

# **Chapter Four**

## **The Establishment, Development and Collapse of Liberia and Sierra Leone**

### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the developments that resulted in Liberia and Sierra Leone's eventual collapse as functional states. Although the chapter looks at both states, the emphasis will be on Liberia and less on Sierra Leone. This is because Liberia was the first case of state collapse in West Africa and thus experienced the first intervention test case for ECOWAS. It thus, serves as the main case for analysis while Sierra Leone is included more as a control example to explain the extent to which the circumstances that led to its collapse could have contributed to the different difficulties it posed to international interveners.

Part of the argument in this chapter is the manner in which weak states threaten the securities of their citizens. This transpired through the failure of political authorities to carry out policies that create legitimacy and authority, and how security problems might develop within states. This chapter seeks to analyse the developments that contributed to the failure of Liberia and Sierra Leone as states. It focuses on and underscores the transition of both states from Settler to Neocolonial States — whose basic nature will be discussed later in

the chapter — by analysing the peripheral and settler nature of these states. It encompasses two tiers of interpretation.

First, is the relation between the world capitalist-economic system and the peripheral social formation in the state. Secondly, is the development of conflicts within that political and social formation. The point of reference will be the power struggles among the different political and social coalitions therein. This deals with:

- (i) a historical analysis of the establishment of Liberia and Sierra Leone, that explains how the specific historical developments contributed to state collapse;
- (ii) the political, economic and social developments in the settler state;
- (iii) the relationship between the state and the major coalitions, i.e. the socio-political character of these relations, and especially those between the pre- to the post independence periods; and
- (iv) the military interregnum or 'anti-colonial revolution[s]' in both states and subsequent developments that eventually led to these states.<sup>1</sup>

This analysis will interweave state-society relations and will clarify the interpretation of the nature and background of the antagonisms that state policy largely fuelled. This contributed to creating a situation where conflicts eventually attained a zero-sum character with very high levels of passions. These were further complicated by state sponsored patterns of deprivation, inclusion and exclusion.

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<sup>1</sup>Two key books that deal with such issues extensively are Zartman, William, I. 1995, ed. *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and restoration of Legitimate Authority*. Boulder: Lynne Reinner and Holsti, Kalevi. 1996. *The State, War and the State of War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The paradoxes inherent in the establishment, development and growth of Liberia and Sierra Leone into the modern state system have been contributory factors to the collapse of these states.

#### **4.1 Historical Background**

The establishment of both Sierra Leone and Liberia had dynamics that were part of developments that had nothing to do with the original inhabitants of the coastal and hinterland areas. These dynamics can be situated within the context of the rapid economic developments taking place in the United States and England in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This was the period when the world system based on mercantilism and slavery had become repugnant, and was concurrently facing economic devastation as a result of African resistance and rebellion. Eventually, it was transformed into one dominated by capitalism. As a result, the earlier labour intensive economic processes based on slave labour became unprofitable. With industrialisation, slavery, at least, in the northern part of the United States, became an increasingly obsolete form of economic investment. Then followed the abolitionist clamour for disbanding slavery as a whole so those free men could enter the open labour market system of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>2</sup>

##### **4.1.1 Liberia**

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<sup>2</sup>Gershoni, Y. *Black Colonialism — The Americo-Liberia Scramble for the Hinterland*. London: Westview, 1985.

In the specific case of Liberia, on the *Elizabeth's* first voyage in 1820 the US government formally rescinded any connection between the official expedition aboard the *Elizabeth's* mission to Africa and the interests of the American Colonisation Society (ACS). The African-Americans on board the *Elizabeth*, however, drew up what became known as the Elizabeth Compact between themselves and the ACS. It produced the outlines of a framework of government for the ACS's settlement effort.<sup>3</sup> These travellers later known as the Americo-Liberians arrived and settled at Cape Mesurado, on land purported to have been purchased or loaned from the Dei and Malinbahn groups. Meanwhile, the dynamics supposed to guide the disposition and development of the settlements and the new relationship between the majority indigenous Africans and the settlers were sealed under gunpoint by the ratification of what was referred to as the *Dukor Contract*,<sup>4</sup> signed on 15 December, 1821.

Some of the contradictions that have dogged Liberia since its establishment were intrinsic to the very essence of the ACS and their rationale for establishing settlements along Liberia's coast. While the ACS and other colonisation movements gave altruistic reasons, the actual numbers of African-Americans repatriated to Liberia were significant -20,000- in the context of developments in the US. Despite such low numbers, they had a critical impact on the subsequent political, economic and social developments in the new state. First, the ACS saw the settlers as having the duty of civilising and Christening the

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<sup>3</sup>Nelson, H.D. ed., *Liberia: A Country Profile*. Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office.

<sup>4</sup>Nelson, op cit. P.10.

indigenous population<sup>5</sup>. Emphasis was, however, placed on “...the economic benefits of establishing a black colony in terms of trade arrangements with the African population that would secure for American merchants trade ... [and] build an American commercial empire with the backing of the United States Government”.<sup>6</sup>

For several reasons, these dreams did not materialise in the manner anticipated by the ACS. In establishing the Liberian state, a contradiction, which was shared by several colonised states, was created: that is, the pre-capital economy, and to a modest extent, the political formations of the coastal zone, (primarily acephalous) were exposed to an incomplete transmutation under the influence of African-American settler arrangements along the coast. This inherent contradiction in diverse state forms and Americo-Liberian inability to incorporate traditional state forms of government and an evolving African civilisation into their modern state was to complicate their already delicate relationship.

For instance, another dilemma that occurred in Liberia was the strategic aspiration — implicit in the Elizabeth compact — of the ACS to act as a state. Two dynamics were present in this process. One was the possibility of the ACS to act as an exclusionist state by interacting selectively with the political and social entities of the African environment. The second option was for Liberia to be an inclusionist state by incorporating the political and social entities within its immediate environment. These dilemmas affected Liberia’s

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<sup>5</sup>Wickstrom, W. *The American Colonisation Society and Liberia, 1817 - 1967*. Monrovia: College of West Africa, 1960.

<sup>6</sup>David, M.S. ‘The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here: An Analysis of the Development of the Settler State in Nineteenth Century Liberia’, *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 31, December, 1984, p.59.

internal economic development and growth and fostered the first seeds of the later political conflicts that became the precursor of the events of today.

Conflicting and contradictory interests resulted between what can be described as the hopeful but unrealistic illusions of the settlers on one hand, and the exploitative and patronising demands and expectations of the ACS on the other. Caught between these hegemonic aspirations, were the diverse indigenous groups and traders who had to resist this encroachment by outsiders to re-gain space for themselves within which to manoeuvre.

In spite of the complexities of the Liberian situation, the ACS saw the initial activities in Liberia's first permanent settlement at Cape Mesurado as a success. The domino effect was the establishment of several colonisation societies and the creation of myriad settlements along the coast.<sup>7</sup> These diverse settlements eventually merged into a commonwealth under a new constitution with the motto "The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here". Explicitly, the establishment of a settler state produced the strategic imperatives by Liberia to develop its territory and to take its place "in world politics" as a fully-fledged member of international society.

Implicit in the Liberian motto were certain discrepancies that were to characterise the relationship between the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous peoples. Forming only four per cent of the population, the constitution empowered Americo-Liberians "to regenerate and enlighten the benighted continent". Nevertheless, on this *mission civilisatrice*, "none but Negroes or persons of Negro descent should be admitted to

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<sup>7</sup>Nelson, op cit., p.14.

citizenship”.<sup>8</sup> To define the nature of state-society relations that were being superimposed on the indigenous populations, the constitution further emphasised that “none but citizens should be entitled to hold property; and that only *property holders* should be *entitled to vote and hold executive office*”.<sup>9</sup>

Nelson succinctly captures the almost feudal and Lockean dynamics of the social relations that characterised these states. These dynamics defined the societal relations — which were to play an important role in the way the state developed — and political developments were established. Specifically, Sesay asserted that “[t]he history of Liberia [until 1980] was the history of the arrival, settlement and success of ex-slaves resettled by the ACS”.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4.1.2 Sierra Leone

Key among the causes or origins of the Sierra Leonean conflict is the interplay of bad governance and deteriorating economic conditions. This was evident under the various regimes spanning both the colonial and post-colonial periods through the 1970s and 1980s

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<sup>8</sup>(Nyong’o, P.A. ed., ‘Popular Alliances and the State in Liberia’, in *Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa*, London: Zed Books, 1987:214; Dollo, E. *Democracy versus Dictatorship: The Quest for Freedom and Justice in Africa’s Oldest Republic*. Lanham. MD: University Press of America, 1996, p.23ff.

<sup>9</sup>Nyong’o, op cit., p.214) [emphasis mine].

<sup>10</sup>Sesay, M. ‘Sierra Leone’s Intractable War’ *Africa World Review*, November-March 1997, p.206.

up-to the Lome Accord of July 1999. David Keen has argued, “even under colonial rule, a pattern of economic development based on the extraction of largely unprocessed raw materials had combined with widespread corruption among Sierra Leone politicians and traditional chiefs to create deep pools of resentment among those excluded from this system of profit and power”.<sup>11</sup> After independence and especially under the leadership of Siaka Stevens, the economy improved through efforts that sought to rationalise the extraction of minerals as a way of reducing illegal economic activities and corruption. These processes concurrently sought an increase in tax revenue for the development of infrastructural and social services.

Nevertheless, by the 1970s and 1980s the economy has plummeted as a result of re-intensification of corrupt practices, centralisation of governance, coupled with clientalism and the neopatrimonial tendencies of Siaka Stevens’s regime. Jimmy Kandeh has argued that:

Conversion of state offices and public resources into sources of private wealth has been the primary mode of accumulation among Sierra Leone’s political elite since independence in 1961. Siaka Stevens ... turned over the entire diamond and fishing industry to Jamil Sahid Mohammed, his Afro-Lebanese crony and business partner ... Mohammed attended cabinet meetings (although he was not a minister or official member of government), occasionally vetoed ministerial appointments, reversed ministerial decisions and routinely violated government foreign exchange regulations”.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>David Keen, *War and Underdevelopment*, Vol. 2. Country Experiences (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.57; Alfred Zack-William.

<sup>12</sup>Jimmy Kandeh, ‘Ransoming the State: Elite Origins of Subaltern Terror in Sierra Leone’ *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. No. 1999, p.249.



The misuse of state resources for personal gain and the attendant abuse of political power, obviously, widened the gap in terms of the living standards between the members of the All Peoples' Congress (APC) government and the citizens of Sierra Leone. Ishmael Rashid has admitted that “the state was in serious crisis ... Siaka Stevens and Jamil Sahid became both the shorthand and embodiment of the country’s crisis in the mid-1970s. The relationship between the two men represented the negative fusion of private and public immorality and corruption”.<sup>13</sup>

The malfeasance in Siaka Stevens’s regime also had negative impact at all levels of state administration to the extent that civil servants had to pay an initial bribe of Le10,000 (the equivalent of ten thousand U.S. dollars at the time) and monthly payments of Le8,000 to keep their jobs.<sup>14</sup> Again, the widespread violence against opponents of the All Peoples’ Congress (APC) regime through the use of thugs by politicians whipped up negative sentiments and created fertile grounds for rebellion against such practices. Kandeh, aptly, summed this up that “the appropriation of lumpen violence and thuggery by the political class undermined security and paved the way for the political ascendancy of

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<sup>13</sup>Ishmael Rashid ‘Subaltern reactions: Lumpens, Students and the Left’ in Ibrahim Abdullah and Yusuf Bangura, op cit., p.27.

<sup>14</sup>ibid., p.351.

armed marginals”.<sup>15</sup> By appropriating such political tactics, what the political elite had demonstrated was their own lack of understanding and commitment to the political process.

Such challenges were compounded by the oil price shocks of 1974 and 1979 and the contemporaneous reduction in the prices of primary products on the world market owing to global recession. These difficulties were deepened by the introduction of IMF/IBRD policies, which also added to the woes of the economy. According to Arthur Abraham, these developments created conditions for a rebellion in that “after a brilliant start at independence in 1961, Sierra Leone began a slow period of decline in the 1970s, and from the mid-1980s, material conditions for rebellion gradually ripened”.<sup>16</sup> The interplay of these factors affected the standard of living of the citizenry including students, public sector workers and the unemployed. The result was “an illegal sector — with government officials turning a blind eye to, and often participating in, smuggling — seriously reduced the state revenues from diamonds and other primary products in the 1980s”.<sup>17</sup> The end result of such corrupt practices and the undermining of state institutions resulted in the inability of state regulatory frameworks to function effectively. It meant that the values of smuggled diamonds reached around US\$300 million every year. Through corrupt practices, Siaka Stevens and his key political allies, notably a small group of Lebanese businessmen built up their personal fortune.

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<sup>15</sup>Kandeh, op cit.

<sup>16</sup>Abraham

<sup>17</sup>Keen, op cit., p.158.

One other public sector that suffered from such practices was the already fragile educational system, which was further worsened by cuts in public spending and rapid inflation leading to currency devaluation.<sup>18</sup> The collapse in state revenues made it difficult for the state to suppress challenges to its authority. Stevens's style of personal rule coupled with the deteriorating economy owing to both internal and external problems weakened and undermined the power of the executive over the affairs of the state. Eventually the political space within which Stevens' government could manoeuvre became limited and created conditions for state collapse, which resulted in violent protest on all fronts including students, labour unions and public sector workers.

In an attempt to revitalise the collapsing state and extend the life of his regime, Stevens engineered a successful though unconstitutional transfer of power to his protégé, Major-General Joseph Mommoh, then head of the army in 1985. Mommoh, according to Kandeh, thus inherited a predatory regime that was steeped in corruption, opportunism, cronyism and sycophancy.<sup>19</sup> Mommoh, however, could not meet the hopes and aspirations of his countrymen and women. This view was re-emphasised by Kpundeh that "the Mommoh regime could neither halt the institutional decay nor repair the economy. Official corruption magnified as 'Squandergate' succeeded 'Vouchergate'.<sup>20</sup> The interplay of the factors enumerated above obviously set the stage for the demands presented for a radical change by the neglected, marginalised and alienated students, and workers.

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<sup>18</sup>ibid., p.159.

<sup>19</sup>Kandeh, op cit., p.352.

<sup>20</sup>Kpundeh 1995, p.63 in Africa Development Vol. XXII, Nos. 3/4m. P.37.

From the ongoing, one can argue that the history and politics of Sierra Leone has been characterised by the complex interconnectedness of youth marginalisation, resource exploitation, deteriorating economic and political conditions eventually leading to conflict. Its political history has alternated between virtual one-party statism and military rule. Sierra Leone was at the critical juncture between disintegration and possible reconfiguration. Since the early twentieth century, several of its rulers had decisively reconfigured the substructure of political authority in the country to deal with the reality of increasing state inversion whereby the state decayed in varying stages over time. The argument is that, as the Sierra Leonean state became inverted, several non-state actors came onto the political and economic scene and began to challenge the authority of the state.

Specifically, at the central or national level, state institutions that monopolised political and economic authority and military power and were expected to exercise policy on a national basis were no longer effective. As such, at the sub-state level, other actors increasingly stepped in to challenge the ability of the state to exercise its authority. This conflict was found on several levels: national, regional and local.

Nevertheless, for the purposes of the case study and its aims, it is the complex relationship and nexus between youth, resources and conflict between 1991 and 1999 that will be the focus. To appreciate Sierra Leone's politics, it must be recognised that different administrations managed, or more appropriately, controlled 'reforms' to acquire new resources. More often than not, these were the unexpected convergence of interests among a myriad set of actors, both at state and sub-state levels. Sierra Leone's case is complex and interesting in several ways because the process of state inversion highlights several

different actors whose arrival on the scene either wittingly or unwittingly enabled the four politico-military leaders to stay in power. In the same vein, the modern political history of Sierra Leone challenges some accepted conceptions and ideas about borders, international recognition, sovereignty and alternative forms of political authority. Closely interrelated to the discussion of youth, resources and conflict in Sierra Leone is the issue of the privatisation of war and innovations in the organisation of warfare.<sup>21</sup> Warfare normally prepares rulers to restrain rivals, while concurrently shaping economies of scale and new mechanisms for controlling populations. Such processes gave rulers a greater degree of autonomy to promote state interests over societal interests. However, in Sierra Leone, totally different dynamics applied.

Traditional state responses to security threats created concurrent hindrances on several fronts. Two of these were, however, critical. First, among some of the vulnerabilities that contributed to conflicts were: political favouritism and exclusion, resource distribution to clients, private exploitation of resources; and the implementation of structural adjustment programmes and their unintended consequences, which undermined the few social services that the state provided. By 1991, the country had experienced an almost seamless progression from politically motivated violence to criminal violence. Second, interference with conventional sources of state revenue during different periods arising from a combination or otherwise of the above factors resulted in the growth of alternate structures or strongmen. The result of the state's response to this complex mix

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<sup>21</sup>William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

of problems undermining sources and potential for revenue while at the same time threatening the survival of the state was the privatisation of the state apparatus.

What occurred in Sierra Leone was that, between the aspiration of the elite — both civilian and military — and the subsistence tactics of the populace, the state habitually seemed to endure basically as a show: a political drama with an audience. As Sierra Leone's case shows, the audience can be located both within the boundaries of the state and in the international arena. Events in the country since the 1970s have vividly demonstrated that what occurred in the early 1990's merely set in motion forces and issues that were still being resolved, and whose contribution to the newly emerging state structures remained undefined. How and why has this complex interplay of interests resulted in tragic circumstances of these states? What are the links between state restructuring, state collapse, and violent conflict? Probably, the independent variables in all these interconnections are natural resources; Sierra Leone's problematic 'Midas touch'<sup>22</sup>

#### **4.2 Political, Economic and Social Developments in Liberia and Sierra Leone**

In order to locate the factors which precipitated the challenge to the state, one has to look at the recent history of both states from the mid-1970s. In Sierra Leone, the main causal factors for the conflict and subsequent civil war could be traced to the debilitating effects of the personalised and monolithic rule of the immediate post-independence leaders.<sup>23</sup> This led to the destruction of civil society and accountability. The end result was the malleability

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<sup>22</sup>Abdul K. Koroma. *Sierra Leone: The Agony of a Nation*. (London: Andromeda Press, 1996).

<sup>23</sup>Kandeh, op cit.

and institutional fragility of the state.<sup>24</sup> As Kandeh has argued, the governing class in Sierra Leone through the process of control and abuse of state power demonstrated its inability to secure the uncoerced compliance of the subordinate strata to their rule.<sup>25</sup> As a result, state legitimisation has been premised not on establishing a state hegemonic project like the one that took place in Liberia but on the reinforcement of the oppressive state apparatus.<sup>26</sup>

This was paralleled with the introduction of a whole network of patron client relations which in recent discourse has been characterised as the 'shadow state'.<sup>27</sup> The activity of the shadow state and its reproduction are premised on state access to sufficient revenue in order to placate clients in order to obtain their support and by extension stay in power. Its operation, which will be eventually linked to the nature of the wars both in Liberia and Sierra Leone, were characterised by asset stripping and revenues expropriated largely from rural producers. It is part of my argument that herein can be located the contradictions of the politics of decline in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Bringing forth these contradictions are important because both states were signatory to the ECOWAS protocols that would eventually be used to intervene in these states. But not only that, their underlying reasons for state collapse were also manifest in several ECOWAS states.

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<sup>24</sup>Zack-Williams, A. 'Sierra Leone: the Political Economy of War, 1991 - 1998', mimeo, July, 1998.

<sup>25</sup>Kandeh, J. 'Sierra Leone: Contradictory Class Functionality of the 'Soft' State' *ROAPE*, 55, 1992.

<sup>26</sup>Zack-Williams, A. 'Sierra Leone 1968 - 85 - The Decline of Politics and the Politics of Decline', *Sierra Leone Studies at Birmingham*, 1985, pp.201-208; Reno, W. 1995, op cit.

<sup>27</sup>Reno, W. 1999. *Warlord Politics and African States*. London: Lynne Rienner, 1998.

### 4.3 The Specific Case of Liberia

With increasing settlements along the coast, the need for a more systematised political control through which American mercantile interests and its local agents could relate to the new and scattered societies became acute. To achieve this amalgamation, all the established independent settlements except Maryland issued the Liberian declaration of independence in July 1847. This was first effectively introduced by the repatriate settlement at Cape Mesurado. However, cognisant of the contestations that arise concerning historical depth and the nature and status of societies before defeat and subordination, I posit that the 1648 dating of Liberia's inclusion in the modern state system is inappropriate. As a result, the argument in this thesis is that the Moroccan war of 1593 and its impact on the sahelian and forest states marked the beginning of the modern period in Africa. For our later analysis of the war, it is important that this point is appreciated. From the point above, it is clear that the modern period, at least among the Sahelian and forest peoples came about as a consequence of Africa's encounter with Arabs and the ensuing Islamic confrontation. Therefore, the modern Liberian period did not ensue from the experience of US philanthropic colonising adventure.

However, it was the expanding relationship between these settlements and the western world on one hand, and the indigenous African environment surrounding them on the other, that the centre-periphery dichotomy is frequently used to analyse Liberian socio-political and economic occurrences<sup>28</sup>. In contrast to establishing the institutions of the

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<sup>28</sup>David, op cit., Dunn, E.D. & B. Tarr, *Liberia: A National Polity in Transition*. London: Scarecrow Press, 1987; Clapham, C. *Liberia and Sierra Leone: An Essay in Comparative Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.



modern nation-state, the indigenous structures that governed the African societies were left virtually undisturbed, and for the first couple of decades, maintained a primarily peripheral relationship to the emerging state. Due to the inability of the state to initiate integrative policies to establish a consolidated state, indigenous groupings “remain[ed] small scale political entities largely inward-looking and adapting only slowly to changes induced by contact with the outside world”.<sup>29</sup>

Several reasons explain Americo-Liberian inability or unwillingness to initiate integrative policies towards indigenous groups. Despite efforts to dismiss the resistance from local groups to the increasing powers that the settlers arrogated to themselves, Nimely has argued that “the local factors that united them locally as tribesmen were the very factors that kept them divided as distinct tribes for centuries”.<sup>30</sup> Settler awareness and conscious manipulation of these antagonistic divergences intensified the ethnic divide of Liberia’s socio-political development. The extent to which faded integrative efforts resulted from weak military force at the disposal of the state, or whether this resulted from an unwillingness to extend the area under their jurisdiction to encompass more regions, thus increasing the level of state expenditure is not definitive. Dunn and Tarr argue that even the largest group, the Kpelle, lacked the requisite strength and structures to sustain resistance to incursions by the political-administrative arrangements of the settlers.

Arguably, the Liberian state was weak in terms of the functions it was expected to perform and the demands made on it. As such, there were several instances when the United States initiated punitive expeditions, not to mention the support obtained from

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<sup>29</sup>Dunn & Tarr, op cit., p.47.

<sup>30</sup>Nimely, A.J. *The Liberian Bureaucracy*. Lanham, M.D.: University Press America. 1997.

passing merchant navies in response to settlement exigencies in dealing with indigenous resistance or endeavour at controlling.<sup>31</sup> Another important deduction normally excluded in the analysis of settler inability to integrate the hinterland populations, were the nature of internal politicking between the different settlements and their political representatives. To this can be added the gradual development of a system where colour and caste - at least in the beginning - were imperceptibly becoming the defining characteristics of internal politics among the settlers. In addition, the social, economic and political struggles for domination among the settlers on one hand, and the ACS on the other, seriously weakened any efforts at hinterland conquest. Settler reluctance to come under the jurisdiction of the ACS increasingly created problems in Liberia. This compounded the already weak position in which the company found itself because of its increasingly precarious financial position. Concurrent with the decline of the ACS was an asymmetrical development among the settlers where the mulatto commercial coalition began to wield increasing political power. With this arose the embryonic “inchoate two- party system”.<sup>32</sup> The internal manipulations involved in this incipient electoral politics contributed to constituting latent societal dislocations that were to characterise Liberian developments until 1980.

With expansion in revenue accruing from the middleman’s activities between the hinterland and the coastal areas and through the import-export trade, a secure source of income gradually enriched the mulatto-based Monrovia commercial interest coalitions. As the ACS’s hegemony declined, this coalition strategically infiltrated the political vacuum thereby fostering the initial underpinning factors that were to create the first major political

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<sup>31</sup>Nelson, op cit., 26 & 28.

<sup>32</sup>Dunn & Tarr, op cit., p.47.

conflict in the state. Closely attached to these ideals, was abhorrence for state intervention in the economy. There was an element of conservatism in terms of the fiscal policy initiated by the commercial group. This was to become the real cause of the conflict in the state. Still, in the ensuing political struggle over which group should fill the vacuum created by the departing ACS, the planter coalition made up of the dark-skinned group whose political and social influences were consistently being obstructed by the Monrovia-based mulatto commercial oligarchy engendered another inherent nascent factor of conflict: this dealt with which group wielded control over the state apparatus. Nevertheless, to maintain economic hegemony, both groups employed 'ethnic' arguments in the ensuing political struggle to win control over the state. The dynamics of the ability to achieve this 'peaceful' transition will be discussed in the next sub-section.

The nature of emerging struggles in the social formation that characterised Liberian politics increasingly dealt with the socio-political and economic preferences of the dominating coalition. This was not to change for the next century. What changed, however, were perceptions concerning the character of the role of the state, and the function it was to perform in settler and subsequent Liberian society vis-à-vis international capital. Accordingly, in the resulting struggles for political control, the planter coalition successfully employed the rhetoric of *colour* to displace the mulatto oligarchy from state power between 1870-1877. The centrality of this incipient struggle should be seen from the dominating role that the state occupied in Liberian society and politics. Both the merchant and planter coalitions saw access to and control over the state apparatus as a source for private accumulation of wealth and political control. Accordingly, such control was later

transformed into an expanded and elected political system, through which the state could confer remuneration and patronage.

Control over state apparatus was crucial in yet another matter. While the Monrovia based commercial oligarchy saw the state as a means to appropriate resources to promote their caste-like interests; the dark-skinned planter coalition after taking control of state apparatus redefined the role of the state in a much wider context. In their interpretation, for the state to play its important role of arbitrating among divergent societal forces, and simultaneously intervene, among contending socio-political pressures, an accommodation was needed between the emergent dark-skinned coalition and foreign capital. Sensitive to the prerogatives of modern development, the new hegemonic coalition encouraged investments in those sectors that could easily accrue profit to the state while, improving the human and material infrastructure needed to survive and maintain that hegemony.<sup>33</sup> The related successive manifestation of this policy will be analysed in the next section.

#### **4.4 The Social and Economic Dimension**

Political control over indigenous areas was characterised by communities in which traditional forms of authority were kept in place. These were based on military, social, religious, cultural and economic sanctions in which secret societies, especially the Poro and the Sande played vital functions.<sup>34</sup> Upon these traditional forms of social stratification and

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<sup>33</sup>Stavenhagen, R. *Ethnic Conflicts and the Nation State*, London: Macmillan Publishers, 1996, p.21ff.

<sup>34</sup>Ellis, S. 1995. 'Liberia - 1989 - 1994: A Study of Ethnic and Spiritual Violence', *African Affairs*, vol. 94, no. 375.

control were superimposed values and ideas that were peculiar to the newly established state.

From the outset, a rudimentary hierarchical system of power and social stratification developed within the settler group on one hand, and yet another different stratification between the settlers and the indigenous Africans on the other.<sup>35</sup> Under this stratification, the repatriates were the most insignificant group in both states. The upper tier of this stratification was the black and mulatto group who had either been born free or purchased their freedom in England or the United States. Lowest on this social hierarchy were the indigenous Africans, whose own longstanding ethnic animosities surfaced when the unifying factor of repatriate oppression was removed. The political importance of the Congos in Liberian politics and Creoles in Sierra Leone politics should be seen from their relative numerical superiority, forming roughly a quarter of all “settlers”, and thus having property and voting rights. In the ensuing political struggles among the repatriates and in spite of their small number, these groups assumed an importance that made them an important political constituency.

In the quest of these repatriate groups to establish a more constructive and authoritative jurisdiction over the hinterland areas, a complex control mechanism of three overlapping strategies evolved. These encompassed: (i) control over tribal mobility; (ii) tribal isolation; and (iii) an indirect rule policy. Through this strategy, sixteen tribal clusters under paramount chiefs, were either established or appointed by the government. As a result, some form of local administration began to emerge. The hinterland was subsequently

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<sup>35</sup>Interview, 12 July 1999.

classified into five administrative regions. Under this system, indigenous Africans were first corporate members of their respective ethnic groups rather than as individual Liberians.

Liberia's emerging position as a peripheral economic state began with the first major loan undertaken by the government in 1871. Positioning this action, in the immediate struggles for political domination, supports the argument that state centrality in economic development was the core essence of those political conflicts.

Under dependency relations, the transfer of surplus profits is a *sine qua non* for integration. Liberia's foray unto the international investment scene was characterised by these relations. This led to the state's expanding indebtedness to European banks.

#### **4.5 The Impact of Socio-political Developments on Youth Culture**

This period, also, coincided with the era in Liberian history generally characterised as "growth without development". The aftermath of these policies on the indigenous peoples was massive. Social investments made by transnational corporations and the general economic effects of these contributions introduced health, education, and modern communication facilities to the hinterlands for the first time. Some analysts have argued that a major offshoot of increased foreign investment, which were not directly related to profit oriented objectives included social programmes.

In both of these states, the modernisation and social investment improved the general conditions of indigenous population that facilitated a stabilisation of the economic structure, but proved to be a double-edged sword. In improving hinterland facilities, tax collection, became more effective and the recruitment of soldiers and labourers were

enhanced under less than voluntary terms. Two interrelated consequences resulted. First, in Sierra Leone, this coincided with the period of the discovery of gem diamonds and the beginning of struggles over access to land, while in Liberia, land grabs were characterised by the Americo-Liberian acquisition of land on a massive scale. Liebenow argues that this period constituted one of the major “land grabs” in African history, and was comparable to land seizures by whites settlers in Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa.<sup>36</sup> Secondly, concomitant to this development was the weakening of tribal bonds because of rural-urban migration for better jobs and facilities, and especially the formation in Monrovia of what has been derogatively described as the “back street boys”. A concomitant development took place in Sierra Leone. Ibrahim Abdullah has argued that in Sierra Leone, the first group of organised youth acted as body guards to politicians, a role that was played as a result of their defective education.<sup>37</sup>

This phenomenon cuts across the whole West African sub-region, though with slight variations. In Ghana, they are known as the *verandah boys* and in Nigeria as *jaguda boys* or *area boys and girls* or *yan banga*. In Algeria they are called *hittiste*. In East Africa, they are known as *bayaye*. In Sierra Leone, they are variously known as *raray-boys*, *savis-man*, *drag man*, or simply *liners*. All these are pejorative terms for the underclass’ youth and are normally employed in reference to rebellious youth culture.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Liebenow, G.L. *Liberia: A Quest for Democracy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988, p.47.

<sup>37</sup> Abdullah, I, ‘Bush Paths to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone’, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 36.2, 1998, p.208.

<sup>38</sup>Museveni. Y. *Sowing the Mustard Seed: The Struggle for Freedom and the Democracy in Uganda*, London, 1997; Abdallah, *ibid*.

These were a motley group of detribalised underclass who were a volatile and potential source of social and political unrest, and were to play critical roles in the initial support given to the fledging opposition parties, the Rice riots of 1979, and the initial crucial support to the military takeover in 1980.

#### **4.6 Towards Collapse In Liberia and Sierra Leone**

The deepened cleavages in societal relations and the latent social antagonism towards the ruling elites in both states made political authority and control of the states difficult. According to several observers, the situation had by 1977 developed to “critical proportions”. Added to this was the fact that the combined effects of the Open Door Policy (ODP) and Unification programmes sharpened the economic disparities and increasing political awareness among the indigenous people. It contributed to laying the foundation for an underclass of politicised youth who desperately wanted the chance to unleash their socio-economic and political frustrations. By 1974, social tensions were prevalent in Liberia, though the political elite successfully managed to keep tight control over the state and thus contained these tensions. Nevertheless, what was lacking to transform this latent social tension into active and open violence and conflict was what has been suitably characterised as the “tipping event[s]”.<sup>39</sup> The discriminatory aphorism, “The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here”, was, in praxis, consistently applied to deny the majority

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<sup>39</sup>Hardin, R. One for all: The Logic of Group Conflict. Princeton: Princeton University Press, (1995:145-7).



indigenous Africans any role in the affairs of state. They had to suffer the indignities of seeing their participation in national affairs relegated to the peripheral confines of society. Nevertheless, these were to change later. The ODP and Unification policies improved the hinterland people's access to education, health, employment and mobility. Added to this was increasing demand for a participatory role in the decision-making process as indigenous Liberians increasingly began to complain about the nature of Americo-Liberian policies from the early twentieth century as laying the potential foundations for the collapse of the state. Due to the lack of political space, indigenous Liberians — civilian and military officers — increasingly agitated for change, and in a few instances resorted to violence. True Whig Party (TWP) stalwarts perceived these forcible efforts at change, as a reflection of widespread discontent among indigenous Africans. Instead of a concerted effort to respond to such complaints, they were interpreted as representing the disgruntled efforts of a few officers.

As these social discrepancies continued, a sense of political awareness began to emerge among students, workers and the displaced urban youth.<sup>40</sup> In the specific case of Liberia, these diverse frustrations were given an outlet for protest when they coalesced in the early 1970s in the creation of self-help groups. The two influential ones were the Movement for Justice in Africa [MOJA] formed in 1973 and led by Togba Nah Tipoteh, and the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL) formed in 1974 under the leadership of Gabriel Baccus Mathews. Though both parties were opposed to the state of affairs in

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<sup>40</sup>Abdullah, 1998, op cit.; Sesay, 1998, op cit.; Zack-Williams, 1998, op cit.

Liberia there were slight differences in their strategic approach to the Liberian situation. MOJA regarded itself as a mass-based Pan-African organisation or “vanguard party” dedicated to the struggle against imperialism and neocolonialism in Africa.<sup>41</sup> PAL, on the other hand, was more populist in nature and drew most of its supporters from disaffected students and back-street boys in the urban areas. In spite of its more radical political rhetoric, it was committed to the democratic process.

By the latter part of the 1970s, both organisations had attained immense support among the youth and students in the urban areas. MOJA also extended its activities into the countryside thus ensuring a more broad based and evenly distributed national support through SUSUKUU, a cooperative scheme described by MOJA as “a development organisation in the service of the poor”. Probably, two policies or “tipping event[s]” struck the death knell for TWP hegemony. First, was the ill-conceived and exploitative policy of increasing the price of rice. Secondly, were the manipulative processes towards preventing Amos Sawyer’s participation in the 1979 Monrovia Mayoral elections. In presenting the former policy, the government argued that the price increase had the aim of serving as a stimulus to rice farmers to increase production and stay on the land instead of migrating to the urban areas or the rubber farms. This was supposed to tackle the problem of increasing scarcity of rice. Instead of devising a long-term strategy to deal with this problem, the “false bourgeoisie or comprador” class immediately saw an opportunity for exploitation. With an annual import and subsidy bill amounting to \$8 million (Dunn & Holso, 1985: 170),

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<sup>41</sup>Nelson, op cit., p.65; Nyong’o, op cit., p.221-225; Sawyer, A. *The Emergence of Autocracy in Liberia: Tragedy and Challenge*. San Francisco: ICS, 1992, pp.289-292.

Tolbert, his family and benefactors who were large commercial farmers and similarly engaged in importing and retailing rice subsidised by the government stood to gain. The public correctly assessed this increase as an attempt by the government to exploit rice production and sale for its own profit.

An analysis of government subsidy policy with respect to cash crops and the powerful retail interest groups in Liberia, represent sharp contradictions in the government's rather weak altruistic arguments. An appraisal of the government subsidy system shows that all-major cash crops-cocoa, coffee and rubber-produced for export mainly by the Americo-Liberians were subsidised by the government except rice that the indigenous group produced. The crop was sold to dealers at prevailing market prices. To make rice affordable, especially at the urban centres, the government heavily subsidised the price of rice at this stage. These were then bought by government ministers and sold on the open market.

In the ensuing criticism of this strategy for economic gains, PAL called for a demonstration against the government on April 14, 1979. With about 2,000 supporters and 10,000 'back-street boys' participating, the demonstration quickly developed into running street battles with the police. The leadership of PAL was incarcerated. Liberia eventually promulgated its mutual defence pact with Guinea, and Guinean troops came to the aid of the government.<sup>42</sup> The role of Guinean and AFL troops in quelling these riots had the unintended effect of signalling to the military, a sense of its own potential, and the strength

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<sup>42</sup>See Museveni, op cit. And Abdallah, op cit. For the role of marginalised youth in political mobilisation.

of military power in relation to the political and economic classes in both countries. Unknown at that time, this incident was to have a serious impact on the politics of the sub-region in the coming years.

Secondly, it was precisely at this period that the Monrovia Mayoral elections were scheduled to take place. MOJA suggested that it intended to register Amos Sawyer as its candidate. Due to Sawyer's popularity because of his SUSUKUU and MOJA activities, the government attempted to prevent Sawyer's candidacy by claiming that Sawyer did not meet property qualifications as stipulated by the constitution. This reaction caused dissension in the government that had difficulty applying this Lockean concept in a modern era.

PAL transformed itself into the Progressive People's Party [PPP] in January 1980, to contest the elections. This strategy led to government decision to suspend the mayoral election until passions had subsided. In response, the PPP organised yet another march to the Executive Mansion demanding the immediate resignation of the President. In the ensuing riots, PPP leaders were arrested and their trial scheduled for April 14, 1980. PPP's political strategies during this period brought the first major differences between these two mass parties to the public notice.

In Sierra Leone, struggles for political activism were strictly within the established confines of the established political parties.

#### **4.7 The Military and Political Interregnum in Liberia and Sierra Leone**

On April 12 1980, two days before PAL leaders were to stand trial, a major change erupted in Liberia's turbulent political scene. A group of seventeen noncommissioned officers in the AFL overthrew the TWP and established a ruling body under the People's Redemption Council (PRC). Initial public responses to the new government led by Master-Sergeant Samuel Kanyon Doe were positive. With a history spanning more than a century of structural discrimination, Liberia had evolved a lopsided development because of an unfair distribution of the national wealth. The first action undertaken by the PRC reminiscent of other African military takeovers was to suspend the constitution, proscribe the TWP and abolished parliament.

Citing a litany of injustices, Doe accused Tolbert's government and the Americo-Liberians of crimes ranging from massive corruption to unemployment resulting in poverty.

Doe's take-over got initial support from the population. The take-over broadcast to the nation ought to have been the first indicator of the variety of contradictory relations in the cabinet make-up as a result of the inclusion of people with different political ideologies, and the later splits that were to haunt the Liberian political scene. With hindsight, it can be argued that the broadcast statement, represented little of what the military desired to say and more of what the dominant civilian factions desired the military to say. The introductory statements amply illustrated the divergent views of prominent members of the cabinet on the character of the political direction of the PRC, and the diverse interpretations of their action.

After this self protective action, the PRC<sup>43</sup> subsequently released all political prisoners, especially PPP and MOJA activists, who had been incarcerated for their political activities and invited them to join the government. Military tribunals were established which attained dubious international fame by immediately ordering the execution of thirteen prominent former TWP ministers. In composing the cabinet, the PRC selected an unholy coalition of civilians made of PPP, MOJA and former TWP members. Comprising ten civilians, they were supposed to administer government departments, but were not given any policy functions. The cabinet met the PRC monthly to offer advice on policy formulation.

Arguably, the extent to which such populist policy measures by the PRC, with respect to its immediate post-*coup d'état* economic actions could be characterised as “reform” or “revolution[ary]”, is questionable. First, presumably in response to increased internal anticipation after the 1980 takeover, the PRC raised its public sector employment level by 50%; it doubled the salaries of lowest-paid civil servants, and the salaries of the military by 150%. The end result of such uncontrollable government spending increased public expenditure as the monthly payroll skyrocketed from \$6 million to \$13 million.<sup>44</sup> The extent, nature and character of decline in the economy began with a downward slide because of previous oil price hikes and the concomitant fluctuations on the international

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<sup>43</sup>*West Africa*, 9 June 1980.

<sup>44</sup>*West Africa*, 12 May 1986, p.99.

market for the prices of iron ore, rubber and timber. Inheriting a debt of \$750 million in 1980, this rose to \$1.3 billion in 1984 under the PRC government. A combination of external and internal factors account for the worsening economic crisis. This included double-digit inflation and a 500% oil price increase by the end of the decade. Extreme recession of world market prices for Liberia's major exports resulted in reduced income. By 1984, iron ore exports had declined by 14% while incomes from rubber had declined by 50%.<sup>45</sup> It cannot be overlooked that the Tolbert government's lack of fiscal discipline, especially the hosting of the 1979 OAU summit believed to have cost the government between \$100-350 million, also, substantially contributed to the rather miserable state of the economy. Nelson has argued, that the *coup d'etat* probably reinforced the already worsening situation where the domestic economy had stagnated; combined with a public sector foreign exchange crisis that was a result of the high and accelerating external financial obligations.<sup>46</sup> The end result was an economy that was in a worse shape than when the military took-over with heightened political tensions as a result of the uncertainty surrounding the re-democratisation process.

Coupled with this worsening economic situation was a gradual waning of enthusiastic support for the PRC. Closely related to the loss of popular support at home were decisions by major transnational corporations (TNCs) to suspend all further activities and investments in the Liberian economy. By the end of November 1980, the government

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<sup>45</sup>*West Africa*, 12 May 1990, pp.990-992; Dunn & Tarr, op cit., 1987, pp.127-12.

<sup>46</sup>Op cit., p.xxix.

had still not managed to present a coherent economic policy. This resulted in most TNC's who controlled almost 90% of total investments in Liberia to suspend their activities. Not only that, a few of the major companies, started to withdraw from Liberia altogether. The result was a crisis of credibility in international finance circles. It has been estimated that by 1984, up to \$40 million, representing a third of the total deposits in the commercial banking system was destroyed.<sup>47</sup> Pushed into an economic quandary where its chances of manoeuvrability were virtually nonexistent, the PRC's ability to meet or fulfil its initial broadcast assurances became difficult. Instead, a paradoxical situation arose where "public enthusiasm for Tolbert's overthrow in 1980 ... [started] to wane as the military regime appeared unable even to manage — let alone restructure — the economy any better than had its predecessors"<sup>48</sup> To deal with the unfolding threatening economic situation, the PRC took a major decision to consult the International Monetary Fund — IMF — and the World Bank — WB — for financial support. The PRC's credibility rating in international finance circles was, to put it mildly, not impressive. To pre-empt a situation where its advances to these institutions would have an equitable chance of success, stalwart TWP adherents whose credentials were found acceptable, were, as a first step, invited to join the PRC.

Between the 1980-1987 period, GNP weakened by an estimated annual average rate of 2.1%, while GNP per head declined by 5.2%. By 1988, Liberia's foreign debt had

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<sup>47</sup>Nelson, op cit., p.221; Dunn & Tarr, op cit., p.198; Nyong'o, op cit., p.235.

<sup>48</sup>Dunn & Tarr, op cit., p.125.



risen to the astronomical figure of USD 1.4 billion. Domestic debt during the same period stood at USD 507 million. Interwoven with the politics of the decision to approach Washington, was a more contentious internal cabinet discussion of the wider political direction that the country was undertaking as a whole. This was to generate and sharpen the schism that had gradually begun to appear in the government.

In a specific example, internal cabinet discussions and the pressures of the international financial community on Liberia, before obtaining deficit financing from the IMF, Germany and United States, the PRC began an enforced savings scheme for all salaried workers, through the purchase of national savings bonds. Before the decision to support Liberia, US foreign policy analysts argued that due to the constellation of the PRC, the US had to step in to extend aid else Libya could offer aid to extend its sphere of influence in the region. This position should be seen in the light of Liberia's claim to have a balanced international posture. This had finally resulted in permission to Libya to open a People's Bureau in Monrovia.<sup>49</sup> The US provided aid, to the total figure of \$20 million, added to foreign military sales, while the World Bank offered another \$3.2 million.<sup>50</sup> This amounted to "the biggest ever [aid gesture] recommended by the US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker, after it was felt that the new PRC government in Liberia would have come under the influence of Libya if the Americans were

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<sup>49</sup>*West Africa*, 7-13 November 1980.

<sup>50</sup>Nyong'o, op cit., p.235; *West Africa*, 6 July 1986, p.2085.

not there with cash first'. Welcome as this infusion of capital was, its total effect on the direction of the Doe government was minimal.<sup>51</sup>

As Doe struggled with the technicalities of leadership and control, he increasingly exploited ethnicity as a factor in these struggles as Doe's attempts to control power led him to promote and fill public positions with members of his Krahn ethnic group. From August 1981, a series of *coup d'etat*'s were used as excuses to purge the PRC of its more radical elements. In the ensuing struggles over policy, the radical civilian components in the cabinet were consistently sidestepped. By the end of 1984, all incompatible opposition members on the PRC had either been killed or driven into exile.

In a short conclusion, after being in power, students and workers agitated for a clarification of the delicate issue of the return to civilian rule. During these struggles for control over government policies, Doe translated all criticism as personal threats against himself and his Krahn ethnic group. For a group that represented not more than 4% of the national population, Krahn influence permeated the very core of the national body politic. The spiralling ethnic factor in Liberian politics, though always underneath the surface of national politics, was now taken to new heights. The general perception in Liberia saw Doe's regime as ruling exclusively for the benefit of his ethnic afinees, the Krahns, at the expense of the other fifteen major groups.<sup>52</sup> Patronage by ascription in its crudest possible form was the order of the day. With the honeymoon over and Liberians clamouring for a

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<sup>51</sup>Nyong'o, *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup>Nelson, *op cit.*, Sawyer, *op cit.*, pp.293-299.

concrete plan for democratisation, Doe was pressurised to initiate a process that would establish a timetable for the orderly return to civilian rule.

#### **4.8 The 'Demilitarisation' and Re-civilianisation Processes**

In his Redemption Day speech, — the PRC re-named the day of their *coup d'etat* as such — Doe indicated his desire to return Liberia to civilian rule. Of interest here will be the processes through which the re-civilianisation process, justifiably or not can be characterised as state/PRC manipulated. Three senior members of the government, Doe, Quiwonkpa and Tipoteh had their divergent interpretation of the genesis of the 1980 'anti-colonial' military interregnum and its future policies. While Doe took a realist position and argued for the entrenchment of the status quo, Quiwonkpa envisaged an orderly process where the military would return to the barracks. Tipoteh's more conspiracy-based rationalisation for the takeover opens new perspectives on why military regimes arise, and probably more prescient is why radical elements, in this case MOJA stalwarts joined such a government.

Afterwards, MOJA stalwarts recommended the establishment of Special Electoral Commission (SECOM) to supervise and conduct a referendum on the draft constitution with a view to finally supervising the first national elections. Under this referendum, Liberians overwhelmingly approved their new constitution that was to be operational on the inauguration of the second republic. With this endorsement, no structural hindrances, it was hoped, would materialise to defer the process. During discussions concerning the

referendum, Doe, however, dissolved the PRC and instituted a 59-member Interim government to govern the country in the transition period between the lifting of the ban on political activities on January 26, 1984 and January 1, 1986.

During this period, Doe consistently manipulated ethnic consciousness. Diverse groups were literally either bought to support the government or intimidated into doing so. Doe, not too surprisingly, became the first to register a party, the National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL) that subsequently won the election. Two incidents proved SECOM's manipulative strategies and flagrantly biased misapplication of the electoral regulations. In the intricate state patronage system that Doe created, TWP members earnestly supported Doe, and increasingly used 'foreign ideology' as an all-encompassing euphemism for socialism.

#### **4.9 The makings of Collapsed States**

After the November 1985 elections, all ballot boxes were sent to a central counting office with fifty specially selected people to perform the assignment. Not surprisingly, the results showed an NDPL victory of 50.9% of the popular vote. Criticism mounted against the election results, and in response, Thomas Quiwonkpa returned from exile in the US through Sierra Leone to mount a *coup d'etat* against Doe in November 1985. After initial successes, Doe's Krahn soldiers with intelligence support from Israel managed to bring the

situation under control.<sup>53</sup> Reprisals against Quiwonkpa's Ninba County comprising the Dan and Mano groups were harsh and spontaneous. The foundation of the zero-sum ethnocide that was to engulf Liberia in a couple of years had been further cemented. In the aftermath of this response, government policy was to become nothing else but ethnic inclusion and exclusion. After five years of military rule, the episodic violence introduced by the PRC had shifted Liberia from state over-centralisation to militarism and eventually degenerated into violence with the onset of gangsterism into politics.

Against this background of worsening ethnic relations, Doe emphasised in his inaugural speech on January 6 1986, a new beginning; a new covenant in which he envisaged a country where the principles of "reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation" were the major objectives. Admonishing Liberians to put "aside our differences ... and submerge our various partisan beliefs", Doe appealed to Liberians to close ranks and "fight only when external aggression engulfs us". Insisting that his New Republic would outline a new socioeconomic and political order, he foresaw a new Liberia, though rather naively, which would be "free from conflicts among tribes".<sup>54</sup> Finally, he saw the security and preservation of Liberia as the first and major duty of his government. Despite these efforts at civilianisation, analysing the extent to which such a scheme is possible in the light of the deteriorating ethnic antipathies in Liberia is important. The

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<sup>53</sup>*West Africa*, 17 February 1986; 16 June 1986; 12 January 1987.

<sup>54</sup>Givens, A.W. ed., *Liberia: The Road to Democracy under the Leadership of Samuel Doe*. Bourne End: Kensal Press, 1986, pp.462-470.

socio-political forces that had sharpened their level of political awareness could be broadly grouped into students, ethnicity, women, churches, organised and the Americo-Liberians.

This period saw the formation of different coalitions against the government taking shape. It is pertinent for our understanding of later developments that we appreciate the role of elite and ethnic configurations in Liberia before 1990. Since the state is an entity representing organised power in heterogeneous societies, it is the group dominating the state that controls both political and military power. In the Liberian example, because minority groups as the Americo-Liberians and the Krahn both representing only 4% of the population managed to take over state power, the employment of force by the state to control the majority was always present.

It was within the fluid context of the formation of elite and ethnic coalitions disgruntled with the Doe regime that Charles Taylor conceived his idea to lead an organised revolt against Doe.<sup>55</sup> By 1986, it had become abundantly clear that the only option left for opposing the Doe regime was through violence. The insurgents of the 1985 attack and other opposition groups had chosen violence because of their frustration with non-violent ways of changing the system. Added to this was a real threat to their survival from the Doe regime.

It must be emphasised that in the initial stages, the confrontation with the regime comprised all the major organised groups within and outside Liberia. Increasing

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<sup>55</sup>Interview, 17 July 1997; *West Africa*, 8-14 April 1991.

Krahnization<sup>56</sup> of especially the security related forces as the AFL, Executive Mansion Guard and the Special Anti-terrorist Unit (SATU) increasingly challenged the dominant forces organising to challenge Doe.<sup>57</sup> The nature of the issues that Liberia faced was complicated and multifaceted, but they were essentially formed by the political, social and economic disparities within the society, upon which Doe had superimposed his new Krahn elite. By 1989, the Liberian political order that had been a highly centralised constitutional system had degenerated into personal rule. Despite the character of the initial coalitions formed against Doe, for many major actors, their complaints against the Krahn dominated Second Republic degenerated into ethnic animosities, which were to emerge both as a major factor in the conflict and similarly fuelled the dynamics of escalation.

With such an array of diverse coalitions against Doe, it is not surprising that at the initiation of the war, internal rebellion against the government and support for the rebel cause led to the collapse of central authority. In the resulting escalation, the complex original coalition formations degenerated into different groupings, and subsequent struggles for control and domination led to some of these groupings to change the nature of the conflict into sub-state or quasi-states conflicts. Some sub-states even went to the extent of declaring real or imagined autonomy from Liberia. The two most functional of these quasi-states or sub-states were New Liberia and Greater Liberia.

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<sup>56</sup>*West Africa*, 16 June 1986:1255.

<sup>57</sup>*West Africa*, 12 January 1987:54.

These two states affected the Nigeria-led ECOWAS intervention in three ways. First was the issue of recognition and by extension relations to the international community. Although New Liberia or Liberia was the formally recognised state, it did not extend over and beyond the capital, Monrovia. Alternatively, Greater Liberia with its headquarters in Gbarnga controlled more than 70% of the state's landmass and exploited its mineral and natural resources to function as a normal state. Second, that since both states claimed sovereign rights it was important for Nigeria to lead its coalition partners only to recognise the formal state apparatus. Third, because of these two states, the international community had to deal delicately with both of them. This was compounded by the fact that Greater Liberia was able to attract more trade than the formal state. All these reasons were to have serious implications for ECOWAS intervention scheme.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

There are two issues of critical theoretical concern here. First, what are the international regime norms concerning the recognition and establishment of states, and decisively the question of the type of international status sub-state frontiers have in collapsing states. Secondly, what is the importance of the aspects of the weak state paradigm dealing with the institutions and the juridical or normative disposition of African states. But most important for our subsequent empirical analysis is that with the eventual collapse of state and societal structures into pockets of entities claiming tenuous authority several critical issues ensued. First, what type of responses were given by Sierra Leone



and Liberia's neighbours. Secondly, how was the nature of response and support patterns to impact on ECOWAS, and thirdly, for the first time ECOWAS was not dealing with a state actor, but with a sub-state actor with international pretensions. How was ECOWAS to elicit compliance from such an actor?