The Evolution of Deadly Conflict in Liberia

THE EVOLUTION OF DEADLY CONFLICT IN LIBERIA

From 'Paternaltarianism' to State Collapse

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Printed in the United States of America

To My Blessed Wife
CANDACE
A Virtuous Woman

I Await Our Glorious Reunion

To the Liberian Masses,
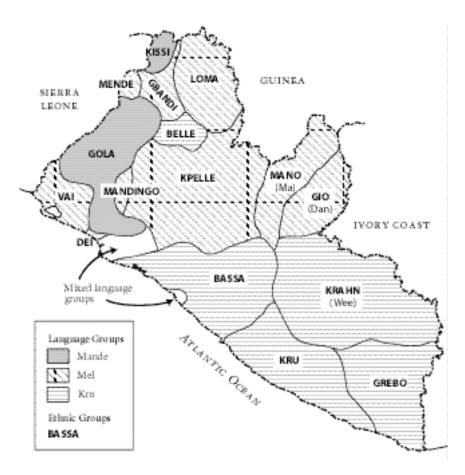*A Great People I Have Come to Love and Respect:*
Your Time Has Yet to Come!

Africa and the African Diaspora Await Your Rebirth!

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SIERRA LEONE

IVORY COAST

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Territory bought from tribal leaders in 1874, later occupied by France. Granted to France by treaties signed in 1907 and 1911.

Territory bought from tribal leaders between 1835 and 1850, later occupied by France. Granted to France by treaty in 1892.

Territory purchased in 1850, later occupied by British. Granted to England by treaties in 1885 and 1903.

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ABSTRACT

This book presents the first attempt to holistically document and analyze the historical causes of deadly conflict in Liberia. It reconstructs and examines the root, operational, and catalytic causes of eighteen internal deadly conflicts that transpired in Liberia from its founding in 1822 through 2003, including fifteen settler-indigenous Liberian conflicts (1822–1915), the 1980 *coup d'état* against the Tolbert regime, rise and fall of the Doe regime (1980–1989), the Great War inclusive of the Liberian Civil War (1989–1997), Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) insurrections (1999–2003), and the forced dismantling of Charles Taylor's regime in 2003.

The book seeks to answer two primary questions: (1) What are the historical causes of deadly conflict in Liberia? and (2) To what extent has the evolution of settler nationalism and authoritarianism contributed to the stimulation of conflict between settler and native Liberians? To answer these questions, it examines a continuum of circular causation among the state of affairs that led to the founding of the Liberian state, the evolution of settler nationalism and authoritarianism, and internal conflict. By analyzing these processes together, the causes of eighteen conflicts are revealed and thoroughly discussed.

The book endeavors to accomplish three objectives: (1) determine the historical causes of deadly conflict in Liberia, in particular the underlying historical phenomena responsible for birthing the Great War; (2) present an alternative framework to comprehend and examine the aged conflict dynamic between settler and indigenous Liberians, and within Liberian society itself; and (3) produce the first comprehensive study of deadly conflict in the republic.

It argues among other things that, taken together, the diametrically opposed principles on which Liberia and native village-states were based, and the authoritarian political apparatus introduced into Liberia by the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1822—and ultimately inherited by the settlers in 1847—permanently shaped the sociopolitical order responsible for the institutionalization of ethnopolitical conflict between settler and native Liberi-

ans bet ween 1822 and 1980, and "all" Liberians bet ween 1980 and 2003. While attempting to establish a settler state, the settlers provoked deadly conflict with, and responded to challenges from, various native village-states. Successive Liberian governments responded to such conflict by evolving in an authoritarian fashion. In this sense, settler-indigenous conflict affected the disposition of consecutive regimes, causing them to implement protectionist rules and strategies to preserve the existence of the settler state, resulting in a perpetual cycle of circular causation with deadly conflict as a permanent feature. From this background, I argue that Liberia's legacy of violent conflict is inextricably linked to its traditions of nationalism and authoritarianism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Research for the book was conducted in Africa, Great Britain, and the United States. I have many people to thank for supporting me throughout the Ph.D. drafting (1997–2001) and book-manuscript preparation processes (2002–2003). Foremost among them is my blessed wife Candace Levitt, for her enduring support and gracious love and my beautiful daughter Makayla for precious hugs and kisses during our difficult transition to a new life. I also thank my wonderful family, for loving me, and Professor James Mayall of the University of Cambridge, for graciously supervising my Ph.D. dissertation, which forms the foundation of this book.

Three major phases of research were carried out for the volume. The first phase of research (April 1998 through August 1999) was conducted in the United Kingdom at the Cambridge University Library, University of Oxford (Rhodes and Bodelian libraries); University of London (School of Oriental and African Studies Library, British Library of Social and Political Science, and the Institute of Commonwealth Studies); and the Public Records Office in London (British Foreign and Commonwealth Office). I was pleasantly surprised by the rich collection of early nineteenth-century information available in these libraries and at the University of London in particular. I humbly thank Abiodun Alao, Emmanuel Kwesi Aning, Gustav Barnard, Kayode Fayemi, Craig Gant, Linda Greene, Craig Jackson, David Lewis, James Mayall, Abigail Noko, Funmi Olonisakin, Mamphela Ramphele, Jack Spence, James Thomas, Matthew Whitaker and Tunde Zack Williams for their wise counsel and resolute support from the beginning. I also thank friends, colleagues, and onlookers from the annual meetings and workshops of the Royal African Society and African Studies Association of the UK for their insightful comments and critiques.

I conducted the second phase of research (August 1999 through August 2001) while an International Studies Fellow at the Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) at the University of Maryland-College Park. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Ernest J. Wilson III for creating a fellowship opportunity for me at CIDCM and providing me with unyielding moral support throughout the Ph.D. dissertation and book

prepatory processes. During this period, I researched at the U.S. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; U.S. National Archives in Washington, D.C.; University of Maryland-College Park Main Library; Georgetown University Main Library; and the University of Virginia Main Library. In addition, I obtained valuable archival information from the Archives of the Episcopal Church in Austin, Texas. This phase of research was critical to uncovering primary information that formed the basis of this book. I would like to especially thank Angel D. Batiste at the U.S. Library of Congress, Walter B. Hill Jr. and L. Holland at the U.S. National Archives, and Yogi Patel at the Archives of the Episcopal Church for their kind support and assistance.

The third phase of research took place sporadically at DePaul University College of Law (April 2002 through December 2003) in Chicago, Illinois, where I spent the bulk of my time editing and fine tuning the manuscript. I thank the Dean's Office of the DePaul University College of Law for providing me with generous research stipends while completing my book.

Because the foundation of the study relies on historical rather than contemporary information, it demanded that primary archival research take precedence over field interviews. With the exception of interviews concerning the Great War,[1] field interviews were inconsequential to the thrust of the analysis. Yet I took advantage of work-, workshop- and conference-related trips to Ghana, Guinea, and Namibia to uncover important research and data, which informed the general thrust of the study. I owe a debt of gratitude to my friends, colleagues, and other analysts (too many to mention) from Canada, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Gabon, Namibia, South Africa, Denmark, the United Kingdom, and the United States, for providing me with vital information and insights on the origins of African conflict and specifically the Liberian Civil War. I especially thank Christopher Clapham, D. Elwood Dunn and Crawford Young, for reviewing the final manuscript and providing me with critical feedback and insights; and Mamphela Ramphele, for her resolute support, grace, and wisdom.

Last but not least, I thank my friends and colleagues formerly with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (now African Union) in Addis Ababa, in particular, Christopher Bakwesegha, John Tesha and Ben Kioko, for furnishing me with important documents and data on ethnopolitical conflict, regional security, state dynamics and state-building in Africa.

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1. The term Great War is used to define the Liberian Civil War (1989–1997) and the Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) insurrections (1999–2003) because the latter conflict is largely a continuation of the former war.