema, Temesadu and Kpandu revealed that:***



The Vice President of the Republic of Liberia, H.E. Joseph N. Boakai, visited Foya and introduced ADA Commercial Inc. as an investment company for rice production with assurances that ADA commercial Inc. would not operate by force and appealed to the people to embrace the opportunity or they lose such opportunity to another area. The benefits of the investment were highlighted through a video clip thus convincing the people to accept the company. However ADA Commercial Inc. had not honored the interests of the people but rather forcibly cleared all lands, including the wetlands, and destroyed the plantation crops of the people without adequately compensating for them. This had led to conflicts at Temesadu which Paramount Chief Momoh Taylor had helped to resolve. However, the people of the concession areas, especially around Temesadu where ADA operations had been implemented since 2009, were threatened with the loss of their livelihoods and displacement without compensations thus making them vulnerable to hunger and homelessness.

There are clear evidences from field survey of silting of over ten hectares of low land through mechanized farming, destruction of cash crops (cocoa, coffee, plantain & banana orchards and dispossession of upland that over five villages with estimated population of five hundred (500) have depended on over the centuries. There were further complaints of unhealthy competition for job opportunities with migrant workers from the neighboring countries of Sierra Leone and Guinea.

Key informants; communities' members of varying background; entrepreneurs and members of civil society organizations in Foyah confirmed that the presence of ADA Commercial Inc. have contributed significantly to reduction in crime rates in the district; restore marriages and reduce gender-based violent and provide hope for jobless youth to eke a living. For example the company provided job opportunities for about five hundred persons within one year. This number could double if the company is allowed to expand its operational area.

In spite of the delay in the company honoring its cooperate social responsibilities, experiences have shown that large-scale in-

vestors usually provide quality education facilities for primary, junior and senior secondary school; sponsor students and institution of higher learning. For example, the LAC and Firestone quality educational system serving workers' wards, and neighboring communities and support extended to institutions of higher learning (University of Liberia and Cuttington University).

Up to date, the poverty of participation in land tenure and acquisition rights for large concession rights and national development that affect tribal communities still exist in Liberia. For example, in the 1920s when the Liberian Government initiated and obtained a five million United States dollar loan from the American Company, Firestone Plantation Company, at a 7% interest rate to off-set some of its cash flow liquidity problems, when the government was seriously behind in meeting its payroll and social services expenditures resulting in the intermittent payment of its financial obligations, traditional settlers in the present concession areas were not consulted on the length and conditions of the cession contract. Although the loan seemed like a very good idea, but the loan opportunity also netted a lucrative 99-year deal with the Liberian Government to purchase Liberia virgin forest land at the sweet heart rate of six cents per acre to construct a number of rubber plantations in Liberia to fuel the company's tyre business (The Perspectives April 18, 2007).

The minority elite having apportioned huge tracks of lands to themselves and their loyalists used the uneducated, poor and powerless aborigines majority to work their ill-gotten lands (Clower, Robert W. et al. (1966, p.66).

In pre-war Liberia, it is hard to speak of any institution; organization or government parastatal that disadvantaged groups could seek redress. At best, this was done through the judicial system which was corrupt and biased against the indigenous people. In post-war Liberia, through the intervention of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that have supported advocacy and awareness programs, members of communities can now muster courage to challenge and defend their rights to land ownership.

### 3.0 Current Debates And Emerging Issues:

Liberia's Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have begun engaging the Liberian government for 'empty promises', claiming that several concession agreements between the government and a number of multinational corporations are at the "expense of the citizenry because the multinationals will always guarantee a pot of money which then gets used by the government to build and strengthen a police state. In the Tuesday, October 6, 2009 edition of the Daily Observer newspaper in Liberia, civil society organizations were quoted as saying "we are tired of rhetoric; there is an urgent need to arrest the embarrassing trend in increasingly awarding agricultural and forest concessions without delivering promised jobs, revenues and the 'new day.'" The editorial of Liberia's Daily Observer Newspaper edition of Friday October 2, 2009 reads "The mass rush for Liberia's forest land has sparked a great concern about the possibility of reckless and vigorous exploitation of these precious national assets by timber companies clamoring for space on this tiny West African Nation".

According to Clower W. et al. (1966) the socio-economic and political structure of Liberia has been fixed during its first 50 years. That is, an economic and political structure that has persistently maintained the dualistic economic structure and stark inequalities between the formal and informal sectors. The growth rates of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the 1950s and 1960s averaged 9% per annum, but these were driven by the formal economy and particularly the 'enclave sectors' of iron ore, timber and rubber<sup>1</sup>. By the end of the 1960s, these sub-sectors accounted for 38% of monetized GDP and 90% of exports – estimates of 'non-monetized' GDP amounted to 8% of the national economy<sup>2</sup>.

The 70% of Liberians in the 'non-monetized' sector, mainly subsistence farmers, survived on per capital incomes of US\$50, compared with a national average of US\$270 (World Bank, 1971).

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1. Various terms have been used to describe that part of the economy associated with informal /subsistence activities. For instance, Dalton et al. (1965), split the agriculture sector into three categories: large-scale commercial, subsistence and 'peasant money'.

2. The World Bank (1971) differentiates between the monetary and subsistence sectors.

The persistence of this dualistic structure has been identified as a major contributing factor to the subsequent conflict (Richards, P. et al. 2004).

The majority of Liberians have always been poor - a product of the dualistic economy. But, their situation has deteriorated since the war. Between 1997 and 2001 the proportion of people living on less than US\$1 a day increased from 55% (UNCCA, 1997/98) to 76% (UNDP, 2001). Level of extreme poverty has increased over the same period from 14% to 52%, with more than 1.4 million people living in abject poverty on less than US\$0.50 per person a day. A typical household spends more than two-thirds of its income on providing food for the family.

Although poverty is pervasive, but rural households are worst off. More than half of the people in Liberia (56%) live in rural areas (no electricity, piped borne water, quality housing, toilets and sewerage systems), defined as settlements with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants, and 86.3% of the rural households are poor, with 64% living in severe poverty (UNDP, 2001).

According to the Comprehensive Assessment of the Agriculture Sector (CAAS-Lib., 2007), in the few remaining functional concessions such as Firestone Rubber Plantations and the Liberia Agriculture Company, many people still live on less than US\$1 a day.

These socio-economic indicators are highly associated with findings of the functional concession specific case studies conducted during this research. In county headquarters, whose population expanded during the war years, 75% of households remain poor, with 40% in severe poverty.

Apparently, Liberia is one of few countries with lower poverty rate of female-headed households than male-headed households. According to UNDP (2001), the proportion below the poverty line was 79% for male-headed households compared with 68% for female-headed households (respective figures for severe poverty were 55% and 42%). One reason is female heads of households work in the informal non-farm sector where incomes are relatively high, as well as receiving inheritance from husbands and close relatives,

and higher levels of education. It is important to note that these expenditure statistics do not include non-monetary dimensions, and here women tend to fare worse: women are particularly vulnerable as a result of exclusion, marginalization and gender-based violence.

The non-economic dimensions of poverty in Liberia are also important and include 'capacity' and 'participation' poverty (UNDP, 2006). With total collapse of the education system, most young Liberians lack basic knowledge, skills and resourcefulness. This 'capacity poverty' makes it difficult for them to set and achieve goals, budget and use scarce resources for agreed purposes, or think through and manage complex processes and interactions. Capacity poverty also excludes them from taking advantage of the limited domestic and international employment opportunities that are available. The legacy of a dualistic society lingers in 'participation' poverty, in which the vast majority of the population is unable to realize their rights to be a part of decision-making processes. Their voices are not heard when policy objectives are being established and decision are being made. Besides the lack of institutional and human capacity to foster participation, poor governance practices have deprived many Liberians from participating in the nation's development process. These limitations have contributed substantially to income poverty and impaired human development as clearly revealed by key informants, groups of varying backgrounds and community members in the footprints of the functional concession specific case studies.

According to the Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey (CFSNS) report, the widely reported high unemployment rate of 85% in Liberia mainly reflects the paucity of employment in the formal sector. Farming, fishing and other natural-resource (NR) based livelihood strategies are essential to survival and are associated with lower per capita expenditure (Table 1). Food crop production is the most important source of livelihood (41% of households are engaged in this activity).

Other economic activities include processing and sale of palm nuts and oil (31%) as well as petty trade and small-scale business (28%), and contract or casual work (18%). The relative importance of these income sources differs across Liberia. For instance, the contribution of food crop production is particularly high in south-

eastern counties of Sinoe (35%), Maryland (29%) and River Gee (26%). Cash-crop production is predominant in Nimba (15%) and Grand Bassa (10%). Processing and selling of palm nuts is a key source of income and also serves as a coping strategy across Liberia (as evidence by the low expenditure figures of households that depend on this activity in Table 1), but is particularly high in Lofa (37%), River Cess (33%) and Bomi (27%)<sup>5</sup>.

One issue that is not crystal clear from these concerns is food security - when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 2006).

Food security profiles developed by Liberia Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey (CFSNS) showed that most rural households are 'food insecure'<sup>6</sup>. Nationally, 80% of the rural population was either moderately vulnerable (41%) or highly vulnerable (40%) to food insecurity. While only (9%) of the rural population was food secure, and 11% were food insecure. At the same time, chronic malnutrition rates reached 39% for children under five, only 32% of households had access to improved water sources, and other basic services were also limited.

As illustrated in Table 2, different livelihood profiles provide various degrees of food security, with the most food insecure and highly vulnerable groups involved in palm oil production and selling (64%), followed by hunters and contract labourers (respectively 61% and 58%). The more food secure and moderately vulnerable groups are among the cash and food crop producers (37%), the petty traders and the employees (44%).

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5. Republic of Liberia, Ministry of Agriculture (2007)

6 Household food security profiles were developed by combining the results of a two-step analysis: The first involved an assessment of food consumption frequency and dietary diversity as proxies of access and nutritional intake, while the second assessed the household's potential to access sufficient food through purchasing power or their own production.

Table 1: Livelihood Profiles and the Composition of Income (2006)

Per capital expenditure US\$/month	Livelihood profile		Source of income					
		% of HH	Main income	%	Second income	%	Third income	%
17.75	Petty trader	12%	Petty trade	81%	Food crop production	5%	Contract work	4%
17.52	Employee	5%	Salary from employer	75%	Petty trade	12%	Food crop production	8%
14.68	Contract labourer	10%	Contact work	79%	Petty trade	6%	Food crop production	5%
14.66	Charcoal producer	7%	Charcoal/wood production	72%	Food crop production	8%	Petty trade	5%
14.42	Fisheries worker	4%	Fishing	79%	Petty trade	6%	Food crop production	8%
13.75	Rubber tapper	7%	Rubber tapping	75%	Petty trade	6%	Food crop production	5%
13.64	Skilled labourer	3%	Skilled labour	74%	Petty trade	8%	Food crop production	7%
13.11	Hunter	5%	Hunting/trapping	73%	Food crop production	8%	processing palm oil	4%
11.84	Food crop farmer	15%	Food crop production	74%	Petty trade	6%	Fishing	4%
11.80	Cash and food crop producer	6%	Cash crop production	62%	Food crop production	22%	Processing palm oil	55
11.20	Palm oil sellers/producer	14%	Processing palm oil	84%	Contract work	5%	Petty trade	3%
11.00	Pal oil and food crop processors	8%	Processing palm oil	49%	Food crop production	26%	Cash crop production	5%
	Other	3%	Other activity	82%	Petty trade	6%	Food crop production	2%

SOURCE: CFSNS (2006)

Meanwhile, results emanating from the Ministry of Agriculture / Food and Agriculture Organization Agricultural Policy and Strategy Workshop (June 9-10, 2009), clearly revealed that the problem of food security in Liberia is not the relative scarcity of lands. Rather, agricultural workers' engagement in producing non-local consumable primary agricultural products: rubber, logging, petty trading and mineral mining in search of cash income and amassing wealth. A situation highly associated with weak institutional and administrative management in the sector and related institutions (Sesay, 2006).

#### **4.0 Challenges and Prospects of Traditional Settlers:**

Out of these concerns, the Government of Liberia has completed an act through the House of Legislators to establish a Land Commission. According to section 1.2 of the Act, this Act may be cited as the LAND COMMISSION ACT of 2008. Section 1.3.2 of the Act defines Public Land as Land which is publicly owned under the constitution, statutes and common law of Liberia.

Section 1.3.3 defines private land as land which is owned or otherwise held under private rights by persons, communities or other corporate entities under the constitution, statutes and common law of Liberia. Section 1.3.4 defines land-use planning as planning for and regulation by the state, county or local governments of the utilization of land. Part III of the Act, Section 3.1 states the mandate of the Land Commission as: The general mandate and purpose of the Commission shall be to propose, advocate and coordinate reforms of the land policy, laws and programs in Liberia. It shall have no adjudicatory or implementation role. Its objectives in policy and law reform shall be to promote: Section 3.1.1 Equitable and productive access to the nation's land, both public and private; Section 3.1.2 Security of tenure in land and the rule of law with respect to landholding and dealings in land; Section 3.1.3 Effective land administration and management; and Section 1.3.4 Investment in and development of the nation's land resources.



Table 2: Vulnerability, Income and Livelihood Profile in Liberia

Livelihood profile*	% moderately vulnerable and food secure	% highly vulnerable and food insecure	% of income derived from food crop production	% of income derived from cash crop production
Cash and food crop producers	63	37	62	22
Petty traders	56	44	5	0
Employees	55	44	4	0
Food crop farmers	53	49	74	0
Charcoal producers	53	47	8	0
Rubber tapers	53	47	5	0
Fisher folks	52	48	8	0
Palm oil and food crop producers	52	48	26	5
Skilled labourers	49	51	7	0
Contract labourers	42	58	5	0
Hunters	40	61	8	0
Palm oil producer/seller	36	64	0	0

Source: CFSNS (2006). Note: \* definitions consistent with table 2

The Government of Liberia has approved an Act to establish The Community Rights Law of 2008 with respect to Forest Lands, emanating from Articles 5 and 7 of the 1986 Constitution of Liberia.

Section 1.1 cites the Act as Part III of Title 23 of the Liberian Code of Laws Revised. Article 7 mandated that “The Republic shall, consistent with the principles of individual freedom and social justice enshrined in this Constitution, manage the national economy and the natural resources of Liberia in such manner as shall ensure the maximum feasible participation of Liberian citizens under conditions of equality as to advance the general welfare of the Liberian people and the economic development of Liberia.”

Moreover, it is clearly stated in the preamble that the National Forestry Reform Law of 2006 requires the Forestry Development Authority to, within one year of the effective date of the National Forestry Reform Law 2006, present to the Legislature for consideration and passage a comprehensive law governing community rights with respect to Forest Lands; to conserve and sustainably manage all forest areas so that forests will continue to produce a complete range of goods and services for the benefit of all Liberians and contribute to poverty alleviation in the nation.

Furthermore, the Government of the Republic of Liberia, consistent with Constitution of Liberia and international conventions, protocols, and treaties, is committed to respecting and upholding the rights of populations to control and make decisions concerning the development or use of their land and resources.

If these laudable ideas and support for the established agencies and instituted instruments is sustained, the Land Commission, Forestry Development Authority, Ministry of Land Mines and Energy will have huge task of putting in clear perspectives a number of concerns related to land acquisition and management of natural resources in Liberia. In addition, existing land conflicts in the country ranging from land disputes amongst individual community members; between individuals and whole communities; between

communities and communities; between ethnic groups within communities; between the Government of Liberia and investors on the one hand and affected communities on the other, due to many factors of inequalities that exist in relation to land rights in Liberia.

Basically, the inequalities are manifested in three-fold: the inheritance to land and property rights and ownership on the basis of sex that gives males dominant rights over females, particularly in traditional settings; the state serving as predator, rather than protector of the citizens rights and access to land and the gap between the power minority elites and majority ordinary people who have little or no right of access to land and legal documentation.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION:**

Results of the concession specific study revealed that social outcomes exist in many dimensions based on both economic and non-economic factors (the dualistic economic structure and poverty of participation) and are cross-stitching.

Conflicts persist between investors and local communities because displacement from agricultural land and settlement resulting to loss of means of livelihood is common; the ties between culture and land as well as local environmental concerns are not considered by the Government of Liberia when allocating land for investment and majority of affected traditional settlers are not compensated for loss of personal assets (food and cash crops) and land when evicted by the government for investment operations.

The settlers wrestled ownership of the land from the aborigines through legislative enactments which tied ownership of land to citizenship. For example, Article V, sections 12, 13 and 14 of the 1847 constitution clearly specified who can own land in Liberia. Excerpts of Article V and the sections referenced follow: "Section 12: No person shall be entitled to hold real estate in this Republic, unless he is a citizen of the same. Nevertheless, this article shall not be construed to apply to Colonization, Missionary, Educational or other benevolent institutions, so long as the property of estate is

applied to its legitimate purpose”. “Section 14: The purchase of any land by any citizen or citizens from the aborigines of this country for his or their own use, or for the benefit of others, or estates in fee simple, shall be considered null and void to all intents and purposes”.

Until October 20, 2009 when “An Act to Establish the Community Rights Law of 2009 with Respect to Forest Land” was approved by the President of Liberia and published by authority, aborigines inhabiting “unencumbered land” were classified as “squatters” and consequently, totally excluded by the government from decision-making related to large-scale acquisition of land by investors, a vivid indicator of the “poverty of participation”.

Inequity persists in land acquisition; ownership rights and sharing of the nation’s wealth and immunities. This was evidenced by lack of consultation with local communities prior to and during implementation of investment projects and institution of follow-up mechanism to ensure effective and timely implementation of company’s corporate social responsibility to traditional settlers. Also, unimplemented labor policies that pose challenges to labor force because the investor decide unilaterally wages to pay for labor, and dismisses employees at will without legal repercussion. For example workers at LAC and ADA Commercial Inc. complained of dismissals at will without reference to labor regulations.

The legitimacy of land ownership debate in post war Liberia is very active. Issues of land rights, administration, management, sale, possession, occupancy, control and distribution have posed major challenges for a peaceful post war Liberia. Many subsistence farmers who depend wholly on land and natural resource-based activities for livelihood are afraid that large companies will take away “their land” and they will have no other source of survival. This will eventually have an adverse effect on full realization of the Liberian Government “Poverty Reduction Strategies”. In most rural setting across the country there are “peace threatening” land disputes between clans, communities as well as community and community members.

A land Commission was established and approved August 4, 2009, in order to judiciously, efficiently and adequately resolve all the issues surrounding land in Liberia and maintain a peaceful and stable society wherein every Liberian Citizen will be afforded equal opportunity to own, use and dispose land in accordance with the laws of the Republic. And to also develop robust land policy, law and program by promulgating the requisite land-use regulations and guidelines within appropriate institutions, establish and maintain an autonomous agency/commission dedicated to pursuit of such desired goals and objectives.

In spite of numerous short-falls of the Liberian Government and large-scale land acquired investors, large-scale investments have contributed immensely to the growth and development of Liberia. They create more job opportunities for residents within concession areas as well as expatriates. Job and income earning opportunities provided reduces potential social vices like crime, domestic violence, divorce and sustain dignity of bread winners in families. For example, the case of desperate ex-combatants and other youth seeking job placements at ADA Commercial Inc. in Foya to eke a living.

They also provide essential social services such as education and healthcare for employees that have spill-over effect to larger communities in Liberia; for examples, LAC and Firestone Liberia school system and healthcare delivery. Also, large –scale investors' extend cooperate responsibilities to institutions of higher learning through student sponsorship and direct contribution to their operations and infrastructure development. For example, the Harvey Firestone Science Complex built and now being renovated by Firestone Company at the University of Liberia.

They provide infrastructure such as roads and bridges that facilitates easy movement of people, goods and services in and out of concession areas.

They pay taxes that increase government revenue base for local and national development, at the will of existing administration.

**Recommendations:**

Although the Liberian Government is making some efforts to reduce the “poverty of participation” and resolve conflicts over land disputes, the following are highly recommended.

The Liberian Government should make social contracts and integral part of concession agreements to make it legal, binding and enforceable through monitoring system at affected communities’ level.

The Government should be proactive to ensure effective implementation of the labor laws, guidelines and regulations in all spheres of the Liberian economy.

The Government should be proactive to put in place mechanisms that will safeguard local communities from environmental degradation from pollutions and unfriendly environmental activities from large-scale investors’ operations.

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# **Microfinance in Post-Conflict Liberia: Implications and Challenges**

**Samuel Wai Johnson, Jr.\***

## **Abstract**

This paper seeks to understand whether microfinance is meeting its social goals in post-conflict Liberia. Pioneered by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), microfinance has emerged as a powerful new tool for the delivery of financial services to Liberia's poor. Apart from deepening Liberia's financial frontier, microfinance is enabling the war affected population to attain some degree of economic independence and communities devastated by the war to leverage local resources and build equity. The client base and the loan portfolio of Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) are increasing, with evidence that sustainable microfinance services are possible in Liberia. There however remain unanswered several questions about the outreach and the products offered by the MFIs, which inhibit any effective argument about whether MFIs are fulfilling their social mission.

## **1.0 Introduction**

Financial intermediation by the poor is not a new invention in Liberia. Until the civil war (1989 – 2003), the poor in Liberia had various mechanisms outside the country's financial system that provided them savings and credit services. These include the susu (known otherwise as the Rotating Savings and Credit Associations [ROSCAs] in academic literature), the yearly club, (or the Accumulated Savings and Credit Association [ASCrAs]) and the daily savings.

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\* Samuel Wai Johnson, Jr. is a Doctoral Student at George Mason University Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution.

But since the end of the civil war, Liberia has seen the emergence of powerful new methodologies for delivering financial services to the poor. Known as microfinance, much of these new methodologies, are being pioneered by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), who had earlier gone to Liberia to provide relief assistance in the wake of the country's civil war. At the end of the war, these NGOs transformed themselves into microfinance NGOs and are now delivering microfinance services to the population. The two major microfinance NGOs operating in Liberia, Liberty Finance and the Local Enterprise and Assistance Program (LEAP), are leading efforts at expanding microfinance services in post-conflict Liberia.

The general belief that microfinance reduces poverty by providing capital for the creation of self-employment opportunities for the poor is also taking hold in Liberia. The Liberian government has anchored the provision of microfinance services in its post-conflict development agenda, the poverty reduction strategy. The Central Bank of Liberia is developing a framework for the incorporation of microfinance into Liberia's financial sector. Meanwhile, microfinance continues to grow in Liberia. At present, there are over 36,000 microfinance clients in Liberia. Nonetheless, there seems to be very little known about the performance of microfinance institutions (MFIs) in Liberia since the 1990s when microfinance was made popular.

This paper looks at the performance of two MFIs in Liberia, LEAP and the Liberty Finance, with a particular focus their outreach; their products (i.e. are the products meeting the needs of the clients for health, housing, income-generation, etc.); and the benefits clients are accruing from their microfinance services. The next section, Section II, lays out the conceptual issue of the paper. Section III scans the existing literature about microfinance and poverty, while Section IV discusses the Liberian civil war and the microfinance landscape. Section V examines the implications of microfinance and the challenges facing MFIs in Liberia and Section VI summarizes the major findings of the paper.

## **2.0 Conceptual Issue: What is Microfinance?**

Microfinance refers to the provision of financial services to low income households, including the self employed, on a sustainable basis. These financial services include the provision of credits, various forms of savings, payment facilities, remittances and insurance (Ledgerwood, 1999; Wright, 1999; Christen & Rosenberg, 2000) which are not available from the financial sector in developing countries. In many developing countries, the financial sector does not provide financial services to the lower end of the market or the informal sector. The financial systems in these countries are mainly developed to provide services exclusively to the wealthiest segments in the market or the population at the upscale rung of the economic ladder. Thus, the provision of financial services to the poor and vulnerable, whose economic activities take place outside the purview of the financial sector, is associated with steep transactions costs. These transactions costs are due to information asymmetry, interest rate variation, credit rationing, exclusivity (Ray, 1997) and the disparate locations of low-income communities.

To offset these costs, MFIs have developed various mechanisms to deliver financial services to the poor and vulnerable with an emphasis on reducing poverty. This focus on poverty reduction gives microfinance a social mission which distinguishes it from formal finance, although recent evidence from microfinance practices show that microfinance also has a commercial mission. There however seems to be a disagreement over the approach to poverty reduction by microfinance institutions. Some supporters of microfinance insist that microfinance serve the poor exclusively and try to reach the envelope deeper in order to serve the ultra poor (Balkernhoul & Churchill, 2002). The other group of microfinance supporters argues about the MFIs' mission of sustainability: MFIs should make at least enough money to cover their cost of operations if not immediately and not completely, but with the aim of eventually becoming viable on market terms. Robinson (2001) calls these two approaches the financial systems approach and the poverty-lending approach, which are also referred to as the "institutional-

ists” and the “welfarists” approaches. The primary goal of the “welfarist” approach is to reach the poor, especially the poorest of the poor, with financial services. Many MFIs using this approach provide microfinance services to poor borrowers at low cost. Critical of this approach, Robinson (2001) argues that with the growing unmet demand for microfinance programs, microfinance should be subsidy-free, since in the long run, subsidies from donors and governments will dry out and microfinance programs will have to sustain themselves independently. To avoid this funding constraint, the “institutionalists” argue that MFIs need to provide high quality financial services on an increasingly cost-effective basis by charging interest rates that reflect the cost of service.

Despite these differences over approach, microfinance provides a means of livelihood for the poor that helps them meet their basic needs. These needs arise from structural, life-cycle and crisis factors. Needs arising from structural factors include the demand for the products and services of poor people such as their labor; life-cycle factors include education, shelter, and healthcare; crisis factors include household shocks such as illness, loss of employment, wars and disasters (Rahman & Hossain, 1995).

Groups providing microfinance services are either informal, semi formal or formal with a wide range of ownership, governance structure and sources of capital. The informal providers include the RoSCAs, the ASCrAs, and the daily savings clubs, while the semi-formal providers include the microfinance NGOs and other non-bank financial intermediaries, and the formal providers are made of commercial banks.

### **3.0 Theoretical Issues: Microfinance and Poverty**

There has been growing interest in the social mission of microfinance in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia. Findings about the impact of microfinance services on poverty have been mixed, however. Snow and Buss (2001) study microfinance programs in sub-Saharan Africa and concluded that there is a need for better goal-oriented assessment in order to determine the effective-

ness of microfinance as a policy for poverty alleviation. Analyzing the relationship between microfinance and poverty in Bolivia, Mosley (2001) shows that microfinance has positive impacts on the initial levels of income and assets of microfinance clients, though the income impacts correlated negatively with income of poor households who choose to invest in low-risk, low-return assets. Microfinance may, however, increase vulnerability if the coping mechanisms of the clients against shocks fail (Mosley, 2001). Bolnick and Nelson (1990) find positive impact of microfinance on typically small enterprises in Indonesia that were labor-intensive and growing. This impact was however not uniform across sectors and the target variables.

Venkatachalam (n.d.) analyzed the appropriateness of microfinance as an instrument to improve the economic well-being of the population and reduce the economic effects of complex man-made disasters in post-conflict Tajikistan. Venkatachalam (n.d.) states that microfinance presents a better, longer-term option for the socioeconomic revival for the population than does continued humanitarian assistance. Almost of the microfinance clients in Venkatachalam's study experienced increase in cash, savings and inventory for sales resulting from access to microfinance loans. These resources provided income and consumption smoothing in times of crisis or capital for further productive investment. They also provided psychological security for the clients' household (Venkatachalam, n.d.).

In northeastern Thailand, Coleman (2002) finds strong evidence that microfinance programs were not reaching the poor as much as the relatively wealthy. Participant households were found to be significantly wealthier than those of nonparticipants. Some of the poorer nonmembers choose not to enlist for microfinance services, while many others were excluded against their wishes. Those who chose not to enlist felt that microfinance services were for the wealthy. Coleman (2002) observed a positive and significant impact of microfinance on the wealth, savings, income, productive expenses, and the labor time of the households of wealthy MFI

clients. The impact of microfinance services on the moneylending activities of wealthy clients was also positive, implying that the wealthier MFI clients apparently borrowed low-interest microfinance loans and lent them at higher rates. The impact of microfinance on poorer client households was largely insignificant due to the difference in access to loans by wealthier and poorer clients (Coleman, 2002).

In Eritrea, group collateral or solidarity lending is not very popular among poor clients. Graeub and Kraehenbuehl (2004) state that the group collateral approach seems to be a very delicate issue among microfinance clients. The members of the group have to be from the same social status, because the richer clients do not want to guarantee the creditworthiness of their poorer counterparts. Thus, for the very poor in Eritrea, group collateral is useless (Graeub & Kraehenbuehl, 2004). The poor are also often reluctant to use MFI loan for emergency purposes, because they have very limited access to other sources of money. Maintaining access to MFI program is therefore a risk management strategy for the Eritrean poor (Graeub & Kraehenbuehl, 2004).

Notwithstanding these mixed results, Buckley (1997) contends that microfinance should not be written off completely; these results should however demonstrate the need to evaluate the praise in some quarters about microfinance's potential for the microeconomic transformation for the poor.

It is within this framework that this paper seeks to explore attempts at providing microfinance services in Liberia. Primarily, the paper is concerned with whether microfinance is fulfilling its social goals in post-conflict Liberia. Imp-Act (n.d.), an organization involved with assessing the social performance of MFIs identifies the inclusion of large number of the poor and excluded people in MFI clientele, the improvement in the quality and appropriateness of financial services, and the creation of client benefits as the social goals for MFIs. With a focus on MFI's performance in such areas as increase in branches and number of clients; increase in number



of active borrowers by product, this paper primarily asks the questions: i) what is the poverty-outreach of the microfinance institutions in Liberia? Poverty-outreach here includes the vulnerable; ii) Are the products being offered by these MFIs appropriate in helping the poor to meet their needs for shelter, health, savings and education? iii) Are MFIs fulfilling their social mission of creating economic opportunities for the poor in Liberia? A consideration of these questions gives an indication about whether microfinance clients are moving in the direction of winners graduation or savers graduation (Ahlin & Jiang, 2005).

The term “graduation” refers to participants “graduating” into income-earning activities that let them sustain themselves without external subsidies. Winner’s graduation occurs when a microfinance client is able to earn relatively high returns on the self-employment created from microfinance loans, eventually saves enough, moves out and finances his/her full-scale business, while the latter occurs from accumulation of average self-employment returns (Ahlin & Jiang, 2005). Either graduation gives an indication about the changes that are happening in the lives of microfinance clients; the relationship between the changes in the clients’ lives and the services offered by the MFI; and the relationship between the services of the MFI and the broader socio-economic setting within which they operate.

#### **4.0 The Liberian Civil War and Microfinance**

##### **4.1 The Liberian Conflict**

Liberia, a country of 43,000 square miles in West Africa, was founded as a geo-political entity in 1821. The country has 16 major ethnic groups, which together constitute 95% of the population. The Americo-Liberians, made up of mainly descendants of free man of color who migrated from the US to Liberia at Liberia’s founding, constitute the other 5%. The origins of the Liberian conflict can be traced back to the various forms of exclusion, and marginalization, which have characterized the country for most of its existence. At the socio-political level, poor governance and con-

strained integration has been critical problems. The founding constitution was, for example, designed for the needs of the settler population at the expense of the indigenous people. Political power was concentrated essentially in Monrovia, Liberia's capital, and primarily at the Presidency. The monopolization of power bred corruption, narrowed the decision-making base, limited the space for widespread participation in the country's governance process, and fuelled ethnic and class hatred among the population.

The exclusion and marginalization extended to the economy as well. In the early days, majority of Liberians had severely limited rights to land and property. Later, the urban-biased policies of successive administrations coupled with an uneven distribution of the nation's wealth and the chronic dependence of the nation on a small range of primary exports complicated Liberia's situation and eventually sowed the seeds for the 14-year violent conflict.

The civil war in Liberia (1989 – 2003) devastated the country's economy and nearly every form of livelihood. Liberia's GDP was reduced by 90 percent, while more than 60 percent of its population was pushed below the poverty line. GDP per capita in 2006 was less than a quarter of what it was 20 years earlier. The country's productive output tumbled, and exports declined from US\$486 million in 1978 to US\$10 million in 2004. An estimated 250,000 Liberians lost their lives during the conflict while about two million were uprooted from their homes during the war and scattered in Internally Displaced People's (IDP) centers and refugee camps largely across West Africa.

The civil war left the country's infrastructure, both physical and social, severely destroyed. At the end of the conflict in 2003, there was barely any provision of public electricity or pipe-borne water, while the delivery of basic healthcare and educational services had essentially been disrupted. More than 101,000 of Liberia's population made to carry arms during the civil war would disarm in anticipation of a rehabilitation and reintegration package.

The near collapse of the formal sector and the massive displacement of people into Liberia's capital Monrovia and other urban centers during the civil war provided the incentives for the entry of a large segment of the population into the informal sector. In 2006, when the democratic government was inaugurated, Liberia ranked 169<sup>th</sup> among 182 countries on the United Nations Human Development Index. The majority of the population returning home at the end of the conflict lacked the needed skills for employment in the formal sector. The informal sector, which requires little or no skills, has therefore been the most attractive sector for employment. Access to capital is however limited in the informal sector. Thus, raising capital to sustain informal sector investments is largely done outside the Liberian financial system including the credit union, whose activities were disrupted by the conflict. This means that the returnee population who were further impoverished by the war had virtually no capital to restart their lives. It is in this context that the NGOs which had flooded Liberia in the wake of the civil conflict to deliver humanitarian assistance began transforming themselves to provide financial services to help revive the livelihood of the poor.

#### **4.2 The Microfinance Landscape in Liberia**

The microfinance landscape in Liberia is evolving. While the term microfinance has become well known since the civil war, to refer mainly to the externally generated financial schemes often implemented by non-governmental organizations, there are other mechanisms that also offer sustainable financial services to the country's poor. Thus, microfinance is made of a breadth that runs from informal to formal MFIs, with a wide range of governance structures and ownership, sources of capital, and levels of external supervision. Below is a typology of MFIs in Liberia. The operation of the ROSCAs and the ASCrAs predates the civil war.

Table 1: A Typology of MFIs in Liberia

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Source of capital</i>	<i>Ownership and governance</i>	<i>Regulation and supervision</i>	<i>Scale (number of clients)</i>	<i>Profitability</i>	<i>Motive</i>
ROSCA	Membership/internally generated	Member-owned and governed	None	Less than 100	Sustainable but not always durable	Self-help
ASCrA	Member shares and borrowings	Member-owned and governed	Secondary or tertiary national credit union association	5-100	profitable	Self-help
NGOs	Donors, retained earnings, commercial borrowings and some savings mobilization	Socially responsible professionals	Limited government oversight	100 – 10,000	occasionally	Reduce poverty and vulnerability through an increasingly commercial means
Microfinance Bank	Private equity, occasional donor support	Private owners	Banking officials	Several thousand - tens of millions	Sustainable	Profitable niche market

LEAP and Liberty Finance are the two largest MFIs operating in Liberia since the civil war in addition to the hundreds of ROSCAs and ASCrAs. The two MFIs have a client base with a combined total of 27, 596 (Central Bank of Liberia [CBL], 2009) made of returning internally displaced people and refugees, ex-combatants and other war affected population. LEAP and Liberty Finance operate in Bong, Margibi, Montserrado and Nimba counties, while LEAP operate exclusively in Bomi and Lofa in addition to the four other counties (CBL, 2009). The two organizations offer similar loan products to their clients, although under different terms.

#### 4.2.1 Leap

LEAP is a micro-finance institution that serves all entering clients, and graduates as their businesses mature. Loan sizes range from \$50 to \$500, with maturities of one to four months and a flat interest rate of 5% (Tucker, 2004). LEAP has more than 10,000 members (L, 2009), more than 85% of whom are females engaged mostly in petty trade. New members have to attend weekly meetings for three months during which they are requested to accumulate savings that are deposited in a special account. After three months, the members are entitled to a loan of which the maximum amount is three times their savings. The savings are held as a security on the loan. Repayments vary based on the kind of business being undertaken by the clients (Tucker, 2004).

From December 2005 – December 2008, LEAP recorded significant gains in its operations: its client base increased by 300% from 2,583 in 2005, while its net loan portfolio increased by 400% from 50,734 in December 2005. Average loan size also increased significantly from \$85 in 2005. As an average of GDP per capita increased by 16 percentage points from 65% in 2005 to 81% in 2008 (World Hope, 2008).

#### 4.2.2 Li

Li is a group of micro-finance institutions that began operations in Liberia in 2005. It offers loans to micro entrepreneurs who want to start or expand their enterprise in the trade services, and small-scale agriculture (ARC International, 2005 p. 6). The use of working capital or business investment loans is more for small-scale livestock production than actual crop production. At present, Li has more than 8,000 clients (CBL, 2009), 75% of whom are women.

Clients organized themselves in solidarity groups of 7 – 10 members, with no immediate family members in the same group. Each group chooses a leader, whose responsibility would be to collect the bi-weekly repayment of the loan from each member and deposit it at a branch office of Liberty Finance. Loan size to each group ranges from \$70 – \$500 and it is awarded for 4 – 6 months with bi-weekly repayments. In addition to group guarantee, each group has a collateral requirement equal to 10% of the loan size, deposited as contributions during repayment (Liberty Finance, 2005). An initial flat interest rate of 4% monthly (65% annual effective interest rate) is charged on the first loan. Members are also required to contribute 1% of the original amount of the loan up front to a Risk Management Fund before receiving the loan. This fund provides a form of insurance on the loan in the case of the death of a client (Liberty Finance, 2005).

Once formed, the solidarity group completes a loan application with the assistance of a credit agent and undergoes a process of screening and basic training in business management offered by Liberty Finance to qualify for the loan. Group members sign a group promissory note and receipts for the loan amount received. Members that complete their repayments are eligible for new loans. These loans are progressively larger, reaching a maximum of \$500 for later cycles. Groups renewing their loans complete a renewal application which is reviewed by the credit committee along with the credit agents' report about the business performance and the repayment history of the group.

From December 2005 – December 2006, Liberty Finance made significant gains in its operations: its client base and gross loan portfolio trended upwards by 54% from 1,765 and 120% from \$67, 619 in December 2005 respectively. Profit margin for the same period witnessed a significant improvement from -737.44% to -155.06%

## **5.0 Implications and Challenges for Microfinance**

### **5.1 Implications**

#### ***Client***

Microfinance is relatively new to Liberia. However, the formality and the credit focus of microfinance institutions in the country seems to be contributing significantly to the expansion of credit opportunities for micro entrepreneurs, a redefinition of the financial sector of Liberia. Microfinance has provided cash flow to Liberia's poor, enhancing their social capital and access to financial capital.

The two MFIs being considered in this study (LEAP and Liberty Finance) have a combined total of 27, 596 clients in six of Liberia's counties (CBL, 2009). Of these six counties (Montserrado, Bomi, Bong, Nimba, Lofa, and Margibi), Montserrado, Nimba and Bong are home to 56 percent of Liberia's population (Government of Liberia, 2008). Despite their high population densities, these counties together account for a significant proportion of the country's population that is returning home from either refugee camps or IDP camps. They also account for a significant number of the combatants that participated in the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) program in Liberia. Clients benefitting from the microfinance services provided by LEAP and Liberty Finance include former combatants and refugees and IDPS who have returned home.

It remains unclear however how well these services are reaching the poor, especially in areas beyond urban centers. Because of this, one cannot effectively argue that the social goals of microfinance are being achieved in rural Liberia.

#### ***Product Appropriateness***

Liberty Finance and LEAP offered similar loan products, though on different terms and conditions. The effective annual interest rates on the loans offered by the MFIs seem relatively high when considered in the context of Liberia's poverty incidence. On

the other hand, they could be justified on sustainability grounds from the context of the MFIs. Nonetheless, the two MFIs are recording high repayment rates with increasing loan portfolio and client bases. It is yet unclear whether this growth in portfolio and client sizes are due to an increase in the loan size of returning clients, which indicates their improving credit worthiness, or an increase in the number of new clients, who are being recruited to replace drop-outs or graduates. The repayment rates also give no indication of client retention or the degree of spread across a geographic region. There is also the question of whether clients are repaying their loans based on returns from their microfinance loan investments or are repaying just to ensure that they maintain their credit worthiness with the MFIs. On the other hand, the improvement in the profit margin indicates that sustainability is possible for the organizations.

### *Benefits*

Microfinance is increasing the access of a large segment of Liberia's population to financial capital. Financial capital is fundamental to households' ability to make a living and invest in themselves and their communities. Financial capital is also critical to enabling communities leverage local resources and build equity. This can be gleaned from the growth trend of the client base of the microfinance institutions in the country.

At the micro level, microfinance has assured income and consumption smoothing. At the macro level, microfinance is expanding the financial frontier, laying the foundation for the incorporation of informal financial intermediation into the financial sector of Liberia. Microfinance has helped to challenge perceptions about the bankability of the informal sector. Private commercial banks have begun developing loan products that target the informal sector, which is occupied largely by the poor. The Central Bank of Liberia is now developing mechanisms to improve access to financial services to those with low income. This has widened the possibilities for the country's population especially those at the lower rung of the economic ladder to gain increase access to financial services.



The clients of MFIs are achieving some level of economic independence, a major condition for post-conflict stability. Many MFI clients are using the dividends from their business on which they get microfinance loans to service their structural, life cycle and crisis needs (Momodu, 2007). With a poverty rate of more than 60 percent, it is however difficult to determine what proportion of these clients represent the ultra poor, which begs a further study. What remains clear however is that microfinance is helping to create opportunities for those in the informal sector, many of whom were victimized by the civil war. This has given this segment of the population often at the margins of society some stake in the governance of their communities. Through the solidarity groups, microfinance clients are able to build trust and social capital among themselves whether returnees or ex-combatants.

Microfinance is also helping to smooth the re-entry of the population returning from IDP or refugee camps. The number of former IDPs and refugees that are MFI clients are unknown, and even if known, from the available data they might be very small when compare to the total number of refugees who are returning home. When taken in the context of the extended family nature of the Liberian society, the multiplying benefits from microfinance might however be larger. What remains unanswered however is whether microfinance clients are moving in the direction of savers graduation or winners graduation.

The experience of LEAP and Liberty Finance has shown that prodding clients towards safe and liquid savings instruments is just as important as satisfying their needs for financial instruments. Savings instruments provide a valuable service of clients who might need savings most especially clients who want to build their borrowing capacity for future loans. Savings by clients has been on the rise. As this type of savings is not voluntary, it gives no indication of the clients' willingness or ability to save. Most of the clients might be saving to ensure access to continuous credit. These microfinance services are not free of challenges, however.

## 5.2 Challenges

Although data are scarce, the greatest challenge facing the Liberian microfinance industry is expanding access to the ultra poor. Majority of Liberia's poor live in rural areas (Government of Liberia, 2008). However, several constraints to expanding microfinance services in Liberia exist at the macro level or the operational environment. Constraints in the operational environment include the poor state of the country's infrastructure, the lack of a regulatory framework, the existence of covariant risk, the lack of impact assessment and a possibility of debt recycling.

### *Infrastructure*

Nearly all roads and bridges in Liberia got destroyed during the civil war. The country's road network totals 6,162 miles of which only 7.4% (456 miles) is paved (Government of Liberia, 2008). Primary and secondary laterite roads connect the 15 counties. Most of these laterite roads are however impassable during half of the year when the rainy season is intense. This poor state of the road networks hinders free movement of goods and services between rural areas and urban centers. It also poses a hindrance to accessing microfinance organizations. In cases where clients have to deposit their repayments at local banks, this constraint acts as a tax. In rural areas, clients might be willing to borrow and save, but where there exists a severe difficulty in accessing the agencies that provide these services, then they have a disincentive to borrow or save.

### *Lack of a regulatory framework*

There is no regulatory framework to govern the operations of microfinance organizations in Liberia. With the growing interest in the provision of microfinance services, this threatens the safety of clients' savings with deposit collecting microfinance organizations.

### *Covariant risk*

Most of the microfinance clients possess similar profiles. They are all engaged in petty trading or businesses that are agriculture

focused and have a greater dependence on seasonal cash flow. Moreover, these clients are all small-scale livestock producers engaging in value-added activities. This clientele allows no diversification of the loan stream and poses a covariant risk, which challenges the effectiveness of the organization during low yield seasons.

### ***Impact Assessment: Employment or Entrepreneurs***

Like in other areas, measuring the impact of microfinance remains a challenge to both researchers and practitioners. The loan portfolios of the organizations are increasing along with their client base. This rise in the number of clients and clients' longevity with the organizations are exciting but gives no indication of whether these clients are becoming self-employed or becoming entrepreneurs as a result of microfinance or are moving in the direction of "winner" graduation or "saver" graduation.

### ***Debt Recycling***

Microfinance organizations have to deal with the danger of their clients becoming over-indebted. Liberia does not have a credit bureau, which would allow creditors to report to a central agency the amount they loan to each of their clients and their repayment history. Without a credit bureau, microfinance institutions cannot be sure whether their clients are not borrowing from other sources to repay their loans. This leaves microfinance organizations vulnerable to client over-indebtedness.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

The microfinance industry in Liberia is on a growth trajectory. There is evidence of growth in microfinance services along with rapidly growing client base in Liberia's densely populated counties. These counties also account for a significant proportion of the country's former combatants and the population that are returning home from refugee and IDP camps. The client base of the MFIs includes these strata. Through the solidarity groups, microfinance is facilitating the building of trust and social capital among their clients

whether returnee or ex-combatant. With a poverty rate of more than 60%, the client size of the MFIs when taken as a proportion of the country's poor is very small, however. The proportion of the client base that represents the ultra poor is difficult to determine and begs further study. It is also difficult to gauge the depth of MFI coverage in terms of their spread across the geographic space (urban centers versus rural areas) due to data limitation. Nevertheless, the RoSCAs, the ASCrAs, and the daily savings club remain viable options for those outside the reach of MFIs.

The two MFIs are offering similar solidarity group loan products. The effective annual interest rate on the loans seems to very high for Liberia, a country with a high incidence of poverty and struggling to rebuild after years of war. Nonetheless, the two MFIs are recording high repayment rates with increasing loan portfolio and profit margins. Yet it is unclear whether this growth in portfolio size is due to an increase in the loan size of returning clients, which indicates improvement in their credit worthiness, or an increase in the number of new clients, who are being recruited to replace drop-outs or graduates. This also gives no indication of client retention or the degree of spread across a geographic region. There is also the question of whether clients are repaying their loans based on the returns from the investments of their microfinance loans or are repaying just to ensure that they do not lose their credit worthiness with the MFIs. With positive growth in their profit margins, the two MFIs have a possibility for sustainability.

Microfinance has provided income and consumption smoothing and some degree of economic independence for their client households. This has facilitated the business growth of microfinance clients. The rapid expansion of microfinance activities has challenged earlier perceptions about the bankability of the Liberian informal sector. Private commercial banks have begun developing loan products that target the poor, while the Central Bank of Liberia develops mechanisms to expand access to Liberia's financial sector for the poor. Several questions however remain unanswered about the outreach and the product appropriateness of the MFIs. Unless

these questions are answered, one cannot argue effectively that the MFIs are fulfilling their social mission or about whether MFI clients in Liberia are moving in the direction of savers graduation or winners graduation.

On the other hand, microfinance organizations in Liberia are faced with several challenges in their operations. These include the poor state of the physical infrastructure, especially roads; the possibility of debt recycling; covariant risk and the lack of a regulatory framework to govern microfinance activities and enable a sustainable growth of the industry.

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# Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of Liberia's Civil Wars

George Klay Kieh, Jr.\*

## Introduction

On December 24, 1989, Liberia joined the growing list of African states that had been afflicted by the “civil war virus.” After about eight years of mayhem and its associated death, injury and destruction, the first civil war ended in 1996, after the seemingly unending cycle of peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace enforcement. However, the failure of the flawed post-conflict peacebuilding project triggered the eruption of the second civil war in 1999. Like the first war, the second one visited death, injury and destruction upon the country, as well as the internal displacement and refugee conundrums.

Why did the two civil wars occur? The ethnic paradigm, the theoretical suzerain in the scholarly literature, lays the responsibility for the occurrence of the two civil wars at the doorsteps of the “ethnic antagonisms” between the “Americo-Liberians,” on the one hand, and the indigenes on the other; and the Krahn ethnic group versus the Gio and Mano ethnic groups. In short, the principal argument of the ethnic model is that the two civil wars were caused by the state privileging the dominant Americo-Liberian stock and marginalizing the sixteen indigenous ethnic groups in the case of the first war; and the state giving preferential treatment to the Krahn ethnic group and marginalizing the other ethnic groups in the case of the second civil war.

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\*Professor of Political Science at the University of West Georgia, and Senior Research Fellow in Ethnic and Federal Studies at The University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's provides the following excellent summation of the ubiquity the ethnic model has acquired in the provision of explanation for the causes of civil wars on the African Continent:

The study of African conflicts has for too long been seen in terms of tribes. Whatever happens in Kenya, Uganda, Malawi is because of Tribe A versus Tribe B. Whatever erupts in the [DRC], Nigeria, Liberia, Zambia is because of traditional enmity between Tribe D and Tribe C. A variation of the same stark interpretation is Muslim versus Christians...where a people do not easily fall into tribes.<sup>1</sup>

Against this background, the central contention of this article is that the ethnic paradigm does not adequately explain the root causes of Liberia's civil wars. Alternatively, the study proffers a political economy approach framed by the peripheral capitalist state theory for explaining the underlying causes of the two civil wars that wreck havoc on the Liberian body politic. In order to explicate the thesis, the article is divided into three major parts. It begins with the examination of the postulates of the ethnic paradigm, including a critique, and the proffering of an alternative explanatory framework. Second, within the context of the peripheral capitalist state theory, the study probes the causes of the country's two civil wars. Next, the article seeks to weave together the linkages between the crises of underdevelopment and the civil wars.

## **THEORETICAL ISSUES**

### **The Ethnic Model**

As has been argued, the ethnic paradigm is the dominant theoretical framework that is used in the scholarly literature to explain the causes of civil wars. In this vein, this section of the article is designed to review some of the studies on civil wars that have used this paradigm as their theoretical compass. These studies are divided into two categories: The general cases and the Liberian ones.

### *The general literature*

Collier (2009) posits that arbitrary countries.<sup>2</sup> The resulting sense of national identity in countries identified with the state made inter-ethnic cooperation difficult in the backdrop of the competition over state resources. Thus, ethnic groups became locked in various conflicts, some of which led to civil wars.

For Rotberg (2003), ethnicity occasions civil conflict and war in three major ways. First, inter-ethnic relations are modulated by what he calls the “fear of the other.”<sup>3</sup> That is, the various ethnic groups harbor mutual suspicions and mistrust. Second and related, a security dilemma ensues characterized by each ethnic group’s apprehension about the intentions of the others. Third, the state fuels ethnically-based hostilities by privileging one or more ethnic groups, while marginalizing the others.

### *The literature on Liberia*

Dolo’s (2007) study extensively applies the contours of the ethnic model to the two civil wars. His framing thesis is that “ethnic bigotry is rooted in Liberia’s inglorious history.”<sup>4</sup> It has found expression in what he refers to as “ethnocentric nationalism—the use of state resources to enact the prejudices of the ethnic groups in power against those with less power.”<sup>5</sup> Against this background, the first civil war was caused by two major sets of ethnic animosities. At the broader national level, the Americo-Liberians used the power of the state as an instrument for marginalizing and oppressing the indigenous population. In the context of inter-ethnic relations, the conflict between the Gio/Mano ethnic groups and the Krahn and Mandingo ones was shaped by these groups’ seeming belief in ethnic bigotry, a pathology that has its antecedents in the era of Americo-Liberian hegemony.

Treading on the premises laid by Dolo (2007), Ohanwe (2009) posits that the origin of the first Liberian civil war can be traced to

“long smoldering grievances of indigenous Liberians, a mental war that was generated by an oppressive political framework” operated by the Americo-Liberians.<sup>6</sup> As for the second war, he argues that the dismal performance of the Taylor regime caused the country to splinter into various ethnic fiefdoms. The resultant inter-ethnic relations became polarized. Consequently, the country degenerated into another round of warfare.

Pham (2004) concurs with Dolo and Ohanwe. However, he adds two dimensions to the ethnic animosities that occasioned the first Liberian civil war. First, he includes those who were “assimilated to [the Americo-Liberians]” as another constituency in the settler bloc. While these “*assimilados*” did not share an ethno-cultural background with the Americo-Liberians, the linkages were based on the former’s acceptance of the values, norms, mores and “worldview” of the latter. Second, he posits that the Doe regime privileged the Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups. In the case of the Krahns, they were favored because of shared ethnicity with Doe. As for the Mandingos, they were favored by the Doe regime because they served as the ally of the Krahns, in the latter’s conflict with the other ethnic groups.

Drawing from the various studies, the major assumptions of the ethnic paradigm can be summarized thus: First, ethno-communal groups are the primary actors in a state. In the specific case of Liberia, the Americo-Liberian stock, on the one hand, and 16 indigenous ethnic groups, on the other, were the central players during the period 1847-1980; and the Krahn, Mandingo and Gio and Mano indigenous ethnic groups were the key actors from 1980-1989. During the latter period, the ethnic paradigm posits that the state privileged the Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups, on the one hand, but marginalized the Gio and Mano ones, on the other.

Second, each ethnic stock or group has its own distinctive agenda that covers a host of issues, including cultural, economic, political, religious and social issues. In the Liberian case, the Americo-Liberians’ agenda was diametrically opposed to the corporate one of the indigenes. Similarly, Krahn together with

Mandingo interests were at variance with those of the Gios and the Manos.

Third, because the Americo-Liberians and the Krahns controlled state power from 1847-1980 and 1980-1989 respectively, the state privileged them as “hegemonic ethnic stock and group,” while marginalizing the indigenes and the Gios and Manos. This meant that the “hegemonic ethnic stock/group” used the levers of state power to receive disproportionate shares of the national resources.

Fourth, over time, the antagonisms generated by the pursuance of the incompatible agendas of the “hegemonic ethnic stock and group” and the subordinate one(s) lead to the development of conflict. In turn, the conflict evolves through various phases, ultimately culminating in civil war, the violent stage. In the case of Liberia, the first and second civil wars were outcomes of the antagonisms between the Americo-Liberians and the indigenes, and the Krahns-Mandingos and the Gios-Manos.

### **The Critique of the Ethnic Paradigm**

The ethnic paradigm suffers from several weaknesses. The core one is that it fails to situate ethno-communal conflicts within the broader crucible of the state, including the domestic political economy. Accordingly, by stressing the centrality of ethnic groups, the theory is focusing on the proverbial “trees” while neglecting the “forest.” This is because ethnic and other conflicts take place within the context of the state as the arena of struggle.

The related point is that the paradigm fails to take cognizance of the overarching world capitalist system and its deleterious impact on peripheral states. In the case of Liberia, as a peripheral state, the Liberian political economy was an appendage of the global capitalist system. In this vein, the dynamics of the global political economy generated adverse consequences for Liberia, and contributed to the sowing, nurturing and germination of the seeds of conflict.

Another pitfall is that the theory treats ethnic groups as monoliths.

In the Liberian case, the repository of evidence shows that there were differences within the Americo-Liberian stock on the basis of skin pigmentation and ancestral origins, as well as other issues. In a similar vein, the members of the Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups had divergent interests.

### **The Alternative Framework: The Peripheral Capitalist State Theory**

Based on the aforementioned shortcomings of the ethnic paradigm, this article uses the peripheral capitalist state theory as its theoretical framework for explaining the causes of Liberia's two civil wars. The theory is based on several major arguments. The framing one is that the peripheral capitalist state is the creation of, and appendage of the world capitalist system. Hence, the peripheral formation is part of the broader multiplex of productive relations that are created, conditioned and shaped by the world system. In this context, the peripheral state is a reflection of the interests of the dominant classes in the metropolis.<sup>7</sup>

Another major pillar of the peripheral formation is that it has a capitalist materialist base. And this is reflected in the centrality of private ownership of the major means of production, the suzerainty of the "market," and the indispensability of the profit motive.<sup>8</sup> Importantly, the materialist base directs conditions and shapes the forces and dynamics that are germane to the reproduction of capitalism.<sup>9</sup>

Based on the imperatives of capitalism, the peripheral formation develops a portrait that embodies its nature, character, mission and political economy. In terms of the nature, it reflects the realities of the metropolis. Since these realities are driven by the penchant for domination and exploitation, the peripheral state, in response, develops a multidimensional character that has been described variously as "absolutist," "criminalized," "exclusionary," "exploitative," "negligent," and "prebendal." However, as Pita Ogaba Agbese aptly observes, "these tendencies are present all the time, even though historical conjunctions such as the end of the cold war,

the interplay of inter and in the incumbent ruler, may give some of these tendencies the mission of the peripheral form for the private accumulation classes. In terms of the dynamics of the structures and dynam

and the character of a particular time to tell, the primary misopituous conditions embers of the ruling my, it is a reflection e. For example, the

major actors are classes. The ruling class consists of the metropolitan-based owner of multinational corporation and other businesses operating in the periphery, local state managers, and local private entrepreneurs. The subordinate classes are the petit bourgeois one (occupied by those with skills), the working class, the peasantry, and the *hoi polli* (the unemployed and veranda boys and girls). As for the peripheral formation, it performs several functions that are designed to create an enabling environment for the private accumulation of capital by the members of the ruling class. Among the functions is the reproduction of an array of social relations—ethnic, economic and political.<sup>11</sup> As Magdalene David notes, “It is at this level that the state can be portrayed as the institutionalized form of the class struggle, as well as a unit of political reproduction and social control.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the various factions and fractions of the local wing of the ruling class are often locked in epic battles for the control of the state’s machinery at particular junctures. In the African context, as Aaron Gana argues,

A situation has emerged throughout the length and breadth of the African Continent in which the ruling class is far less passive about who governs and becomes engaged in bizarre factional struggles for hegemony through the control of the formal access to state power. This battle is all the more grim because government and state power have tended to become the means of accumulation for the African bourgeoisies.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, as Claude Ake asserts, "In Africa, those in power do all they can to perpetuate their hold on it; and those out of office do all they can to get it."<sup>14</sup>

In turn, the nature and dynamics of the peripheral formation produces contradictions, and ultimately crises and conflicts. As Immanuel Wallerstein posits, "The primary contradiction is between the interests organized and located in the core countries and their local allies on the one hand, and the majority of the population on the other." Since the ruling class tends to be unresponsive to the needs of the subalterns, multifaceted crises—cultural, economic, environmental, political, security and social—developed and are not attended to. Over time, these crises lead to conflicts.<sup>15</sup>

## **THE ROOT CAUSES OF THE CIVIL WARS**

### **The Historical Development of the Liberian State: A Background**

The Liberian state has evolved in two major phases: settler (1847-1926), and peripheral capitalist or neo-colonial (1926-present). The settler phase had its origins in the "repatriation project." In the early 1800s, as the slave-based political economy began to disintegrate in the United States, the American ruling class and its government were confronted with the challenge of dealing with a large pool of freed African Americans. As Robert Smith observes, "The United States Government believed that the 'subsequent' emancipation and education of Blacks coupled with their fast birth rate would in due course enable them to dominate the U.S."<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the American government made the determination that the "solution" to the emergent racial problem was to repatriate the freed African Americans to Africa, their ancestral land. In this vein, the American Colonization Society (ACS), whose membership included some of the prominent members of the American ruling class such as U.S. Supreme Court Justice Bushrod Washington, was organized in 1816, as the vehicle for implementing the "repatriation project."<sup>17</sup>



With the financial and military support of the United States government, the ACS began the "repatriation project" in 1820.<sup>18</sup> When the first group of repatriated African Americans or "Americio-Liberians" or "settlers" arrived in the Grain Coast (now Liberia) in 1822, they met various indigenous ethnic groups occupying the area. These ethnic groups had polities replete with the ensemble of cultural, economic, political and social systems. However, trapped in the "psychology of slavery" and its associated vagaries of hubris and oppression, the repatriated African Americans perceived themselves as being "civilized," and therefore superior to their indigenous kin. As George Brown notes, "...the American-Liberians [the settlers] considered themselves a 'superior people;' thus, there was no sense of feeling of oneness with the Africans [the indigenes]." <sup>19</sup> Thus, as Mobolade Omonijo points out,

Right from the beginning therefore, the seeds of discontent were sown. The newly freed Negro slaves rather than see themselves as Africans, who were lucky to have been brought back to their roots, merely transferred the oppression they suffered in the United States of America to the Native population; they became the new lords of the settlement.<sup>20</sup>

The resultant polarization over issues such as culture, religion, and political economy, including land between the indigenes, on the one hand, and the settlers, on the other, became the enduring conflict of the settler phase of the state-building project. And in some cases, the conflict degenerated into warfare between the settlers and various indigenous ethnic groups.

Characteristically, a local political economy developed as the base of the emergent settler state. Rooted in caste cum class relations of production, an individual's status was determined by skin pigmentation and ancestral origins and relationship to the state.<sup>21</sup> As Carl Burrowes argues, "Social groups were defined by two theoretically distinct but in reality overlapping characteristics. Very often the obvious but static caste distinction on the basis of skin

color and ancestral origin coincided with class differences defined by the relationship of each group to the means of production and the state.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, as Neil Davidson asserts, “Oppression based on the grounds of skin color, gender, religious belief and social orientation can be more or less severe depending on where the victims are placed within the class structure.”<sup>23</sup> In this vein, the caste cum class structure consisted of three tiers. Initially, the upper tier was occupied by the colonial agent and other functionaries of the ACS, who governed the colony from 1822-1839.<sup>24</sup> The class base of this group was essentially petit bourgeois: many were lawyers and doctors.<sup>25</sup> The middle segment comprised the mulattos or the light-skinned settlers.<sup>26</sup> Class-wise, they were compradorial: with their relatively good educational background, they formed an alliance with the ACS. In turn, they were rewarded with junior level positions in the colonial bureaucracy.<sup>27</sup> The lowest rung had two sections.<sup>28</sup> The upper one was occupied by the dark-skinned settlers.<sup>29</sup> In class terms, they were self-employed farmers and artisans.<sup>30</sup> The bottom level comprised the Congos—those who were recaptured while en route to slavery—and those indigenes, who were under the jurisdiction of the colony.<sup>31</sup> The members of this tier were principally free laborers (the Congos) and indentured servants (the indigenes).<sup>32</sup>

When Liberia became an independent state in 1847, the pedigree of the settler state was institutionalized. For example, the indigenes were excluded from the state-making process, including the constitutional convention. Under the incipient constitutional order, citizenship was restricted to the settlers and their descendants.<sup>33</sup> However, the indigenes were required to pay taxes such as the obnoxious hut tax.<sup>34</sup> The substance of the domestic political economy remained intact, with the exception of the fact that the light-skinned settlers became the dominant class, in view of their control of the economic and political levers of the state.

Beginning in 1860, the settler state commenced the “imperial project” of territorial expansion into the hinterland, the domain of the various indigenous ethnic groups. The project was undergirded

by the desire of the settler state to reinforce its institutional and economic structures by replacing society and politics with those apparent in the laws of the privileging of the settler for decades of conflicts, including ethnic groups, the settler state, through the use of military force, was able to establish its suzerainty over the territorial confines of Liberia. The post-expansion settler state was anchored on a political economy that consisted of an embryonic peripheral capitalist mode of production in which the relations of production were based on ancestral origins and the individual's relationship to the state. In other words, there was continual intersection between one's ethnocultural background and his or her class.

In 1926, the state-building project entered its neo-colonial or peripheral capitalist phase. The change was occasioned by Firestone's entry into the domestic political economy, the resultant opening of the Liberian economy to foreign investment, and the subsequent finalization of the country's incorporation into the world capitalist system. However, the settler dynamic had not run its course. Hence, it co-existed with the capitalist ethos. In other words, in spite of the inception of the peripheral capitalist phase of the state-building project and its class relations that emphasized the individual's relationship to the means of production, ancestral origins remained staples of the domestic political economy. For example, the various national symbols—the emblem, the motto and the flag—continued to exclusively reflect the cultural-historical experiences of the settlers. In short, the emergent peripheral capitalist state sought to straddle the imperatives of the capitalist mode of production, as well as the enduring legacy of settler privileging.

Notwithstanding, every regime (from Charles D.B. King to Charles Taylor) used state power for three major purposes. First, as a peripheral capitalist construct, the Liberian state played its role as a plantation for the production of raw materials to help feed the industrial-manufacturing machines of the core states like the United

States. Second, the peripheral capitalist Liberian state created propitious conditions to enable the members of the external wing of the Liberian ruling class—the owners of Firestone, other multinational corporations and metropolitan-based businesses—to privately accumulate wealth. Third, the Liberian state, against the backdrop of its lack of autonomy—relative or otherwise—served as the handmaid of the faction or fraction of the local wing of the ruling class that controlled state power on behalf of the metropolitan-based bourgeoisies at various junctures. And this enabled the compradors to use the machinery of the state to privately accumulate wealth through sundry corrupt means.

### **The Portrait of the Liberian State**

The state-building project in Liberia produced a specific portrait of a settler and later a peripheral capitalist or neo-colonial state. The nature of the state reflected, and continues to reflect external objective conditions and the cultural-historical experiences of the Americo-Liberian stock. These experiences were rooted and shaped by their enslavement in the United States.

The character of the Liberian state is multidimensional—criminalized, exploitative, exclusionary, negligent, prebendal, rentier and repressive. However, as Pita Ogaba Agbese observes, “These tendencies are present all of the time, even though historical conjunctions such as the Cold War, the interplay of inter-and intra class struggles and the character of the incumbent ruler [gave] ascendancy at a particular time to some of these tendencies than others.”<sup>36</sup> For example, the repressive proclivity of the state’s character became ascendant when workers and students posed challenges through demonstrations and strike actions.

The mission of the Liberian state is twofold. First, it has, and continues to create propitious conditions that would enable the owners of metropolitan-based multinational corporations and businesses such as Firestone and Mitel Steel to accumulate profits through predatory investment practices. Second, it establishes a conducive environment for the members of the faction or fraction

of the local wing of the ruling class that control state power at a particular historical junctio  
s to privately accu-  
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The domestic politic  
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hat is, under the “in-  
minant forces in the  
world capitalist system, Liberia serves as an enclave for the pro-  
duction and export of raw materials such as rubber and iron ore that  
are used to promote socio-economic development in the metropolis.  
As well, the economy is disarticulated, because there are no link-  
ages between and among the various sectors of the economy. In  
terms of the relations of production, they revolved around five  
major class clusters: ruling, petit bourgeois, working, peasant and  
lumpen. The ruling class has two wings. The external one is occu-  
pied by the owners of Firestone and other foreign-owned and based  
multinational corporations and businesses that control the political  
economy. The local wing comprises state managers and local en-  
trepreneurs. The petit bourgeois class is composed of the intellec-  
tuals, and other skilled individuals. As for the working class, its  
membership consists of those who produce the country’s wealth by  
working on the rubber plantations and the mines. The peasantry  
comprises the farmers, who earned their living by tilling the soil.  
As for the lumpen class, it has two sectors: One segment comprises  
the unemployed, and the other the *hoi polli*, mainly disaffected  
youth, who are alienated from the society. As for the state, it serves  
both the overall interests of the ruling class, as well as the particu-  
laristic agendas of the faction or fraction of the local wing of the  
ruling class that control the state machinery at a particular interval.  
Since the control of the state and political power equals the oppor-  
tunity to engage in the predatory accumulation of wealth, the state  
has become akin to a “buffet service in which the members of the  
faction or fraction of the local wing of the ruling class that is in  
power and their relations eat all they can eat for free.”<sup>37</sup>

### **The World Capitalist System**

The nature and dynamics of the world capitalist system contributed to the civil conflict that generated Liberia's civil wars in two major ways: the role of systemic factors, and American neo-colonialism. In terms of the systemic factors, some of the major ones will be examined. To borrow from Cheryl Payer, "the debt trap"<sup>38</sup> in which Liberia was engulfed forced the country to spend a substantial portion of its foreign exchange earnings to service odious debts. For example, in 1985, Liberia spent \$38 million on servicing its external debt, substantial portions of which were owed to the core-controlled International Monetary Fund (IMF).<sup>39</sup> To make matters worse, the IMF imposed two structural adjustment programs" (SAPs) on the country in 1980 and 1984. The conditionalities under the SAPs led to the decline of wages in the public sector and the decimation of the limited "social safety net" in areas like education and health care.

In the area of foreign investment, various multinational corporations and foreign businesses exploited the labor of the country's workers and exploited the country's natural resources such as rubber and iron ore. Consequently, these metropolitan-based businesses siphoned off huge profits that were repatriated to the metropolis. For example, from 1963-1976, LAMCO accrued profits of over \$485 million, from its initial investment of about \$250 million.<sup>40</sup>

As for trade, Liberia was disadvantaged under the "international division of labor" and the "system of unequal exchange." In the case of the former, Liberia was transformed into plantation for producing raw materials to meet the development imperatives of the core states, while neglecting its own. In the latter case, Liberia was paid less for its raw materials, but was required to pay more for the manufactured goods from the core. Overall, because of the monocrop foundation of its economy, which was imposed by the world capitalist system, Liberia was, and remains vulnerable to the vicissitudes in the prices of its raw materials, notably rubber and iron ore.

To borrow from Kwame Nkrumah "American neo-colonialism in Liberia was the worst cause it meant the exploitation of Liberians without responsibility, and the redress. In short, America created what Leong Yaw generally refers to as a system of dependency and exploitation."<sup>42</sup> This was not ways. In the area of private investment, the American government used its neocolonial control over the Liberian state and its various governments to ensure that American businesses were given lucrative investment terms. For example, under the original Firestone concessional agreement, the company paid six cents per acre to lease one million acres for 99 years.<sup>43</sup> In terms, these American businesses exploited the labor of Liberian workers, exploited the country's natural resources, siphoned off huge profits back to the United States, and destroyed the environment.

Trade relations between the two countries were conducted under the world capitalist system dictated "international division of labor" and the "system of unequal exchange." Hence, the United States accrued much greater benefits in terms of the type and cheap prices of Liberian goods which it received, and the huge amounts of money it made from the sale of its manufactured goods to Liberia.

In the military-strategic realm, Liberia hosted one of the U.S.'s Omega navigational Station, one of five such American installations around the world.<sup>44</sup> The towers were used for an assortment of intelligence functions. As well, Liberia was a site for one of the transmitters of the Voice of America (VOA). From the site, the United States was able to broadcast its propaganda around the world.<sup>45</sup> Also, Liberia placed its airport and seaports at the disposal of the United States for the latter's military operations.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Liberia was a key operational site for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>47</sup>

As well, the United States supported successive authoritarian regimes in Liberia. Particularly, the United States provided the Doe

regime, one of the most repressive governments in Liberia's history, with over \$500 million in foreign aid. When repression wearied Liberians sought to vote the Doe regime out of office during the 1985 national election, the United States acquiesced in Doe's commission of various fraudulent acts, including the "declaration of victory." In expressing the U.S. government for Doe, the then Assistant Secretary of State Chester Crocker argued, "The elections portended well for the development of democracy in Liberia, because of Doe's claim that he won only a narrow 51 percent election victory—virtually unheard of in the rest of Africa where incumbent rulers normally claimed victories of 95 to 100 percent."<sup>48</sup>

### **The Resultant Crises of Underdevelopment**

The confluence and interplay of the domestic and external factors impregnated the peripheral capitalist state with various contradictions and crises. Culturally, the local ruling class and its bureaucratic wing that managed the state failed to develop a sense of nationalism, patriotism and inclusion. In the specific case of the settler state, its central tenets of domination, exclusion and privileging created both ethno-cultural cum class divides. In the case of the former, the settlers were pitted against the indigenes. In the latter case, there was a schism between the light-skinned and dark-skinned settlers, and between the subalterns, the Congos and the indigenes, who were resident in the settler state, on the one hand, and the light-skinned settlers, and the dark-skinned. During the peripheral capitalist phase, the legacy of the polarization between the descendants of the settlers and the indigenes continued. In addition, the Doe regime generated antagonisms between the Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups, on the one hand, and the Gio and Mano ethnic groups, on the other.

Economically, there were various pathologies. In the area of employment, a significant number of Liberians of working age could not find jobs. For example, in 1988, the unemployment rate stood at 36.2%.<sup>49</sup> By 1999, the figure burgeoned to 85%.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, there were gross inequities in terms of the distribution of in-



come and wealth. In the case of the former, in the 1985, for example, the subaltern classes, which accounted for about 75% of the national population accounted for a paltry 20.2% of the national income.<sup>51</sup> By the close of the 1980s, Liberia's Gini Coefficient, the measure of the distribution of the national income stood at a high 0.53.<sup>52</sup> This meant that the distribution of income was highly skewed in the favor of the members of the ruling class. As for the distribution of wealth, by 1980, the members of the ruling class, who comprised about 4% of the national population, owned about 60% of the national wealth.<sup>53</sup> These gross inequities and inequalities contributed to mass abject poverty. By 1999, the country's poverty rate was about 80%.<sup>54</sup> Amid the state of mass deprivation and abject poverty, the members of the local wing of the ruling class criminalized the state, by engaging in sundry acts of unbridled corruption, including the conversion of public funds into the sources of personal wealth.

Politically, within the crucible of a "culture of impunity," the venalities of the authoritarian state found expression in various areas. In terms of political human rights, each regime violated the basic freedoms that were enshrined in the constitution.<sup>55</sup> In the absence of the "rule of law," a weak and plaint judiciary proved incapable of meting out justice, amid the recurrent abuse of power by the "hegemonic presidency" and other state functionaries.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, there was no "code of conduct" for public officials. Thus, unconstrained, some public officials used their respective positions to engage in various unethical and illegal acts, ranging from the regular collection of "gifts" (bribes) from merchants, to the use of state property for personal business.

In the security sphere, the state posed the greatest threat to the physical well-being of its citizens. This was reflected in the state's recurrent use of violence as the vehicle for modulating state-society relations. For example, on April 14, 1979, state police and security personnel opened fire on citizens, who were protesting the government's plan to increase the price of rice, the country's staple food, as well as the overall horrendous performance of the Liberian

state.<sup>57</sup> Again, on August 22, 1984, armed soldiers invaded the campus of the University of Liberia, where they raped, injured and killed several persons, in response to a peaceful protest over the Doe regime's arrest of Amos Sawyer, then Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and George Kieh, then Lecturer of Political Science.<sup>58</sup> During the Taylor regime, on September 7, 1997, state security forces opened fire on about 7,000 unarmed workers at Firestone, who were protesting the deduction of 37.5% from their monthly salaries by the management, as the so-called "reimbursement" for the money that was stolen from the company's safe deposit box that was allegedly looted during the first Liberian civil war.<sup>59</sup> In the aftermath, several workers were wounded, two were killed, while several others remained missing.<sup>60</sup>

Socially, the members of the subaltern classes lived perilously. In the area of health care, by the end of the 1980s, only 35% of the population had access to health care.<sup>61</sup> This was made worse by the fact that about 1.1 million people or more than half of the national population did not have access to safe drinking water. The resultant effect was that thousands of Liberians became vulnerable to diseases, and some died from even curable ones. These horrendous conditions continued throughout the regime of Charles Taylor (1997-2003). The educational sector mirrored the health area. For example, there were the perennial problems of inadequate number of schools; the inadequacy of personnel, especially trained ones; the lack of adequate supplies, instructional materials and equipment. Thus, it was no surprise that the country's illiteracy rate stood at about 77% by the commencement of the first civil war.<sup>62</sup>

## **FROM THE CRISES OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT TO CIVIL CONFLICT AND WAR**

The crises of underdevelopment engendered by the authoritarian peripheral state occasioned the erosion of the legitimacy of the state, as a result of the loss of the support of the majority of the citizens, especially the subalterns, for whom the state had become irrelevant. In turn, this led to the development of an overarching

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Against this backdrop of Liberia (NPFL) took ad-  
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failed coup led by General Quiwonkpa in 1985, made several  
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However, when he assumed the presidency in 1997, after a landslide victory, Taylor, like Doe, failed to set into motion the critical process of democratically reconstituting the Liberian state. Specifically, the Taylor regime engaged in the same actions that led to the first civil war. Consequently, the mass support, which he enjoyed during the initial phase of his tenure, quickly evaporated. Accordingly, the underlying civil conflict, the source of the first war, was exacerbated. Amid this state of affairs, the Taylor regime was gripped by a crisis of legitimacy. Characteristically, the Liberians United for Democracy and Reconciliation (LURD) and later on the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) took advantage of the situation and launched an armed rebellion against the Taylor regime. The resultant military "tugs and pulls" escalated to a full-scaled civil war, the country's second.

## THE SECOND POST-CONFLICT PEACEBUILDING PROJECT

In October 2003, under the suzerainty of the United Nations, the United States and other powerful actors in the international system, Liberia embarked upon its second post-conflict peacebuilding project. The first phase of the project revolved around the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) of the combatants, who fought for the various warring factions—the “national military,” on the one hand, and LURD and MODEL, on the other.<sup>63</sup> Phase two focused on the holding of national elections for the presidency and the national legislature in October and November 2005 respectively.<sup>64</sup> Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected the new president, and subsequently assumed office in January 2006.

Since 2006, the other aspects of the peacebuilding project have been set into motion. Among them is security sector reform, involving the establishment of a new military and a new police force.<sup>65</sup> As well, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was one of the key elements of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended the second civil war in 2003, has issued its final report.<sup>66</sup> In its report, the TRC has accused President Sirleaf and several other government officials of the commission of war crimes during the country’s two civil wars.<sup>67</sup> Interestingly, President Sirleaf has failed to demonstrate the requisite political will in implementing the TRC’s key recommendation, which calls for the establishment of a “special court” to try those accused.<sup>68</sup>

Overall, the current liberal state reconstitution project that is in progress in Liberia suffers from two major clusters of problems. At the implementation level, the repository of evidence is beginning to show that the Sirleaf regime is not committed to the establishment of a liberal state with its associated institutions and processes such as “checks and balances,” and the depoliticization of the civil service. Two major cases are noteworthy. In 2008, based upon the request of President Sirleaf, and the subsequent lawsuit filed by the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) and the Liberty Party (LP), two opposition parties, the Supreme Court of Liberia ruled that the President of Liberia can appoint city mayors.<sup>69</sup> This means

that President Sirleaf has taken a major step to expand the ambit of the “hegemonic presidency” by granting the president the authority to appoint virtually every official in the executive and judicial branches of the government. Clearly, this does not demonstrate a commitment to political democracy, a major component of liberal state reconstitution. Another case revolves around President Sirleaf’s instructions to cabinet ministers to find jobs for the members of the ruling Unity Party (UP).<sup>70</sup> Again, this continues the tradition of politicizing the civil service, and undermining the critical norm of merit as the basis of recruitment. In short, the emerging trend is the development of a hybrid Liberian state that combines elements of authoritarianism and liberal democratization.

Yet, the other cluster of weaknesses relate to the nature and dynamics of the liberal peacebuilding project. Even if the Sirleaf regime were to implement all of the dimensions of the project to the fullest, liberal state reconstitution would not address the country’s underlying civil conflict for several reasons. First, liberal peacebuilding seeks to establish political and legal equality amid economic inequalities and inequities. This is because Liberia has recommitted to the peripheral capitalist path to development with its inherent undemocratic nature. In short, there is a continuing dialectical tension between the efforts to democratize the political space, on the one hand, while leaving the economic arena undemocratic, on the other. Second, the liberal state reconstitution project has not set into motion the process of transforming the perennial asymmetrical power relationships that constitute the bedrocks of the various sectors—cultural, economic, political and social. As well, little attention has been given to the critical issues of social justice and the imperative of ending the “culture of impunity.” Third, the project is formulaic in both design and implementation. That is, it is a “template” produced from the experiences of other post-conflict societies. Thus, it is devoid of the objective historical and contemporary conditions in Liberia.

## CONCLUSION

In contradistinction to the ethnic paradigm that enjoys hegemony in the scholarly literature on civil wars, the article argues that Liberia's two civil wars were consequences of the crises of underdevelopment engendered by the country's authoritarian peripheral capitalist state. Specifically, the Liberian state was impregnated with these crises by the dynamics of the world capitalist system and the country's domestic political economy. In the case of the world capitalist system, which shaped and conditioned the Liberian state, the travails of its structure, trading system, predatory investment, and cycle of odious debts and the resulting "debt trap" asphyxiated the Liberian state and its various regimes, thereby making it difficult to formulate and implement people-centered public policies.

At the domestic level, the political economy, a reflection of the vagaries of the world capitalist system, created various pathologies. Economically, there were gross class inequities as reflected in the disparities in income and wealth. Moreover, there was mass abject poverty as thousands of Liberians could not afford the basic necessities of life. Amid this, the various factions of the local wing of the ruling class, who controlled state power at various historical conjectures and their relatives, used the state, to paraphrase Franz Fanon, "as a warehouse from where they collected their share of the supplies."<sup>71</sup>

The current liberal peacebuilding project that is in progress in the country will not establish durable peace, and promote real democracy(beyond political forms) that revolves around a comprehensive human-security based approach to development (a comprehensive approach that embodies cultural, economic, environmental, political, security and social areas) for two major reasons. The Sirleaf regime is not committed to liberal democratization, the political plank of the liberal peacebuilding framework. Another reason is that even if the Sirleaf regime were fully committed to the building of a liberal state, the results will not lead to addressing the underlying causes of Liberia's multidimensional crises of underdevelopment and the roots of the civil conflict.

Finally, the country's development should be addressed by democratically of liberalization. At the same time, the nature, character, and dynamics of its political environment and the nature and dynamics of its political environment should be placed on the "front burner" of post-conflict peacebuilding. Ultimately, the trajectory should be to construct durable peace based on the establishment of holistic or "deep democracy"—the confluence of culture, economics, the environment, gender relations, politics, religion, security and social issues—based on the historical and contemporary realities of the country.

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## **Lessons from Liberia's 2005 Presidential Election: What Worked and What Needs to Work in the Next Election**

**Christopher M. Kimaru\***

Liberia's 2005 Presidential election in which Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected President was a significant milestone for Liberia, and the whole of the African continent. Her victory over the Milan striker George Weah was a great accomplishment. International observers reported the election to have been peaceful and orderly. Thousands of Liberians were said to have waited patiently in line for up to twelve hours in the Liberian heat to cast their ballots.<sup>1</sup>

The election was reportedly well administered, but there were some riots over George Weah's claim that he had been cheated and claims that the election was rigged, irregular and not free and fair. He submitted a formal complaint to the National Election Commission [NEC], filed a Supreme Court petition seeking to halt vote counting, and informed the international community involved in the election of his allegations. The riots did not escalate to a point of derailing the election. A report by the Congressional Research Service reported that on December 12, Weah returned to Liberia after meeting with Presidents John Kufuor of Ghana and Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, who reportedly urged him to concede his defeat with grace.<sup>2</sup> Intervention by these two respected African leaders, underscores the significance of the election, and the deep-rooted desire by the entire African continent for Liberia to have a successful and peaceful election.

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\* Christopher M. Kimaru, Associate Professor, Department of Public Administration, North Carolina Central University, Durham, NC.

Besides being the first President Johnson Sirleaf's democracy in Africa, and the continent. Free and fair elections to flourish, and any such achievement to the continent

President in Africa, significant blow for indications for the continent's ingredient for democracy in Africa is a notable right direction.

Liberia is not alone in this accomplishment. There have been other recent cases of successful elections notably in Botswana, Ghana, South Africa, Malawi and Tanzania. But in a continent comprising of some 53 countries, the number of successful elections is relatively low, and should be a great concern to the continent.<sup>3</sup>

Michael Bratton and Nicholas Van der Walle in praise of South Africa's first democratic election in 1994, argue that signs of democratic gains are eroding all across Africa. They point out that democratization has been reversed as a result of military forces overthrowing elected governments, or democracies survive but elected rulers have lapsed back into manipulating political rules in order to consolidate their personal hold on power.<sup>4</sup>

Bratton and Van der Walle are not alone in painting this bleak picture of eroding democracy in Africa. Recently, Jean Ping, Chairman of the African Union Commission told the organization's last summit in Libya that unconstitutional seizure of power was becoming a scourge of Africa. Ping added that the African Union was extremely concerned by the re-emergence of coups or attempted coups around the continent. He cited those of Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau and Madagascar, as recent examples.

It was equally a worry that the President of Niger, Mamadou Tandja, has overturned the constitutional limit to his perpetual stay in power.<sup>5</sup>

At this writing, in Niger, President Mamadou Tandja, was reported to have been seized and detained by the military, after a military coup orchestrated by Colonel Salou Djibo. The coup was condemned by France, the African Union and the UN Secretary

General Ban Ki-Moon, who appealed for calm and respect for human rights. The African Union imposed sanctions on the country and demanded a return to constitutional rule.<sup>6</sup>

This assault on democracy in Africa makes it essential to study the few African countries such as Liberia that have taken the first step towards democratizing, by conducting successful elections.

This paper examines the factors that contributed to the success of the 2005 Liberian Presidential election. Knowing and understanding these factors is important for Liberia and any African country that wants to advance democracy and consolidate any democratic gains achieved. Identifying these factors could also help us understand what may have gone wrong in a number of African countries where elections failed, resulting in significant loss of life and property, and tremendous internal strife. Identifying these factors could also help us understand what needs to work for Liberia to conduct another successful election in 2011.

The paper is not an evaluation of Liberia's success in democratization, governance or economic development, but rather focuses on evaluating the process used to attain a successful election. President Sirleaf recently admitted that there is a complete system failure in her government. She attributed the failure to lack of accountability in government, fraud and gross mismanagement of finances.<sup>7</sup>

### **Significance of Elections in a Democracy**

The literature on democracy and elections is voluminous. The two political terms are not synonymous, nor do they have a causal relationship. Having elections does not necessarily mean that there is democracy in a country. A country, however, cannot have democracy without elections. If leaders are imposed rather than elected and the people have no say in choosing their leaders, then the country is devoid of democracy.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is clear on this. It states that the basis of the authority of government is the holding of periodic and genuine elections by universal and equal suffrage and shall be

the basis of 1948 is very clear. It shall be the basis of the authority of government. All shall be expressed in the form of periodic and genuine elections by universal and equal suffrage and shall be

Richard Katz views elections as a necessary condition for the success of institutions of modern democracy. He argues that there are those who view elections as the device that makes democracy possible, in societies so grown in scope and complexity that direct rule by the assembly of all citizens is not possible. To others, elections are an impediment to the achievement of democracy, and a device for elites to control the people rather than the reverse.<sup>8</sup>

In highlighting the importance of elections, Michael Bratton states that elections are fundamental not only for installing democratic governments, but as a necessary requisite for broader democratic consolidation. The issue of regularity, openness and acceptability of the elections signal whether basic constitutional, behavioral and attitudinal foundations are being laid for sustainable democratic rule. He argues that it is meaningful to study elections for the simple reason that, while you can have elections without democracy, you cannot have democracy without elections.<sup>9</sup>

Bratton acknowledges that elections do not constitute a consolidated democracy. A consolidated democracy requires civil rights and due process of law; checks on arbitrary executive power; civilian control of the military; and an independent press and civil society.<sup>10</sup>

Richard Joseph also views democratization in broader terms than just holding periodic elections. He argues that democratization in Africa is losing its connection with real lives of African people and that the exercise of power is configured to satisfy minimal international requirements of periodic elections.<sup>11</sup> He goes on to argue that these periodic electoral dances are staged by African autocrats in the absence of very basic conditions for fairness and political freedom.

When we look at African countries that have conducted a number of repeat elections only a few would claim to have a consolidated democracy. The problem in many of these countries lies in failure to implement many of the above requisites advanced by Bratton, and often prescribed by western donors and international organizations. Elections in Africa have not always enhanced democracy. In Nigeria, for example, three consecutive elections have been conducted, uninterrupted by military rule; in 1999, 2003, and 2007. And yet, these elections did not enhance democracy in the country, but rather undermined it.

An International Crisis Group article described the 2007 Nigerian election as an election that derailed Nigeria's democracy. It posits that the election was supposed to consolidate the country's evolution as a democracy, facilitate the peaceful resolution of its many internal conflicts and bolster its nature as a leading peace-maker and peacekeeper in Africa. But instead, the conduct and outcome deepened long running political crises, pushed the country further down the road to failure as a democratic state and weakened its position as a broker of peace across the continent.<sup>12</sup>

Failed elections are not unique in Africa or the world for that matter. There were worse cases in Kenya [2007] and Zimbabwe in 2008. Both countries had failed elections that resulted in significant loss of life, and tremendous social strife, despite having had more than three consecutive elections prior to the failed elections.

Iran's 2009 presidential election is another example of a failed election that obviously undermined democracy rather than enhance it. In an article on the election, Michael Collins states that there was fraud in the 2009 Presidential election and in every previous election held under the current electoral system.<sup>13</sup>

In Iran, presidential candidates must be approved by Iran's Guardian Council. The council consists of six Islamic jurists appointed by the supreme leader of Iran and six from majlis, Iran's popularly elected parliament. They screen presidential candidates



through background checks and a detailed written examination. Very few pass the test.

In the same article, Collins points out that since 2004, Iran's Guardian Council has routinely rejected reform candidates. He argues that this bias against reform candidates is the real fraud perpetuated on the Iranian people. The outcome of every election is determined by 12 men through the selection process that they devise. The choice of Iranian voters is determined before they ever get to the polling place.<sup>14</sup> This practice of holding elections as a charade and a mockery to democracy is perverse, and is not limited to any one country or region.

In addressing the question of why there are no Arab democracies, Larry Diamond argues that most Arab autocracies do not rely on unmitigated coercion and fear to survive. They use repression selectively and some also allow limited pluralistic elections. These elections, he argues, are held when pressure mounts, both from within the society and from outside. The regime loosens its constraints and allows more civic activity and a more open electoral arena – until political opposition grows and appears to be formidable. Faced with the threat of a formidable opposition, the regime returns to more heavy-handed methods of rigging elections, shrinking political space, and arresting the usual suspects. Elections in these Arab states is thus like a huge pair of political lungs, breathing in and expanding, but then inevitably exhaling when limits are reached.<sup>15</sup>

Daniel Brumberg had written earlier on this topic of liberalized autocracy. He states that liberalized autocracy has proven far more durable than once imagined. The trademark mixture of guided pluralism, controlled elections and selective repression in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria and Kuwait is not just a 'survival strategy' adopted by the authoritarian regimes, but rather a type of a political system whose institutions rule, and logic defy any linear model of democratization.<sup>16</sup>

For most African countries, elections are considered a first step toward democratization. There is excitement about elections that bring change, especially post-conflict elections, which raises hope for peace and democratization. But there is no guarantee that the election at hand, or future elections will advance democracy. There is always the possibility that future elections could be used to bolster or legitimize an undemocratic regime. There is also the possibility that the regime could resort to guided pluralism or controlled elections, both of which undermine democracy. The examples given above are a testament to this, but as mentioned earlier, there are exceptions to the rule especially in countries where elections and democratization are moving in tandem.

### **The Liberian Experience**

The historical path taken by Africa's first republic to the election of 2005 was not an easy path. Prior to the 2005 election, Liberia held 2 previous elections. The first post coup election was held in 1985. This election was meant to legitimize Samuel Doe's regime. The election was a charade, and virtually all international observers agreed that the Liberian Action Party (LAP) led by Jackson Doe, had won the election by a clear margin. After a week of counting the votes, Samuel Doe fired the count officials and replaced them with his own Special Election Committee (SECOM), which announced that Samuel Doe's ruling National Democratic Party of Liberia had won with 50.9% of the vote.<sup>17</sup>

The second election was held in 1997 and Taylor was elected President, after leading a bloody insurgency backed by Libyan President Muammar al – Gaddafi.

From a technical point of view, as determined by international observers, the 1997 election was declared to be free and fair. But the underlying reasons that made voters vote for Taylor were coercive and threatening.<sup>18</sup>

In reporting about the outcome of the election, Mary Fitzpatrick wrote that, 'Putting up with Taylor in exchange for peace

and stability – no matter how tenuous – is a far better option than watching his forces again ravage the countryside in their ruthless quest for power. In the eyes of these voters, a victory for anyone else would have meant almost certain resumption of the bush warfare that has cost the lives of so many of their family members and friends.’<sup>19</sup>

Terrence Lyons also expresses a similar sentiment when he states that in the 1997 Special Elections in Liberia, many voters understood their choice as being between Charles Taylor, the former factional leader, and war. Given the legacy of the past conflict and the pervasive fear that Taylor would return to war if not elected, many Liberians made a calculated choice that they hoped would more likely promote peace and stability.<sup>20</sup>

Taylor’s autocratic rule and dysfunctional government led to the second Liberian civil war in 1999. The two elections did not bring lasting peace to Liberia, nor did they promote democracy. They serve as a good example of how elections do not necessarily lead to democratic rule. The two elections were tools of the two despots to legitimize their regimes and were a dismal failure in restoring peace in Liberia.

During the course of Liberia’s long conflict from 1989 to 2003, about 250,000 people died, and up to half of the three million population fled their homes.<sup>21</sup>

Human rights abuse was pervasive during this period, with extensive massive civilian killing and extrajudicial killings. Rape and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls was a common instrument of war used by all sides to the Liberian conflict.<sup>22</sup> The conflict is also remembered for its use of children in the fighting.

In making a case about this conscription of child soldiers, Chernor Jalloh and Alhaji Marong argue that while the use of children in armed conflict dates back to World War II when the Third Reich and underground movements both resorted to large scale use

of children in battle, in the post-World War II period, Liberia ranks among the worst users of child combatants. According to the UN estimates, approximately 15,000 children were involved in the Liberian civil war. Most of them were forcibly recruited and then sent into training camps, where they were either beaten or drugged to commit various atrocities.<sup>23</sup>

Liberia's experience during the 14 years of conflict was painful, but it gave the country a unique perspective of what the country needed to do and what to avoid. The country needed to break away from a past marred by conflict and plunder and embrace a future of peace and prosperity under a democratic rule. The appetite for conflict had waned and people's hopes for a better Liberia were high.

There is a saying which states that there is no power as great as an idea whose time has come. The year 2005 seemed to be the right time for Liberia to change. This change would start by holding a successful election to elect a President to lead the country and a legislature to pass laws.

### **What Made Liberia's 2005 Election Successful?**

When countries such as Liberia initiate change from an autocratic regime to one that embraces democracy, the first step is to hold an election that is deemed by its citizens to be fair and open. The reason for such an election is to legitimize the new government to its people and the world. Consolidating a democratic system also needs such an elections as well.

An even more fitting reason for an election in the Liberian case would be what Andrew Reynolds and Timothy D. Sisk term as inaugurating a post conflict order. They argue that elections are perceived as the mechanism by which a transition from armed conflict to inclusive governance is accomplished.<sup>24</sup>

Lindberg on the other hand, views elections as a core of representative democracy, and a means of deciding who should hold legislative and executive power.<sup>25</sup>

In the Liberian case, both views would be correct, because the election was a critical turning point at which the Liberian society turned away from armed conflict, and embraced a new era based on using democratic means to achieve political ends.

Once a need for an election is established, the big challenge that countries face is how to conduct such an election successfully. Some of the countries turn to the United Nations for help, while others turn elsewhere for help. In the case of Liberia, the United Nation played a key role in facilitating a successful election, through the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

The United Nations budget for its' Mission in Liberia for fiscal year 2004/2005 was \$821.98 million, and for fiscal year 2005/2006 was \$722.42 million. A further \$717.85 million was provided for fiscal year 2006/2007.<sup>26</sup> The budgets for fiscal year 2004/2005 and fiscal year 2005/2006 can be attributed directly to facilitating the Liberian election of 2005. The purpose of the budgets was to provide deployment of 215 military observers, 14,785 military troops, 1115 United Nations police, 599 international staff, 957 national staff and 278 United Nations volunteers.<sup>27</sup>

These amounts are astronomical by Liberian or African standards, and in return, one would expect heavy involvement by the UN in structuring the election to meet its acceptable standards.

The United Nations has four clusters of procedures that a country can follow to build an atmosphere of trust to overcome or at least mitigate the divisive nature of African elections:

- 1) Establishing an independent agency to oversee electoral process
- 2) Making elections accessible to all voters
- 3) Authorizing and encouraging the observation of elections by domestic and international observers

4) Crafting an electoral law that guarantees a measure of representation and perhaps a share of power for all significant constituencies contesting the election.<sup>28</sup>

This paper will use these procedures as criteria for evaluating the success of the 2005 Liberian Presidential election. Such an evaluation will help clarify the thinking and organization that went into making the election a success.

To meet the first procedure or requirement for conducting a successful election, the National Elections Commission (NEC) was formed after the parties to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) agreed that the electoral system of Liberia needed to be reformed and reconstituted. It was agreed that the best way to implement such reform was through a legislative process. The Electoral Reform Law temporarily suspended certain provisions of the constitution and amended a number of sections of the 1986 Elections Law. In the end, the legal framework for the 2005 elections comprised of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), the Liberian Constitution, the Elections Law of 1986 and the Electoral Reform Law of 2004.<sup>29</sup>

Initially, there was concern about the administrative and technical capacity of NEC to deliver a credible election. But with the robust support from the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and other International Organizations, such as the International Foundation for Elections (IFES), NEC performed its mandate with impartiality and competence.

The challenges that NEC faced included (1) to undertake the effective administration of the elections (2) to acquire the technical knowledge necessary to organize elections and (3) to build a physical infrastructure to support its operations.<sup>30</sup>

By performing its mandate with impartiality and competence, NEC fulfilled requirements 1 and 4 of the UN procedures mentioned above. The logistical support provided by international organizations facilitated this, and one can only hope that Liberia will

have the required resources to sustain the good work of NEC in the forthcoming 2012 election.

To meet the criteria of authorizing and encouraging the observation of elections by domestic and international observers, the Liberian election official were cooperative. Domestic observers included civic leaders, leaders of political parties contesting the election, and leaders of domestic non-partisan monitoring groups.

International observers included a large US observer Delegation for the Liberian Elections, headed by Assistant secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer. The American delegation was in Liberia as part of the US commitment to support democracy in the country founded by free slaves from the United States.<sup>31</sup>

The International community was well represented, by delegates from the United Nations, European Union, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Organizations that gave electoral support such as the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, the Carter Center, and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, also participated in observing the elections. These organizations also played a pivotal role in supporting the preparation of the elections as outlined in the National Democratic Institute and Carter Center Report.<sup>32</sup>

Other notable international observers of this monumental election, included former US President Jimmy Carter, and former President Nicephore Soglo of Benin.

To meet the last criteria of crafting an electoral law that guarantees a measure of representation for all, involved encompassing the provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) along with the Liberian Constitution, the Elections Law of 1986 and the Electoral Reform Law of 2004, as discussed above. The implementation of these provisions, as stated above, was carried out by the National Elections Commission (NEC).

Judging by the UN criteria outlined above, it appears that Liberia successfully implemented the procedures perfectly. The UN was very involved in the election as stated earlier, in providing funding and logistical support through the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Given this UN involvement, Liberia had good guidance and could not stray without jeopardizing the substantial funding and support. So Liberia stayed the course, and as a result benefitted tremendously, as evidenced by the election results.

It is important to note here that in its website, the United Nations Mission in Liberia Electoral Division, credits the success of the election to the National Election Commission (NEC). It states that the responsibility of holding elections rests with the Liberian National Election Commission. The UNMIL Electoral division provides technical assistance and capacity building support to the NEC, and coordinates other international assistance to the NEC to carry out this responsibility.<sup>33</sup>

The UN does not claim credit for being the catalyst behind the successful election. But a good understanding of their procedures outlined above, can help us fit generalities into specifics in the criteria.

David Harris for example, attributes success of the election to lack of violence due to lack of combatant forces, the absence of an incumbent, and the presence of 15,000 UN peacekeepers. He posits that the election was by far the freest and fairest election that Liberia has ever seen, and credits the success of the election to the excellent work done by the NEC. Harris argues that NEC demonstrated an impartiality that would be the envy of most African states.<sup>34</sup>

In retrospect, Harris is highlighting the importance of procedure one in an election. His other stated reasons for the success of the Liberian election can fit into procedures one and two. But lack of an incumbent is an important variable that he introduces into the equation and needs further discussion below.



### Implications for Liberia's

The Liberian constitution held once every seven years be held in the year 2011. Liberia will conduct another election and consolidate the democratic gains from the

2005 election to be the next election should be watching to see if the election will consolidate

Steven Hood lists three phases of democratization; transition, consolidation and finally, established democracy.<sup>35</sup> If we use these phases to determine a country's evolution to an established democracy, we can argue that Liberia went through the transition phase when it shed its autocratic past and ushered in a democratically elected government. The election was a post-conflict election, whose main goal is to restore peace in the country. The challenges in the next election will be more complex than in the last election. It is difficult for a baby to learn to stand, but it is even more challenging for the baby to learn to walk and finally run.

The 2011 election will be a big challenge for Liberia. The country will be under pressure to consolidate the democratic gains attained from the 2005 election. Such gains as free press, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly and freedom from harassment by state organs would be expected to continue. A successful repeat of the 2005 election would assure the country and the world that consolidation is taking root. A failed election would be a serious setback to the country.

Many African countries have been struggling with the consolidation phase and very few have achieved a number of successive successful elections. There have been a few notable exceptions such as Botswana, Ghana, South Africa, Mauritius, Namibia and Tanzania. These African countries have all held at least three consecutive successful national elections. We can only hope that Liberia will be included in this list in the future.

One of the big changes in Liberia's 2011 election is that this time there will be an incumbent president unlike in 2005. An in-

cumbent is always difficult to beat in an election even in old democracies such as the US. In Africa, incumbents have been known to use state resources, coercion and their political influence to win re-election. In most cases they have prevailed. The question here is will the incumbent president in Liberia play fair and let the people choose their leader freely, or will she tilt the political balance in her favor?

The challenges facing Liberia are very similar to those facing other African countries, and can be overcome with courage and political will. Continued overall democratic development will be needed to overcome these challenges. This should include strengthening of political parties so that they are not organized according to ethnic cleavages. Continued involvement of civil society in the political process, especially in voter education is crucial.

In accentuating the importance of civil society in peace building in Liberia, T. Debey Sayndee argues that civil society should aim to help build a stable, broad based and well organized institutions that form the foundation for a strong civil culture. He goes on to posit that this task can be fulfilled by championing capacity building, service delivery and advocacy activities, conflict early warning, openness and accountability in public institutions, political participation, democratization and election monitoring, community development, conflict prevention and non-violent conflict resolution.<sup>36</sup>

Another crucial role that civil society can play is to quell ethnocultural conflict and keep Liberians focused on issues that enhance the country's economic, political, and cultural development. Negative ethnicity should have no place in Liberia.

George K. Kieh addresses this issue of ethnocultural conflict and explains how this conflict was heightened during the Doe regime. This conflict involved the settler versus the indigenous; the light skinned versus the dark skinned settlers; conflicts between various indigenous ethnic groups; and the conflict engineered by

the Doe regime between th  
An engaged civil society

and ethnic groups.<sup>37</sup>  
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of what Boyart called ' the politics o the elly' which, in turn con-  
fines democratic politics to a narrow elite circle and so weakens its  
relevance to the wider African society. <sup>38</sup>

Freedom of the press should be maintained at all cost. Such  
freedom is an essential prerequisite for a credible election. It is im-  
portant to note that there was no report of press censorship in the  
last election.

In its recommendations for Liberia's future elections, The  
Carter Center Report points out that the media has an important  
role to play in successful elections. It should provide accurate and  
balanced reporting on the electoral process, and should refrain from  
reporting information in an inflammatory manner that would pro-  
voke violence.<sup>39</sup>

The issue of funding for the 2012 election could also be a big  
challenge. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) pro-  
vided substantial technical, operational and logistical support to the  
National Elections Commission's capacity to conduct the last elec-  
tion. Such support is not guaranteed in the future, nor is the gener-  
ous contribution by the international community that was given in  
the last election. Funding has to be sought to continue building  
NEC's capacity to conduct another successful election.

One of the recommendations made by African election experts  
in the Accra Communique to African governments, is to take steps  
to fully fund elections through budget allocations as a matter of na-  
tional sovereignty.<sup>40</sup>

A common problem among emerging African democracies is

the use of state resources by the incumbent to give himself or herself an advantage in the election. In Malawi, which conducted yet another successful election in 2009, the major complaint by international observers was the use of state resources to tilt the balance in favor of the incumbent.

*The Globe and Mail* reported that ‘by exploiting the state’s resources, Mr. Mutharika gave himself a huge advantage over his rival in the campaign. And sure enough, he won a landslide victory in the election this week. It was announced today that he had captured 66 per cent of the votes, compared to 31 per cent for his nearest rival, John Tembo, who promptly complained of vote-rigging.’

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Liberia did not have an incumbent in the 2005 election, but even though it did not have an incumbent, David Harris argues that this did not stop the flow of government resources into the hands of aspirants.<sup>42</sup> With an incumbent in power, this problem could be worse if it is not addressed. To avoid this problem, the incumbent in Liberia should resist the temptation to use state resources to gain advantage over other candidates in the election. An engaged civil society and a free press can help contain this problem if it arises.

The challenges facing Liberia’s 2012 Presidential election may look daunting, but they are not insurmountable and can be overcome by concerted political will and good planning. After all, the framework and road map for conducting a successful election already exist. Learning from mistakes of the past can also help a great deal.

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Augustine C. Ohanwe, *Post-Cold War Conflicts in Africa: Case Studies of Liberia and Somalia*, London: Adonis and Abbey Publishers, Ltd., 2009, 249pp, Bibliography, Index. Price: NA**

The book has three major objectives. First, it examines the nature and dynamics of the Liberian and Somali civil conflicts. Second, it postulates that Africa has been neglected and marginalized in the post-Cold War international system, due in part to the “indifference of the UN” (p.14). Third, based on the U.N’s indifference, the study seeks to “define the position of Africa in the post-Cold War order, and to provide an alternative peacekeeping method and conflict resolution paradigm” (p. 14).

Organizationally, the book is divided into nine (9) chapters. Chapter 1 provides the context of the study. In chapter 2, Ohanwe articulates the conceptual framework for the study. Chapter 3 reviews the scholarly literature on civil conflicts and conflict management, and seeks to situate the study within the corpus of scholarly works. Chapter four is devoted to the discussion of Liberia’s civil wars. Chapter 5 focuses on the seemingly unending Somali civil war. In chapter 6, Ohanwe, compares the two case studies. Chapter 7 probes the various methods of conflict resolution and transformation, including those that were used in the two case studies. In chapter 8, Ohanwe assesses Africa’s place in the post-Cold War global order, and articulates an alternative trajectory for the continent in managing its affairs. Chapter 9, the conclusion, seeks to summarize the major findings.

Ohanwe’s argues that the first Liberian civil war was the consequence of the “long –smoldering grievances of indigenous Liberians, a mental war, generated by an oppressive political framework” (p.64) operated by the Americo-Liberians. As for the second civil war, he posits that its origins were lodged in “Doe’s inability to de-

liver his post-coup promises" (p.64). As a result, the country splintered into what he called "half a dozen fiefdoms divided along ethnic and cross-ethnic lines" (p.64).

The study then examines the role of various external actors in the first Liberian civil war. In the case of the United States, Ohanwe asserts, "In light of the end of the Cold War, the U.S. no longer had interest in Liberia. However, during the first civil war, the U.S. pursued a 'policy of vacillation' " (p.78). Specifically, according to Ohanwe, the U.S. initially supported Doe. Later, it abandoned him, and started supporting Prince Johnson's INPFL (p.78). Finally, the U.S. adopted a posture of neutrality (p.78). Within this context, the U.S. limited its role to financial and humanitarian assistance (p.79). As for Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Libya and Nigeria, Ohanwe argues that they contributed to the escalation of the civil war via their support for various factions in the conflict. With regards to the Economic Community of West African States, Ohanwe suggests that the subregional grouping intervened in the first civil war for several reasons, including the indifference of the U.N. and the rest of the international community. He posits further that the U.N. contributed humanitarian assistance, on the one hand, but demonstrated indifference toward the politico-security situation, on the other hand. This can be attributed to Africa's marginal role in the emerging post-Cold War international system.

In terms of conflict management methods, ECOWAS employed peacekeeping and peacemaking as the cardinal instruments. ECOWAS used these instruments against the backdrop of the various rounds of fighting between and among the various warring factions in the conflict. Finally, the war ended, and ECOWAS organized a multi-party election.

As for the Somali civil war, Ohanwe argues that the conflict was caused by three major sets of factors. At the core were clan-based antagonisms between and among the country's various clans and sub-clans. Also, the negative effects of Somali irredentism toward its neighbors was a major contributing factor (p.141). Another



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The study then exami  
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differences between and among the various militias became ascen-  
dant. Consequently, the coalition disintegrated, thereby setting the  
country on the perilous course of unending warfare.

Ohanwe then tackles the critical issue of external intervention in the civil war. In the case of the United Nations, he argues that it intervened because of “blunt criticisms and the charge of double standards” (p. 156). According to Ohanwe, the U.N. employed peacemaking and peacekeeping as the modes for its intervention. In terms of peacekeeping, there were three operations: UNOSOM I, UNOSOM II, and UNITAF, codenamed “Operation Restore Hope,” an American initiative that was authorized by the U.N. Security Council and led by the U.S.(p.162). Ohanwe criticizes UNITAF for its “quick fix approach” (p.163). Also, he argues that UNOSOM I was under *de facto* American control. Overall, Ohanwe asserts that UNITAF and UNOSOM II failed principally because of the U.S.’ over-reliance on the use of excessive force. Furthermore, he indicts both the American troops and the forces of Warlord Mohammed Farrah Aideed for committing human rights abuses during the two peacekeeping operations. With the failure of the peacekeeping operations and the various peacemaking efforts, the post-intervention era began to be shaped by an unending cycle of warfare between and among the various factions.

In terms of comparisons between the Liberian and Somali civil wars, Ohanwe makes the following observations: First, in both cases, the international community demonstrated the lack of interest in helping, because of Africa’s marginalization. Second, ECOMOG performed better in Libera than UNOSOM I, UNITAF and UNISOM II did in Somalia. Third, ECOWAS emphasized disarmament

in Liberia, while the U.N. focused on the implementation of an arms embargo as the strategy for helping to end the war. Fourth, in Somalia, the U.N. and the U.S. demonstrated a visible anti-Aideed bias that undermined the success of the intervention. Fifth and related, the U.N. made the cardinal error of assuming police functions in Somalia, against the backdrop of a civil war. Sixth, the U.N. failed to conduct a thorough assessment in Somalia, prior to its intervention.

Ohanwe then proffers an alternative framework for post-Cold War peacemaking and conflict management in Africa. The core element of the framework is that Africa should use a sub-regional approach to conflict management. Specifically, this should involve sub-regional bodies handling conflict management operations in their respective areas (p. 207). This should be complemented by what he calls the "Omenala approach" (p. 207). This would entail the involvement of the services of eminent men and women from the various sub-regions as conflict managers.

He then reiterates his central argument that in spite of the U.N. and the U.S.' roles in the Liberian and Somali civil wars, Africa still remains marginalize. In other words, the intervention by these two external actors did not alter Africa's position in the new "balance of power." Accordingly, he admonishes Africans to take their destinies in their own hands. As he notes, "a new dawn has arrived when Africa should captain its own destiny—"a home-grown paradigm" (p. 223).

In terms of an assessment, the book does a thorough review of the scholarly literature on conflict management. Also, the study undertook a detailed discussion of the nature and dynamics of the Liberian and Somali civil wars. Another strong point of the book is the effort to proffer an innovative African-based conflict management approach.

On the other hand, there are issues that need further exploration. How did the nature of the neo-colonial state as an appendage

of the world capitalist system and Somalia? Can violence be managed within the context of Africa? How would the international management be supported in these terms? What should be the role of the United Nations and other international organizations in this environment?

The civil wars in Liberia have been fought and effectively managed by neo-colonial states in the absence of an approach to conflict resolution. The material and personnel involved in these wars have had no relations with the post-Cold War international environment.

George Klay Kieh  
University of West Georgia

## News and Notes

**On 14<sup>th</sup> November 2010, Professor Yekutiel Gershoni, Scholar of Liberian History at Tel Aviv University, was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.**

The fact that the decision to award Professor Yekutiel Gershoni with the honorary doctorate was initiated not by his own University, but by Ben Gurion University of the Negev, implies how significant Africa Studies and in his case Liberian Studies, have become in Israeli Academia. Professor Gershoni has been researching Liberian History since 1978 when he started research for his PhD thesis, and continues with it up to today. Over the decades, he has not only taught courses on Liberia, but has participated in numerous symposiums and academic meetings that have taken place all over Israel. The Honorary Doctorate is the Israeli Academia's appreciation of his commitment to disseminate African History, and Liberian history in particular, in Israel and abroad.

**In the words of the awarding committee, the award was given:**

“In recognition of a broad-minded scholar, who by virtue of his uncompromising courage and intellect went on to succeed in all his pursuits – from scientific research to the world of sport – despite suffering serious injuries during his army service; in esteem for a learned academic who researched the political history of West Africa, specializing in Liberia, and the relationships between Africans and African-Americans, taught many students and researchers, and contributed to the advancement of higher education by filling key positions, including Chair of African Studies at Tel Aviv University; Chair of the Department of Middle Eastern and African History; Head of the history track in the Israel Science Foundation and President of the Liberian Studies Association in the United States; with admiration for an inspiring sportsman who participated in dozens of competitions in Israel and around the world,

won medals in three Paralympic Games and brought great honor to the State of Israel; and with gratitude to a courageous and generous man, who dedicates his time and inexhaustible energy to a wide range of volunteer activities, particularly reaching out to and supporting those who are injured and disabled, instilling in them a new hope for a brighter future”.

### **Biographical Information**

Yekutiel Gershoni was born in 1943 in Israel. Married to Ruth with 3 children and 5 grandchildren. Kuti, as he is known, was severely wounded while serving in the Israeli Defense Forces in 1969. He started his academic career in 1970 as an undergraduate in the Department of Middle Eastern and African History at Tel Aviv University. Ten years later, he received his PhD in African History from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, winning the Allan Bronfman Award for Outstanding Ph.D. Thesis.

In 1979 he started teaching in his first teaching position at Tel Aviv University. He was then promoted to senior lecturer, associated professor and full professor of African History. He has also taught at the Open University, Israel and the School of History, Tel Aviv University. In 2000 he was elected Chair of the Department of Middle Eastern and African History. He served as Vice-President and President of the Liberian Studies Association. He has published 3 books and scores of articles. From 2008, he is Professor Emeritus at Tel Aviv University. Today, he continues to conduct research, publish articles, and participate in international conferences.

## **Troubled Boundaries, in Liberia's Past and Suggestions toward their Resolution**

**Presented to the Truth and  
Reconciliation Commission,  
Monrovia, Liberia  
September 2, 2008**

**Svend E. Holsoe, Ph.D.**

Today, I would like to suggest some ways to look at what I will call "troubled boundaries." Although many of these boundaries may not have directly led to the civil war, what they created was an environment of tensions in the society, which served as an underlying troubled base, from which particular issues could bubble up to outright overt violence. By structuring a way to look at the general situation and to provide a few examples, it may be useful to provide a framework for the TRC and ultimately Liberians to come to grips with the past, and at the same time, create a mechanism to look for sustainable ways of confronting contested social issues. Let me emphasize that I do not presume to have all of the answers, nor are my examples exhaustive, but hopefully these comments may be useful.

To start with, I would like to provide some ground rules which I have used to frame the issues at hand.

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Svend E. Holsoe Ph.D. is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at University of Delaware

To start with, I would like to state some ground rules which I have used to frame

some ground rules I would like to use to take on the topic of looking at what has been entitled by the TRC,

In general, we live in a world of what happened in the past. Thus, this is one of the things we hear. This is not to say

we try to make sense of what has happened around us. C, and especially this situation which confounds

us, and we cannot, at least in the short term, figure out why some person, or some group has done what they have. In general, as I say, we think that there is a logic which exists, even if it may not be clearly understood, or may be of a nature that is deeper than the overt and immediate situation. Thus, we strive for ways to reach that understanding, and in so doing, to then try to make sense of what has happened. It is with this premise that I want my remarks to be understood. It is a structured approach, which ultimately may allow for, what at least, seemingly, may appear as irrational behavior.

In addition, I believe that things are always in flux. That people take their perceived knowledge and use it, usually to their advantage. Thus, there is a constant social dynamic in which, what might be thought of as established truths, are suddenly manipulated or transformed to be used for other purposes than what was their original intent.

And finally, as a consequence of the above, I believe that directed change has to start with what is perceived as existing, which is then transformed into something new. Change cannot be imposed, as if there is a cultural vacuum. If this is done, quite often, people will maintain an underlying hostility to the imposed change, and in time figure out strategies to repulse the change, or manipulate it, to more closely fit the earlier perceived standard. The "obvious" idea for change, may not always be obvious to an existing society.

So, those are some of the ground rules I would like to use to take on the topic of looking at what has been entitled by the TRC,

namely “Liberia’s past — reality, myth, falsehood and conflict” as it had impact on the civil war.

What I would like to do then, is first, to look at some areas of dispute or conflict, namely troubled boundaries. I pick this subject, because not only were many of them bases for the outbreak of violence, but there were others that served as bases of social discontent, even if not the actual cause for overt conflict. These unsettled boundaries provided a general base which allowed other disputed areas to flourish.

Secondly, I would like to try to explain why disputes may have occurred.

Thirdly, to look at what room there is for mediating those troubled boundaries.

And finally, to suggest some possible mechanisms for continuing an oversight of the progress being made to resolve the troubled areas of social dispute.

Recently in an article in the *Daily Observer* (“We Pledge Allegiance,” 22 Aug. 2008), it was stated that the core problem was: “that things went wrong because everyone was aggrieved; everyone wanted to find a way out of the malaise and so we all went mad.”

What were the areas in which disputes occurred? What was the underlying malaise? There are many areas that can be named. I will start, with what for many may seem the obvious: governance.

This is clearly the topic which attracts the most attention, as it seems to lie at the core of everything else in the Liberian social system. Let me look back at something of the history of Liberia’s situation.

In the past, prior to the arrival of the American returnees to Africa, there were at least two major differing political systems op-



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their neighbors. The second group is the central, northern and north-  
western peoples, namely the Vai, Mandingo, Mende, Bandi, Loma,  
Kpelle, mā (Mano) and Dan (a.k.a Gio), who are speakers of  
Mande languages and the Kissi and Gola, who are speakers of Mel  
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The southern and southeastern peoples have traditionally had less complex political structures, which were very largely lineage based with heads of each of these lineages operating as more or less equals, in a non-hierarchical structure. In the coastal areas, particularly in modern day Maryland County, where the population was more dense, the political system was a little more complex, but still largely based on the strength of lineages and their heads. In the central, northern and northwestern areas, there has been a greater tendency toward hierarchical political structures, in which, at times there were groups of local communities, or even differing language speakers, who banded together to form confederations. The most famous of these was the Condo confederation with its capital in Bopolu, during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and nineteenth 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The division described here is not totally accurate, but for our purposes, it will suffice. These basic differences in governance have remained a major distinction between the two areas up until the present day.

As the settler based central government began to assert its political control over the areas away from their original coastal enclaves, largely in response to pressure from British and French colonial powers, which were claiming large neighboring tracts of

territory, a governance system was established under President Arthur Barclay's government, which was modeled after the British indirect rule policies. In a nutshell, it was an attempt to work with preexisting local

leadership in the areas being brought under central government control. Thus the current chief of an area was to be the authority figure through which the interior commissioners, sent out from Monrovia, were to interact.

But what often happened in the central, northern and north-western areas was that the traditional leader did not become the recognized authority figure. To take two examples, among the Bandi, Bombo Kwele, who had been the traditional leader of the southern and eastern Bandi was bypassed for his young nephew, Mambu. The latter had curried favor with the central government commissioners. It led to conflict, during the period from 1911-1914, with the assassination of 8 chiefs loyal to Bombo Kwele, the retaliatory killing of Mambu, and finally the flight of Bombo Kwele to Sierra Leone. A similar pattern occurred in the Dan (Gio) area where Tuzama, who was not a traditional leader, but a young aspiring man, was able to have himself recognized as a chief by the central government. Thus, in these examples and many others, the seeds of dissention were sown between the local population and the central government. On the surface, the power of the central authority through its Frontier Force soldiers won the day, but until recent times the dealings of the central government toward their ancestors were remembered with disfavor.

In the southeast, especially in the Krahn area, where leadership was in the hands of lineage heads, who were essentially equals, as mentioned above, the concept of a hierarchical leadership structure was unknown to them. The choosing of chiefs was quite arbitrary, and occurred usually because the opportunity arose for a man to win the approval of the local government Commissioner.

As recently as 20 years ago, a Krahn town to discuss the Town Chief to speak. What authority did not lie with him? The Chief was dismissed as "the chief, but the government" elsewhere, it is worthwhile discussing women's and children's health issues, though males started to answer questions, they were quickly pushed aside by women who began to speak. Such behavior by women would never have occurred in the central, northern and northwestern areas of Liberia. In the Krahn region, women were overtly and socially closer in status to men in public situations. This was normal behavior.

In the central, northern and northwestern areas, men were in overt social dominance. This is not to say that there was not a women's world, which was the purview of women, but it was largely exercised outside of public view. It was men who essentially controlled the political arena. The elders who sat in consultation rarely included women, and if so, only those past child-bearing age.

There was in this central, northern and northwestern region, in the past, a dynamic between the traditional political chief who came to authority by virtue of lineage position and age, and the war chief, who achieved his position by virtue of his strength and bravery. Here, there was internally in the system a tension, with the war chief usually only able to assert temporary authority during periods of crisis. On occasion, however, such individuals would maintain their political power for their lifetime, but very rarely was it transferred to their kinsmen.

There are many individuals who can be described. One of those that I am particularly familiar with, is Zolu Duma of Cape Mount, who ruled during the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In his case, there are two differing viewpoints about his rise to power. In one case, there is the "western" explanation, based on the fact that he had received special

training to serve as a local agent for European traders on the coast, and thus he had access to economic resources not available to other Vai men. But from the Vai point of view, given that Zolu Duma was seen as exceptional in being able to rise above other men, the only explanation was that there was a spiritual force or being, who was supporting him, a jinai (jinn), with whom he had made a pact. And according to the traditions, for him to have received this special support, he had to commit an asocial act, namely murder.

When he died, of old age, he was buried, but quickly exhumed by other aspiring leaders, and his body was desecrated, so that his power could not be transferred to others.

This pattern of political leadership was widespread, across the central, northern and northwestern parts of Liberia. And, as everyone here will have noted, there were reminders of this pattern in the recent civil war.

In all parts of the country, there were very weak mechanisms to create and maintain peace, particularly between warring entities larger than local lineage groups or clusters of related villages. In the southeast, for instance among the Krahn, there was sufficient land so that conflicting groups would just move apart. In more densely areas, as along the coast, for instance among the Glebo, there was the very longstanding antagonisms between the Klemowe and the Nyimowe, which periodically spilled over into warfare, but which ultimately died by sheer lack of means to continue to support the conflict.

In the Vai area, there were occasionally attempts by third parties to mediate disputes, but lacking power to enforce the peace, disputes quickly broke out again. Thus, there was, as was particularly evident from the documentation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a considerable amount of continual conflict.

Thus, the central government intervened, but to occupy the territory so as to take claim, against which to hold the British and

French colonial powers at bay. This was known in the terminology of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century as effective occupation. The last of this process of that form of occupation took place in the Sasstown area of the Km Coast in the mid-1930s with defeat of Jua Nimely. Thus, Pax Liberica was exercised across the total territory of Liberia only fairly recently.

With the power of the central authority, conflict was subdued. The central government then imposed mechanisms for adjudicating disputes. In most cases in the interior, it was through the indirect rule mechanism, where chiefs were given authority to hear disputes and to render decisions. And if the parties were not satisfied, they could appeal to the local Commissioners appointed by the central government, and ultimately the case might be heard by a tribunal in Monrovia, at the Department of the Interior. The new system essentially brought overt violent conflict to an end.

There was, however, a little unconstitutional problem to this structure. Members of the Executive Branch of the government were hearing and settling legal disputes. A court case was brought to the Supreme Court in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the court ruled that the structure was unconstitutional, but the court's decision was ignored for decades.

More importantly what we saw develop beginning with the Presidency of Edwin Barclay was the increasing centralization of power, following on the subjugation of the peoples of Liberia. It was done as a mechanism to rule a peoples who were not used to a modern democratic system. But, although there were minor bows to the democratic process, by in large, it was a centralized control of the vast majority of the Liberian people. When the franchise was extended both the women and in turn to the peoples of the "hinterland," the choices provided this new electorate was sharply controlled, so that free and open elections only with rarity occurred. And then this all unraveled.

As I am sure others will argue, with the overthrow of the leadership of the central administration in 1980, and in particular, with the new leadership favoring people of certain regions and ethnic groups, the overarching control by force of the central government was weakened. As a consequence, there was an opportunity for disputes to flare up, which the central authorities had difficulty quashing.

The top was off the box, and disputes spilled out, thereby allowing local war lords to arise. As a consequence, some of the patterns of violent disruption, known from the past, began to re-emerge. How these disputes occurred and what the regional variations were, I leave up to the individuals more knowledgeable in the recent history.

What can be learned from this review? There are regional variations in Liberia, and they are real and continue to exist. Secondly, there was a need to re-impose central authority over all of the country in order to return to tranquility. This was finally established by UNMIL troops, and the final removal of the weak central political structure and its leader, Charles Taylor, and his government.

How does one put the state back together? It is necessary to acknowledge in any new political structure, that there are regional political and social differences, which any new structure of local governance will need to pay attention to. In addition, in the matter of dispute settlement, mechanisms need to be put in place that are appropriate, and yet, at the same time, a standardized legal system needs to be made operative across the country.

The lesson is that in designing modern governance structures, non-hierarchical systems work better in the south and east. While the more hierarchical system will work in the central north and northwest. Thus, local people must be left to design within a general structure, the political system that works best for themselves, and not have the specifics of it imposed.

As alluded to above, traditional and the statutory this has also been a "trouble" to wrestle with this problem competitiveness between the allowed litigants to play the made the legal situation unexpected.

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But let us go back and review a different phenomenon, which ties into this dual legal system. Starting in Maryland County in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and then spreading outward, there has been the creation of dual villages, the traditional village and the "civilized" Christian area. The underlying issue was that the Christian converts no longer wanted to be socially bound to the traditional systems of governance and belief.

This old phenomenon has seen its expansion into recent times. Starting in the 1960's, though there are a few earlier instances, people deemed "civilized" not only by themselves but by the central government, and thus in certain situations allowed to vote, began to exchange their individual separate Christian villages for Townships. This, in and of itself, was not surprising, as this was what the outside settlers had created to distinguish their areas of authority from that of the traditional peoples' government authority. However, in this case, it was not people of overseas origin, but local people.

In even more recent times, peoples in areas designated by the central government as Districts from the indirect rule system, petitioned the central government, namely the legislature, to have those areas designated as Statutory Districts. Likewise, there has been the escalation of the process, by now moving to create cities. Grand Km County with a population, by the recent census estimates of about 67,000 + people, had thirty plus cities. Thus, these decisions were presumably made so that all legal transactions would occur under statutory law, and not traditional law. This was the ostensible

reason for change.

However, I suspect no one was naïve enough to believe that this was the only motivation for the creation of these new legal entities. The underlying old motivation was undoubtedly there to move away from traditional governance systems. But there were certainly others who saw this as a way to create new government bureaucracies, and thus new jobs.

In the short term, it has caused considerable problems, especially in the creation of townships and cities, as in many cases, the new political entities have not followed the boundaries of older tribal units. Dual systems thus continue to exist and thus a troubled boundary has not been eliminated.

I am aware of the work of the Election Commission along with other government entities to try to regularize political boundaries, namely the Boundary Harmonization Commission, and of the proposed legislation that is before the legislature.

The general underlying point, however, is that those communities which have made the decision to be governed by statutory law should be encouraged. Ultimately, Liberia needs to come under one legal and unified system. The process has begun with some.

In the end, the legal system with its courts will be the arbiter of the land. And this system functioning smoothly and fairly, for all to seek justice, will serve as the basis for the settlement of disputes. Any other manifestation of social disruptions, and in particular violence, which is outside of the law, will have to be controlled by an effective policing organization.

I am aware that the government is making great strides toward providing effectively functioning court systems across the country. Magistrates are being trained, buildings for the hearing of cases are being constructed.



If the law is to be the controlled, then there is the exists of. That does not mean it great attention, but it sho should be widely distribute school libraries and of co Along these lines, it would

of the legislature be reinstituted. The practice began in 1839, but was abruptly stopped in the 1960s'. Today, the only documents available are the individual handbills, and there is no easy way to know what the full list of acts are which were passed for any legislative session.

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In another way to diminish tensions from disputes might be to consider the role of mediation in civil cases — which is sometimes called “pretrial conferences.” One of the things which existed in the Danish legal system, was the establishment of an arbitration or mediation court. All civil cases had to first be heard by such a court in an attempt to see if compromise could be reached before they could proceed to a court of law. In a sense, the Liberian traditional system has had forms of this judicial concept, where disputes were held before traditional leaders. Admittedly, they often rendered judgment. The thought here is to establish a system, whereby trained mediators are charged with trying to bring the litigants to an understanding or compromise. There would be no winners or losers, and there would be no judgment rendered. If the mediator was unsuccessful, then the dispute would move to a judicial hearing. It would inject into the dispute system, the understanding that compromise is important, rather than continued antagonism.

Now let us turn to other areas of the social system where there are “troubled boundaries.”

In all societies, social differences are exploited to gain an advantage. Liberia is a very widely diverse clustering of peoples. There are sixteen officially recognized languages, but in fact, from linguistic studies, there are many more. However, there are many

areas of shared institutions and practices. In addition, the boundaries between groups were imminently malleable, so that what today is a shared behavior, tomorrow is a significant divide. Certainly, it is clear that very many people were multilingual, and they put many of us today, to shame for our limited linguistic abilities.

But having said the above, it is evident that ethnicity is a significant factor in social interaction among peoples across the country. Although today, one may not ask directly from which ethnic group a person comes, there is a desire to do so. As a substitute, one might ask, from what county did one's family come. As an aside, I did that recently with the lady who runs a wonderful Liberian restaurant in Philadelphia. She told me she came from Red Light. That ended that line of questioning.

Why is one interested? We think that ethnicity frames a person's background, their sense of self, and allegiances. There is no doubt that people in a position to hire others will tend to hire those from their own background. We saw this in Doe's government. Greater shared values and loyalty are expected from one's own people.

And we have seen it shape political organization. At a seminar in Washington, DC, in the 1980's, a discussion concerning political discord in Liberia took place, and the topic of ethnicity was raised. A suggestion was made by one of the participants that it might be possible to dampen ethnic tensions by creating counties based on ethnicity. Thus, allowing those particular groups to govern themselves, and not have to share it with others, as was often the case. The idea was roundly dismissed as giving in to this social division. And yet, what has happened. Bomi County was created, with its majority base being Gola. River Gee County was created from Grand Gedeh, largely because they were Grebo speakers in a county which was dominated by Krahn. Other examples can be cited. Thus, the reality of the ethnic self perception is real, and certainly we saw ethnicity play itself out in the recent civil war.

There is no question that in any dispute, people will try to use differences as a basis for dividing themselves from others. Ethnicity is definitely one of these definitions which individuals have of themselves, and that they use as a way to think of others. This is a particularly interesting matter when a person is of mixed ethnic background.

At a seminar which I attended last summer, here in Liberia for local citizens, Liberian culture was discussed. What became clear as the seminar progressed was that the participants did not know each other. That is, in the sense, that they believed that the cultural institutions and social structures of their own background was the same for all the other people at the seminar. The participants began to realize that this was not the case, as individuals began to challenge cultural patterns of some participants.

The perceived differences are real, one has only to look at the recent tensions which have arisen again between the people of Grand Gedeh and those of Nimba. One way to break down this troubled boundary might be, to find mechanisms for Liberians to get to know each other. The President has begun the process by holding her cabinet meetings in different parts of the country.

Here I would suggest, that another way to do this, is for university students to be placed during vacations periods in other parts of the country than that of their own background, for a month, possibly twice during their four academic years of training. During that month, they would live with a local family and they would do some form of social service. For instance, helping with others in the community in a work camp, building or repairing something that the community chooses, doing vacation teaching, giving assistance in a local health facility, and so forth. These practices are widely done in many parts of the world, and there is no reason why they cannot be tried in Liberia. The exposure to people in other parts of the country is an invaluable part of widening the horizons of students. In the end, the nation as a whole will benefit.

In addition, as part of civil law on discrimination, ethnicity must become a protected status by the courts. Discrimination on the basis of peoples' perception of one's ethnicity must be made punishable.

Another area of great importance to the reconstruction of the nation is the need to weaken a social and political system based on privilege. For far too long, social differences based on wealth, education and health care which provided for a better quality of life, have been the norm. For all of the moves by the last two True Whig Presidents to improve the standard of life, the chasm between rich and poor, privileged and humble, strong and weak, remained notable. The process initiated by the Presidents, to change these conditions did occur, but the problem was enormous and the change was not as fast as hoped. In addition, because the process had begun, expectations of improved social conditions rose far faster than could be delivered. This then was another troubled social boundary that existed prior to the 1980 coup.

In addition, probably partially due to the social disparities, but also because a fundamentally different social system was being imposed on the various peoples of Liberian society, I think it can be argued that a new system based on trust was demanded. If in the past, individuals who largely obtained what they desired, admittedly with some socially constrained circumstances, a new social order which demanded that all individuals work honorably, loyally and with a sense of obligation towards others, was a social change that was difficult to make. I mentioned in the beginning that certain new ideas fall on fertile ground, but many do not resonate and thus are either rejected or grudgingly accepted when imposed, but with undercurrents of discontent. And when these new demands occurred in a social setting where the old norms of the village including economic and emotional sustenance were no longer valid, it was not surprising that asocial behavior arose. People look out for themselves and their kinsmen. There was a kind of free for all to make sure that one survived. All of these patterns of behavior had to be reined in, in the new modern social system.

Into this mix also come the areas of social interaction that involved matters concerning the family, take as the central focus of this whole examination the family, arises in the society, gender was one of the fundamental issues in the societies, including Liberia. It is less than a half-century ago that in many areas of Liberia, women were seen as passive participants. They could be pawned, exchanged or sold, on, it was women, who, along with children, bore the brunt of civil conflict. In this fundamental social divide, women had little or no say in their fate.

And so, domestic relations were one of the most troubled areas of social life. One observer has stated that he thought that about 90% of all cases of litigation during the Pax Liberica period revolved around, from the men's point of view, "woman palava." This boundary of instability may not have led to the actual civil war, but it was a factor in a widespread undercurrent of social discontent.

Matters over the past many decades have moved toward the improvement of women's social positions, including the granting of the vote, active involvement in the political process, the new domestic relations law, and more recently, the right of inheritance. But it is clear still, that many have yet to reach the recognition that women deserve to be equal players in all matters. The fact that the nation elected its first female President has gone a long way in this direction, but as most will acknowledge there is much to be done. This is the case, in particular, in the more conservative areas of the country. The process is currently being monitored by both civil society organizations as well as the Ministry of Gender.

One of the ways that improvements are being made is by sensitization meetings for women on their rights, and responsibilities, and on choices they can feel free to make which were not possible until recently. Along these lines work needs to be done with men, also, to change their attitudes towards what were believed to be the narrowly defined roles which only women might play. And to explain, what it is important for everyone, including men, that women make choices for themselves freely. True, men may need also to

change the way they relate to women, and to achieve the privilege of having a equal relationship with women.

I am also aware that the TRC has held Women's Thematic Hearings. This, will help not only to heal wounds, but also to further the process of making women an equal part of the society. The emphasis then, must ultimately be in finding ways to make absolutely sure, that women are full and equal members of Liberian society. Any actions taken in this direction must have the full support of the state and ultimately of the society, and thereby cause the diminution of this socially troubled boundary.

Another matter which involves a major transformation for most of the people of Liberia revolves around the issue of how individuals and groups have access to land. In the past, with some limited exceptions, land was usually not contested. The population was generally sparse, and thus access to land was fairly easy. Thus, it was mainly people not land, who were the subject of contestation. The concern of leaders was to accumulate sufficient numbers of people to work the land. The use of slavery was one such way. People, and in particular, women, in fact, had more value than land.

The exceptions to the previous comments were where land was limited, namely in high population density areas. These usually were along the coast, where people could no longer continue to spread out. In addition, there were newer groups from the interior trying to gain access to the coast, and salt, or outside trading possibilities, which caused territorial disputes. However, as stated above, these were the exceptions. For the vast portion of what is modern day Liberia, disputes revolved around claiming people, not land.

Thus, although groups of people usually knew where the boundary was between themselves and others, given the fluid nature of political control, groups of people moved backwards and forwards being connected to one group, or pulled away to another. Land largely only became a problem when the central government

moved toward indirect political entities, which came only then, did the boundaries become significant. Presiding inordinate amount of time and resources. As a consequence, conflict.

er to stabilize the polans and chiefdoms. Each group and another in Barclay spent an equalizing those boundaries from people to territory.

What was created by the central government was something which was called "tribal land." This was nominally controlled by local political authorities, such as clan chiefs or Paramount chiefs. However, this clashed with the nation's right to the land. Thus, any "unoccupied" land belonged automatically to the nation. In addition, the state had sovereignty over all of the territory within its boundaries, and this included rights to all minerals below the surface of the top soil. And so, many "troubled boundaries" in both the sense of land, but more importantly socially, were created by the central government imposed control.

And if that was not enough, land could be alienated from local peoples, by the authority of their chiefs and elders, so that legal title could be given to private individuals or groups. Talk about "troubled boundaries." They were numerous. In more recent times, the titled land was usually surveyed, the document to the land was registered with the State Department, now Foreign Affairs, and a deed was granted. However, record keeping has had its challenges, to put it mildly, and many of those records have been misplaced or lost, allowing for claims on land that were not always legitimate. There is a monumental task ahead to bring order to this dilemma, and the current government has proposed the creation of a Land Commission, legislation of which is now before the National Legislature.

Another issue which is raised, which involves all of the diversity of peoples and social changes which have occurred in Liberia, is a need for the creation of some overarching entity which tries to bring some coherence to it all. Here I am thinking about the need

for a national identity, and with that a national purpose. As Wilton Sankawulo said recently, “we have got an identity crisis in this nation,” (*Daily Observer*, (8 August 2008).

I am aware that there have been discussions to create a commission. It is possible that a sense of national purpose will lead to the diminishing of disputes as the recognition that there is a need to work for the common good. I know that the subject of national symbols has been raised by many. There are other aspects to this subject as well. For instance, the need to create a national history. A group needs to be assembled to define what is desired as guidelines for such a history. What will give national pride? There are the achievements which are to be celebrated such as — the Vai script and subsequent scripts among several groups, the achievements of Kru men who successfully found economic opportunities as sailors along the West African coast, returning to their communities with new ideas from the outside world. The artistic achievements of many Liberian communities. There is the first novel written in black Africa, created by a Vai man [*Guanya Pau* by J. J. Walters]. Some of the most aesthetically pleasing carvings in Africa, highly appreciated by the world community, come from Liberia. I think of the achievements of the Mano and Dan (Gio) carvers among others. There was also the remarkable use of brass to create both ornaments and figures. There was the important ability to make iron, examples of which have been seen both in the Kpelle country and in the Putu country. The Cultural Center at Kendeja, in the past has highlighted the beauty of dancing from various parts of Liberia. These are just a few achievements to be named.

There is also the past history of conflict, which must be addressed. Not unlike what this Commission is doing, the different types of conflict need to be brought into the open. Liberia was not unique in this, just look at the long history of conflict which existed in Europe, just to name one area of the world. Not only is it to be described, but also it needs to be explained. What was the nature



of the social and political mechanisms existed or not? This past heritage makes sense of the role that Liberia's diverse population played in bringing the central government into control. How did the modern era come over the territory in this process, not only the ending of internal conflict, but also the cessation of hostilities toward the state.

And then there were the men and women who tried to cross the social boundary between their traditional backgrounds and the modern. For instance, Momolu Massaquoi, Diddhwo Twe, Victoria Elizabeth Jellemoh Grimes, George Barh-Fofoe Peabody, Plenyono Gbe Wolo, and Robert Johnson, better known as Jallah Malay, just to name a few among many. Their lives were often difficult, but they made the effort, and that is to be celebrated. Here I echo recent editorials in the *Daily Observer* urging Liberians to learn about prominent figures in Liberia's past.

What is clear is that Liberians need to know themselves and their diverse history. The coming of the settlers from the New World is only a very small part of that history. Today, is the time to begin the process of bringing the past to light, so that Liberians can have a sense of pride in who they are. It is part of the national healing.

This leads finally, in my arbitrary choices of contested boundaries, to the spiritual world. There are divisions in Liberian society, for instance, those who are members of a monotheistic religion vs. those who believe in the traditional world of spirits. Into this mix are those who welcomed change and those who desired the comforts of a world of continuity from the past.

In the latter case, at times issues are raised about what is to be in a modern society and what must be banned because it goes against what are termed in the modern world, basic human rights. Thus, the killing of individuals for their body parts, hearts for in-

stance, is seen by most of the world as abhorrent. The practice, as is well known in Liberia, and it is hard to ban. Returning to a theme stated earlier, one kind of mechanism usually urged by social scientists is to try to figure out a mechanism to transform the practice to something socially acceptable to a modern society. However, in some cases, one is hard put to figure out how to transform heart men. And thus, the only choice is to outright ban it and use the full power of the state to implement the ban. These kinds of situations, however, need to be the exceptions to changing social practices.

There is another area of social/religious practice, which might be treated differently. This concerns the matter of clitoridectomies, a difficult subject, with people having strong feelings on both sides. An example of transformation was suggested to me recently. In the U.S., Ghanaians, who also have the practice, have in the American urban setting, taken their young girls off to a motel for a weekend. There they are given a concentrated course in what is expected of a Ghanaian woman. And at the end of the weekend the girls are celebrated as having become women, before they returned to their homes. Thus, the Ghanaians have maintained a core principle of the girls initiation, the principal of transformation, but without the clitoridectomy, creating if you like, a kind of girls "finishing school."

Traditionally, the spiritual world was a mechanism for societies to reinforce social practices by using spiritual sanctions to shape peoples social behavior and thus to provide a means of social control. At least, this was possible within the local social grouping, though similarity of such patterns might be widespread, allowing people to move, or be moved, from one grouping to another without facing a totally different social system. Here I am thinking about the world of the peoples of the central, northern and northwestern parts of Liberia, and the institutions of Poro and Sande. Similarities in patterns of behavior and belief came to be called a culture area by social scientists. Although the institutions did not have overarching control, they did provide a means whereby individuals could

move from one community to another with little disruption of their spiritual beliefs.

At a fairly early time, in the northern and northwestern part of Liberia, individuals, mainly Mandinka speakers (Mandingo) penetrated into the forest regions in search of kola nuts and commodities from the coast, including salt. They brought with them Islam, but in a form that was tolerant to the people they met. The rate of conversion was slow, though often when it occurred, as in the Vai area, it was among the communities who saw this as a mechanism to resolve conflicts between the different groups. Thus, if there were no conflicts, they usually resolved around other matters such as differences in wealth, or cross access of each group to the women of the other group.

In the case of Christianity the process was a little different. Initially some individuals from the local traditional societies, mainly boys, became wards in settler homes. It was a useful mechanism on many levels. But, for the matter at hand, these boys came into Christian homes, and often were converted. On their return to their traditional towns, they may not have continued Christian practices, but they understood something of what Christianity was about.

With the coming of the central government's political control over the interior, by the 1920's the interior areas were opened to Christian missionaries, and each denomination was given a particular portion of the country, so that, at least initially, each denomination would not clash with another over winning converts. However, many of these churches set about in their conversion process to destroy the local religious practices. And, as a consequence, a new contested boundary was created. There are stories in certain areas of the country, where the missionaries forced local people to bring out their religious objects and to publically burn them. By this time, if objections arose, the missionaries had the support of the central government and its military, the Frontier

Force, to back them up. Thus, although on the surface, the discord was muted, underneath, there remained the on-going objections to what was being imposed.

There was another aspect of the conversion process. It was very different in the south and east from the central, north and northwest. In the former, the converts had a very strong aversion to continue to compromise with their past belief systems, and so made a major transformation to a totally different system. Thus, as we have seen, there was the demand to create civilized towns separate from the towns where traditional practices continued. This phenomenon did not occur in the central, northern and northwestern parts of Liberia. Here

Christian converts lived side by side with their traditionalist relatives. Again, we see the regional variation. In the former areas, contested boundaries were created between Christians and non Christians, which caused difficulties in the two types of communities to live side by side. In the rest of the country, this was not a particular problem.

What I have tried to point out here is that there were a wide variety of conflicted social boundaries. Some were openly and violently contested, and in other cases, they were submerged. The latter created a social undercurrent of tension. Thus, when violence did break out, it was not necessarily solely based on the overt stated reason for disruption, but may also have had a more deeply rooted basis in the particular societies. When the central government then superimposed its military might upon these societies, all of the contested social boundaries were submerged. However, in some cases new underlying tensions were also created.

As the imposers of this social control were essentially the returned American Africans, local ethnic tensions were also submerged. Once the leadership of the centrally controlled government was overthrown, and the new leaders from particular ethnic groups took charge, the Pandora's Box was opened, and the potential lo-

calized rivalries based on ethnicity or regional residence was unleashed. Also, the new central authorities began to lose control over particular parts of the country, and thus the forces for civil war were created. In some ways, the days prior to the mid-1930's were returned to, but in a new and larger, and in some ways more national form, rather than the earlier more localized form. The consequence has been the chaos of nearly fourteen years.

How does today's society deal with these troubled boundaries? As we have seen, mercifully, outside military troops were deployed to return the country to peace, by imposing military force on the various peoples of the country. In the long term, although new Liberian police and military forces are being created, it is the underlying tension areas that must have attention today. The government's Poverty Reduction Strategy developed by Liberians and external donors, will address many of the overt and important areas. However, there are other areas not mentioned in this new roadmap for Liberia. They are often the more intangible areas, some of which have been mentioned here

Ultimately, it is the sustaining of all of the proposed areas for change that must be continued. The Poverty Reduction Strategy document has built into it some on-going monitoring systems. As I have indicated there are further areas not mentioned in this important document which have to be addressed. It may be useful to lay out all of the contested boundaries which can be identified. In addition, attention needs to be paid to how the various disputed boundaries are interrelated. Once this done, then mechanisms need to be set into place to watch how each of these areas of conflict are being given attention and by whom. Finally, an annual monitoring and review should be taken for each disputed area, and a report written on the progress being made, and what needs further attention. This could be done in a manner similar to annual human rights reports which are published by certain governments looking at the problematic countries around the world.

As an unnamed former President of Liberia has stated, “We cannot get vexed with history.” (“Know Yourself to Change,” *Daily Observer*, (28 July 2008). We need to study it, learn from it, and create the desired future.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you. I welcome any questions which you may have.

**1784, November:**

Danish Frigate [Ship (1,6)] *Grey Ernst v. Schimmelmann* (7,8).  
[Baron Ernst von Schimmelman (2)]

123 (1,6,7,8) [126 (2,3)] Komm. Lwster, 295 (302) Tons.

Registered, Copenhagen (7,8).

Chartered by det ostersoiske guineiske Kompagni (7,8), second sailing for the company. [Belonging to the Kongelig Oc-toryerede Guineiske Handels Selskab (6)]

Granted Algerian sea pass, nr. 318, 8 August 1783, destined to Guinea and the West Indies (7);

Royal Latinsk Sea Pass, 7 August 1783 (6,7,8), destined for Guinea & St. Thomas (8) Captain Christen Lihme (7,8) [Christian Lime, Christian Lihme, died (1)]; Rasmus Boldt (3)

[Rasmus Bold of Copenhagen (1), Rasmus Bolts (6)].

Departed Copenhagen

With 43 crew members (4)

Arrived Guinea

Departed Upper Guinea (1), 1784, with 352 Africans (154 men, 108 women, 63 boys, 27 girls) (5).

**Arrived St. Thomas, 20 November 1784**, with 303 adult & young Africans (1). Departed St. Thomas

**Arrived Frederiksted, 24 November 1784**, and hereto destined, with 298 Africans (6) Departed Frederiksted, 7 December 1784, destined for Christiansted [with no Africans] (7) **Arrived Christiansted?, 27 November 1784**, with 296 slaves. [??]

Departed St. Croix,

Arrived Copenhagen, . Returned Algerian sea pass, 19 July 1785 (7).

26 crew members died during this voyage (4)

- (1) VL, Mazgleren paa St. Thomas Protokoller, Nr. 74 (1784), incoming no. 1437; (2) Klem, *Skibsbyggeriet*, II, 20; (3) Dehn, 167; (4) GTK, no. 67; (5) Sv. Green-Pedersen vessel, no. 46; (6) RA, VL, VI Regering pa St. Croix, Indberetning fra Fsted Ma2glerkontoret, 1784-86, 30 Nov. 1784; (7) Algeriske s6passer; (8) GTK, Forskjellig oplysninger, III, ff. 83v-84

Original sources:

Docs. - good: VL, Handelsdirektion, St. Croix, Breve ... 1778-1786 \*

Danish Frigate [Ship (1,6)] *Grey Ernst v. Schimmelmann -cont.*

**Oxhohn, Peter L.** (1):

5 Queen's Quarter, Estates Windsor & Windsor Forest and Morningstar (2).

Purchased 15 men, **Asmus** (George), no. 2, **Biarke** (Quaco), no. 9, **Gilbert** (Saturday), no. 9, **Gurre** (Parris), no. 43, **Helge** (Paulus), no. 49, **Jack** (Monday), no. 60, **Mads** (Peter), no. 84, **Normann** (Vulcanus), no. 90, **Pyrrhus** (Dickey), no. 106, **Sib** (Guy), no. 121, **Sim** (Jim), no. 122, **Tim** (Philip), no. 135, **Hensen** (Andreas), no. 158, **Durant** [Dorant] (Emanuel), no. 170, & **Eadbert** (Obadiah), no. 173, and 8 women, **Bilha** (Nelly), no. 192, **Claudia** (Lucy), no. 203, **Dimna** (Belinda), no. 205, **Dido** (Clarissa), no. 207, **Phrygne** (Johnny), no. 267, **Rosa** (Rose), no. 272, **Sunith** (Rosina), no. 278 & ?, no. 282, on 27 November 1784 (1). He took out a mortgage with the Royal Guinea Trading Directorate for 5750 rd., on 27 November 1784, for 23 individuals, Georg, Qvaco, Saturday, Paris, paulus, Monday, Peter, Wolcanus, Dicky, Guy, Sim, Phillip, Andreas, Emanuel, Obadia, Nelly, Lysi, Belinda, Clarisa, Jonny, Rosa, Rosina and (3). This mortgage was paid off on 14 July 1787 (4).



[( )= new name on St. Croix]

- (1) RA, VILA, Udtagne Sager, St. Croix, Handelsdirektion, *Grey Ernst Schimmelmann*, Sales List by Purchaser & Account Sheet; (2) RA, 1784 St. Croix Matricle; (3) NA, RG55, Landsting, Pantebog, Litra F (1782-1785), ff. 404-405; (4) *ibid.*, Litra H, f. 58

**Purcel, Margaretha**, [Free Black Woman] (1):

12 King's Cross Street, Frederiksted (2).

Purchased a girl, **P** no. 266, on 29 November 1784, for 220 rd. (1).

- (1) RA, VILA, Udtagne Sager, St. Croix, Handelsdirektion, *Grey Ernst Schimmelmann*, Sales List by Purchaser & Account Sheet; (2) RA, 1784 St. Croix Matricle

**Ramlose, Hans** (1):

112 [Queen's Street], Frederiksted (2).

Purchased a boy, **Elmer**, no. 175, on 27 November 1784, for 160 rd. (1), and a girl, **Phea**, no. 277, on 3 December 1784, for 132 rd. (1).

- (1) RA, VILA, Udtagne Sager, St. Croix, Handelsdirektion, *Grey Ernst Schimmelmann*, Sales List by Purchaser & Account Sheet; (2) RA, 1784 St. Croix Matricle

**Richardsen, Richard**, with **John Conner** (1):

37 Northside A Quarter (2).

Purchased 2 women, **Hannah**, no. 231 & **Jone**, no. 239, on 3 December 1784, at auction for 256 rd. (1).

- (1) RA, VILA, Udtagne Sager, St. Croix, Handelsdirektion, *Grey Ernst Schimmelmann*,

**1791, January:**

Danish Barque [Bark] *Mary* (1,2)

26 tons (1,2)

Owners, Oxholm & Watlington of St. Croix (2)

Received West Indian Sea Pass, 21 August 1790 (2)

Captain Barn. Watlington of Christiansted (1) [Bern'd. Watlington (2)]

Departed St. Martin (1).

**Arrived Christiansted, 19 January 1791**, with 4 adult blacks, namely Baptis, Venus, Sara & Francis, and 3 youths, Nancy, Wingo & Sara, and 2 children, Peggy & John. They were landed with the government's permission of 10th January 1791 (1)

(1) NA, Christiansted Customs Journal, Jan. 1 - June 16, 1791, incoming no. 58; (2) NA, RG55, Box 588, StX Sea Passes, 1782-1807

**1796, December:**

6 December 2002

British Ship *Mersey* (3,4,5,7,8). [Mercy (1), Mercey (2)].

212 tons (1,3,5,7).

Allowed to carry 346 slaves (1)

Captain Robert Jones of Liverpool (1,3).

Cleared Liverpool 18 May 1796 (3). (14 May 1796 (4)). (22 May 1796 (6)).

Departed Africa (1). (Departed Cabinda, 21 October 1796 (4)). (Departed Angola (5)). (Departed Congo (6)).

Arrived Martinique 21 December 1796 with 345 Africans (5).

**Arrived Christiansted 31 December 1796** with 329 Africans for Christopher McEvoy [Jr.] (1). (Arrived 1 January 1797 with 147 men, 68 boys, 80 women, 14 girls, total 329, 6 six died underway (4,6)).

P. L. Oxholm advertised the sale of 100 Africans from 12 to 18 years of age, as the remains of the cargo (8).

Departed 26 January 1797 for Liverpool with ballast (2).

(1) NA, Xsted Customs Journal 1796, incoming no. 1665 & Xsted Customs Journal 1797, incoming no. 89; Xsted Customs Antegnelser 1796; (2) Xsted Customs Journal 1797, outgoing no. 115; (3) BPP/ST61 1971: 429; (4) Green-Pedersen 1985: 447; (5) BPP/ST61 1971: 39; (6) Behrendt notes -2/6/1993; (7) BPP/ST61 1971:13; (8) *The Royal Danish American Gazette*, (ell January 1797)

**1796, December:** 9/15/94

Ship *Mersey* - continued.

Of the 345 Africans brought in, the following were exported:

Danish Schooner *St. Croix Packett* (1) [Danish Schooner *St. Croix Packet* (3) 23 tons (3)

Owner, David de Young of *St. Croix* (3)

Received West Indian Sea Pass, 8 November 1796 for 6 months (3)  
Captain David De Young of Christiansted (1) [David de Young (3)]

Departed Christiansted 28 January 1797  
with 24 Africans (4 adults and 20 children) belonging to Reg. Raad Oxholm with the government's permission for *St. Thomas* (1).

**Arrived *St. Thomas* 29 January 1797** with 24 Africans (2).

(1) NA, Xsted Customs Journal, 1797, outgoing no. 120; (2) 406VJ1797.

American Ship *Asia* (1) 327 tons (1)

David Lamb of Boston (1)

Departed Christiansted 14 February 1797  
with 20 adult slaves for Mississippi  
with the government's permission  
(1). Did not depart with this cargo  
(2)

(1) NA, Xsted Customs Journal 1797, out-  
going no. 178; (2) *ibid*, outgoing no.  
[bet. 209-290]

Danish Bark (1,2) *Brothers* (2)

29 tons (2)

Owner, Thomas Renadus of St.  
Croix, newly imported purchase  
(2) Received West Indian Sea Pass,  
2 February 1797, for 6 months (2)  
Captain Thomas Renadus (1,2) of  
Christiansted (1)

Departed Christiansted 21 February 1797  
with 18 adult slaves for St. John (1).

(1) NA, Xsted Customs Journal 1797, outgoing no. 208; (2) NA,  
RG55, Box 588, St. Croix Sea Passes, 1782-1807

**1797, January:** 9/15/94

American Brig *Susan* (1)

176 tons (1)

Captain Joseph Gardiner (1,2) of Boston (1)

Departed Christiansted 26 January 1797 with 15 blacks [15  
Africans, belonging to George Usher (2)] destined

for New Orleans (1,2) in Mexico (1)

(1) NA, RG55, Xsted Customs Journal, 1797, outgoing no. 112; (2) RA, VL, VI Regering, Toldregnskaber, Nr. 10, 1797, Liquidations Beregning, f. 6

Danish Schooner *St. Croix Packett* (1) [Danish Schooner *St. Croix Packet* (3)] 23 tons (3)

Owner, David de Young of *St. Croix* (3)

Received West Indian Sea Pass, 8 November 1796 for 6 months (3)

Captain David De Young of Christiansted (1) [David de Young (3), DeYoung (4)]

Departed Christiansted 28 January 1797 with 24 Africans (4 adults and 20 youths) (2) belonging to Reg. Raad Oxholm (1) [belonging to Chr. McEvoy (4)], with the government's permission (1) for *St. Thomas* (1,4).

**Arrived *St. Thomas* 29 January 1797 with 24 Africans (2).**

(1) NA, RG55, Xsted Customs Journal, 1797, outgoing no. 120; (2) 406VJ1797; (3) NA, RG55, Box 588, StX Sea Passes, 1782-1807; (4) RA, VL, VI Regering, Toldregnskaber, Nr. 10, 1797, Liquidations Beregning, f. 5

Danish Ship *Johannes* (2,3). [Danish Bergant'n. el Juan (1)] Owners, Echard & Co. of *St. Thomas* (2).

Issued a Seapass, January 1797, destined for Havana & Hamburg (2). Captain Mathias Petersen (2). [Matias Petersen (1)]

Cleared *St. Thomas*, 27 January 1797 with 100 Africans, destined for Havana (3).

Entered Havana, February 1797 with 99 blacks [60 men, 5 male youths, 11 boys = 76; 9 women, 9 female

youths, 5 boys = 23; total = 99] (1).

Destined for Hamburg (2).

SGP No. 17.

(1) Se-28/2/1797; (2) 383VJ97; (3) 406VJ97

### **1797, April:**

British Ship *Achilles* (3,3a)

204 tons (3)

Permitted to carry 338 slaves (3a).

Captain Jno. Bennett (3a); Captain John Bunnell (1,5) of Liverpool (1)

Cleared Liverpool, 11 August 1796 (3,3a). (August 14, 1796 (4))

Departed Africa (1,5).

**Arrived Christiansted 18 April 1797** with 327 Africans (1,5) (196 men, 68 women, 23 male youths, 40 female youths (1)) (304 adults, 23 youths (5)) for Government Councillor Oxholm (1,5). Final auction held 9 May 1797 (6).

Departed Christiansted, destined for Liverpool on 16 May 1797. Only carried African cargo, nothing from island (2).

On homeward voyage this ship was lost (4).

(1) NA, Xsted Cus. J., 1797, incoming nos. 522 & 656; (2) *ibid.*, outgoing no. 577; (3) BPP/ST61 1971: 15; (3a) *ibid.*, 430; (4) Behrendt notes - 2 June 1993; (5) RA, VL, VI Regering, Toldregnskaber, Nr. 10, 1797, Liquidations Beregning, f. 8; RA, VL, Xsted Byfoged, Nr. 22, Auktions Protokol, 1796-98, f. 109-109v

Auction list for 5 (6)

**1797, May:** 9/15/94a

British Ship *Eliza Jan* [Eliza Jane (3,3a)] 120 tons. [118 tons (3,4)]

Permitted to carry 196 slaves (3a)

Captain Daniel Hayward (3a,5) of Liverpool (3a)

Cleared Liverpool 24 September 1796 (3,3a). (4 October 1796 (4)).

Departed Africa (1,5). (Rio Pongo/Nunez (4))

**Arrived Christiansted 15 May 1797** with 164 Africans (1,5) (45 men, 25 male youth, 61

women, 33 female youth (1)) (106 adult & 58 youths (5)) for Thomas Reeve (1,5).

[The same person who as Captain of the ship James, which arrived 25 Jan. 1797?] Departed 14 June 1797 for Liverpool (2).

(1) NA, Xsted Cus. J. 1797, incoming nos. 668 & 685; (2) *ibid.*, outgoing no. 707; (3) BPP/ST61 1971: 15; (3a) *ibid.*, 430; (4) Behrendt notes - 2 June 1797; (5) RA, VL, VI Regering, Toldregnskaber, Nr. 10, 1797, Liquidations Beregning, f. 10

The following vessel exported slaves imported by the Eliza Jane:

Danish Bark *Peggy* (1,2)

70 tons (2) **Change the main entry!**

Owners, Maitland & McCormick of St. Croix, newly imported purchase (2) Received West Indian Sea Pass, 2 March 1797 for 6 months (2)

Captain Jonathan Tatem (1,2) of Christiansted (1) [Jon. Tatem (3)]

Departed Christiansted 18 May 1797 with 158 Africans

(1,3) (106 adults & 52 youths (3)) for Reg. Raad Oxholm (1) (for Th. Reeve (3)), with governmental permission (1), destined for St. Thomas (1,3).

[Not listed as an arrival in St. Thomas - SH.]

- (1) NA, RG55, Xsted Cus. J. 1797, outgoing no. 588; (2) NA, RG55, Box 588, StX Sea Passes, 1782-1807; (3) RA, VL, VI Regering, Toldregnskaber, Nr. 10, 1797, Liquidations Beregning, f. 10

British Frigate Ship *Sundet* (3,3a,4) [Lundet (7)]

187 tons (3). [200 tons (5)]

Owner, Wm. Harper and Co. of Liverpool (4).

Permitted to carry 311 slaves (3a).

Captain Jno. Herron, died (3a,4); Captain John Maxwell (1,4,6,7) of Liverpool (1,4).

Departed Liverpool on 19 January 1797 (3,3a).

Arrived Angola

Departed Africa (6), Angola (1,4,7).

Boarded by privateers while Herron was still alive (4).

**Arrived Christiansted 3 November 1797** with 299 Africans (1,4,6,7) (100 men, 70 male youth, 50 women, 79 female youth) consigned for Robert Faussett (1,4,6). Faussett had been in correspondence with Wm. Harper & Co. (4).

The government permitted the slaves to be sold on St. Croix (4). They were advertised for sale by Robert Fausset at Mr. Tirel's Long Hall, Christiansted, on 13 November 1797 (7).

Departed Christiansted 5 December 1797, carrying with him 20 barrels of sugar for Robert Faussett, des-



tined for Liverpool (2).

Arrived Liverpool

- (1) NA, RG55, Xsted Cus. J. 1797, incoming nos. 1349 & 1457; (2) *ibid.*, outgoing no. 1297; (3) BPP/ST61 1971: 16; (3a) *ibid.*, 430; (4) RA, VL, VI Regering, Referatprotokol No. 1085, 6 Nov. 1797; (5) Behrendt notes - 2 June 1993; (6) RA, VL, VI Regering, Toldregnskaber, Nr. 10, 1797, Liquidations Beregning, f. 7; (7) *Royal Danish American Gazette*, vol. xxviii, no. 3217 (8 November 1797)

British Frigate Ship *Sundet* -continued

On 11 November 1797, Peter Totten as attorney for Government Councillor Oxholm, requested permission to export 114 slaves from this vessel, which he had purchased, to St. Thomas where various planters needed slaves. He promised that none of these slaves would be re-exported before eight days had elapsed (1).

- (1) RA, VL, VI Regering, Referat Protokol, No. 1101/1797.

Danish Bark *Peggy* (12)

70 tons (1,2) NB record changes in main entry!

Owners, Maitland & McCormick of St. Croix (2)

Received West Indian Sea Pass, 18

September 1797 for 6 months (2)

Captain Jonathan Tatem (1,2) of

Christiansted (1) [Jon Tatem (3)]

Departed Christiansted 13 November 1797 with, 112 Africans [67 adult and 45 "half grown"], exported for Robert Faussett (1,3) with governmental permission (1), destined for St. Thomas (1,3).

[No St. Thomas report available for November.]

(1) NA, RG55, Xsted Cus. J., 1797, outgoing no. 1226; (2) NA, RG55, Box 588, StX Sea Passes, 1782-1807; (3) RA, VL, VI Regering, Toldregnskaber, Nr. 10, 1797, Liquidations Beregning, f. 7

(Continued on the following page.)

British Ship *Philip Stevens* (1,5) [Philip Stephens (4)]

147 tons (1)

Allowed to carry 245 slaves (4)

Captain John Thomborow of Liverpool (1,5). [John Thombarrow (4); John Thomborrow (2)]

Cleared Liverpool 9 December 1795 (2) [28 November 1795 (4)].

Arrived Africa

Departed Africa (1, 2) from Angola (5).

**Arrived Christiansted 9 November 1797** with 193 Africans (54 men, 6 men, 67 male youth, 35 women, 31 female youth) for Christopher McEvoy [, Jr.].

Captain John Thomborrow on 10 November 1797, appeared before a Notary in Christiansted to issue a protest (3).

192 people were advertized for sale by Peter Totten the attorney for P.L. Oxholm, to be sold on 16 November 1797 in Christiansted (5).

The ship was condemned at St. Croix (2).

(1) NA, Xsted Cus. J. 1797, incoming nos. 1371 & 1433; (2) Behrendt notes - 2 June 1993;

RA, VL, Xsted, Byfoged Arkiv, Notorial Protokol 1784-1801, VL

04, f. 116b;

BPP/ST61 1971:429; (5) *The Royal Danish American Gazette*, XXVIII (November 15, 1797)

The following vessel exported Africans imported by the ship Philip Stevens:

Danish Schooner *Dorothea* (1)

57 tons (1)

Captain Hezekiah Lord of St. Thomas (1)

Departed Christiansted 20 January 1798 with 3 adult and 2 half grown Africans, exported for Chr. McEvoy, with customs paid and governmental permission, destined for St. Thomas (1).

**Arrived St. Thomas 22 January 1798** with 5 Africans (2).

[May have been shipped to Santiago de Cuba on the American Brig Ann, Captain J. Burnham (348VJ1798).]

(1) NA, RG55, 1798 Xsted Cus. J., outgoing no. 53; (2) 348VJ1798.









