“He Killed My Ma, He Killed My Pa… I’ll Vote for Him”:
The Narratives of Liberia’s Warlords, and Where the World Stopped Listening

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Abstract

This thesis problematizes the popular Western use of the label “warlord” when describing the main actors of the two Liberian Civil Wars (1989-2003). The widespread perception of Africa as a foreign place of chaos and barbarism has facilitated the use of the term in such a way that strips it, and the study of the conflict and the actors themselves, of analytic thoroughness. In the case of the Liberian Civil Wars and the three actors investigated in this thesis, Charles Taylor, Roosevelt Johnson, and Joshua Milton Blahyi, the West’s choice to lump the men together as “warlords” led observers to miss the cultural context of the conflict.

The thesis begins with an investigation into the modernity of Liberian ethnicity and the manufactured tensions between various African-Liberian groups under the administration of Samuel K. Doe, which ultimately led to the outbreak of the First Liberian Civil War in 1989. With the cultural context of the conflict in mind, and following a brief survey of the intricacies of the war’s brutalities, Charles Taylor, Roosevelt Johnson, and Joshua Milton Blahyi are evaluated according to the model of a warlord borrowed from Anthony Vinci. This thesis finds that while the anarchy of the war transformed all three men into actors worthy of the “warlord” label, their original tactics, actions, and motivations reveal a coherency, intelligence, and connection to Liberian culture oft ignored by contemporary accounts of the conflict. Additionally, all three men emerge as undeniably unique, with disparate motivating factors and goals for Liberia and themselves.

The West’s application of the “warlord” label divorced the actions of Taylor, Johnson, and Blahyi from any rational thought process other than the relentless pursuit of wealth and power. In actuality, the actors of the Liberian Civil Wars were motivated by universal concerns of group preservation, colored by varying levels of personal ambition. Unfortunately, the foreignness of the conduct of the war to Westerners precluded attempts to understand the wars in all of their complexity. This thesis argues that the violence of the wars, however shocking, was not incomprehensible. The answers exist in the cultural, social, and political history of Liberia, which the practice of glossing all of the actors as “warlords” obscured.
Introduction

“As soon as day broke I ran straight to our house and asked for my grandma, they say she gone on the farm so I waited. Later when I come I saw the place, I saw that same place I killed her so my father say oh why you do this kind of thing? I say Papie, the revolution has started.” – Lee Tommy Kiadi, Age 10

In 1996 Charles Ganghay Taylor ran a campaign that included young supporters chanting “He killed my ma, he killed my pa, I’ll vote for him,” in the streets and billboards featuring the message: “NO GANGHAY, NO PEACE.” In July of that year, Taylor won the presidency with 75 percent of the vote. In the seven years preceding his election, Liberia was torn apart by a horrifying civil war characterized by a multiplicity of warring factions, prominent leaders, anarchy, and shocking atrocity. Over the course of the conflict, Charles Taylor and his rival leaders were labeled as “warlords” by the Western press and international diplomats. This label came to color the rest of the world’s understanding of the conflict itself.

The Label: Defining the Term “Warlord”

“Warlord” was an African buzzword in the 1990s, especially when it came to the Liberian Civil War, as well as Western media descriptions of conflicts in Somalia, Congo, and Sierra Leone, which describe “leaders of ragged bands of disaffected and traumatized young men, exchanging precious minerals for arms.” The term warlord itself is quite modern, first used in the early twentieth century to describe the competing provincial military and political leaders in China after the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911. In this context, James Sheridan defined a

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warlord as an actor who “exercised effective governmental control over a fairly well-defined region by means of a military organization that obeyed no higher authority than himself.” In his analysis of Afghan warlords, Antonio Giustozzi essentially concurs with this definition, rewording his own definition to describe a warlord as “a particular type of ruler, whose basic characteristics are his independence of any higher authority and his control of a ‘private army’, which responds to him personally.” Anthony Vinci simplifies these definitions into two necessary characteristics of a warlord: a private army and an area under his control.

As would be expected when attempting to define a label meant to cover a variety of political actors across time and space, the definition of a “warlord” has not remained that simple. Present-day warlords were created due to the special circumstances of a dissolved or dissolving state with little or no central authority. In these late-twentieth century circumstances, the label was applied very broadly to describe “a wide range of clan and political leaders who use[d] armed civilians to impose power.” In trying to account for this, warlord commentators have noted two supplementary features to the definitions above, specifically the economic issues connected to warlord organizations and warlords’ “notorious barbarism.” Warlord economics are basically self-serving. Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz label warlords as “quite literally, businessmen of war,” relying on violence as the instrument of their economic activity. Economic exploitation is thought to be a warlord’s primary justification for warfare, basically equating

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5 Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 315.
6 Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 316.
7 Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 316.
8 The source most cited in this section, an article by Anthony Vinci, recognizes the complexity of the term and laments the one-sided understanding so often applied to those labeled “warlord.” Since it is an article with the self-professed intention to “mend this deficiency through a detailed and holistic conceptual analysis of warlords, which integrates political, economic, military, and social aspects of warlord organizations,” and begins with an overview of past efforts to define and analyze the term, Vinci’s definition of a warlord is the definition accepted by this thesis. The actors of the Liberian Civil War investigated in later chapters will thus be interrogated according to Vinci’s standards; Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 313.
10 Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 313.
11 Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 316.
warlord organizations to corporations as simple profit-generating machines.\textsuperscript{12} The sole aim of a warlord, then, is believed to be economic self-enrichment.\textsuperscript{13}

Warlords’ “barbaric” natures are universally noted, though there is not an agreed upon and convincing explanation for this, apparently key, attribute of a warlord. Some theorists argue that the savagery is motivated by ethnic grievances, while others maintain that warlords are simply evil.\textsuperscript{14} Despite not understanding the motivations behind it, the label “warlord” has come to be synonymous with barbarism, savagery, and senseless acts of violence. In fact, scholars hold that it is the apparent “uselessness” of their violence that sets warlords apart.\textsuperscript{15}

The ethnic grievances explanation for warlords’ actions is particularly popular, even though some scholars note that warlords often attack their own communities and in general are not driven by ideological concerns.\textsuperscript{16} Vinci rails against this camp, arguing that, “the warlord becomes a warlord in the sense that he breaks away from dependency on the clan.”\textsuperscript{17} A warlord may continue to use ethnic or clan rhetoric, however to deserve the label “warlord,” Vinci maintains that the actor must be motivated by other factors. A warlord can try to use ethnicity, clan consciousness, and tribalism for his own purposes, but the two should not be equated. Tribes, clans, and ethnicities, where they traditionally exist, are characterized by an institutionalized form of interaction that protects against the fragmentation of warlordism. Equating a warlord with his clan can have a dangerously legitimizing effect on the warlord’s otherwise illegitimate actions. Collective punishment of the clan or members of the warlord’s ethnic group affects the ethnic group as a whole, contributes to a new definition of the warlord’s

\textsuperscript{12} Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 317.
\textsuperscript{13} Hansen, “Warlords, Patrimonialism and Ethnicity,” 77.
\textsuperscript{14} Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 314.
\textsuperscript{15} Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 317.
\textsuperscript{16} Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 317.
\textsuperscript{17} Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 319.
role within the group, and ultimately leads to a dangerous cycle of justified violence, which the manufactured Krahn-Gio/Mano rivalry of the Samuel Doe years exemplified (discussed in Chapter One).  

With the warning against equating the warlord with his clan or ethnic group in mind, it is equally important to recognize that warlords do not exist in a cultural vacuum. While a warlord seldom has preexisting traditional authority within his ethnic group, as noted above the warlord’s actions can have very real implications for traditional political and social structures. 

Warlords lack ideational power and legitimate claims to ethnic authority, so instead a warlord relies on warlord economics (their selfish harnessing of resources), in order to gain political power that only later becomes ethnically based. It is the distribution of resources that provides a warlord with the institutionalized structure he otherwise lacks. If the warlord thus becomes a source of food, protection, employment, or other resources, his warlordism transcends greed, and becomes harder to distinguish from traditional ethnic roles of authority.

Similar to the Liberian Civil War itself, warlords are often understood as one-sided, shallow actors, operating solely according to either the “greed” or “grievance” approach to understanding their actions. They are portrayed in an ideological vacuum as the embodiment of pure evil, motivated by nothing other than the pursuit of personal wealth and lacking any discernable ideology. In sum, warlords are held to be nothing more than a purely destructive force. These overly simplified explanations obscure the reality that while warlords are separate from existing political and social communities, such as clans or administrative counties, they

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20 Hansen, “Warlords, Patrimonialism and Ethnicity,” 89.
22 Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 313.
24 Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 317.
nonetheless have very real relationships with those communities that evolve over time as the warlord and the communities react to and against each other. A warlord’s initial reliance on patrimonial and charismatic sources of authority can transform him into the head of a patronage network with deeply embedded ethnic backing as the distinctions between the warlord and traditional sources of authority blur over time thanks to a warlord’s distribution of resources.\(^{25}\)

**Bastards to Butchers: The Western Press and the Liberian Civil War**

On 23 July 1997, the *Washington Post* reported

Liberians have chosen a strange way to end – if it is ended – the seven year civil war that shredded their 150-year-old West African country. They have overwhelmingly elected president the single person most responsible for Liberia’s tragedy. Charles Taylor, a warlord, broke out of a Massachusetts jail where he was being held on embezzlement charges, invaded his country on Christmas Eve 1989 and soon toppled the government of Samuel Doe. Immense ethnic horrors followed.\(^{26}\)

This brief paragraph sums up the basic Western understanding of the First Liberian Civil War, which raged from 1989 to 1996.\(^{27}\) Of course, some correspondents managed a better grasp on the conflict than others; however, certain characterizations of the conflict continuously pop up when flipping through reputable news sources such as the *New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and the *Washington Post*. Most glaringly, the Liberian Civil War was described again and again as a conflict of and between “warlords,” with civilians caught in the crossfire. The thousands of ordinary Liberian combatants, if referenced at all, were only ever depicted as “teenage gunman,” “boy soldiers,” or “teenage warriors.”\(^{28}\) The factions of the war and their goals were rarely

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\(^{25}\) Vinci, ““Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,”” 321-22.


\(^{27}\) For a full discussion of the war, see Chapter 2.

distinguished, simply lumped together as the “many militias” or “rival factions.”"\textsuperscript{29} According to
press reports, a reader would have been led to believe that the Liberian Civil Wars consisted
solely of a few (equally prominent and equally insane) madmen leading around gangs of young
boys; the adult population of Liberia apparently played no role in the conflict at all, other than
dying.

The use of child soldiers in the two Liberian Civil Wars is well documented; there is no
denying that thousands of them did take part in the fighting. What the press ignored was that
there were thousands of grown men fighting, too. The original insurrectionary force that started
the war, Charles Taylor’s National Patriotic Front of Liberia, had a large contingent of former
professional soldiers, as did his main rival faction, the United Liberation Movement for
Democracy in Liberia.\textsuperscript{30} By ignoring the role, and thus the motivations, of the hundreds of
thousands of mature Liberians who joined the conflict from 1989 through 2003, the Western
press sensationalized the war and ignored what logic did exist in an admittedly shockingly brutal
conflict. The focus on warlords and child soldiers allowed the press to demonize the faction
leaders and dismiss any reasons behind the war other than the warlords’ insatiable greed and
bloodlust. After all, the only ones crazy enough to follow them were drugged-up children. There
were ordinary men and women behind the conflict, too, and the warlords’ ability to mobilize
them is a story waiting to be told.

To be fair, to a certain extent the Western press was correct to focus on the incredible
individual agency of the leading faction leaders of the Liberian Civil Wars. Over the course of
the conflict, a few men managed to carve Liberia into pieces and assert their own personal rule

\textsuperscript{29} French, “Liberian Truce Fails to Hold,” 1; Chris McGreal, “Liberia Pays High Price for Peace; Chris McGreal
\textsuperscript{30} Colin M. Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State: Charles Taylor and Liberia (New York: Zed
Books, 2011), 132; Felix Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation: The Political Economy of War and Peace in
Liberia (Leipzig: Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, 2013), 123.
over their territory. These men eventually became so powerful that the international community had no choice but to place them on the State Council of the official government of Liberia. 

Rather than truly tell the story of the faction leaders, however, the press labeled them as warlords and assumed nothing else need to be said. “Lifting Liberia out of Chaos,” Jeffrey Goldberg’s New York Times piece, captures the tone taken by his colleagues:

George Boley stood in a clearing deep in a Liberian rain forest and said that he was misunderstood. “I am not a warlord,” he told me in late 1994. “I don’t know why they use this term to describe me.” Behind the self-styled chairman of the wildly misnamed Liberian Peace Council stood eighty soldiers. Most were teenagers, some were as young as nine. All were armed, many were drunk. “These are professional fighting men,” he said, without irony. Mr. Boley, who holds a Ph. D. in education administration from the University of Akron, is most assuredly a warlord, as are the other Liberian faction leaders who last week drove their country back into chaos.

What did Boley consider himself, then? Goldberg does not bother to find out, nor does he defend his own assertion of the correctness of the warlord label.

Thomas L. Friedman, also of the New York Times, was guilty of the same crime.

Friedman wrote, “Charles Taylor and Alhaji Kromah, two of the ruling warlords, are eager to be interviewed by CNN and myself.” Friedman goes on to describe Taylor and Kromah as “peacocks strutting through the graveyard, killers with fax machines,” and notes that he believed the men to be out of their minds. No interview follows.

The one article that claimed to be a profile of faction leader Roosevelt Johnson had this to say:

Occupation: Warlord. Not many of them around these days. Maybe they’re not strutting their stuff in China or South-East Asia’s Golden Triangle any longer, but warlording has become the in career for disenchanted gents of a military bent in some West African states. Do they have ranks, these warlords? They generally start as bastards and progress to butchers.

Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 169-171.
Friedman, “Heart of Darkness,” 15.
“Warlord,” for the Western press, said it all. This begs the question of whether or not they intended to imply all of the connotations of the above definition of a warlord, or if they were simply seeking to demonize men whose conduct and motivations they could not understand.

The Warlords Speak: Situating The Thesis

The dominant explanation for the causes of the two Liberian Civil Wars is the classic argument found in African history that the war was the consequence of ethnic antagonisms, an explanation that is exceedingly lacking.35 Both the two Liberian Civil Wars and their main actors require a nuanced examination of the events, motivations, and tragedies that characterized the 1990s in Liberia, but this cannot be achieved until the key actors cease to be glossed as warlords without a historically, socially, and politically minded investigation into what that label actually means. Deeper investigation than the label allows reveals that the main actors were motivated by the universal concern of group preservation, albeit colored by varying levels of personal ambition. Since Westerners ranging from press reporters to United States diplomats and politicians utilized and believed in the warlord label, this thesis goes beyond a mere critique of the media. Ultimately, this thesis aims to interrogate the logic and consequences of the use of the term warlord to describe three representative Liberian faction leaders: Charles Taylor, Roosevelt Johnson, and Joshua Milton Blahyi. The narratives of the men themselves reveal the complexities of the wars, but the world stopped listening at their label, a label that both explains and colored how the world understood the conflict that “toppled and surpassed all other wars in form and character, in intensity, in depravity, in savagery, in barbarism, and in horror.”36

Chapter One: Ethnicity, Doe, and the Warlord Phenomenon

“General Doe, you promised the people so many things, and you are not keeping those promises.” – Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

“I didn’t promise them shit.” – Samuel K. Doe

In an effort to provide the background necessary to interrogate the motivations of the main actors responsible for the Liberian Civil War, this first chapter introduces the Liberian people and their society, customs, and political culture in the period prior to the conflict that tore them apart. Given the propensity of Western observers to blame African conflict on “ancient ethnic antagonisms, this chapter aims to assess the validity of this claim. Section I with a short history of the seventeen major ethnic groups that comprise the Liberian people. Section II goes on to explain the divide between the sixteen indigenous groups, known as the African-Liberians, and the “settlers,” or Americo-Liberians (a group composed of the descendants of former United States slaves) who ruled Liberia for 133 years, and are more accurately described as an elite political class. After a brief note on religion in Liberia and an investigation into the effects of the indirect rule system on the formation of modern Liberian ethnicity, Section III covers the official integration of the indigenous hinterland into Monrovia’s republican system of government. With the political and ethnic background of Liberia established, Section IV then covers the 1980 coup of Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe, its resultant violent mobilization of ethnicity, and sets the scene for the breakout of the start of the First Liberian Civil War in December 1989.

Section I, The Seventeen: A Brief Survey of the History of Liberian Ethnicity

“This state of affairs has created stereotypes of Africa as a doomed continent with inescapable ethnic cleavages and violent tribal conflict.”

The complexities and motivations of both the Liberian Civil War that began in 1989 and its many actors cannot be comprehended without a basic understanding of the ethnic situation of the country. A basic understanding of Liberian ethnicity, however, is not so simple to achieve. Seventeen major ethnic groups reside in contemporary Liberia speaking over twenty local languages and dialects, all with different histories, traditions, religions, and political practices. Scholarship on the groups is nowhere near complete, although attempts have been made to draw lines, map distinctions, and write neat histories of the groups.39 For instance, Linda Jackson, an anthropologist, provides a helpful guide breaking down the seventeen groups into their geographic regions: the Gissi, Gbandi, Loma, Mende, and Belle are found in the northwest region, the Gola, Vai, Dei, and Mandingo live in the western region, in the central region reside the Kpelle, Bassa, Mano, Gio, and Congo ethnic groups; finally, in the southeast region there are the Krahn, Kru, and Grebo.40 History, however, is rarely that neat.

For the purposes of this thesis, an ethnic group is understood as “a group that is bounded off from other comparable groups or population categories in the society by a sense of its difference which may consist in some combination of a real or mythical ancestry and a common culture and experience.”41 The indigenous ethnic groups in Liberia, like ethnic groups elsewhere across the African continent, are bounded off by the objective criteria of language, territory, culture, and myth of common descent. Language is the most popular criteria for identifying ethnic groups, and the model for Liberia provided by Willi Schulze has wide acceptance among Liberian scholars. Schulze identifies five language families: West Atlantic (the Gola and Kissi ethnic groups); Kru (the Bassa, Belle, Dei, Grebo, Krahn, and Kru); Mande-fu (the Gbandi, Gio,

39 See Appendix 2
41 Eghosa E. Osaghae, Ethnicity, Class, and the Struggle for State Power in Liberia (Dakar: Codesria, 1999), 3.
Kpelle, Loma, Mano, and Mende); Mende-tan (the Mandingo and Vai); and English, made up the Congo, or Americo-Liberians. Language groupings, however, do not provide a basis for ethnically motivated political behavior. They do reveal the close family associations between ethnic groups in Liberia and those in neighboring Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Cote d’Ivoire, though. In the nineteenth century during the European scramble for Africa, French, British, and Liberian officials undertook similar processes of administrative classification resulting in considerable confusion of names of and relations among ethnic groups across political lines. For instance, Gio of Liberia are called Yacouba in Cote d’Ivoire, but are also known as the Dan, while the Liberian Krahn are called Wee by the Gio but Guéré in Cote d’Ivoire. If even the names are the groups are in dispute, any neat history of ethnicity in Liberia should be scrutinized.

With an awareness of the still-developing nature of Liberian ethnicity studies, there are some well-established facts about the seventeen ethnic groups of Liberia. All of the groups are small-scale and decentralized, and none of them ever approximated a large-scale centralized political organization. In addition, almost all of the groups considered indigenous to Liberia actually migrated to the country not too long ago in historical terms. The Gola and Kissi, generally regarded as the earliest migrants, probably arrived between 1300 and 1700, while the Grebo, Kru, Gio, and Mano arrived between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. The Mandingoes, who came to Liberia as itinerant traders and Muslim leaders from Guinea and Mauritania in the early nineteenth century were not fully settled as Liberians until the 1980s. In fact, still today many Liberians persist in regarding the Mandingo as outsiders, even though they have lived in Liberia for generations, because of the not-so-distant memory of the Mandingo

acting as slave traders. All of the African-Liberian groups also have cross-cutting linkages that developed from close interaction, which allow for Liberians to actually switch ethnic groups if circumstances require such a switch. For instance, during the Liberian Civil War many Gio, Mano, and Krahn (the main ethnic groups involved in the conflict) became Kpelle or Vai to avoid victimization and retaliation violence.

The ability to switch between ethnic groups is not surprising given the Liberian conception of ethnicity. In most of rural Liberia, the hinterland outside of Monrovia, most people’s ideas of who they are and to whom they have moral obligations have been kinship based rather than tied to an ethnic group. According to Stephen Ellis:

> In the past, clusters of lineage groups formed so-called ‘stateless societies’, in which notions of kinship and common ancestry serve as the main glue for communities without strong centralized political institutions… Only in the present century did every area in the country come under the rule of a republican state based in Monrovia… and it was this process of interaction between national and local politics that the vaguely-defined, kinship-based communities of the past, having no permanent political center, became classified as distinct ‘tribes’, containing equally distinct sub-tribes called ‘clans.’

As late as the 1970s, those distinct tribes and sub-tribes (clans), which together made up one government-designated ethnic group, could sometimes hardly understand each other’s dialect. This was the case, for instance, among the sixteen clans that today constitute the Krahn group. Before the 1980s, the sixteen indigenous ethnic categories like Krahn implied almost nothing except for a vague geographical identity. As Ellis explains, using the terms was “roughly equivalent to referring to a white person from America or northern Europe today as an Anglo-Saxon – a known expression, but hardly one which can be used as a basis for any sort of systematic social or political transaction.”

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institutions that unite the various lineages or clans that comprise the major ethnic groups, other than the tendency of governments to lump them together.

In summary, the seventeen units of political ethnicity generally used in Liberian national politics “do not describe the modern descendants of ancient micronations,” but instead are recent creations inseparable from the politics of modern nationhood.48 Still today, indigenous Liberians are more likely to identify themselves by their town, district, or lineage, than as a member of one of the seventeen ethnic groups, and local politics are often dominated by rivalry between lineages. Lineage disputes stem from the historical politics of stateless societies, where political units that competed for access to land and trade routes were comprised of a hierarchy of founding and “late-comer” lineages.49 Ideas of “Krahn-ness” or “Gio-ness” only gain salience in national politics when politicians in Monrovia try to argue that they are still in touch with their rural roots in order to maintain their claims to public morality.50 When rivalries do exist between the main ethnic groups, they are usually over competing claims to land or problems of national politics, not manifestations of “ancient enmities rooted in the history of medieval Africa.”51 This is not to say that all ethnic labels are colonial inventions, as some like Mandingo and Vai are old labels whose meanings have changed. All of the labels, however, have been profoundly affected by the contemporary exercise of national government.52

Section II, Sixteen Plus One: Class and Political Division in Liberia

“We, the people of the Republic of Liberia, were originally inhabitants of the United States of North America.” – Liberian Declaration of Independence, 184753

48 Ellis, The Mask of Anarchy, 32.
50 Moran, The Violence of Democracy, 36.
51 Moran, The Violence of Democracy, 41.
52 Moran, The Violence of Democracy, 197.
“Out of an estimated population of 3.3 million, 2.5 percent are descended from settlers dispatched by the ACS and the MSCS, 2.5 percent are descendants of captured Africans who were intercepted during their trans-Atlantic crossing by U.S. and other naval vessels and released to the colony, and 95 percent are descendants from the original inhabitants of the region.”

The seventeen major ethnic groups in Liberia can more accurately be grouped into the sixteen “indigenous” groups, often referred to as the African-Liberians, and the Americo-Liberians (somewhat derisively also known as the Congoes), who are those whose ancestors were former slaves in the United States of America. The Americo-Liberians, or the “settlers” ruled over the African-Liberians for 133 years until the 1980 coup led by Samuel K. Doe and could be regarded as a type of aristocracy. It is the settler/native encounter that comprises the dominant “master narrative” for histories of Liberia. That history began in 1822 when The American Colonization Society founded Liberia as an effort to solve the problem of race relations in the United States by resettling freed black slaves “back” to West Africa.

The first Liberian settlers, later called Americo-Liberians, could actually be divided into three distinct sub-groups. At the top of the social order were the mulattos, children of female black slaves and their white American owners who, while born US citizens, were at the bottom of the American social ladder and thus drawn to Liberia with the hope of social advancement. The second group, which made up the majority of the Americo-Liberians, consisted of freed black slaves from America. Finally, the last group was recaptured slaves rescued from slave ships seized by US Navy and resettled in Liberia. After declaring independence from the American Colonization Society in 1847, these Americo-Liberians ruled over the indigenous

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54 Pham, Liberia, 14.
56 Moran, Liberia, 72.
57 Pham, Liberia, 5-12.
people of Liberia in the manner of European colonizers until the 1980 military coup removed their political party, the True Whig Party, from power.

At the conceptual level, most analysts prefer to treat the Americo-Liberians as a class rather than an ethnic group, but in accordance with the definition of an ethnic group posited above, the Americo-Liberians can be regarded as an ethnic category in addition to a class. The Americo-Liberians existed as both the privileged socio-economic class and the dominant political class, operating through the True Whig Party, without being successfully challenged in their dominance until 1980. J. Gus Liebenow describes the pre-1980 relationship between the Americo-Liberians and the African-Liberians as

A colonial one in which the authoritative allocation of values for one group is determined by another superior group which monopolizes the use of force, establishes the primary goals for all societies concerned, limits the means for these goals, and attempts to determine the ultimate outcome of the relationship: continued domination.\(^{59}\)

Until the 1950s, African-Liberians were so unincorporated and ignored by the ruling Americo-Liberian settlers that many people in the hinterland were even unaware that they were “Liberians.”\(^{60}\)

During the late nineteenth century, the hinterland of Liberia, dominated by Monrovia through its army, contained multiple systems of political organization that varied by geographic region. In western Liberia there were migrant bands gathered around an individual leader lacking any traditional basis of authority, conservative local chiefdoms, expanding chiefdoms, and larger confederations of all of the above. None of them was ethnically homogenous and in all of them, to a large extent, religious corporations controlled political power. In the southeast, there were acephalous groups or communities governed by prominent age sets, and federations that


revolved around prominent individuals, influential priests, or secret societies. What is thought of as traditional tribalism, then, was by no means the dominant “ancient” form of political organization across Liberia.

**Uncovering the Secret: A Note on Religion in Liberia**

Religion in Liberia is not a single, unified phenomenon across the country. The details of various beliefs, practices, ritual, and forms of religious organization differ across Liberia’s regions and societal groupings. One 2002 estimate classified Liberians as forty percent “Traditionalist,” forty percent Christian, and twenty percent Muslim. The single category of “Traditionalist,” however, is misleading. To start, there is a widespread tendency among Liberians to combine diverse beliefs, thus blurring the lines of religious demarcation and allowing people to owe concurrent allegiance to multiple faiths. Additionally, there is no one single “traditional” faith in Liberia, but rather a multiplicity of religious corporations and secret societies that all involve belief in and interaction with spiritual forces. Across all of the religious affiliations, though, there are noticeable similarities in practice and belief.

Most Liberians recognize spiritual forces at work in their daily lives and fortunes and acknowledge the power of evil in human affairs. Moreover, propitiation involving sacrifice is a widespread practice in the negotiation of relationships with the supernatural world, as is the practice of keeping secrets. The superhuman entities to be placated, either by individuals or by a collective, are subordinate to the ultimate source of supernatural power, which is a type of high god conceived of in a variety of ways, including a creator. The high god’s pervasive power is

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63 Olukoju, *Culture and Customs of Liberia*, 23.
64 Olukoju, *Culture and Customs of Liberia*, 21-23.
that which mortal men may seek and gain for their own ends.\textsuperscript{65} Belief in a variety of spirits, spanning from ancestral spirits, various water and bush spirits, and genies, to spirits of the associations and spirits specific to societies such as the Poro, is fundamental to Liberian life, although the beliefs vary in both their details and that they are more grounded in some regions than others.\textsuperscript{66} Bush and water spirits and genies, in particular, are believed to possess human beings in order to transfer knowledge or power to them, which has led to specialized priests, diviners, physicians, and fortune-tellers who claim to communicate with those spirits.\textsuperscript{67}

Another vital aspect common across Liberian religions is the belief in the continuity of the human spirit after death. This, paired with the perceived two-way traffic of the spirit world as represented by possession, is the basis of the practice of eating the heart (or other body part) of a dead human that so shocked Western observers during the Liberian Civil War. Especially when the person was powerful or especially brave, the hope was to ensure the continuity of that person’s spirit while appropriating his or her spiritual potency for oneself through consumption.\textsuperscript{68} While there were multiple documented cases of such cannibalism during the Civil War, it is important to stress that throughout Liberian history the acquisition of power was routinely understood through the idiom of eating. Consequently, it has sometimes been difficult to discern whether reports of powerful people eating human flesh were truth, rumor, or metaphor.\textsuperscript{69} As far as other notes of spiritual possession go, Liberians also believe that supernatural power (derived from the high god) can inherit specific materials to be used for

\textsuperscript{65} Thomas D. Roberts et al., \textit{Area Handbook for Liberia} (Washington, DC: American University, 1972), 147.
\textsuperscript{66} Olukoju, \textit{Culture and Customs of Liberia}, 24-5.
\textsuperscript{67} Olukoju, \textit{Culture and Customs of Liberia}, 24.
\textsuperscript{68} Olukoju, \textit{Culture and Customs of Liberia}, 26.
socially approved or disapproved ends.\textsuperscript{70} Finally, animals are also often venerated for possessing spiritual power in a religious practice known as totemism.\textsuperscript{71}

While Liberians acknowledge the power of evil in human affairs, there is not the same sharp distinction between good and evil that is familiar to most Western religions, which informs their conception of the practice of sacrifice. For instance, in the past it was just as acceptable for Poro priests, known as zoes, to sacrifice their own close relations in order to attain a higher level of spiritual power as it was for them to execute social deviants. Both actions were considered unavoidable in the effort to maintain the integrity of the social order. Thus, both murder and ritual sacrifice were not viewed as evil as long as they were performed for the ultimate good of the larger community, nor did either act taint the practitioner with evil.\textsuperscript{72} In a broader sense, power itself in Liberia is regarded as morally ambiguous as the source of both life and death.\textsuperscript{73}

The presence or absence of one religious organization in particular, the Poro (and its female counterpart, the Sande), distinguishes one group of tribes from another in Liberia.\textsuperscript{74} The Poro tribes include the Vai, Gbandi, Kpelle, Loma, Mende, Mano, Gio, Dei, Belle, Gola, and Kissi.\textsuperscript{75} While the existence of the Poro does not guarantee political or social cohesion across tribes, it does set those tribes off from non-Poro tribes.\textsuperscript{76} A more in-depth look at the Poro is valuable, because although membership in the society is not universal across Liberia, nor does it represent the only “traditionalist” religion, it does encapsulate the general religious worldview of most Liberian peoples. Operating as a system of initiation, the Poro and Sande exist in multiple communities under the control of local councils of elders and, in addition to their political and

\textsuperscript{70} Roberts et al., \textit{Area Handbook for Liberia}, 148.
\textsuperscript{71} Olukoju, \textit{Culture and Customs of Liberia}, 25-6.
\textsuperscript{72} Olukoju, \textit{Culture and Customs of Liberia}, 27.
\textsuperscript{73} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 231.
\textsuperscript{74} Roberts et al., \textit{Area Handbook for Liberia}, 55.
\textsuperscript{75} Roberts et al., \textit{Area Handbook for Liberia}, 55.
\textsuperscript{76} Roberts et al., \textit{Area Handbook for Liberia}, 57.
religious functions, also serve the social function of deterring antisocial behavior or beliefs.\textsuperscript{77} The initiation into adult society involves a system of controlled rituals, the details of which the boys and girls are strictly bound not to reveal to non-members.\textsuperscript{78} Where they exist, however, all men and women are expected to become members. Located mainly in northwestern Liberia, the Poro and the Sande (but also their Kruan counterparts in southeastern Liberia), are the central religious institutions of the indigenous Liberians in that area and represent the meeting point of religion and the state, thanks to their element of social control that even extends to political behavior. The Poro historically even exercised judicial powers and tried capital offenses.\textsuperscript{79} In contemporary times, however, the Poro and the Sande have lost their grip on the socialization process, which has become the joint responsibility of traditional, Christian, and Islamic educational institutions.\textsuperscript{80}

Noting the influence of the Poro over society and political behavior is not to say that the Poro institution was the political institution of hinterland Liberia stateless societies. The Poro organization was independent of the secular political hierarchy. Chiefs were always members of the Poro, sometimes even high-ranking members, but the head of the Poro and the secular Chief were rarely the same person.\textsuperscript{81} Instead, up through the presidency of Charles Taylor, secular political leaders have had to work to co-opt the Poro by getting themselves initiated as an attempt to entrench their power.\textsuperscript{82} In fact, beyond just the Poro and Sande, over the course of the twentieth century the Monrovian republican political elite worked to reach a series of accommodations with all of the local chiefs who were the mainstays of the indirect rule system

\textsuperscript{77} Olukoju, \textit{Culture and Customs of Liberia}, 25. \\
\textsuperscript{78} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 228. \\
\textsuperscript{79} Olukoju, \textit{Culture and Customs of Liberia}, 37. \\
\textsuperscript{80} Olukoju, \textit{Culture and Customs of Liberia}, 117. \\
\textsuperscript{81} Roberts et al., \textit{Area Handbook for Liberia}, 72. \\
\textsuperscript{82} Olukoju, \textit{Culture and Customs of Liberia}, 37.
in order to co-opt the rules, conventions, and rituals of the traditional religions. This had
dangerous consequences, as the religious practices that were formerly subject to controlled
conditions and only carried out by the appropriate specialists became divorced from their
religious context and instead used as a political posturing tool.\textsuperscript{83}

The Poro and the Sande are often referred to as “secret societies,” however this is
somewhat of a misnomer, and they are not to be confused with other Liberian secret societies.
The common practice is that every man and woman in a society that has the Poro and the Sande
is initiated, and therefore the “secrets” are just that only to outsiders. On the other hand,
exclusive groups did historically exist in Liberia rightfully referred to as secret societies. These
groups consisted of people believed to be liable to possession by carnivorous animal spirits,
usually leopards and crocodiles, and who would carry out ritual killings while in the state of
possession.\textsuperscript{84} Sometimes known as “Leopard Societies,” these religious organizations were
formed by older men who met in secret conclave and would eat the flesh of their sacrificial
victims in order to increase their virile powers. It was the act of eating that bound the men
together and informed their identity as leopards.\textsuperscript{85} These secret societies involved fetish worship,
and the practice of eating human flesh was also intended to “feed the charm,” or fetish, and thus
bring strength and protection to the community. Therefore, even though its rituals included
human sacrifice, these Leopard Societies were actually regarded as socially valuable, in keeping
with the blurring of the line between good and evil common in Liberian traditional religions.\textsuperscript{86}
These societies, too, became politicized as the Monrovian republican government moved into the
hinterland. Local notables used the “ritual killings” to cover up murders used to advance their

\textsuperscript{83} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 224.
\textsuperscript{84} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 222.
\textsuperscript{85} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 234.
\textsuperscript{86} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 235.
factional interests in local politics, while Monrovian officials discovered that entering the secret conclaves gave them access to political influence in rural areas.87

This bastardization of religious practices became even more profound during the First Liberian Civil War and the events that precipitated the war under the administration of Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe. During the twentieth century, practices formerly controlled by distinct religious hierarchies and convention and widely supported by the community had become divorced from those social controls and changed radically.88 Liberians’ fundamental belief that all power has its origin in the invisible world, however, remained constant. What resulted, in a basic sense, was that Liberians took it upon themselves to access supernatural power in an environment devoid of the necessary societal restraints that had allowed actions such as ritual sacrifice to remain morally ambiguous. For example, Liberians widely believed President Doe to be endowed with great supernatural powers, a belief brutally publicized during Doe’s videotaped torture and death. Doe himself apparently believed in and worked to effect his supernatural fortification, which was evident during his final ordeal when his captors discovered various charms on his body.89 During the Civil War itself, the traditional religions took an even harder hit when acts committed during the war descended into outright desecration and sacrilege.90

Fighters on both sides of the Civil War behaved in ways informed by their traditional religious beliefs. Early accounts of Charles Taylor’s faction, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, described initiations resembling quasi-traditional rituals. Similarly, the much-sensationalized practice of cross-dressing exhibited by some of Taylor’s adversaries in the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia has religious roots. Transvestitism was

87 Ellis, The Mask of Anarchy, 242, 256.
88 Ellis, The Mask of Anarchy, 222.
89 Olukoju, Culture and Customs of Liberia, 23.
90 Olukoju, Culture and Customs of Liberia, 22.
traditionally often taken as a demonstration of the strength of the warrior as it contained an element of wildness and represented the ability to transcend established genres.\textsuperscript{91} In sum, the tactics used by fighters in the Liberian Civil War deemed so absurd by the Western media often had a traceable basis in a warrior’s traditional religious search to obtain the strongest possible “war medicine,” a medicine that often contained human body parts. Crucially, though, the traditional limits placed upon those originally religious practices of societal sanction and strict ritual guidelines had been removed throughout the twentieth century’s experience of republican rule and political co-optation.\textsuperscript{92}

\textbf{Of Paramount Importance: The Indirect Rule System, Its Paramount Chiefdoms, and the Effect on Ethnicity}

In 1847, when Liberia formally declared independence from the American Colonization Society, the new constitution provided for a county-based system of government modeled on the government of the United States of America. The new Liberian government, however, only operated in the five coastal counties where the Americo-Liberians resided. The hinterland territories, not yet incorporated as counties, were not administered as part of Liberia until President Arthur Barclay (1904-1912) implemented the indirect rule system in 1904, and even then the country maintained something of a dual system of administration.\textsuperscript{93} The dual system would persist until President Tubman’s National Unification Policy in the 1960s. Under the dual administration, the hinterland “protectorates” were divided into three provinces, Eastern, Western, and Central, and were not entitled to representation in the legislature. The Americo-Liberian coastal territories, on the other hand, were governed by the county system. Each hinterland province was further divided into districts, which in turn were subdivided into

\textsuperscript{91} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 259-60.
\textsuperscript{92} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 260.
\textsuperscript{93} Osaghae, \textit{Ethnicity, Class, and the Struggle for State Power in Liberia}, 33.
paramount chiefdoms.\textsuperscript{94} The Liberian government either formally suppressed or formally incorporated all systems of government previously existing in the hinterland.\textsuperscript{95}

Paramount chiefdoms were the basic unit of administration and consisted of between thirty-four and sixty villages of the same or different ethnic groups. Paramount chiefdoms, therefore, were not necessarily ethnically homogenous. Each paramount chiefdom was headed by a paramount chief who was elected by clan and town chiefs, who were themselves elected, and then approved by the president. Paramount chiefs operated directly under the District Commissioner who was the president’s representative, and also the commander of the district’s Liberian Frontier Force, which would later evolve into the Armed Forces of Liberia. Paramount chiefs were indirect agents of the president whose duties included performing traditional functions like heading “tribal courts” in addition to collecting taxes, levies, and annual tributes of rice, and handling labor recruitment.\textsuperscript{96} All male citizens were liable to be subject to forced labor for public works and to carry goods for passing travelers, although in practice a paramount chief could exempt his favorites.\textsuperscript{97}

These paramount chieftaincies were not indigenous or previously existing groupings, they were creations of the Americo-Liberian state. Consequently, establishing the paramount chieftaincies was often a violent process as petty chiefs who refused to accept the imposed authority of the new paramount chief were imprisoned or even hanged.\textsuperscript{98} For the Americo-Liberians attempting to establish fixed systems of local government able to work with the administration from Monrovia, the stateless societies of the hinterland were irritatingly fluid.

Americo-Liberian officials attempted to identify people with some form of authority and confirm

\textsuperscript{95} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 207.
\textsuperscript{96} Osaghae, \textit{Ethnicity, Class, and the Struggle for State Power in Liberia}, 34-5.
\textsuperscript{97} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 45.
\textsuperscript{98} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 42.
them as the paramount chiefs responsible for carrying out orders from above, but in many areas, mainly the east and southeast, there was no tradition of strong chiefdoms. Civic leaders in those areas of the hinterland were all believed to be subject to the ultimate authority of the spirits of the forest, and consequently administered their land anonymously in the fashion of a possessed masked official, rather than as a public chief in a fixed position of power. Clearly, then, tribalism is not an unchanging, ancient form of political organization in Liberia, but rather more of a fluid form of organization capable of mutating to confirm to contemporary circumstances.  

In practice, a patchwork structure ultimately resulted across the hinterland in which local communities and their leaders reached a variety of agreements with Monrovia within which old institutions of government, such as religious sodalities, acquired new characteristics. Notably, in areas where clan chiefs had been subject to religious corporations, those corporations were suddenly declared by Monrovia to be non-political and forbidden from interfering with the administration of the paramount chiefdom. Additionally, both the African-Liberians in the hinterland and the Americo-Liberians in Monrovia often manipulated clan disputes in bids to increase the authority of the paramount chief in regions where chiefdoms lacked traditional power. Only the members of the settler oligarchy, the Americo-Liberians, had real political rights, while hinterland politics steadily grew more and more into the management of ethnic blocks represented by the government’s new paramount chiefs.

The creation of paramount chiefdoms under the indirect rule system played a large role in the formation of modern ethnicity in Liberia as African-Liberians responded to political and administrative incentives and opportunities, even though this was in no way part of the central

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99 Ellis, The Mask of Anarchy, 206.  
100 Ellis, The Mask of Anarchy, 207.  
101 Ellis, The Mask of Anarchy, 210-11.
government’s plan. The legitimacy of paramount chiefs depended on their ability to represent and govern a tribe, clan, or town, which required both of the chief and of the people a commitment to new notions of tribal authority. Unfortunately, the new governing system also eliminated the traditional means of advancement, war, for young men of talent and ambition in the new chiefdom. Local politics became the arena to prove oneself, and evolved into intense opportunistic factional struggles whose objective was formal recognition as a chief. Identity, whether ethnic, religious, or other, was the new vital issue in local power struggles. As these struggles developed into a major element of tribal politics, they also became an instrument of government control. Paramount chiefs “became cultural brokers, translating the values of ‘tribal’ society to the Americo-Liberian elite, and vice-versa.” Ultimately, those most successful in local politics were those appointed to a chieftaincy on the grounds that they represented a given tribe, which further reinforced the political salience of tribal identity. Thanks to this process, it was eventually in the chief’s interest to maintain that each tribe had a distinctive culture and ancestry that required autonomous administration.

In her anthropological studies of West Africa, Mary H. Moran notes:

In most of the scholarly literature on Africa, nationalism is contrasted, either explicitly or implicitly, with ethnicity or ‘tribalism.’ There is a curiously unexamined evolutionism to this view, as if ethnicity was an historically earlier, more ‘traditional,’ and certainly more deeply felt form of group identity.

The historical experience of Liberia seems to directly contradict this accepted wisdom. The system that developed across the hinterland until the 1970s was one of patronage of the supposedly “native” chiefs who were in fact installations from Monrovia, paid off in return for the maintenance of a passive population. The close working relationship between the paramount

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102 Ellis, The Mask of Anarchy, 36.
104 Moran, Liberia, 75.
chiefs and their Americo-Liberian patrons was exemplified by the fact that most of the chiefs were also the chairmen of their region’s True Whig Party, the single political party that ran Liberian politics for the 133 years of Americo-Liberian domination. It was a phenomenon viewed by many historians as the representatives of native Liberia “selling out” to Monrovia, but considering the paramount chiefs were often not authentic native institutions to begin with, the relationship is unsurprising.\(^{105}\)

The indirect rule situation in Liberia also played the crucial role of transforming the country into a military state, which would reverberate far into Liberia’s future. Military conquest played a large role in the establishment of indirect rule, and once the paramount chieftaincies were well cemented the Liberian Frontier Force (LFF) did not retreat. Instead, the ruling Americo-Liberians believed that a strong military force coupled with strong and constant displays of force were necessary to keep the African-Liberians submissive to Monrovia. Thus, Liberia was a military state insofar as the hinterland was in a perpetual state of military conquest, while the Americo-Liberians had the right to bear arms and to organize militias for their defense against the expected aggression of the indigenous peoples. It was in this climate that the LFF evolved into the National Guard and later into the Armed forces of Liberia. It is interesting to note that while the LFF was notorious for dehumanizing African-Liberians, it nonetheless admitted African-Liberians to its enlisted ranks with little restriction, although its officer corps remained Americo-Liberian. Military practices even evolved to further reinforce ideas of tribalism by recruiting from the “warrior tribes,” the Kpelle, Loma, and Gbandi. Given the military’s openness to African-Liberians and the loss of traditional smaller-scale warfare as a

method of social advancement, then, it is not surprising that non-commissioned African-Liberian soldiers carried out the coup of 1980.106

**Section III, One: The National Unification Policy**

“All of us must register a new era of justice, equality, fair dealing, and equal opportunities for every one from every part of the country regardless of tribe, clan, section, element, creed, or economic status.” – William Tubman, President of Liberia 1944-71

“In fact, Tubman expressed grave fear that the ‘civilized’ elements of Liberia stood in danger of being overrun by what he called ‘a large semi-civilized population.” – Amos Sawyer, Interim President of Liberia 1990-4107

In 1964 President William Tubman finally accorded legislative representation to the hinterland and ended the dual system of administration.108 Tubman’s National Unification Policy, however, left a lot to be desired. Essentially, the old order remained. A dual legal system continued to exist, with the hinterland governed by “tribal laws.” In theory, the unification and integration policy of Tubman was designed to create a political situation that transcended ethnicity. Tubman also worked to ensure that no ethnic group or politician enjoyed special treatment. In practice, the policy resulted in a universal check on the potential power of the African-Liberians as the controlled system absorbed limited numbers of indigenous persons into national political life.109 Tubman also tried to prevent African-Liberians from uniting their political power by playing into and exaggerating differences between ethnic groups when carrying out things like his new land allocation policies.110 Insofar as a consciousness of oneness among African-Liberians did emerge under the unification policy, the idea of a truly unified

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Liberia could not fully take hold since the Americo-Liberians continued to wield all political, social, and economic powers.\(^\text{111}\)

In order to integrate the hinterland into the county system, which had been governing the coastal areas since 1847, in 1963 the republican government in Monrovia divided the interior into new administrative divisions called counties. The five older counties populated by Americo-Liberians that originally comprised the country system kept their names but were enlarged by new boundaries drawn further inland to include parts of the hinterland. The remainder of the hinterland was divided almost entirely along major river lines to form four new counties.\(^\text{112}\) The counties would have a significant impact on the way people within them thought of themselves and formed various local alliances. For instance, the Liberians that today comprise the Krahn tribe generally consider their home area to be Grand Gedeh County, which was created in 1963 in such a way that it incorporated two districts occupied mostly by Grebo people, whose main home region is in Maryland County. This sometimes caused the Grebo and the Krahn to take opposite sides on particular issues pertinent to local Grand Gedeh politics.\(^\text{113}\) Despite divisions like these, ethnic groups ultimately became coterminous with counties, thus making ethnic sub-units the local units of political administration. As a result of the unification system, county, political, and ethnic identities all worked to reinforce each other.\(^\text{114}\)

In the 1970s, the administration of the new president William Tolbert slowly began actually promoting indigenous Liberians to more positions in government. By this time, many African-Liberians were making advances by enrolling in higher education and securing jobs in academia, the civil service, or business. Many of these advances, however, stemmed from

\(^{112}\) Roberts et al., Area Handbook for Liberia, 35.
\(^{113}\) Ellis, The Mask of Anarchy, 35-6.
\(^{114}\) Osaghae, Ethnicity, Class, and the Struggle for State Power in Liberia, 16.
conscious efforts among the indigenous Liberians to mask the visible distinctions between themselves and the settlers. While intermarriage and mixed-parentage existed by the 1970s, it was still a clear advantage for anyone with indigenous heritage to conceal or downplay his or her tribal background, and naturally lighter-skinned Liberians fared better in society often because they could pass as Americo-Liberians.\(^\text{115}\) Throughout the decade Tolbert tinkered with reform as tensions grew between the economically empowered Americo-Liberians and the materially disenfranchised communities of the hinterland. Engineering change, however, proved difficult, as the unification policy could not overcome the Americo-Liberian entitlement society, which remained “a rigid class system based on patronage and a rock-solid culture of exploitation.”\(^\text{116}\)

**Section IV, All for Doe, Doe for Krahn: President Doe and the Violent Mobilization of Ethnicity**

“The real meaning of democracy... is to give jobs to somebody who can promote you.” –Samuel K. Doe\(^\text{117}\)

On 12 April 1980, a military coup of seventeen non-commissioned officers led by Sergeant Thomas Quiwonkpa and Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe murdered President Tolbert and finally broke 133 years of continuous True Whig Party rule and Americo-Liberian social, economic, and political domination.\(^\text{118}\) The seventeen coupists, all African-Liberians, were ethnically comprised of five Krahns (including Doe), four Gios, three Krus, two Grebos, and one Sapo, Kissi, and Loma each.\(^\text{119}\) In place of the old government, a military junta called the People’s Redemption Council (PRC) took over, with Doe as the chairman. None of the coup


\(^{118}\) Waugh, *Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State*, 75.

conspirators had even a high school education. This new administration claimed to be acting on behalf of Liberians of indigenous origin, and the junta was popular at first. The people of the hinterland expected the new junta, comprised of men from the interior like themselves, to bring money, jobs, and other resources to their home regions. Unfortunately, this also meant that divisions within the junta had rapid repercussions in home counties of the leaders.

The new era of indigenous rule quickly descended into the violent period of autocratic rule by Samuel K. Doe characterized by instability of state institutions and the intensified and blatant deployment of “tribal” ethnicity as a political tool that most scholars consider to be the proximate cause of the First Liberian Civil War. The administration built by Doe was based even more on patronage than any of the True Whig Party administrations before him, and “soon became many times more violent, unrepresentative, and inhumane in its conduct.” Before the 1980 coup, the popular view was that African-Liberians mobilized ethnicity as a political resource only to a very limited extent because they had no participant political structure within which to mobilize it. After the indigenous junta took power, however, “latent and incipient ethnic conflicts were galvanized into action by the new ruling class whose members had few alternative resources beside ethnicity to pursue their power interests, and the masses responded quite well, becoming ethnic champions and relating with others on this basis.”

Doe and Quiwonkpa initially struggled for power following the April coup, and it was their antagonisms that ignited the Krahn and Mandingo rivalries with the Gio and Mano that would explode into the Liberian Civil War in 1989. Contrary to the hopes of indigenous Liberians across the interior, Doe did not consider himself their representative. Furthermore, Doe

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123 Waugh, *Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State*, 82.
did not even consider himself the emissary of Grand Gedeh County or the entire Krahn tribe, but only felt beholden to the Gborbo and Konobo clans, two of the at least sixteen clans that comprise the Krahn tribe. In order to cement his power in the PRC and position himself against rival and coup-organizer Quiwonkpa, a Gio, Doe systematically promoted Krahn from these selected clans to sensitive posts in the government and the army.\textsuperscript{125} Doe also catered to the Mandingoes, aware of their powerful position dominating the transportation and retail sectors of rural Liberia, in order to strengthen his hold on the economy. Within four years, Doe had eliminated all potential rivals to his political power, at least fifty of them with murder.\textsuperscript{126}

In 1983, in the midst of Doe’s power play, several of Quiwonkpa’s Gio supporters launched a raid into Nimba County, with the hope of sparking a full-scale insurrection against Doe, which had disastrous consequences.\textsuperscript{127} In retaliation for their alleged complicity in the raid, Doe gave his army permission to target the ordinary Gio and Mano citizens of Nimba County “on purely ethnic grounds, rather than for any identifiable offence or to any obvious political advantage.”\textsuperscript{128} Despite this, Doe “won” the blatantly rigged presidential election in October 1985. The presidency allowed Doe to build his patronage network, which he constructed entirely on an ethnic basis. Doe continued to fill military and political positions with Krahn, while the Gio and the Mano from Nimba County were excluded entirely from political society in retaliation for the 1983 actions of Quiwonkpa’s supporters.\textsuperscript{129}

In response to the stolen election, Quiwonkpa attempted a coup against Doe on November 12, 1985. The coup failed, and Quiwonkpa was murdered. What followed was a display of brutality that would come to be commonplace in the Civil War four years later. Doe’s

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\textsuperscript{125} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 56.
\textsuperscript{126} Adebajo, \textit{Liberia’s Civil War}, 26-8.
\textsuperscript{127} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 58.
\textsuperscript{128} Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 99.
\textsuperscript{129} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 59-60; 65.
\end{flushright}
soldiers paraded Quiwonkpa’s mutilated corpse around Monrovia, and a Nigerian journalist recorded witnessing:

A macabre cannibalistic ritual by some of Doe’s soldiers who, astonishingly in these modern times, still believe that by eating bits of a great warrior’s body, some greatness would come to them. The heart, of course, was the prize delicacy and it is traditionally shared on a hierarchical basis.¹³⁰

Feeling secure after “winning” the election, and with US military backing, Doe then felt free to send his army on a spree of ethnic massacres against Quiwonkpa’s “supporters” that killed an estimated 3,000 Gios and Manos.¹³¹ According to Adebajo, “this single episode, more than any other, set the stage for the exploitation of ethnic rivalries that would eventually culminate in Liberia’s civil war.”¹³² The mentioned US support enjoyed by Doe reflected the Cold War politics of the time, with America focused on reinforcing the security of its West African military base and collecting allies in the region.¹³³ The shallowness of the American understanding of the Liberian situation, however, was made apparent when during an August 1982 visit to Washington, DC, President Reagan introduced Doe to the press as “Chairman Moe.”¹³⁴

From 1985 until 1989, Doe’s government continued a systematic purge of non-Krahn or Mandingo actors in government and society. After nearly a century and a half of Americo-Liberian oligarchical rule, the coup of 1980 delivered an indigenous government that was even more ethnically motivated, violent, and tyrannical than its predecessor.¹³⁵ Where before African-Liberians had been united against the enemy of the Americo-Liberian settlers, the Doe regime turned to the “enemies” within the African-Liberians themselves. At stake was control of the government, which was the means to access to wealth, privileges, and other forms of patronage

¹³⁰ Ellis, The Mask of Anarchy, 60.
¹³³ Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 90.
¹³⁴ Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 94.
¹³⁵ Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 4.
like education. Osaghae points out why the situation spiraled so drastically after the events of 1980: “as previously disadvantaged and excluded groups, the desperation to make up for previous losses heightened the new forms of ethnic conflicts,” and Doe’s insistence on keeping it all for his Krahn group only worsened the situation.136

The ethnic conflict between the Krahn and the Gios and Manos was not an inevitable result of ancient, deep-rooted ethnic antagonisms. Krahn-Mano/Gio relations date far back, and while unfortunately there has been no formal study of these relations, there is also no evidence of ancient hatreds. In the immediate aftermath of the 1980 coup that brought Doe to power, the Mano and Gio ecstatically supported the new government; Nimba County was even the first to openly declare its support.137 The rivalry between the groups was modern and generated by the competition between Doe and Quiwonkpa. The practice of collective responsibility, a characteristic of many of the indigenous Liberian cultures, aided the development of this rivalry. In this practice, an individual alone is not responsible for a crime, but also members of his family, tribe, and associates. Consequently, blame and responsibility were transferred from Doe to the Krahn and Grand Gedeh County, and from Quiwonkpa to the Gio and Mano of Nimba County.138

It has been said that before Doe, Liberia was one of the few African countries without serious tribal hostility.139 Then, hungry for power after 133 years of disenfranchisement, Doe and his men “killed to survive, and spawned a world of real and imaginary enemies whose deaths would ultimately be avenged.”140 The lead avenger, Charles Ghankay Taylor, would usher in a civil war in 1989 that only brought deeper division and fiercer antagonisms along ethnic lines.

138 *The Liberian Crisis*, 18.
The origin of the politicized ethnicities that were to tear Liberia apart, however, was not ancient tribal hatreds, but rather an uneducated master sergeant named Samuel K. Doe, who, according to Stephen Ellis, “because of his excessive use of violence and his hostility to whole social groups… could reasonably be described as the first of the modern Liberian warlords.” The men who followed Doe’s rule and became the main actors of the two Liberian Civil Wars, however, were a disparate group of complex individuals whose unique motivations for fighting were unfairly ignored by grouping them together under the single, and often misleading, label of “warlord.”

Chapter Two: Charles Taylor, “Chief Warlord,” and the Liberian Civil War

“God willing, I will be back.” – Charles Taylor\textsuperscript{142}

This chapter attempts to provide insight into the Liberian Civil War itself and its most notorious actor, Charles Taylor. Section I begins with a biography of Charles Taylor up until the First Liberian Civil War. Section II provides a background account of the First Liberian Civil War that raged from December 1989 until July 1997 in order to provide further context for both Charles Taylor and the actors discussed in Chapter Three. Section III interrogates Taylor’s methods and motivations on an individual level according to Vinci’s warlord model during his ascent to the highest office in Liberia. Section IV then briefly outlines the Second Liberian Civil War, often considered simply a continuation of the conflict that began in 1989. Finally, Section V utilizes three competing narratives: those of Charles Taylor himself, Liberia’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and United States diplomats in order to illuminate contrasting accounts and perceptions of Taylor in an effort to urge more analytic thoroughness than what typically accompanies the use of the term “warlord.”

Longstanding stereotypes of the African continent as a dark place of chaos and barbarism divorced from the logic of the civilized Western world have lent themselves to the inappropriately wanton application of “warlord” when describing African political and military actors. While the brutality of many of those actors cannot and should not be excused or underplayed, focusing only on violence and greed, as the label warlord does, ignores the coherency of many actors’ strategies and motivations. Charles Taylor, in particular, consciously created both a universally appealing public persona for the Liberian civilians as well as a fully functional parallel state apparatus during his time as “warlord.” As both of these aspects do not

\textsuperscript{142} This was the closing line of Charles Taylor’s farewell address to Liberia on August 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2003, his last day as President of Liberia. Colin M. Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State: Charles Taylor and Liberia} (New York: Zed Books, 2011), 277.
fit into the scholarly expectation of warlord behavior, it is already clear that a misguided use of
the term risks missing an opportunity to understand both the conflict and its actors on a deeper
level, which this chapter hopes to rectify.

Section I, From McArthur to Ghankay: A Brief Biography of Dakhpannah Charles
McArthur Ghankay Taylor

“Real power you take. It’s not given to you.” – Charles Taylor

On 24 December 1989, 168 insurgents belonging to the National Patriotic Front of
Liberia (NPFL) and led by Charles Taylor invaded Liberia from Cote d’Ivoire intent on
removing Samuel K. Doe from the presidency. The rebels’ leaders were known to be mostly
Gio and Mano politicians and soldiers. Consequently, the Front first moved into Nimba County,
knowing that its population composed mostly of Gios and Manos would be sympathetic to their
cause after having suffered ethnically motivated violence and repression under the Doe
administration for nine years. Indeed, Gio young men in particular flocked to join the NPFL
en masse as it moved through the county. After initial disbelief in the face of the invasion, Doe
once again turned to his Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) troops to carry out his reprisal.
Sweeping through Nimba County, the AFL looted, raped, and killed, making “little distinction
between Gio fighters and Gio civilians, massacring both as they moved through Nimba county,
spraying villages with machine gun and mortar fire, bayoneting civilians and driving residents
across the border or into the bush.” These massacres soon spread to Monrovia, where the AFL
conducted door-to-door raids, again targeting Gio and Mano households, suspected by reason of

144 Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 123.
145 Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 124.
their ethnic origin alone to be NPFL collaborators. The result was “a steady stream of murders marked by the appearance of headless corpses in the morning.”

Thus the First Liberian Civil War began, and would not end until Charles Taylor succeeded in getting elected to the presidency in 1997 under the campaign slogan of “He killed my Ma, he killed my Pa, I’ll vote for him.”

Who was this man that held an entire country hostage until it bent to his will? Charles McArthur Taylor was born in Arthington, Liberia in 1948 to Nielsen Philip Taylor, an Americo-Liberian, and Louise Yassa Zoe Taylor, an African-Liberian of the Gola tribe. Although Taylor would later play up his mixed settler and native heritage, at only eight months old Taylor was adopted by a close friend of his grandmother, Martha Anne Cisco, and raised in nearby Millsburg as a member of an established Americo-Liberian family. When speaking of his mother, Taylor refers to Cisco, not Zoe. Taylor did not speak the indigenous language of the Gola tribe, nor was he a member of the Poro religious secret society. Instead, Taylor attended one of the top Americo-Liberian high schools in Liberia. Taylor, for all intents and purposes, was Americo-Liberian.

Taylor began his professional career in 1967 as a junior high teacher in Bomi Hills, Liberia, where he stayed for a year before returning to his original hometown of Arthington to teach, apparently to appease locals resentful that one of their own had become so qualified only to move away. Not one for village life, Taylor did not even last a year in Arthington before moving to Monrovia where he continued to teach, and also enrolled in a US-based distance-learning program. By 1970, Taylor had secured a part-time job in President Tubman’s Ministry

148 Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*, 76.
of Finance, which in 1971 turned into a full-time junior accountant job in President Tolbert’s Ministry of Finance.\textsuperscript{151} Always eager for advancement, even a government job in Monrovia could not hold Taylor for long. Still in the early 1970s, Charles Taylor arrived in America to attend Chamberlayne Junior College before moving on to Bentley College in Boston, Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{152}

Taylor’s time in America marked the beginning of his politicization and radicalization, the effects of which would change his home country forever. The official umbrella organization for Liberian expatriates living in the USA to participate in Liberian politics was the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA), founded in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in July 1974. Throughout the 1970s the ULAA grew into the predominant vehicle for educated but politically disenfranchised Liberians in America to agitate for change and voice their disapproval of the Tolbert regime. Although, most ULAA members were indigenous Liberians, and for all intents and purposes Taylor was not an indigenous Liberian, he still managed to assert himself as a vocal leader of the movement from the outset of his involvement. Taylor attended rallies and demonstrations up and down the East Coast, typically protesting the Tolbert Administration, and eventually became head of the Boston branch of the ULAA.\textsuperscript{153}

Charles Taylor returned to Liberia in 1980, just a few months before Samuel Doe’s fateful coup. After the coup’s success, Taylor proactively sought involvement with the new regime, and eventually became director of the General Services Agency of the Republic of Liberia. His new position brought cabinet rank as a politician and the military rank of a major. Taylor was just one of two non-indigenous Liberians in Doe’s cabinet.\textsuperscript{154} Quick to join the new

\textsuperscript{151} Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 41-2.
\textsuperscript{152} Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 63, 65.
\textsuperscript{153} Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 67-70.
\textsuperscript{154} Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 86.
ranks of power, Taylor was also quick to create enemies. Initially, Taylor used his position to try and enforce some discipline in the use of public resources. This, paired with his Americo-Liberian education and management experience gained in America that caused Taylor to keep aloof from Doe’s mostly uneducated inner circle, unsurprisingly made him unpopular within the administration.\footnote{Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 88.}

In May of 1983, Taylor’s personal ambition and unpopularity caught up to him when the Liberian Ministry of Finance discovered an over-payment by Taylor’s General Services Agency, which Taylor’s rivals used to build a case against him as evidence of mismanagement and corruption. Facing indictment, and fearing Doe’s intentions, Taylor fled from Liberia back to Boston where he was arrested after Doe issued an international warrant. Taylor was held in Plymouth House Correction jail for two years from 1983 until 1985, because the US government feared creating a diplomatic incident by agreeing to extradite Taylor back to Doe who they believed would execute Taylor upon his arrival. Eventually, Taylor escaped under mysterious circumstances on 15 September 1985. Divergent accounts and conspiracy theories involving the CIA’s role in the escape abound to this day.\footnote{One theory holds that Taylor and three fellow escapees cut through prison bars with hacksaws and then lowered themselves to the ground outside with knotted bed sheets. Others postulate that Taylor cut a backroom deal with US authorities. Yet another theory speculates that smooth-talking Taylor may have convinced a guard escort him to a low-security wing because he wanted to play bridge, and it was from there that Taylor slipped away in a pre-planned escape. Taylor himself maintains that the CIA arranged for his cell to simply be unlocked one night, and Taylor merely walked out of the Plymouth facility with no one stopping him. Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 97-112.} No matter how he escaped, Taylor nonetheless returned to Africa, where after going in and out of jail in Ghana, he finally moved to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in 1987. There he established what would be his base for the next two years while the organization and training for the National Patriotic Front of Liberia rebel movement got under way.\footnote{Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 117.}
Section II, Anarchy: The First Liberian Civil War

“Welcome to Liberia, scene of one of the wackiest, and most ruthless, of Africa’s uncivil wars. It’s a war with a general named Mosquito, a war where soldiers get high on dope and paint their fingernails bright red before heading off to battle. It’s a war where combatants sometimes donned women’s wigs, pantyhose, even Donald Duck Halloween masks before committing some of the world’s worse atrocities against their enemies. It’s the only war that hosts a unit of soldiers who strip off their clothes before going into battle and calls itself ‘the Butt Naked Brigade.’ It’s a war where young child soldiers carry teddy bears and plastic baby dolls in one hand and AK-47s in the other. It’s a war where fighters smear their faces with makeup and mud in the belief that ‘juju,’ West African magic, will protect them from the enemies bullets.”

Arguments stressing the ethnic dimension of the conflict find much of their support in the conduct and events of the first weeks of the Civil War. On Doe’s side, the Armed Forces of Liberia experienced widespread defections of Gio, Mano, and other non-Krahn soldiers, which not only diminished its ranks but also further polarized the warring factions along ethnic, rather than ideological or political, lines. On the other hand, as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia advanced and gained territory, its composition changed from Libyan-trained, exiled Liberian fighters and foreign Burkinabe troops to more and more bands of local youths left orphaned by the AFL attacks, some as young as fourteen years old. Unfortunately, the NPFL advance into the south and east of Liberia also perpetuated and worsened the ethnic dimension of the fighting. Following behind the fighters, villagers from Nimba County, the long-persecuted Gios and Manos still reeling from the AFL’s reprisal massacres, took their revenge upon the Krahn and Mandingo civilian populations of Grand Gedeh County with machetes and small arms. The Gios and Manos regarded the Krahn as collectively responsible for the Doe administration’s
brutality, and resented the Mandingoes for profiting from Doe’s rule by acquiring land in Nimba County where they did not have hereditary rights.\footnote{Ellis, The Mask of Anarchy, 78.}

As more and more Gio and Mano civilians either joined the Front or simply extracted their revenge as civilians, the NPFL morphed into the content of Doe’s nightmares. The NPFL even went so far as to send messengers ahead of the soldiers announcing that their enemies were the Krahn, Mandingo, and government supporters. As Stephen Ellis notes, the rebellion quickly took on the form of an ethnic pogrom.\footnote{Ellis, The Mask of Anarchy, 78.} In response, Doe’s government began distributing weapons and enlisting into the army the Krahn and Mandingo civilians who were suddenly desperate to defend themselves. These new troops became known as the “1990 soldiers,” and were notoriously undisciplined and brutal fighters. On both sides of the conflict, issue of ethnicity spurred involvement, mobilized resources, and incited a vicious cycle of blame and bloodshed.

Charles Taylor’s National Patriotic Front of Liberia and Doe’s Armed Forces of Liberia were but two of at least seven warring factions of any relevance in Liberia’s First Civil War. According to one account, the NPFL was co-founded by Moses Duopu, a former student activist, and Charles Taylor, whose initial position was head of the military section.\footnote{Eghosa E. Osaghae, Ethnicity, Class, and the Struggle for State Power in Liberia (Dakar: Codesria, 1990), 93.} Others maintain that the NPFL originated with Doe’s old rival Brigadier-General Thomas Quiwonkpa as early as 1984.\footnote{George Klay Kieh, “Irregular Warfare and Liberia’s First Civil War,” Journal of International and Area Studies 116 (2004): 68.} In any case, before their Christmas Eve invasion, the NPFL troops underwent guerilla training in Libya in one of Colonel Muammar Qaddafi’s training camps for African anti-colonialist rebels, thanks to connections cultivated by Charles Taylor. These connections also
secured Taylor a leadership position in the Front.\textsuperscript{165} Stephen Ellis maintains that in December 1989 the NPFL was more of a network of armed dissidents, somewhere between a political party and a guerrilla army, with a small core military force.\textsuperscript{166} By the time the Front launched its insurrection against Doe, it could be described as a one-man band with no broader leadership structure or guiding political ideology, just Taylor making all decisions himself. The aim of the NPFL was two-fold: remove Doe from power, and install Charles Taylor as president.\textsuperscript{167}

While the NPFL did consist of some prominent Gio elites, the rest of its original 168-man force was significantly non-Liberian, thanks to soldiers lent from Burkina Faso by President Compaoré. Gios and Manos did not flock to the ranks of the NPFL until after Doe’s AFL started massacring civilians in response to the incursion, which it believed to be a continued of Quiwonkpa’s previous failed coup attempt. Before the Gios and Manos of Nimba County were essentially forced to align themselves with the NPFL, the Front could be reasonably interpreted as merely exploiting the existing conflict situation and legitimate grievances between the Gio/Mano and the Krahn/Mandingo, with no real personal stake in the conflict itself beyond Charles Taylor’s desire for the presidency.\textsuperscript{168} To many, the NPFL was nothing more than a tool for Taylor’s political ambitions, and was not genuinely connected to the ethnic conflict at all.\textsuperscript{169}

One of the key characteristics of the First Liberian Civil War was rampant factionalism. Although securing the presidency for himself was one half of Taylor’s goal and of those loyal to him, he had only modest support amongst the original fighters who trained in the camps in Libya and Burkina Faso while he was president of the NPFL, Instead, most of those men owed their

\textsuperscript{165} Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 120.
\textsuperscript{166} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 74.
\textsuperscript{167} Osaghae, \textit{Ethnicity, Class, and the Struggle for State Power in Liberia}, 94.
\textsuperscript{168} Osaghae, \textit{Ethnicity, Class, and the Struggle for State Power in Liberia}, 93.
immediate loyalty to politicians like Taylor’s purported co-founder Duopu, or to their commanders, usually former AFL officers like Prince Yormie Johnson, who were themselves from Nimba County.\textsuperscript{170} As a result, in 1990 the Front splintered, with Prince Johnson leading the new faction. In the Doe years, Prince Johnson had been a commissioned officer in the Armed Forces of Liberia and reached the position of Commander of the Liberian military police in 1976. Although he was a career military man, joining the army at age nineteen, Prince Johnson was also a Gio, and had participated in Quiwonkpa’s 1985 coup attempt. After fleeing to Cote d’Ivoire after Quiwonkpa’s death, Prince Johnson was invited to join the NPFL during their guerilla warfare training in Libya and Burkina Faso where he became their chief military instructor.\textsuperscript{171} His credentials led him to be made Commander of the NPFL’s elite force, the Black Scorpions.

In July 1990 Johnson broke away from the Front in order to form the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia, INPFL. In doing so, he took most of the NPFL’s trained fighters with him, mostly ethnic Gio men originally from the AFL who served under his command. Charles Taylor was left with mainly civilian recruits, child soldiers, and a force of regular troops supplied by Burkina Faso’s president Compaore. There are conflicting reports for the reason behind the split, but the end result was clear: Taylor and Johnson were no longer working for the same goal.\textsuperscript{172} The INPFL maintained the object of ousting Doe, and in the process continued to target and attack Krahns and Mandingoes.\textsuperscript{173} In fact, it was Prince Johnson

\textsuperscript{170} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 74.
\textsuperscript{171} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 81.
\textsuperscript{172} Reasons given for the split include anti-African-Liberian actions pursued by Taylor, a dispute over Johnson’s execution of twelve men for theft and desertion, Johnson’s protective reaction against the murder of Duopu (which many believed to have been ordered by Taylor), and a reflection of a split between Johnson and Taylor over their goals for the post-Doe era. Ellis, The Mask of Anarchy, 81-4; Osaghae, \textit{Ethnicity, Class, and the Struggle for State Power in Liberia}, 94; Kieh, “Irregular Warfare and Liberia’s First Civil War,” 69.
\textsuperscript{173} Osaghae, \textit{Ethnicity, Class, and the Struggle for State Power in Liberia}, 94.
and the INPFL that ultimately brought Doe’s demise. The INPFL had an additional agenda, however, which was preventing Taylor from succeeding Doe as president of Liberia.\(^{174}\)

In the context of the First Liberian Civil War, during which the country slid into anarchy and became known for its proliferation of “warlords,” Prince Johnson managed to gain notoriety. Johnson controlled his men through personal supervision, draconian physical disciplinary measures, and fear. Widely regarded as an “alcoholic psychopath” known for his unpredictability and propensity for casual killing, in many ways Prince Johnson and his INPFL exemplified the savagery and polarizing nature of the conflict.\(^{175}\) When Johnson captured Doe on 9 September 1990, his INPFL soldiers tortured and gruesomely killed Doe, all on videotape, with Johnson occasionally appearing in the frame casually sipping a beer while directing his men. Rather than fearing retribution for his actions or attempting to cover up his brutality, Prince Johnson distributed copies of the tape to the foreign press corps.\(^{176}\)

During the First Liberian Civil War the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) was transformed from its previous multiethnic composition and role as the official government forces into an instrument for protecting Doe’s rule and Krahn domination. As the Christmas Eve invasion erupted into full-scale war, Doe found that only Krahn soldiers could be trusted. Beginning in May 1990 Gio and Mano AFL soldiers were disarmed, detained, or killed, and thereafter only Krahns were made Commandos. Even after Doe’s murder, the AFL continued to function as a warring Krahn faction until the establishment of an interim government led by Amos Sawyer

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undertook to reorganize and restore the AFL to its original status as the legitimate state army of Liberia.\textsuperscript{177}

Many of the Krahns of the AFL also defected to the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO) and the Liberia Peace Council (LPC). Clearly, the mobility of individual soldiers and the frequency with which they abandoned or joined different factions throughout the conflict makes arguing for ethnic grievances as the ultimate cause of the war difficult. ULIMO for instance, although it attracted many Krahns, also initially had a large Mandingo Muslim contingent. That different ethnic groups had multiple factions to fight for illustrates quite nicely that the Liberian citizens were not as neatly united or divided along ethnic lines as it may seem at first glance. The LPC emerged in 1993 originally as a civil society movement composed mostly of southeasterners under the leadership of former Minister of State and businessman, Dr. George E. S. Boley, another Krahn.\textsuperscript{178} The LPC quickly became dominated by the Sarpo, who are related to the Krahn and were targeted by the NPFL’s attacks.\textsuperscript{179} Eventually, united in their loyalty to Doe and fight against Taylor, the Liberian Peace Council formally allied itself with the Guinean-based Movement for the Redemption of Muslims and the Sierra-Leone-based Liberia United Defense Force under the umbrella faction ULIMO, which was originally founded in 1991.\textsuperscript{180} The unity of the United Liberian Movement for Democracy was brief, however, and the faction split in 1994 into ULIMO-K and ULIMO-J, this time largely along ethnic lines.\textsuperscript{181}

\textsuperscript{177} Osaghae, \textit{Ethnicity, Class, and the Struggle for State Power in Liberia}, 95.
\textsuperscript{178} Kenneth Omeje, ed., \textit{War to Peace Transition: Conflict Intervention and Peacebuilding in Liberia} (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009), 34.
\textsuperscript{179} Gerdes, \textit{Civil War and State Formation}, 36.
\textsuperscript{180} Gerdes, \textit{Civil War and State Formation}, 123.
\textsuperscript{181} This split is discussed more in depth in Chapter Three.
The Lofa Defense Force (LDF) was the smallest and shortest-lived faction headed by Francis Massaquoi and founded in 1994 by members of the Loma, Gissi, and Gbandi ethnic groups in response to wanton killing and the desecration of graves and sacred groves by ULIMO-K forces. Operating only in Lofa County and reportedly under the direction of Poro religious authorities, the LDF is representative of both the readiness of Liberian civilians to factionalize and take up arms, and to do so along ethnic and religious lines. The Lofa Defense Force was not fighting for Liberia’s future development or in support of a particular political ideology. Instead, the LDF was an example of the chaotic nature of the First Liberian Civil War, where the proliferation of factions resulted in anarchy and carved up the country into pieces.

While the LDF’s history and composition supports arguments that ethnic grievances fueled the conflict, the composition of the other factions and the pre-eminence of their leaders, or “warlords,” has prompted many to argue that the war was a struggle motivated by greed between elite individuals for political and military power and for the ultimate goal of personal enrichment.

After Doe’s grisly death the scale of the violence only continued to grow and warring factions proliferated, causing Liberia to descend into near total anarchy. Fearing the chaos, Liberia’s regional neighbors Nigeria, Ghana, and Sierra Leone pressured the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to intervene. ECOWAS formed a conflict mediation committee and signed an agreement on 7 August 1990 in Banjul, Gambia that committed troops to Liberia in a military intervention force known as the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group, or ECOMOG. The purported objective of ECOMOG was to assemble a neutral multinational force that could appeal to all of Liberia’s warring

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182 Omeje, *War to Peace Transition*, 34.
183 Gerdes, *Civil War and State Formation*, 37.
184 Gerdes, *Civil War and State Formation*, 32.
factions in order to bring about a quick cessation of hostilities. In reality, operating under the direction of its most influential contributor, Nigeria, ECOMOG made its primary objective preventing Charles Taylor from becoming president. As a result, ECOMOG cultivated strong links with factions opposed to Taylor’s NPFL and deliberately fought only Taylor by proxy.

*Gbarnga to Monrovia: How Charles Taylor Wore Down the World*

At the Banjul summit, in response to the power vacuum left by Doe’s murder, ECOWAS also established the Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) with Amos Sawyer, a leading progressive, at its head. The international community recognized the IGNU as the legitimate government of Liberia. The Interim Government was intended to provide an alternative to “warlord rule;” however, in the context of war-torn Liberia, the civilian government lacked any real power and was more of ECOMOG’s puppet government. Eventually the international community recognized the reality of the situation in Liberia, and in March 1994 the IGNU was dissolved and replaced with the first of three Liberian National Transitional Governments (LNTG I-III), which integrated the major armed factions into the official government. Civilian government separate from the warring faction leaders had officially failed in Liberia.

In response to the establishment of the Interim Government of National Unity, Taylor established his own government in the territory occupied by his NPFL, called the National Patriotic Reconstruction Assembly Government (NPRAG). At that point in 1990 Taylor controlled ninety percent of Liberia, which became known as “Greater Liberia,” and had its capital in Gbarnga, Bong County. On a basic level, Taylor managed to control so much

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186 Gerdes, *Civil War and State Formation*, 35.
189 Gerdes, *Civil War and State Formation*, 36.
territory quite simply because he fed the civilians when others could not. During the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia at the close of the war, one former child soldier testified that, “people used to come from Monrovia, Buchana, and other parts of Liberia to live in Gbarnga… at the time, food was the main concern of most of us and there were enough of rice here in Gbarnga and almost everyone was happy here.”\(^\text{191}\) Taylor, from this position of power, impeded any attempts at peace by refusing to participate on equal footing with any of the other factions. Most scholars take this to be clearly indicative of Taylor’s ambition to become president at any cost.\(^\text{192}\) Taylor’s situation changed by September 1991, however, when ULIMO launched an effective offensive against the NPFL that significantly reduced Taylor’s holdings. By July 1993, after a re-energized ECOMOG and the LPC joined the fight, Taylor had lost nearly two-thirds of Greater Liberia.\(^\text{193}\)

In September of 1994 Taylor and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia suffered another blow when three cabinet ministers, Tom Woewiyu, Laveli Supuwood, and Sam Dokie, widely considered to be the NPFL’s intellectual backbone, broke ranks with Taylor. Woewiyu went on to personally attack Taylor, claiming, “Mr. Taylor is an enemy to this society. He is an enemy to the NPFL. He has distorted our ideals and wasted blood on the noble goals of the people of this country.” Woewiyu went on to accuse Taylor of what many other vocally maintained: Taylor was continuing the war because he feared electoral defeat.\(^\text{194}\) Now Taylor had no choice but to negotiate.

After eleven attempts at a lasting peace accord and twenty cease-fires since the NPFL first invaded Liberia in 1989, on 19 August 1995, the leaders of all seven of Liberia’s warring

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\(^{192}\) Omeje, *War to Peace Transition*, 35.


factions signed a peace agreement in Abuja.\textsuperscript{195} The Abuja Accord established a new transitional government, headed by a six-member Council of State with Taylor, as speaker of the parliament and leader of the largest faction, in charge of the Liberian National Transitional Government (LNTG) in all practical terms. Under LNTG administration, the true balance of power was still determined in the countryside according to how much force the faction leaders could muster to promote their political interests, and Taylor was still the strongest.\textsuperscript{196}

In December 1996, Liberia experienced its last descent into full-scale warfare of the First Civil War. On 28 December, Roosevelt Johnson, (not to be confused with Prince Johnson) leader of the ULIMO-J faction, launched a surprise attack on ECOMOG in a major breach of the countrywide ceasefire. The incident plunged Monrovia back into unrestrained conflict as the ULIMO-J forces resisted Taylor’s attempts to capture Roosevelt Johnson, all while Taylor attempted to portray himself and the NPFL as Liberia’s “true government forces.” Among the groups defending Johnson was the infamous “Butt Naked” brigade, a popular feature in international press reporting.\textsuperscript{197} On the NPFL side, the conflict escalated into “Operation Pay Yourself,” as Taylor’s unpaid combatants took the opportunity to loot the capital.\textsuperscript{198}

Finally, on 19 July 1997, in what was certified to be a free and fair democratic election, Charles Taylor was elected President of Liberia with a commanding 75.3 percent of the vote.\textsuperscript{199} The international community was shocked, especially in light of the campaign song sung by Taylor’s young supporters: “He killed my Ma, he killed my Pa, I’ll vote for him.”\textsuperscript{200} Most scholars believe that Liberians voted for Charles Taylor as a vote for peace out of fear that he

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\textsuperscript{196} Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 169-171.
\textsuperscript{197} The Butt Naked Brigade is discussed further in Chapter Three
\textsuperscript{198} Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 172-177.
\textsuperscript{199} Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 228.
\textsuperscript{200} Ellis, \textit{The Mask of Anarchy}, 109.
\end{flushleft}
would re-start the war should he lose.\footnote{Adebajo, Liberia’s Civil War, 221-3.} This fear was not unfounded, considering that in 1990 Taylor had claimed that, “If it was necessary to flatten Monrovia so he could be the president, he would do so.”\footnote{The Liberian Crisis (Monrovia: Justice and Peace Commission National Catholic Secretariat, 1994), 26.} Even though, there are alternate explanations. The strongest alternative theory stresses the financial aspect of Taylor’s victory, positing that Taylor’s impressive wealth, unrivaled by fellow faction leaders, went beyond simply enabling him to reach more voters. Six days before the elections, Taylor paid $23,000 for the Liberian soccer team to travel to an African Nations Cup qualifying game. Taylor also donated ambulances to hospitals, established the philanthropic Charles Ghankay Taylor Educational and Humanitarian Relief Foundation to rehabilitate war victims, and established the Charles Taylor Relief Agency to distribute rice, milk, and bread. Taylor’s strategy here was to play the archetypal African Big Man and present himself as the biggest and richest chief with the most patronage to distribute. Additionally, Taylor’s rivals were perceived as disjointed and opportunistic, which weakened their counter-campaign.\footnote{Adebajo, Liberia’s Civil War, 221-3.}

Despite the international community’s disbelief, power sharing with accused “warlords” is not a phenomenon unique to Liberia. Jeremy Levitt explains that, “the logic behind power sharing assumes that rebels and warlords will behave and act as good citizens once they are given authoritative positions. It presupposes that warlords can become democrats once sanctioned with state authority.”\footnote{Jeremy Levitt, “Illegal Peace? Power Sharing with Warlords in Africa,” Proceedings of the Annual Meeting (American Society of International Law) 101 (2007): 153.} Whether or not democracy would follow, Liberians at least had peace. Seven years and six months after launching his initial assault from Cote d’Ivoire, Charles Taylor finally realized his goal of becoming the President of Liberia, and allowed the First Liberian Civil War to come to a close.
Section III, Papay: Charles Taylor and the Creation of His Liberia

“In the final analysis, when the people had the opportunity to come out and speak in the last elections, they said, ‘you’ve wasted our time for six and a half years; we’ve always wanted this man to lead us; you did not give us a chance to express it, you came and dictated your policies, now we are speaking: that’s the man we want.” – President-elect Charles Taylor

Charles Taylor’s charisma, intelligence, and skillful political networking, cultivated since his time as a student in Boston, were key elements of his successes in the period from 1987 until the launch of the First Liberian Civil War in 1989. Whereas his charisma was a hallmark of a Vinci “warlord,” Taylor’s intelligence and artful navigation of politics revealed his vision for both himself and his territory surpassed what Vinci would expect in scope and sophistication. Importantly, Taylor had a number of allies among the leaders of West Africa, including Burkina Faso’s Blaise Compaoré, who allowed Taylor to use Ouagadougou as his staging ground, Cote d’Ivoire’s Félix Houphouët-Boigny, and probably most importantly, Libyan revolutionary Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. It was Taylor’s connection with Gaddafi that resulted in the NPFL being invited to train in Gaddafi’s anti-colonialist training camps paired with Taylor’s personal wealth (accumulated through personal business ventures in the automobile and insurance agencies since his time in America) that ultimately allowed the Americo-Liberian Taylor to secure his leadership position in the National Patriotic Front of Liberia. As the First Liberian Civil War gained momentum, so did Taylor’s bid for full, undisputed control of the Front. Between June and August 1990, there was a series of as many as eighty assassinations of key figures behind NPFL lines, a purge that removed all of Taylor’s most dangerous rivals except for Prince Johnson who had already formed the breakaway faction of the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia.

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205 Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 233.
206 Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 68, 115, 120.
207 Ellis, The Mask of Anarchy, 85.
Once the Civil War began in earnest, Taylor’s NPFL offensives were so successful that by mid-1990 Taylor controlled ninety percent of the country. Referred to as “Greater Liberia,” Taylor ruled his territory as the president of the parallel government he set up known as the National Patriotic Reconstruction Assembly Government, or NPRAG. From this time until 1993 when the NPFL suffered extensive territorial losses, Taylor was the head of the most well managed military-economic operation of the First Liberian Civil War.\(^{208}\) Greater Liberia has even been described as Taylor’s personal fief. According to Felix Gerdes, Taylor outperformed the other faction leaders precisely because he established a system of total domination that was more comprehensive and effective than that any of his rivals, and even bordered on a cult of personality. Key features of Taylor’s domination were revenue extraction, appearances of legitimacy, and strong internal control measures.\(^{209}\) An oft-cited example of the level of control in the NPFL territory was Greater Liberia’s gate system. All roads in Greater Liberia were sealed with checkpoint gates where travelers could be stopped, interrogated, and their goods looted. The most notorious gates were decorated with trophies like human skulls and acquired nicknames such as “No Return.”\(^{210}\) In most respects, Taylor’s level of control over his territory was unrivaled. Ironically, it was within Greater Liberia, a territory held by Taylor alone on the basis on the strength of his personal army – the hallmark of a Vinci warlord – that Taylor achieved his most sophisticated levels of statecraft and nation building that are not coherent with the warlord model.

Taylor extended his personal, autocratic control over the economy as well, where he personally managed business contracts with foreign interests. He would grant a license to operate in return for a personal payment of tax in US dollars, and through this system Taylor was able to

\(^{208}\) Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 181.
\(^{209}\) Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 60.
generate an impressive income for Greater Liberia despite the fact that it was an internationally unrecognized state. One estimate reported that Taylor managed to collect $75 million per year from his territorial control of key resources such as timber, rubber, and diamonds, although other estimates place Taylor’s earnings much lower, at around thirteen to eighteen million per year. No matter the sum, Taylor did accumulate enough personal wealth during the war to live such an ostentatious lifestyle that one scholar argues the war could have been over nothing else than “the deification of Taylor.” Following from this intense level of personal control and financial success, visitors to Taylor’s capital in Gbarnga noticed growing signs of a personality cult revolving around Taylor. The NPFL and its leader had become inextricably linked.

Although the NPFL by its nature was an armed insurrectionary faction, the military and political chains of command governing Greater Liberia existed separately, preventing a merger of political and military powers at the local level. This differs noticeably from Anthony Vinci’s assertion that a warlord organization should involve “a total combination of military and political means. All members of the warlord political community are a part of a military organization, and even the economy is fundamentally wrapped up with the military.” Instead, Taylor’s systematic domination was much more sophisticated and statecraft-oriented than mere intimidation and pacification by brute military force, and thus surpasses expectations of a simple warlord organization. Separate from the military and commercial core of the NPFL organization, Taylor exercised his political domination through traditional-patrimonial administration by distributing jobs and largesse to civilians in an attempt to maintain a balance of ethnic and

211 Ellis, The Mask of Anarchy, 90.
214 Ellis, The Mask of Anarchy, 92.
215 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 64.
regional support. Ultimately, Taylor’s system of rule was centered on himself and personal relations of domination. His rural subjects were patrimonially integrated through the intermediation of locally influential persons, such as clan chiefs, whose support Taylor actively cultivated. Thus, Taylor co-opted traditional parts of the existing chieftaincy administrations in order to ease his rule, and so that daily life for civilians continued with some semblance of normalcy.\(^\text{217}\)

For Taylor’s mostly youthful combatants, his patrimonial domination was reflected in semantics and deference referring to kinship, most noticeably in Taylor’s nickname “Papay,” or “Father.”\(^\text{218}\) Most of these combatants were unpaid and survived through looting, which both enticed soldiers to take on frontline assignments and was a part of the NPFL’s military strategy.\(^\text{219}\) Generally, in Greater Liberia there were no rights, just privileges, but one of those key privileges was not to be looted. In fact, apart from instances of actual battle, arbitrary violence and general insecurity in Greater Liberia existed only on the periphery. Again, this differs from what Vinci would expect. In Vinci’s conceptual analysis, “the warlord community is separate, but related to existent political communities, such as clans or state,” and “the individuals within the warlord organization have their own separate political community and see the local residents that they prey on as enemies.”\(^\text{220}\) In the case of Greater Liberia, however, Taylor arguably created more of a nascent nation-state than warlord fiefdom, and his efforts to do so prove that he set his sights higher than the mere accumulation of wealth, which should be a warlord’s primary motivation. Mark Huband, a journalist who spent time with Taylor in Greater Liberia during the conflict, stressed Taylor’s concern with discipline, noting multiple instances

\(^{218}\) Gerdes, *Civil War and State Formation*, 66.
\(^{219}\) Gerdes, *Civil War and State Formation*, 68.
of Taylor issuing the following warning to his men: “anybody found raping or looting will face a firing squad.”

Truth and Reconciliation Commission testimony from former soldiers confirms that Taylor followed through on this, sometimes with beatings if not actual executions. It was not until the NPFL was severely weakened in 1994 that the core territory of Greater Liberia began to experience high levels of insecurity and violence.

Taylor’s level of domination across Greater Liberia was not fully dependent upon patrimonial relationships. Rather than only a brutal warlord, many Liberians actually viewed Taylor as a liberator. Especially among Liberia’s youth, Taylor represented a new, more inclusive Liberia. Additionally, Taylor’s charisma, stubbornness in resisting the negotiating table, and shows of strength served to increased his perceived legitimacy, rather than negatively impact his popularity. The image of a new, strong, revolutionary leader committed to changing Liberia inspired loyalty and commitment from Taylor’s combatants. It was the strength of Charles Taylor as a personality where he did conform to part of Vinci’s estimation of a warlord. For Vinci, it is both the reliance on patronage and patrimonial and charismatic sources of authority that “explain why the warlord as an individual is so central to the organization,” and why, in Liberia in particular, “success and influence depended more on a commander’s power in his own right as a dominating personality in the faction hierarchy than on his capabilities as a military leader.” Vinci, however, was talking only in terms of a combat organization. Most scholars agree that Taylor’s success relative to the other faction leaders stemmed from his

221 Huband, The Liberian Civil War, 77.
223 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 74-5.
224 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 69-70.
225 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 71.
personal qualities like his charisma and oratory skills, but also factors that extended away from war and into politics, like his internationally savvy nature. Taylor behaved like a warlord insofar as his larger-than-life public persona inspired loyalty and held his military faction together, but as the extent of the organization of Greater Liberia and the integration of civilians showed, Taylor’s ambitions were larger, too, than those of a simple warlord.

Beyond his popularity amongst those whom he “liberated” from the terrors of the Doe administration, Taylor also meticulously cultivated his international media image with an extensive PR operation largely fueled by his frequent BBC broadcasts. As time wore on, however, Taylor’s international image became increasingly sensationalized as the leader of a group of out-of-control fighters, who looted and destroyed more than they effected positive change. The West was fascinated both with the brutality of the warfare as well the combatant’s bizarre rituals and attire. The international press corps reported on Taylor’s NPFL forces going into battle high, committing atrocities against civilians, and fighting alongside child soldiers all while their leader financed the operation by plundering the countryside’s natural resources and working with pariah states’ arms dealers.227

During his time as “president” of Greater Liberia, Charles McArthur Taylor realized the importance of establishing himself in the traditional society of native Liberia. Growing up in an Americo-Liberian household before working in Monrovia and moving to America, he had little previous contact with the customs, trappings, and rituals that governed ordinary lives of hinterland African-Liberians. Taylor believed that the genesis of Liberia’s current crisis went back to the mistakes of the first settlers who failed to integrate with the indigenous Liberians, and he also believed that as a man of mixed descendent he was truly special and meant to rectify this divide. In Taylor’s words: “I… fell almost dead center… so I mean I could fit in any camp.”

227 Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 189.
In reality, Taylor had no natural constituency, as he was not a member of the Americo-Liberian True Whig Party and had only tenuous links to his birth mother’s Gola tribe.228 Aware of this, and already possessing the complexion and attitude of Monrovian Americo-Liberians, he used his years in the bush to engineer his indigenous identity.

Traditionally, West African rulers could not expect power without ascending through the tribal hierarchy and gaining the loyalty and respect of local chiefs in the process. With no time to actually participate in years of ritual and a war to fight, Taylor used a series of cosmetic changes to leapfrog the system. First, he replaced his Americo-Liberian middle name, McArthur, with the Gola name “Ghankay,” meaning “strong one.” Next, Taylor started appearing more and more in white robes and traditional attire, and the habit of carrying a carved oxblood chieftain’s stick. He even went as far as to create an association of officials of Liberia’s traditional societies, of which he then proclaimed himself the supreme chief. Taylor acquired a new, self-conferred title, “Dakhpannah,” confirming that he was now the overall chief of all the interior’s tribes. Careful to play up his mixed descent, Taylor did all of this while somehow managing to maintain his Christian credentials in order to appeal to the Americo-Liberian constituency.229 Years later at his trial before the Special Court of Sierra Leone, Taylor would explain his title “Dakhpannah” as the name for the “most senior traditional chief.”230 Considering the sixteen major indigenous ethnic groups of Liberia arguably had their formal origin in the late twentieth century, and that there had never before been an indigenous leader ruling over all of Liberia, Taylor’s interpretation of “traditional” seems to be quite liberal.

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230 Special Court of Sierra Leone, “The Prosecutor of the Special Court v. Charles Ghankay Taylor,” (Date: 7/14/), Text from: rcsel.org; Accessed 11/21/15.
The consummate statesman and ever the showman, while Taylor may not have been raised to believe Liberia’s superstitions, he certainly learned how to manipulate them to his benefit. In December 1996, a powerful rumor swept through the country that on 8 December 1996 a darkness would engulf Liberia. Fearing the consequences, and speculating that it was a prophecy of a wave of even more terrible violence, the rumor was taken seriously across the country. The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) forces were even put on special high alert on 7 December. When 8 December arrived, Taylor erected a Christmas tree and, filmed by the press and broadcasted around the country, turned on the lights. In one fell swoop Taylor both enhanced his supernatural credentials and eased the anxiety of a tense nation, all by plugging in a strand of lights.231

Taylor’s attempts to improve his popularity among the Liberian people undeniably succeeded. After the Abuja Accord of 1994 placed Taylor on the State Council of the Liberian National Transitional Government, an eyewitness reported that, “none of the warring faction leaders received the euphoric and exhilarated reception that Charles Taylor did. When Taylor arrived, the normal life of the city came to a halt, and people lined the streets almost nine miles from the ECOMOG/NPFL buffer zone outside the city to downtown Monrovia.”232 Arthur F. Kulah, a Liberian bishop, noted Taylor’s contradictory popularity in his reflections on the crisis:

To many, Taylor was the hero who aroused courage; to others, he was the villain who stirred fear and masterminded the destruction of Liberia. To yet others he was a liberator, a revolutionary ready to lead Liberia in the twenty-first century, while others vowed to make life unpleasant for the warlords and their cronies… Taylor was loved and hated, worshipped and detested, adored and abhorred.233

Taylor was polarizing, but there was no denying he was powerful.

231 Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 201.
233 Kulah, Liberia Will Rise Again, 42.
So Let Him Fix It: Charles Taylor in the Presidency

When Taylor launched his insurrection in December 1989, he declared it a popular revolution aimed to free the Liberian people from the grips of Doe’s death squads. As the war raged on after Doe’s death and Taylor resisted attempts at peace negotiations, it became increasingly obvious to some of Taylor’s top lieutenants that Taylor’s war was not a war against tyranny or an unselfish fight for democracy; it was a war first and foremost to make Charles Taylor the President of Liberia. By the time the elections of 1997 came around, Taylor’s intentions literally stared Liberia in the face with billboards reading “NO GHANKAY, NO PEACE.” War weariness paired with the widespread sentiment: “he spoil Liberia – so let him fix it,” combined to give Taylor his goal in July of that year. The international community was shocked, especially because the media had portrayed Taylor as nothing other than a savage warlord. Instead, Taylor surprised the world by offering a certain number of cabinet posts to the leaders of the main rival factions under the banner of “National Reconciliation.” The Taylor administration thus had a promising beginning, but the peace unfortunately did not last. It was actually only once he held the position as the democratically elected, internationally recognized President of Liberia that Charles Taylor’s rule disintegrated into a security-centric, personal wealth obsessed “warlord organization” that Vinci would recognize.

A key part of Taylor’s transformation from faction leader to president was the transfer of the administrative apparatus of his “warlord fiefdom” of Greater Liberia into the formal institutions of the state of Liberia. Control over state institutions followed the pattern of Greater

\[234\text{ Kulah, Liberia Will Rise Again, 72.}\
\[235\text{ Kieh, “Irregular Warfare and Liberia’s First Civil War,” 72.}\
\[236\text{ The Liberian Crisis, 49.}\
\[237\text{ Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 228.}\
\[238\text{ Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 229.}\
\[239\text{ Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 240.}\

Liberia and was organized according to the principles of charismatic legitimacy and patrimonialism, with Taylor as an official head of state continuing to exercise significant personal control over the economy. Within this system, possibly unexpectedly, Taylor did not (at least initially) rely on wartime metrics of loyalty. Instead, Taylor used his new state apparatus to try and buy off or befriend opponents under the “National Reconciliation” banner before resorting to harsher measures. Taylor also continued his quest to co-opt traditional sources of power, and both Poro officials and other religious personalities were freely handed money and other forms of patronage.²⁴⁰

When it came to the economy, Taylor continued to run government business and his personal business simultaneously and often used government business to finance personal deals, if a line could even be drawn between the two. Taylor’s “dual fiscal system” allowed the president to take cuts on government monopolies in timber, gold, and diamond mining, as well as commissions on control of other commodities.²⁴¹ Contrary to the accepted knowledge on warlords, Taylor did not (at least initially) need war to pursue his economic self-interest, since he made plenty of profit during his peacetime stint as president. On the other hand, Taylor’s early efforts to bring about positive change in Liberia were soon abandoned.²⁴² Improvements for the general welfare of the population, such as in infrastructure, were nowhere to be seen, and unlike the practices of neighboring heads of state elsewhere in Africa, members of Taylor’s home community or even his own family members did not receive any particular advantages over their fellow Liberians.²⁴³ Different from in Greater Liberia where Taylor provided relative peace, as President of Liberia Taylor seemed to regress into practicing “warlord economics” in is pure

²⁴⁰ Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 134-5.
²⁴¹ Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 249-50.
²⁴² Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 2-3.
²⁴³ Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 37.
Liberia under Taylor essentially became “Liberia, Inc.,” Taylor’s personal economic venture.  

Taylor merged his roles as “warlord” and president even more obviously in the security sector. Rather than disarming his NPFL combatants, Taylor instead funneled them into two new security agencies: the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU) and the Special Security Services (SSS). The ATU was run by Chuckie Taylor, Taylor’s son, and reported to only Chuckie and Charles himself, rather than to a government ministry. The SSS, on the other hand, operated as Taylor’s personal security force. Neither was provided for in Liberia’s national budget, but rather were paid for by Taylor’s personal funds. The AFL, supposedly the country’s official army, was downgraded to near irrelevance during Taylor’s peacetime presidency. Taylor’s continued resort to unofficial security with a strong degree of personal, rather than legislative, control both did little to improve the welfare of the Liberian population and perpetuated his image as a brutal warlord in the eyes of many. One half of Vinci’s basic definition of a warlord, it should be recalled, is the control of a “private army.” The other half is “an area under his control.” Paired with the supplementary factor of the “pursuit of narrow, commercial self-interest,” it was arguably only the lack of “notorious barbarism” keeping President Taylor from backsliding to “warlord.” Unfortunately for the Liberian people, President Taylor did not remain innocent of accusations of “notorious barbarism” for long.

Not long into his presidency, Taylor abandoned the façade of reconciliation, cracked down on opposition, and attempted to institutionalize his dominance. By filling his personal armies with loyalists, Taylor created conditions ripe for the (re)mobilization of ethnic groups in

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244 Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man’: A Conceptual Analysis of Warlords,” 320.
245 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 151.
246 Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 250-4.
order to protect their own against a partisan army. Most of Taylor’s opponents also correctly viewed Taylor’s state apparatus as an extension of his personal power, and thus did not perceive acts of “justice” as neutral. For his part, Taylor’s paranoia and obsession with security only increased as his time in office wore on.\textsuperscript{248} Taylor censored the Liberian press, refused to cooperate fully with ECOMOG’s demobilization efforts, and eventually resorted to outright violence and authoritarianism.\textsuperscript{249} In April 1998 Liberia was rocked by a string of extrajudicial killings, most notoriously the murder of Taylor’s former ally-turned-rival Sam Dokie, and by late 1998 Taylor had forced most of his main political rivals into exile, largely through the use of personal security forces.\textsuperscript{250} Even within his own cabinet, Taylor implemented repeated and systematic cleansing attacks on private entities as yet another method to eliminate challenges to his authority.\textsuperscript{251} Taylor’s attempts to eliminate his opponents reached their zenith with seventeen hours of outright paramilitary conflict with Roosevelt Johnson just a hundred meters from the Executive Mansion.\textsuperscript{252} The murders and exiles, rather than bolstering Taylor’s position, only reinforced latent doubts over Taylor’s willingness to engage with rivals and eroded the trust that was so key to the complex personal bonds of Taylor’s brand of patrimonialism.\textsuperscript{253}

\textbf{Section IV, Taylor’s Last Stand: The Second Liberian Civil War}

“I have not left this city and I will not leave this city. I will remain to encourage my combatants to fight all the way. My survival is the Liberian People’s survival, your survival is my survival.” – Charles Taylor\textsuperscript{254}

\textsuperscript{251} Levitt, The Evolution of Deadly Conflict in Liberia, 214.
\textsuperscript{252} Discussed in more detail in Chapter Three; Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 155-6.
\textsuperscript{253} Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 158.
\textsuperscript{254} Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 274.
Taylor’s repressive regime and failure to cultivate true political inclusion eventually fostered conditions hostile enough for the breakout of the Second Liberian Civil War in 1999, although many scholars consider the two wars to be one long, continuous conflict with a brief interim of peace.\textsuperscript{255} Essentially, the Second Liberian Civil War was the violent expression of the disintegration of Charles Taylor’s system of domination. Unlike in Greater Liberia, once Taylor was elected he failed to monopolize the means of military violence. Domestically, his patronage system also broke down while Taylor’s diplomatic relations with neighboring states in the region were strained to the point of hostility. Ultimately, Liberia’s economy then collapsed when all of the pressures on Taylor’s rule combined and became too much.\textsuperscript{256} It only exacerbated the situation that Taylor resisted ECOMOG’s attempts at demobilization, which when combined with his insistence on transferring untrained NPFL soldiers into the official security apparatus of Liberia fostered conditions of militarization and mistrust so volatile that mere charisma and shallow patrimonial bonds could not cement Taylor’s hold on power.

Taylor’s main opponent in this new chapter of the war was the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy rebel movement, or LURD, founded in 1999 in Sierra Leone and composed mostly of Taylor’s original enemies, the Mandingo and Krahn. Led by Sekou Conneh, LURD swore that its only objective was to remove Taylor from power and that all land and assets captured in their fight would be returned once Taylor stepped down. For three years LURD fought to oust Taylor in a war that originated in Lofa County but soon spread not only across Liberia but also to parts of Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Cote d’Ivoire.\textsuperscript{257} LURD was joined four years into the war in 2003 by another faction formed in Cote d’Ivoire and called the

\textsuperscript{255} Omeje, \textit{War to Peace Transition}, 37.
\textsuperscript{256} Gerdes, \textit{Civil War and State Formation}, 154.
\textsuperscript{257} Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 264-6.
Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). As the rebel troops proliferated and advanced, Taylor’s old claims to legitimacy, namely his ability to maintain control, commandeer resources, and subdue adversaries, only continued to erode.

A major difference between the two civil wars was the second’s effect on civilians. In the Second Liberian Civil War, violence against civilians was much more restricted and targeted, as LURD forces in particular were markedly more disciplined and better controlled than both its ULIMO predecessor and Doe’s old associated factions. Additionally, the LURD leadership actively worked to counter the perception of being merely a new set of aspiring warlords. Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy did not promote any one individual, and rather than impose military control LURD established a rudimentary civilian administration in its controlled territories. Thus, the Second Liberian Civil War took on a character distinct from the first, while simultaneously discrediting and providing an alternative to Taylor’s version of domination.

The international community outside of West Africa also played a more active role in the Second Liberian Civil War than the first. On 7 March 2001, the United Nations passed a resolution that renewed a ban on arms supplies to Liberia (in force since 1992), imposed an embargo on diamonds exports from Liberia, and implemented a travel ban against Charles Taylor and his entourage of 130 people. Sanctions against Taylor and Liberia were then extended in May 2002. It took until early August 2003, however, for Charles Taylor to finally see the writing on the wall when United States President George W. Bush directly insisted that Taylor

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258 Omeje, War to Peace Transition, 36.
259 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 158.
260 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 168, 170.
resign as president and leave the country, with the threat of US troop intervention. On 11 August 2003, Charles Taylor officially stepped down as the President of Liberia.\textsuperscript{261}

In his last days in office, angered by the international pressure being placed on him by Western powers, Taylor ranted, “It is not about Taylor. It is about the question: can Africa be free? It sets an unhealthy precedent.”\textsuperscript{262} Of course it was about Taylor; and, once he realized his defeat, he admitted as much. Referring to himself as a sacrificial lamb and a whipping boy, Taylor managed to transform the conflict from an internal insurrection to oust him into an international Western conspiracy against him and the rest of the Liberian people. Taylor, even in defeat, waxed heroic: “They can call off their dogs now. I realized that I could no longer see the blood of our people wasted… I do not stop out of fear of the fight. I stop now out of love for you.”\textsuperscript{263} Charles Taylor’s last presidential plea was a challenge to the “real” enemy, calling on US President George Bush to “please… do something for our people.” Finally, weeping, Charles Taylor handed over his green sash of office and promised, “God willing, I will be back.”\textsuperscript{264}

Section V, He Said, They Said: Charles Taylor’s Narrative and Competing International Voices

“I am not guilty of all these charges, not even a minute part of these charges… They demonize you and set you up that even if a common criminal walked off the street and maybe put a bullet in your head, it would mean that people should cheer.” – Charles Taylor\textsuperscript{265}

Established by the United Nations in 2002, in March 2003 the Special Court for Sierra Leone indicted Charles Taylor on seventeen counts of war crimes.\textsuperscript{266} Sierra Leone wished to prosecute Taylor because throughout the Liberian conflict, Taylor’s career was intertwined with

\textsuperscript{261} Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 263-4, 268, 275, 286.
\textsuperscript{262} Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 274.
\textsuperscript{263} Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 276.
\textsuperscript{264} Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 276-7.
\textsuperscript{265} Special Court of Sierra Leone, “The Prosecutor of the Special Court v. Charles Ghankay Taylor,” (Date: 7/14/09).
\textsuperscript{266} Waugh, \textit{Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State}, 270.
support for an anti-government rebel group in Sierra Leone called the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by Foday Sankoh. Taylor and the NPFL allegedly trained with RUF troops in Libya, collaborated militarily, and even directly interfered in the neighboring Sierra Leone’s civil war.267 During Taylor’s trial for crimes against Sierra Leone, the prosecution relied heavily on Taylor’s actions in his own country during the Civil Wars in order to paint the portrait of the man they were accusing of crimes ranging from murder and rape to terrorism and mutilation. The trial testimony provided a platform for Taylor to explain his career in his own words.

From the outset, when questioned about the charges he was facing, Taylor denied the allegations, countering: “I have fought all my life to do what I thought was right in the interests of justice and fair play.” With his life on the line, he now had to convince the world of this. Taylor testified that he launched his 1989 invasion of Liberia because “elections were held, they were stolen by Doe and there was a reign of terror and so we went in to bring about some order and restore democracy in Liberia.” When questioned further about the revolution’s ideology, Taylor stuck to the theme of democracy, maintaining that, “I have tried not to become so ideologically attached to some of these different dogmas that you hear, but it was informed by one thing: a desire for democracy and the rule of law.”268 As the trial wore on, however, Taylor’s definition of democracy became clear.

In response to what type of government Taylor wanted to establish in Liberia, Taylor answered, “It was going to be a democratic government. We wanted to go in, launch the revolution and submit ourselves to free and fair elections.”269 The word “ourselves” was the key

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267 Waugh, Ambition and Atrocity in Africa’s Lone Star State, 202, 209.
268 Special Court of Sierra Leone, “The Prosecutor of the Special Court v. Charles Ghankay Taylor,” (Date: 7/14/09).
269 Special Court of Sierra Leone, “The Prosecutor of the Special Court v. Charles Ghankay Taylor,” (Date: 7/15/09).
word in Taylor’s above statement, which the prosecution pushed on. What follows is a
condensed transcript of Charles Taylor’s interrogation:

Prosecution: “Mr. Taylor, Jackson F. Doe, who is the one seen by most Liberians to have
won the elections, after Master Sergeant Doe is killed in September 1991, you could have
made Jackson F. Doe the President, could you not, Mr. Taylor?”
Taylor: “No, the circumstances at the time was different. No, I could not.”
Prosecution: “And that would have been acting according to the will of the people of
Liberia, wouldn’t it, Mr. Taylor?”
Taylor: “No, no, I would disagree with you as you put it. We’re talking about many years
after that situation, political situation, social situation. We were not an army for Jackson
doe, so I would disagree.”
Prosecution: “Indeed you did not, did you, Mr. Taylor? You didn’t launch it to put Mr.
Jackson Doe in the Presidency, did you?”
Taylor: “We were not Jackson Doe’s army.”
Prosecution: “Mr. Taylor, this paragraph four attempts to explain why you and the
National Patriotic Front felt that it was your right and bounded duty to rid the people of
Liberia of the despotism by whatever means at our disposal wasn’t really a true
statement, was it, Mr. Taylor? You wanted to rid Liberia of Master Sergeant Doe because
you wanted to be in power in Liberia?”
Taylor: “Counsel, well, you can draw your own conclusion. I disagree.”270

Considering the anarchic conditions ravaging Liberia at the time of Samuel K. Doe’s death,

Charles Taylor’s testimony that raising Jackson F. Doe to the presidency would have been
impossible was probably accurate. By pressing this issue, however, the prosecution was
attempting to uncover what the entire world thought it already knew: that Charles Taylor wanted
nothing to do with democracy, and everything to do with unadulterated power. The Justice and
Peace Commission of the National Catholic Secretariat of Liberia represented this international
perspective in their report on the Liberian crisis, which condemned Taylor as a man who “had
and has no moral constraints. As we shall see presently, his methods of trying to come to power
[were] diabolical and satanic.”271

270 Special Court of Sierra Leone, “The Prosecutor of the Special Court v. Charles Ghankay Taylor,” (Date:
1/21/10).
271 The Liberian Crisis, 26.
According to Taylor’s testimony, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia operated as a legitimate military organization. Taylor never denied that atrocities were committed during the Liberian Civil Wars, instead using the evidence of cruelties to argue that, “When we [the NPFL leadership] found out that atrocities had been committed, we acted… They [the perpetrators] were tried before military tribunals using the military code of justice that officers on this side of the Court know very well, the uniform code of military justice.”

It seems, if Taylor is at all to be believed, that Taylor actively attempted to counter at least one aspect typical to “warlord organizations.” As discussed earlier in the analysis of Taylor’s domination over Greater Liberia, a warlord community is expected to be “separate, but related to existent political communities, such as clans or state,” while “the individuals within the warlord organization have their own separate political community and see the local residents that they prey on as enemies.”

In his defense, however, Taylor stressed that, “the 168 men that we trained were basically depending on the civilian population in Liberia to launch the revolution. Now, it would be silly and really stupid for anyone wanting to launch a revolution using civilians to want to terrorize them.”

What the earlier analysis of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia and the First Liberian Civil War has made clear is that Taylor did in fact use civilians in a very calculated manner by protecting and integrating some into his warlord organization, i.e. Gios and Manos, while at the same time executing “a plan… to terrorize the civilian population,” just as the Court accused him, but only against the exploited Krahn/Mandingo enemy. The politics of ethnicity exploited by Taylor complicate the overly simplified version of the story that was presented by the court.

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272 Special Court of Sierra Leone, “The Prosecutor of the Special Court v. Charles Ghankay Taylor,” (Date: 7/14/09).
274 Special Court of Sierra Leone, “The Prosecutor of the Special Court v. Charles Ghankay Taylor,” (Date: 7/15/09).
275 Special Court of Sierra Leone, “The Prosecutor of the Special Court v. Charles Ghankay Taylor,” (Date: 7/15/09).
and has been aided by the assumptions and connotations that followed from labeling Taylor a “warlord.” Taylor further explained his approach, and how it differed from an expected warlord organization, by noting that, “military people would deal with military people, but civilians would deal with civilians and that is why even as we entered Liberia we did not dismantle the civilian apparatus that we met on the ground. We took advantage of our chiefs, our elders… to work along with the population.”276 Taylor, at least so he claimed, did not intend to nor try to completely supplant existing structures of civilian and religious authority during his NPFL campaign.

Of course, while it is important to listen to the narratives of the accused “warlords” themselves, they cannot be blindly accepted. In response to a question about being a dictator, Taylor responded with the following:

I’ll speak about my presidency. I’m into office for six years. I have a multiparty system going on. There is freedom of speech, there is freedom of the press, there is freedom of association… There is not one political party leader that was arrested or harassed… So the whole branding or wanting to brand Taylor as a dictator, that just doesn’t come my way.277

The murder of Sam Dokie and the outright paramilitary action against Prince Johnson’s residence on Camp Johnson Road, just to name two particularly high profile incidents, indisputably contradict Taylor’s claim that no rival politicians were so much as harassed. Taylor himself, however, describes quite nicely why his narrative should not be fully ignored: “When you look at all of these nuances and you look at the characterizations of Heads of State, I am this mad, wild man. They demonize you and set you up that even if a common criminal walked off

276 Special Court of Sierra Leone, “The Prosecutor of the Special Court v. Charles Ghankay Taylor,” (Date: 7/15/09).
277 Special Court of Sierra Leone, “The Prosecutor of the Special Court v. Charles Ghankay Taylor,” (Date: 8/3/09).
the street and maybe put a bullet in your head, it would mean people should cheer.”\textsuperscript{278} The demonization of Taylor may be warranted, but only if it is not based on assumptions and prejudices that follow from practices such as glossing all actors in an extremely complicated, protracted conflict as the same. For \textit{justice} to be served, Taylor’s motivations and justifications must receive their due consideration.

In an effort to seek that justice, Liberia founded the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia in 2005. At the end of their investigation, the Commission released a final report that recommended some perpetrators for prosecution for “violations of international humanitarian law, international human rights law, war crimes, and egregious domestic law violations of Liberia, and economic crimes.” The top two men recommend for prosecution were Charles G. Taylor and Prince Y. Johnson.\textsuperscript{279} In contrast to Taylor’s version of events and neat picture of Greater Liberia, the nine Liberian Commissioners declared that the NPFL, “lived off of the labor and sweat of civilians in an unequal relationship that saw the population massively victimized, killed and properties looted; entire villages and towns were burnt… Massacres, rape, torture, [and] child recruitment into their ranks were pervasive as ethnic cleansing and ethnic profiling was standardized.”\textsuperscript{280}

According to the Commission’s report, “Taylor was relentless, resistant, and unpopular. His personal agenda to become President of Liberia became very clear as was his disregard for the heavy toll on human life and suffering his ambition had on the people of Liberia.”\textsuperscript{281} As has been noted before, it is without a doubt that Taylor’s ambition for the presidency prolonged the

\textsuperscript{278} Special Court of Sierra Leone, “The Prosecutor of the Special Court v. Charles Ghankay Taylor,” (Date: 7/14/09).
\textsuperscript{281} Grafix, “Republic of Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume II,” 158.
civil war and thus exponentially increased the suffering of the Liberian populace as their country descended into near total anarchy. What is less self-evident, however, is the accusation of Taylor’s unpopularity. Hundreds of men and women loyal to Taylor though seven years of war, three-quarters of the population voted him into office, and even after Taylor resigned as president and was detained in The Hague, Liberians could be found who anxiously awaited his return.\textsuperscript{282} Thus, narratives from the other side must also be accepted with a level of caution.

Finally, international narratives of Taylor and the conflict must necessarily be taken into account, given the international involvement in the conflict and Taylor’s ultimate indictment at the hands of the United Nations. Given Africa’s oft-ignored status on the international stage, sources such as oral interviews of former United States diplomats stationed in Africa may be almost as problematic as Taylor’s own testimony. For instance, in his retelling of his experience in Liberia during the conflict, US diplomat Leonard H. Robinson, Jr. mistakenly identified Prince Johnson as “Chris” Johnson, the field guerilla commander of the “NPSL.”\textsuperscript{283} Robinson’s explanation of the impetus to the conflict reads as someone only vaguely aware of the events: “The Krahn and two or three other tribes formed a coalition and dominated the government. Charles Taylor had a hatred for the Doe regime. He had been an officer in the army… So the hatred of the Doe regime, and Taylor’s quest for power, that really led to the uprising.”\textsuperscript{284} Robinson showed no indication that he understood the connection between the Krahn domination and hatred of the Doe regime, or where the Americo-Liberian Taylor fit into this complex situation.

\textsuperscript{284} Robinson, "The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project."
Other diplomats demonstrated a firmer grasp of the conflict, and their illustration of Taylor is particularly important. Stevenson McIlvaine, another former US diplomat who served in Liberia, described Taylor as a “Third World warlord and not a president at all. He wasn’t even making much of a pretense of it. He would sort of make a run at it and then decide it was too boring and no fun and wasn’t getting him anywhere.”

Similarly, Donald Petterson remembered how, “In time, it became clear that he was a thug whose only interest was in feathering his own nest and maintaining himself in power.” While these characterizations of Taylor as a “warlord” are important in that they reflect both personal experience and Taylor’s diplomatic persona, one must question whether the diplomats intended to use the term with the analytic thoroughness Vinci urges, or, if it was a misleading gloss of a man they simply wished to demonize. Ultimately, each narrative has biases and untruths, but the truth cannot be discovered if any of them is wholly ignored.

Taylor’s successes and carefully cultivated persona reveal a coherency to his actions and an ambition that reached beyond the simple accumulation of wealth. His tactics were brutal and the atrocities committed in his name must not be excused; however their existence should not preclude attempts to uncover Taylor’s true motivations. Taylor’s popularity and the positive conditions achieved in Greater Liberia reveal just as much statesman as warlord existed in Taylor’s polarizing figure, a reality that contemporary politicians and future historians should recognize and from which diplomats should learn.

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Chapter Three: Roosevelt Johnson and Joshua Blahyi: Krahn Warriors

“His crimes include child sacrifice, cannibalism, the exploitation of child soldiers and trading blood diamonds for guns and cocaine, which he fed to boy soldiers as young as nine.” – “Face to Face with General Butt Naked – ‘The Most Evil Man in the World’”\(^{287}\)

This chapter surveys the other side of the Liberian Civil Wars (1989-2003), Charles Taylor’s adversaries. Section I traces the history of the NPFL’s most dangerous rival faction, the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO) before turning its focus to Roosevelt Johnson, the Krahn leader of ULIMO-J. After dissecting and questioning the logic of applying Vinci’s warlord label to Johnson, Section II turns to one of Johnson’s subordinate commanders Joshua Milton Blahyi, better known as General Butt Naked. Although a subordinate actor in the conflict, General Butt Naked enthralled Western audiences and soon became one of the most notorious and well-known actors of the war. The subject of various popular articles and even a documentary, General Butt Naked is again evaluated according to the warlord model in order to trace its relevance through the multiple layers of the political and military hierarchy that added some semblance of order to anarchy of Liberia’s civil war. Ultimately, Blahyi provides an excellent case study in the interaction between a state of anarchy, traditional positions of power, and warlordism.

Section I, ULIMO: Doe’s Krahn Group in the Liberian Civil War

“Roosevelt Johnson, General Lincoln, they never wanted the killing to be done in the open. They wanted the sacrifice to be done in secret because they said it was diminishing to their image as a faction, as a political body, their political interest.” – Joshua Blahyi, General Butt Naked\(^{288}\)


Charles Taylor was not the only alleged warlord in the Liberian Civil Wars whose motivations, conduct, and personal end goals throughout the conflict deserve examination. The most notorious combatants of Charles Taylor’s main rival faction, the ULIMO, both conform to and defy the warlord label in their own ways. Roosevelt Johnson and Joshua Milton Blahyi exhibited strong appeals to their Krahn ethnic identities in order to justify their participation in the Civil War; however, the barbaric acts of violence perpetrated by both men prompted the West to label them as warlords. In order to fully understand the nuances of both Johnson and Blahyi, and of the conflict itself, scholars must look to the narratives offered by the ULIMO faction and the men themselves so as to appreciate how legitimate ethnic concerns of seeking and offering ritual protection evolved into habits of warlordism and shaped the character of the Liberian Civil War.

The history of the ULIMO faction itself provides valuable insight into the complexities of the first Liberian Civil War. Originally founded in 1991, the ULIMO, or United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia, was actually an alliance of three different groups that had their roots in the Samuel K. Doe regime. The first of these groups was the Liberia-based Liberia Peace Council (LPC), headed by former Minister of State George Boley, comprised of many of Doe’s political and military cadres. Though not at first characterized by any one ethnic group in particular, the Krahn soon dominated the LPC. Mandingoes who had fled Liberia largely made up the second group, the Guinean-based Movement for the Redemption of Muslims (MRM), led by former Minister of Information Alhadji Kromah. Finally, the third group, and initially “the most important constituent party,” was the Sierra-Leon-based Liberia United

290 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 123.
Defense Force (LUDF) led by General Albert Karpeh, who had been Doe’s ambassador to Sierra Leone. The LUDF was comprised of ethnic Krahn warriors.291

When the three organizations formally merged into ULIMO they were united in their loyalty to the deceased Krahn President Doe and in their fight against Charles Taylor’s National Patriotic Front of Liberia. The importance of ethnicity within the factions, however, continued to grow in salience as the war dragged on. From the outset of its formation in 1991, ULIMO’s organization relied largely on personal connections, and from the very beginning friction existed within the faction.292 Despite intra-faction turmoil, early on in the war ULIMO’s public pronouncements and documents were united in expressing the professed purpose “to liberate Liberia from Charles Taylor and his NPFL forces who continu[ed] to hold the country ransom in arms.”293 Through the latter period of 1992, the full agenda of ULIMO beyond these statements remained unclear, and the faction gave no indication of its plan for Liberia after removing Charles Taylor from power. With their unifying figure, President Doe, already deceased, the faction lacked an obviously discernable end goal for Liberia. As the fighting drew on, ULIMO failed to distinguish itself meaningfully from the other armed factions ravaging Liberia.294 According to Western reports, ULIMO and the rest of the numerous warring factions sometimes appeared to be fighting simply to fight.

At the tail end of 1992, there emerged effectively two chains of command in the faction split between Mandingo and Krahn lines. Many historians have been careful to note the ethnic character of this fissure. The two chains of command engaged in a fierce rivalry from 1992 through 1994, refusing to cooperate despite their originally similar goals and even engaging in

291 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 123.
292 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 124.
294 The Liberian Crisis, 51.
mutual obstruction of activities. Eventually, in June 1992, non-cooperation devolved into the assassination of the Krahn LUDF leader Karpeh by the Mandingo Kromah and the attempted assassination of ULIMO’s Deputy Field Commander Roosevelt Johnson on the same day. It was not until 1994, however, that an attempt at a peace agreement prompted competition for access to state resources and resulted in the official split of the Krahn faction from the Mandingo faction. The combatants themselves cited ethnic reasons as the impetus for this break.

On 7 March 1994, the peace agreement between the warring factions referenced above installed a five-man State Council as part of the Liberian National Transitional Government (LNTG). Despite his February election, Thomas Ziah, a Roosevelt Johnson-supported Krahn, did not join the State Concil in March. Instead, Dexter Tahyor replaced him on the Council. Although Tahyor was also a Krahn he was supported by Kromah’s Mandingoes, and the Roosevelt Johnson-led side of ULIMO was outraged at the ousting of their representative. That both men were Krahn confuses and defies the argument that the war was fought over ethnic lines. The Krahns, led by Johnson, argued that this State Council was organized by tribal representation, and claimed that they opposed Mandingo leadership in the organization for fear of the establishment of Mandingo hegemony. Johnson and the Krahns argued that the overall allocation of seats in the LNTG favored the Mandingoes and their interests and marginalized the Krahns. This dispute finally prompted the formal split between the Krahns and Mandingoes of ULIMO. The Krahn faction was then designated as ULIMO-J, in reference to its leader Roosevelt Johnson, while the Mandingo faction was called ULIMO-K for its leader Alhadji Kromah. Although prompted by ethnic concerns on the surface, the details of the split do not

295 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 124.
296 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 124.
297 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 38.
298 The Liberian Crisis, 76.
299 The Liberian Crisis, 52.
quite add up, and suggest the existence of alternate explanations, such as power plays by the two leaders Kromah and Roosevelt, for the true reason behind the fissure. As will be recalled from the previous chapters, both the Mandigoes and the Krahns were equally targeted by Taylor’s largely Mano and Gio NPFL, and thus had no obvious reason to fear or mistrust each other, even if ethnicity was at the forefront of their minds.

**Taylor’s Nemesis: Roosevelt Johnson’s Leadership of ULIMO**

Roosevelt Johnson, leader of ULIMO-J, had a civilian background as an official in the Ministry of Finance, but emerged as ULIMO’s main military commander in Sierra Leone in 1991. Johnson earned a BSc in education from the University of Liberia, and he was a teacher before assuming his role as assistant commissioner for internal revenue during the Doe administration. Thus, Roosevelt Johnson lacked both a formal military background and substantial political leadership experience before becoming the leader of the faction that would come to be Charles Taylor’s principle rival in the Second Liberian Civil War. This relative lack of high-level national experience in both the civil and military spheres caused ULIMO-J to be relatively weakly organized, especially when compared to Charles Taylor’s NPFL-controlled territory.

Roosevelt Johnson’s main source of revenue was rubber from the Guthrie plantation. Johnson controlled the Guthrie plantation, the third largest plantation in Liberia stretching over Bomi and Grand Cape Mount Counties, for the latter part of the war. Vinci regards control over natural resources for a source of revenue as one hallmark of warlordism. Vinci, however, also expects the revenue from those natural resources to be funneled toward the personal

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300 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 124.
302 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 126.
enrichment of the warlord, since the predominant raison d’etre of the warlord is the “pursuit of narrow, commercial self-interest.” For Vinci’s warlord, war and violence are merely the means to the end of personal fortune.303 Roosevelt Johnson, however, never amassed a personal fortune like that of Charles Taylor. Johnson likely brought in less than a million dollars a year, and much of this went to his subaltern commanders.304 Therefore, especially when compared to the fortunes Taylor proved possible, it is difficult to argue that Johnson engaged in the war predominantly for self-serving economic reasons.

It was not Roosevelt Johnson’s ability to distribute revenue to his men, nor his legitimacy or past as a leader, but rather his devotion to further Krahn ethnic interests upon which he based his power.305 The power of the Krahn ethnic group was strong enough that Charles Taylor considered Roosevelt Johnson and ULIMO-J to be one of his principle threats. Initially after becoming President in 1997, Taylor first tried to co-opt Johnson and the Krahn he represented. Johnson was actually one of the first ministers nominated under Taylor to the post of Minister of Rural Development.306 Despite this seeming integration into the new government, Johnson nevertheless ostentatiously maintained his personally controlled militia to the vexation of Taylor.307 The maintenance of his personal army somewhat places Johnson into Anthony Vinci’s warlord mold, even though he had the higher power of Taylor to answer to and could not use that army to control a defined territory after the 1997 elections. By refusing disarmament, however, Johnson maintained ULIMO’s original purpose of opposing Charles Taylor and acting as a source of power for the Krahn people, even while acquiescing on the surface to Taylor’s

304 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 127.
305 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 131.
306 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 155.
307 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 155.
supremacy. Johnson at least appeared to have accepted the results of the 1997 democratic election.

Closer examination, however, reveals that Roosevelt Johnson did, to a certain extent, fulfill many of the expected roles of a warlord, especially after Taylor’s election. According to Vinci, “a warlord had two necessary characteristics, a private army and an area under his control.” Johnson did not merely maintain his personal militia; he used his fighters to control his neighborhood to an extent that rivaled Taylor’s wartime control of Greater Liberia. Johnson’s soldiers controlled access to his road, closing it to motor traffic, and constituted a potential and visible threat to the president. The neighborhood, located on Camp Johnson Road, was even referred to by Taylor’s men as the “Republic of Camp Johnson Road.” In practice, Johnson thus acted as a warlord by exercising de facto autonomy independent of any higher authority, which was facilitated by his control of a private army that responded to him personally. Johnson’s autonomy in the face of Taylor became blatant in 1998 when Taylor demanded that Johnson relocate to a residence that was not a few hundred meters from the Executive Mansion. Johnson refused, and as punishment Taylor removed Johnson from his post as Minister of Rural Development. Johnson then refused an appointment to Ambassador of India, Taylor’s next attempt to displace him, and instead reinforced his position, continuing a now obvious stand-off. Eventually, Taylor sent his paramilitary force, the Special Operations Division (SOD) to arrest Johnson, who escaped to the US embassy and was subsequently evacuated after seventeen hours of fighting between ULIMO and government troops on the embassy grounds.

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309 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 155.
312 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 155-6
Recall from the first chapter that the second supplementary feature of a Vinci warlord is notorious barbarism. It has already been noted that Johnson lacked the extreme personal wealth usually hoarded by warlords, the first supplementary feature. As far as barbaric violence, however, Roosevelt Johnson and the rest of ULIMO should not be absolved. Indeed, despite the 1994 split into two factions, ULIMO remained a type of brand name meant to instill fear and deference among those who encountered either arm of the faction. In comparison to Charles Taylor’s NPFL, the ULIMO was considered even more brutal and less disciplined. Both Roosevelt Johnson and Alhadji Kromah possessed weak legitimacy throughout their respective factions, and many ULIMO combatants could not name any supreme leader of their faction and considered their local commanders to be their leaders. The feudalization of both ULIMO factions resulted in commanders appropriating a wide range of powers. One the most notorious of these commanders fought in support of Johnson at the head of his Butt Naked Brigade, which was a popular feature in the dispatches of the international press corps mesmerized by the combat unit’s bizarre lack of battledress and chalk-painted faces.

Section II, “The Most Evil Man in the World”: Joshua Blahyi’s Evolution into Notorious General Butt Naked

“As a priest, the orientation was to protect and defend the well-being of the tribe.” – Joshua Milton Blahyi, General Butt Naked

The story of the leader of the Butt Naked brigade, General Butt Naked (real name Joshua Milton Blahyi) provides a strong case study into alternative motivations for participation in the two Liberian Civil Wars that defy the warlord model and illustrates why the cultural context of

313 Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 316.
314 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 125.
315 Gerdes, Civil War and State Formation, 124-5.
317 TRCL, “Blahyi.”
the war should not get lost in the gloss of “warlordism”. Blahyi was described by Western
reporters both during and after the conflict as “the most evil man in the world,” “one of the most
inhumane and ruthless guerilla leaders in Africa’s history,”318 and most consistently, a
warlord.319 When describing himself, however, Blayhi told a story of spiritual responsibility for
his ethnic group. In his own words given as testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation
Commission (TRC) of Liberia, Blahyi claimed:

I happen[ed] to be the priest for the entire Krahn tribe at the tender age of eleven… As a
priest, the orientation was to protect and defend the well being of the tribe. President Doe
being a Krahn tribe, I had to protect and provide security for him as a Krahn man
traditionally… When the president die[d], it was frustration, the tribe got in disarray and
so my position as a priest became more tedious protecting the tribe… And then the tribe
went into exile… the tribe decided to come back under the name ULIMO, [and then]
ULIMO-J, my tribe, was in authority, [and] so my role was felt.320

For Blahyi, then, his entrance into the conflict was predicated upon his Krahn identity and his
customary duty as a tribal priest to protect the rest of his Krahn people. In fact, when the TRC
explicitly asked Blahyi, “So your involvement in the civil war was for tribal issues not of
national issue?” his response was a simple “Yes.”321

Blahyi was not a faction leader like Roosevelt Johnson, but rather he took direct orders
from Johnson, whom he interestingly characterized as a political rather than a military leader.
According to Blahyi, ULIMO-J was “operating with field commanders but with two leaders.
Roosevelt Johnson was responsible for [the] political link and [General] Lincoln for [the]
military link.”322 As Blahyi noted above, however, his commitment to the Krahn cause first
began in service to President Doe. According to Blahyi, he was Doe’s spiritual advisor and was

318 Edna Fernandes, “Face to Face with General Butt Naked – ‘The Most Evil Man in the World,’” Daily Mail,
November 27, 2010.
320 TRCL, “Blahyi.”
321 TRCL, “Blahyi.”
322 TRCL, “Blahyi.”
always “in the watch for him,” using the spiritual world to look out for threats to Doe. When questioned by the TRC about Doe, Blahyi recounted Doe’s demise exclusively within the context of a tribal priest. According to Blahyi, during Doe’s capture he could not get his “spiritual flight,” and his “powers were depreciating.” In Blayhi’s eyes Doe’s captor, Prince Y. Johnson, was not a mere political rival, but instead “was spiritually conjured” as part of a demonic coup.323

*Tribal Priest: The Background of Blahyi’s Spiritual Motivation*

As a Krahn tribal priest from the southeast of Liberia, Blahyi was not a member of the Poro society, the most well-known of Liberia’s traditional religions, but instead was a member of a similar association known as the Tarnue.324 As a tribal priest, Blahyi’s duties involved communication with and propitiation of the spirits believed to be at work in Liberians’ everyday life. Typical of specialized Liberian priests trained to interact with bush and water spirits, Blahyi underwent episodes of spiritual possession in order to transfer knowledge or power from the spirits to his people.325 In his case, Blahyi spoke of being directed by a spirit that he referred to as “devilish,” although this characterization was made after his later conversion to Evangelical Christianity.326 As was discussed in Chapter One’s note on religion, most adherents to Liberia’s traditional religions would not make this distinction between good and evil that accompanies talk of the Christian Devil. Instead, Blahyi’s actions, when carried out in the correct ritual context, would have been acceptable to the community because of their role in enhancing the common good.327 Blahyi’s wartime spiritual duties also included providing “medicine” to his child soldiers in order to protect them in battle and make them impervious to harm. Such war

323 TRCL, “Blahyi.”
326 TRCL, “Blahyi.”
327 Olukoju, *Culture and Customs of Liberia*, 27.
medicines traditionally contained human body parts and reflect a widespread traditional belief in the power of juju, or black magic, and the use of charms. All of Blahyi’s ritual defenses, including the most abhorrent of child sacrifice and instances of cannibalism, had their root in socially approved traditional religions. The anarchy of the war, however, and the persistent need for protection disrupted, co-opted, and ultimately desecrated those previously sacred rituals until Blahyi himself admitted that they eventually lacked any religious significance at all.

*Naked Brutality: Joshua Blahyi’s Ritual Conduct During the Conflict*

Blayhi’s tribal duties did not die with Doe, and he subsequently turned his spiritual powers toward protecting his “principal man” Roosevelt Johnson as leader of ULIMO-J. As Blahyi put it, however, he was not just protecting one man, but rather “the interest of the Krahn people is what we were protecting.” Blahyi claimed to be uninterested in the politics of the war beyond the protection of Krahn interests. When the TRC asked a question as simple as where his weapons came from, Blahyi dismissed the inquiry by stressing his role as a tribal priest and stating, “when I was fighting I was not interested in arms, I was only making sure my spiritual powers was intact.” Of course, Blahyi may have stressed his spiritual role before the Commission as an effort at self-preservation. Although, given his willingness to discuss the details of murders he himself carried out, and his own assertion that he would accept life in prison or the death penalty, one wonders exactly what Blahyi hoped to gain by pleading ignorance to these matters if he was in fact lying.

Blayhi’s method of spiritual protection over his fellow Krahn, however, attracted much national and international scrutiny because of its insidiously barbaric character. As far as Vinci’s

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329 Fernandes, “Face to Face with General Butt Naked.”
330 TRCL, “Blahyi.”
lament that warlords have become “almost synonymous with barbarism, savagery, and ‘senseless’ acts of violence,” none came closer to making this statement true than General Butt Naked.331 Blayhi’s alleged crimes included child sacrifice, cannibalism, murder, the exploitation of child soldiers, and trading blood diamonds for guns and cocaine.332 When asked about the atrocities he committed, Blahyi did not try to diminish them, admitting that the number of casualties he inflicted on Liberia either through fighting or sacrifices “should not be less than 20,000.”333 In an interview with VICE News, Blahyi vividly described the child sacrifice he would conduct before each battle, detailing not only the gruesome details of the killing of babies he personally carried out, but also the cannibalism that he and his child soldiers engaged in after the sacrifice.334 Blahyi, whose recruited child soldiers were as young as nine, would first eat a wounded enemy’s live heart, and then, in his own words, would lay down the body and have his “child soldiers cut the person to pieces, so that they would not have any feelings for people.”

When describing the violence characteristic of a warlord, Vinci draws the distinction that “while states may commit ample atrocities and be otherwise savagely violent, what sets warlords apart is the uselessness of their violence.” Vinci explains further that this violence is often explained by outside observers as lashing out in response to long-standing ethnic grievances.336 Blahyi’s violence was barbaric; there is no disputing that fact. The child sacrifice, cannibalism, rape, and murder engaged in by Blahyi and his men cannot be justified or excused. To Blahyi, however, the violence was not useless; rather, the violence itself served an explicitly instrumental purpose. Blahyi explained:

331 Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 317.
333 TRCL, “Blahyi.”
336 Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 317.
At that time [of the war], it was not the traditional season to make protection, so I needed to physically take part. As a priest, I was not supposed to defile my office before my subjects... My office, it [combat] was defiling to my office. So I needed to make human being sacrifice to the said Deities or the gods that I was representing to the tribe. That was where my physical action of destroying my fellow Liberians came from... Accomplishing the mission required human sacrifices.

Some of the violence perpetuated by Blahyi and his men, including the most horrifying acts of human sacrifice and cannibalism, thus had an explicitly instrumental character and were intended to offer protection to the Krahn people. Although in a sense this may be characterized as being ethnically motivated, it was not the “lashing out” that Vinci describes. Even Chapters One and Two of this thesis noted the force of ethnicity as a motivating factor to join the conflict, as Krahns, Mandingoes, Manos, and Gios all lined up along the divide manufactured by Doe. Blahyi’s commitment to protecting Krahn men demonstrates that; however, diminishing barbaric acts motivated by ethnic concerns to mere “lashing out” ignores the explanations for the violence given by the perpetrators themselves and trivializes the conflict by ignoring the depth and complexities of the various actors’ cognitive worlds and motivating factors.

Again, although Blahyi could explain the logic behind some of his brutality, that does not diminish its savagery or its morally abhorrent character. Krahn political leaders, including Roosevelt Johnson, recognized the barbaric nature of General Butt Naked’s brigade. Blahyi noted that, “they never wanted the killing to be done in the open. They wanted the sacrifice to be done in secret because they said, it was diminishing their image as a faction, as a political body, their political interest.” Not every Krahn shared Blayhi’s understanding of the violence; however, that should not diminish the power of Blahyi’s narrative. It is the multiplicity of narratives, motivations, and plans for Liberia that made the two protracted civil wars so bloody, and attempts to gloss over their nuances does a disservice to the Liberian people and their history.

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337 TRCL, “Blahyi.”
338 TRCL, “Blahyi.”
Unfortunately for casual observers of the conflict, glossing and sensationalizing comprised the entirety of the media’s approach to the Liberian Civil Wars. Admittedly then, this thesis’ use of an interview with Blahyi in one of those newspapers as a source must be done very carefully. General Butt Naked became one of Liberia’s most notorious warlords precisely because the Western media loved to report on him and his boy soldiers charging “into battle naked apart from boots and machine guns.” Blahyi was not the “warlord” who became president, he was not even the “warlord” at the head of his faction; Blahyi was merely a tribal priest turned mercenary soldier whose naked brutality (so to speak) catapulted him into international fame. Blahyi, however, even had an explanation for his signature battlefield nudity which earned him his moniker: “Normally, material is a serious hindrance to every spiritual side, so when I had on cloth to carry on my spiritual ability would be hard; but, if I am naked, I would have my powers in fifteen seconds. As such, I had to be naked.” To Blahyi, he was a tribal priest performing his duties, albeit murderous ones, for his people. To a Western blogger, he was “the most evil man who ever lived.”

Blahyi to Butt Naked, and Back Again: Joshua Blahyi’s Evolution and the Warlord Label

Today, Blahyi himself no longer practices his tribal rituals and has traded in his General Butt Naked moniker for the more demure Pastor Joshua Milton Blahyi. After an epiphany in 1996, Blahyi became an evangelical Christian preacher. According to Blahyi, his conversion came when

Jesus appeared in the form of white lightning… This is what he said, “my son, why are you slaving, why are you living as a slave?” Because at that time I was a king; if I gave

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339 Fernandes, “Face to Face with General Butt Naked.”
340 TRCL, “Blahyi.”
341 Fernandes, “Face to Face with General Butt Naked.”
any command it must be executed, and he said, “you are supposed to be a king but are living as a slave.”

After his exposure to the black and white world of Christianity’s conception of good and evil, Blahyi described his life before conversion as guided by devil worship. As Blahyi also noted, during his time as General Butt Naked he was “supposed to be a king.” Beyond being a priest, Blahyi led a brigade of child soldiers regularly into battle and had a swath of territory in Monrovia that was under his personal control. During his interview with VICE News, Blahyi revisited his old area and described the location of his chair where he lounged surrounded by his child soldiers, reminiscent of a king and his court. In fact, when speaking to VICE, Blahyi elaborated on his conversion experience and recounted how he recoiled at being called a slave, because, in his words, “In this whole territory,” he gestured to the land he controlled, “I [was] the king.” Like Roosevelt Johnson and his Camp Johnson Road territory, then, General Butt Naked could boast of a personal army and an area under his control, both hallmarks of a warlord.

Of course, as has been repeatedly noted, Blahyi’s form of warfare included excessively brutal and barbaric, though not necessarily “senseless,” violence. The savagery, territorial control, and personal army, however, are where Blahyi’s adherence to the warlord model end. In opposition to the label, Blahyi did not participate in the conflict for self-enrichment, nor did he appear to desire increased personal power. Blahyi engaged only in spiritual commerce, rather than embodying the “businessman of war” persona in the “pursuit narrow, commercial self-interest” that would be expected of a warlord. Most importantly, however, Vinci maintains that warlords “in general do not seem to be driven by singular ideological concerns of any

342 TRCL, “Blahyi.”
343 Andy Capper, The Cannibal Warlords of Liberia.
344 Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 316.
sort.”  

Blahyi, to the contrary, repeatedly expressed his ideological commitment in the defense of broader Krahn spiritual interests.

Blahyi’s connection to Krahn spirituality distinguished him from the cookie-cutter warlord model. According to Vinci, warlord organizations are “made up of those who are specifically initiated,” and “as with states, the paramount way to (re)create the friend-enemy distinction is through war. This helps to explain the warlord’s continual need for conflict; without it, his organization might simply dissolve.”  

Blahyi, who was a Krahn tribal priest before the conflict even began, did not base his leadership identity upon the conflict; rather, he viewed the violence as a new test for which he had to adapt his traditional role. Blahyi’s Krahn tribal priest identity, which motivated him to fight in the wars and to carry out so many child sacrifices and other atrocities, means that his “Butt Naked brigade” operated under a logic completely divorced from Vinci’s observation that “the warlord community is separate, but related to existent political communities, such as clans or states.” A true warlord only “becomes a warlord in the sense that he breaks away from dependency on the clan.”  

Blayhi’s role in the conflict, the faction he fought for, and even much of his violence, were entirely grounded in his specific identity as a Krahn tribal priest. Blahyi did not need to rely on patrimonial and charismatic sources of authority when he had tribal spirits and power deities to affirm his power.

There are scholars who argue that ethnicity in Liberia was employed only as a façade, and that he only true motivations guiding the combatants were greed for money and power.  

Blahyi, however, had an established history of defending his ethnic Krahn group under the Doe administration as the president’s spiritual advisor and protector long before war broke out or the

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345 Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 317.
346 Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 319.
347 Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 319.
348 Vinci, “‘Like Worms in the Entrails of a Natural Man,’” 325.
possibility of pursing personal political ambition through violence seemed a viable option. Therefore, Blahyi’s appeals to his Krahn identity cannot be so easily dismissed. This spiritual protection that Blahyi habitually provided for his Krahn people over the years also sets him apart from the warlord model. As Vinci states, a warlord is “absolutely illegitimate, for, they have no rightful reason to expect to receive any gains, since they provide nothing.” Although it may be foreign to dominant Western schools of thought, Blahyi provided spiritual protection and strength for his Krahn leaders and even for his child soldiers. It does not excuse the forced conscription of child soldiers, nor the child sacrifice that Blayhi believed brought this protection; however, in Blahyi’s understanding he provided a very real service to his people.

In his work on warlords, Stig J. Hansen stresses the importance of understanding the local culture within which the accused warlord is operating, while cautioning that it is equally important to avoid confusing the warlord’s wartime power status with the traditional structures of institutionalized power of his ethnic group. Hansen’s caution stems from his desire to avoid equating warlordism with ethnicism, clanism, and tribalism so as to avoid the trap of justifying warlordism itself. Hansen’s warnings are clearly applicable in the case of Blahyi. Hansen also notes, however, that, warlords are created out of a state of anarchy. Joshua Blahyi, tribal priest, existed before the coup of 1989 caused the state to collapse. General Butt Naked, on the other hand, was a product of the war.

In his TRC testimony, Blahyi lamented a tribal priest “going to fight was a reduction. My office, it was defiling to my office.” Combat, let alone leading a brigade of child soldiers, was thus never a part of Blahyi’s traditional job description as a tribal priest entrusted with protecting

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353 TRCL, “Blahyi.”
the Krahn people. Blahyi was correct: fighting defiled his previously legitimate tribal office. This is why Blahyi provided religious justification for the sacrifice of babies before battle, but could not justify his drugging of child soldiers, urging those child soldiers to commit horrific murders, or any of the other rapes, murders, and brutal acts of torture he himself carried out. General Butt Naked resembled a textbook warlord in so many ways noted above because the special circumstances of state dissolution allowed not only his acquisition of land and a brigade of child soldiers, but also his descent into gratuitous brutality under the guise of accepted ritual practice.

The distinction drawn here is one between motivation and ultimate conduct. At the outset of the First Liberian Civil War, Blahyi did not draw upon his Krahn ethnicity to legitimize his warlordism or use it as a mere façade. Initially, Blahyi’s tribal priest identity possessed traditional ritual legitimacy and operated with an institutionalized form of interaction that distinguishes structures like ethnicism, clanism, and tribalism from warlordism.354 His motivations for appealing to his Krahn identity thus did not originally stem from a desire to justify his warlordism. Instead, conduct of the war and its constant fighting disrupted Blahyi’s institutionalized forms of interaction and transformed him as he adapted his office to life in never ending conflict. The constant battles called for constant sacrifice for protection, for Blahyi to commit repeated murder, and differed markedly from offering spiritual guidance in the Executive Mansion. According to Blahyi, the savage habits of the Liberian Civil War twisted his spiritual role to the extent that his conduct could no longer be explained in a religious or ritual context, and eventually his brutality and embrace of the war resulted in his descent into near complete warlordism.

Just as Blahyi’s previously legitimate rituals evolved over time into unrecognizable acts of brutality, so too did he grow from Roosevelt Johnson’s spiritual protector in General Butt Naked, warlord commander of his own. Blahyi admitted that a few years into the war, he “went outlaw” and stopped answering to his superiors in the ULIMO-J chain of command.\textsuperscript{355} Therefore, Blahyi’s conduct changed over the course of the war, as did his identity. Eventually, Blahyi was not fighting to protect his Krahn leader, but rather he was fighting for himself in the pursuit of his own private motives. The anarchy of the Liberian Civil War created a Vinci model warlord out of the priest.

Blahyi’s conversion to Evangelical Christianity at the end of the war caused him to recognize the brutality of his conduct during the war and to seek atonement; Blahyi, then, even after finding himself on the losing side of the war, did not try to use his Krahn tribal identity to justify his barbarism. After his conversion, Blahyi called for the ritual practice of child sacrifice and cannibalism to end, while never shying away from disclosing the details of his own participation in these matters.\textsuperscript{356} Blahyi recognized his guilt, and when asked if he was prepared to spend life in prison he responded, “I would accept it willingly, as well as the death penalty.”\textsuperscript{357} A punishment does not seem likely for Blahyi, however, as the TRC believed Blahyi’s remorse and repudiation of the warlord lifestyle. The final report released by the TRC states:

The TRC recommends, without prejudice to the Palava Hut process, that the following persons, though found to be responsible for gross human rights violations including violations of international humanitarian law, international human rights law, war crimes and egregious domestic laws violations of Liberia are recommended not to be prosecuted because they cooperated with the TRC process, admitted to the crimes committed, and spoke truthfully before the Commission and expressed remorse for their prior actions during the war.\textsuperscript{358}

\textsuperscript{355} TRCL, “Blahyi.”  
\textsuperscript{356} Fernandes, “Face to Face with General Butt Naked.”  
\textsuperscript{357} Stock, “The Penitant Warlord: Atoning for 20,000 War Crimes,” 2.  
Joshua Milton Blahyi was number four on the list that followed.

Blahyi’s attempts to seek forgiveness do not absolve him of his crimes as a warlord, but they do reveal that he eventually viewed his barbaric violence while acting as General Butt Naked as divorced from his role as a tribal priest. When telling of his efforts to be granted forgiveness, Blahyi characterized the people he needed forgiveness from as the “victims of [his] crimes.” This language shift to describing torture and murder as “crimes” differs from how he described the legitimate child sacrifices performed as a tribal priest as “required physical action” against fellow Liberians. By recognizing “victims” and “crimes,” Blahyi distinguishes General Butt Naked’s warlord savagery from his original tribal priest duties. This distinction is drawn as an effort heed Hansen’s warning to avoid mixing up the warlord and the traditional structure of the ethnic group into which he was born.

Finally, Blahyi’s admission of his crimes is important in light of Kamari Maxine Clark’s definition of a warlord that states that, “there is a necessary construction of the commanding perpetrator as a warlord – someone who operates above the law and whose impunity cannot be allowed to continue.” During the chaos of the First Civil War, General Butt Naked without a doubt operated above the law. Blahyi, however, eventually surrendered his impunity and willfully submitted to the proceedings of the TRC without attempting to use his tribal identity as an excuse for his crimes. Blahyi’s admission that his tribal priest duties did not result in immunity for his barbaric violence as General Butt Naked again illustrates his understanding of the disconnect between legitimate actions taken for the sake of Krahn protection and the excessive violence into which General Butt Naked and his child soldier brigade descended.

360 TRCL, “Blahyi.”
Ultimately, Blahyi’s story represents the complete opposite of what William Reno terms “warlord politics.” Warlord politics is a strategy of waging war as a means to strengthen personal political authority, legitimacy, and wealth while rejecting the pursuit of the collective good.\footnote{Jonah Victor, “African Peacekeeping in Africa: Warlord Politics, Defense Economics, and State Legitimacy,” \textit{Journal of Peace Research} 47.2 (2010): 220.} In Blahyi’s case, war ultimately weakened his authority and legitimacy by debasing his spiritual duties and sending him into a tailspin into warlordism. After the conflict ended, however, Blahyi changed his ways and attempting to act to further the common good. In his interview with VICE News, Blayhi showed off the mission he built for not only his own former child soldiers, but also for some of the soldiers who were his old enemies. In the interview, Blahyi discussed his efforts to help rehabilitate them back into society. Blahyi did not campaign for political power to do so, nor did he revert to violence to agitate to implement his desired programs. Instead, Blahyi simply worked on his own to help improve the lives of the former child soldiers for the sake of the collective good. Blayhi’s General Butt Naked identity did not consume him, and he was able to integrate back into society without suffering too much disenfranchisement because he did not rely upon violence to determine his peacetime identity.

Both Roosevelt Johnson and Joshua Milton Blahyi exhibited many of the attributes that Vinci would expect of a warlord. As the complexities of Johnson and Blayhi’s careers illustrate, however, the warlord label alone does not suffice to explain the nuances and complexities of their individual motivations and conduct throughout the two Liberian Civil Wars. The Western media reporting at the time may have glossed the two men into uncomplicated, one-dimensional warlord monsters out for blood and personal wealth alone; however, the histories of the ULIMO-J faction and of Krahn tribal traditions of spirituality reveal that putting either man into the warlord box precludes a full understanding of his role before, during, and after the conflict, and
does a disservice to Liberian history in general by trivializing a decade-long war into a petty battle of barbaric individuals devoid of historical or cultural context. For Liberia to recover from its past and succeed in the future, it must both understand the power of ethnicity as a motivating factor while also learning to spot and condemn the brutalized violence that accompanies the descent into warlordism.
Conclusion

“Mr. Kiadi, given your experience during the war and with what you have just told us, who do you think is responsible for this war?” – Liberia’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission

“We all were responsible for the war, we all welcomed it.” – Tommy Lee Kiadi, Child Soldier

“And to all of the Liberian people we want you to forgive us, it was not our own doing. It was the work of the devil.” – Ugin Gray, Child Soldier

Using the term “warlord” results in a missed understanding, both popularly and politically, of the cultural context of the two Liberian Civil Wars. In his work on the culture and customs of Liberia, Professor Ayodeji Olukoju stresses, “Liberian political culture is a product of its history and reflects the characterization of the country as a high-context society. More emphasis is placed on the survival of the group and its leadership than on the sensibilities of the individual.” The anarchy of the First Liberian Civil War reflected the truth of this statement when ordinary Liberians resorted to loyally defending the interests of various faction leaders, leaders only recently determined by ethnic considerations.

These faction leaders, in particular Charles Taylor, Prince Johnson, Roosevelt Johnson, and Joshua Milton Blahyi, were not fighting for unintelligible reasons. The West’s application of the label “warlord,” however, divorced the actions of these men from any rational thought process other than the relentless pursuit of wealth and power. The very fact that they were faction leaders and not acting alone proves that they must have, at least at some point, stood for something more. Charles Taylor stood against Krahn domination and violent tribalism. Once Taylor’s efforts to overturn Samuel Doe’s administration of Krahn domination proved to be too

364 TRCL, Monrovia: Day 6, “Twenty-First Primary Witness of the TRC Public Hearings: Lee Tommy Kiada,” (Date: 1/16/08), Text from: TRC of Liberia Transcripts, Available from: TRCofliberia.org
self-serving, persisting even in the face of horrific violence tearing the country apart, Prince Johnson stood up against Taylor’s blind pursuit of power. On the other side of the conflict, Roosevelt Johnson and Joshua Milton Blahyi fought defensively to protect their Krahn ethnic group, now under attack by the National Patriotic Front of Liberia. Johnson fought to lead politically while Blahyi fought in the spiritual realm before the pressures of constant fighting and the lawlessness of anarchy destroyed all of the institutional structures regulating their actions and opened the door to wanton brutality.

The atrocities committed by all sides during the two Liberian Civil Wars and Charles Taylor’s presidency cannot be excused and should not be forgotten. At the same time, the foreignness of the conduct of the war to Westerners should not preclude attempts to understand the wars in all of their complexity. The actors of the Liberian Civil Wars were motivated by universal concerns of group preservation, colored by varying levels of personal ambition. Anarchy, the complete loss of social controls, and the subsequent adaption of traditional ritual behavior resulted in a shockingly barbaric method of waging war. Legitimate concerns and motivations, although they did generally devolve over time, did exist from the warlords themselves all the way down through their civilian supporters. The war was not senseless, the violence not incomprehensible. The answers are there in the cultural, social, and political history of Liberia if the world cares to look.

And look it should. This thesis stressed the Western media’s labeling of Charles Taylor, Roosevelt Johnson, and Joshua Blahyi as warlords. The consequences of the popularity of this label, however, reached beyond their civilian readership. As the interviews with former US State Department diplomats revealed, the US government itself utilized the warlord label in its understanding of the Liberian conflict and its main actors. Given the international nature of the
two Liberian civil wars, the shortcomings of this label are extremely problematic. Not only did other West African states get involved in the wars with the deployment of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), the United Nations prosecuted the lead actors of the war accused of war crimes, and it was UN-imposed international sanctions and the threat of US intervention that finally removed Charles Taylor from power and ended the Second Liberian Civil War.

Conflicts today are increasingly international in character, as illustrated by a conflict even with motivations as culturally specific as Liberia’s two civil wars. The demonstrated effect of the international community on such conflicts proves why a deeper understanding of the conflict than the “warlord” label allowed could have changed the course of the war. The warlord label divorced the fighters from their cultural context by negating the role of civilians and ignoring the motivations and goals of the actors on all sides of the multifaceted hostilities. The West’s shallow understanding of the war and its faction leaders undoubtedly influenced its policies toward the conflict.

The United States did not distinguish Liberia from other African countries, such as Rwanda or Somalia, and as such viewed intervention as an absolute last resort that was almost destined to fail. It may sound trite, but Africa is not a country. This phrase, which should be a simple statement of fact, has had to evolve into a worldwide campaign. To the rest of the world, Africa is often perceived as a dark monolith: far away, uniform, and dangerously inaccessible. This attitude undoubtedly influenced both the United States’ shallow understanding of the war and its actors and US foreign policy decisions. More than almost any country in Africa, though, the unique circumstances of Liberia should have been taken into greater account by US policymakers. The relationship between America and Liberia is often described as one between
mother and orphan. Liberians respect and to some extent even idolize the United States of America. In times of crisis, the cry will go out, “send in the Marines,” meaning American ones.\textsuperscript{367} Many Liberians interviewed during the conflict openly expressed their desire for American intervention, often mixed with surprise as to why the help had not yet arrived.\textsuperscript{368}

It did not help that Liberia had become a trope in and of itself, in large part thanks to Robert Kaplan’s 1994 \textit{Atlantic Monthly} article “The Coming Anarchy,” which was one of the most publicized accounts of West African wars, and presented the entire region of West Africa as fated for inevitable disease, poverty, and violent tribalism.\textsuperscript{369} To the United States, the conflict in Liberia was no more than another African mess best left alone. The desire of the Liberian citizenry for American intervention prompts the question of what could have happened had the US intervened earlier. Liberians maintain that the American troops would have been met positively, maybe even sparking abandonment of the various factions in favor of the Marines. The odds of Liberia being “another Somalia” were low. Most illustrative of this was that the simple threat of US intervention caused Charles Taylor to back down. It turns out that America had for once clearly underestimated its influence. A better understanding of the conflict, its actors, and Liberia itself thus may have shifted US foreign policy toward an engagement strategy by demythologizing Liberia’s supposedly intractable “cannibal warlords.” One of Howard French’s articles, the \textit{New York Times’} Liberia correspondent, entitled “The World Shrugs at a Massacre, and Liberians Ask Why,” reveals that Liberians took note of the international (lack of) response to their plight; now the rest of the world should, too.\textsuperscript{370}

\textsuperscript{369} Kenneth Omeje, ed., \textit{War to Peace Transition: Conflict Intervention and Peacebuilding in Liberia} (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009), 4.
# Appendix 1

## Helpful Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>Armed Forces of Liberia&lt;br&gt;- National Army turned Doe’s personal Krahn faction</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATU</td>
<td>Anti-Terrorist Unit&lt;br&gt;- Charles Taylor’s personal military force, run by son Chuckie Taylor</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECOMOG</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECOWAS</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States</td>
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<tr>
<td>IGNU</td>
<td>Interim Government of National Unity&lt;br&gt;- Short-lived civilian transition government led by Amos Sawyer</td>
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<td>LDF</td>
<td>Lofa Defense Force&lt;br&gt;- Loma, Gissi, and Gbandi faction operating only in Lofa County</td>
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<td>LNTG (I-III)</td>
<td>Liberian National Transitional Governments&lt;br&gt;- Governments comprised of faction leaders</td>
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<td>LPC</td>
<td>Liberia Peace Council&lt;br&gt;- Krahn faction led by George Boley, merged with ULIMO</td>
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<tr>
<td>LUDF</td>
<td>Liberia United Defense Force&lt;br&gt;- Muslim faction, merged with ULIMO</td>
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<tr>
<td>LURD</td>
<td>Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy&lt;br&gt;- Mandingo and Krahn faction in the Second Civil War</td>
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<tr>
<td>MODEL</td>
<td>Movement for Democracy in Liberia&lt;br&gt;- Faction against President Taylor in the Second Civil War (no ethnicity specified)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPFL</td>
<td>National Patriotic Front of Liberia&lt;br&gt;- Charles Taylor’s insurrectionary faction, mainly composed of Gios and Manos</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPRAG</td>
<td>National Patriotic Reconstruction Assembly Government&lt;br&gt;- Charles Taylor’s parallel government set up in Greater Liberia</td>
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<td>PRC</td>
<td>People’s Redemption Council&lt;br&gt;- Name of Samuel K. Doe’s military junta government</td>
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<td>SSS</td>
<td>Special Security Services&lt;br&gt;- Charles Taylor’s personal security force</td>
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<tr>
<td>TRC</td>
<td>Truth and Reconciliation Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>ULAA</td>
<td>Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas</td>
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<tr>
<td>ULIMO</td>
<td>United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia&lt;br&gt;- Charles Taylor’s rival factions; 1994 split into Roosevelt Johnson-led Krahn faction (-J) and Alhadji Kromah-led Muslim faction (-K)</td>
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<td>ULIMO-J</td>
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<td>ULIMO-K</td>
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Appendix 2

Figure 1
Regional distribution of major ethnic groups in Liberia.
Appendix 3

Chronology of the Liberian Civil Wars

24 December 1989: Charles Taylor and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) launch an armed insurrection into Liberia to oust Samuel K. Doe

July 1990: Prince Johnson splits from NPFL to form the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia

7 August 1990: Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) formed to intervene in Liberia; Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) established

9 September 1990: Samuel K. Doe assassinated by Prince Johnson

Late October 1990: Charles Taylor establishes his parallel government in Greater Liberia, the National Patriotic Reconstruction Assembly Government (NPRAG)

June 1991: The United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO) begins operations against the NPFL

19 August 1995: Abuja Accord establishes the Liberian National Transitional Government (LNTG) with a five-man Council of State, led by Charles Taylor; LNTG replaces IGNU

1994: Lofa Defense Force (LDF) founded

December 1996: Operation Pay Yourself (ULIMO-J vs. NPFL battle in Monrovia)

19 July 1997: Charles Taylor elected President of Liberia

Early 1999: Breakout of the Second Liberian Civil War, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) against Taylor

7 March 2001: UN Resolution passed increasing sanctions on Liberia and Charles Taylor

August 2003: US President Bush threatens American troop intervention

11 August 2003: Charles Taylor resigns as President of Liberia
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