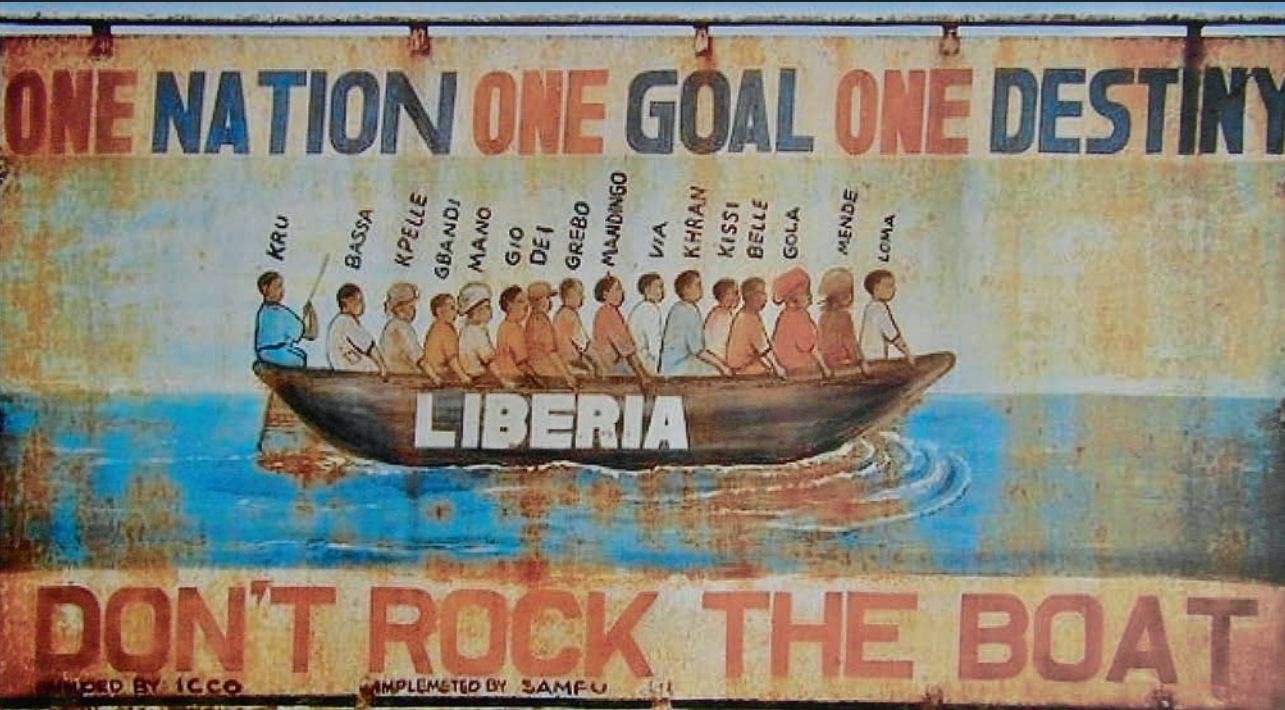


Liberia: From the Love of Liberty to Paradise Lost

Fred van der Kraaij



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List of abbreviations

AACC	All African Council of Churches
ACDL	Association for Constitutional Democracy in Liberia
ACS	American Colonization Society
AFC	African Fruit Company
AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
ALIMUSA	Association of Liberian Ministers in the USA
ALLA	Association of Liberian Lawyers in the Americas
AMC	Aureus Mining Company
APCL	African Petroleum Company Ltd
ASC	African Studies Centre
ATU	Anti-Terrorist Unit
AU	African Union
BDF	Bong Defense Front
BMC	Bong Mining Company
BTC	Barclay Training Center
CDC	Congress for Democratic Change
CEDE	Center for Democratic Empowerment
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEPSA	Compañía Española de Petróleos S.A.
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIJ	Coalition for International Justice
COLIDAP	Citizens of Liberia in Defense of Albert Porte
COPL	Canadian Overseas Petroleum Ltd
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CRC	Cavalla Rubber Corporation
CRC	Central Revolutionary Council
DELIMCO	Deutsch-Liberian Mining Company
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECOMIL	ECOWAS Mission in Liberia
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EFLA	European Federation of Liberian Associations
EPO	Equatorial Palm Oil Ltd
EU	European Union
FDA	Forestry Development Authority
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FELMAUSA	Federation of Liberian Mandingo Associations in the USA
GAA	General Auditing Commission
GC	Governance Commission

GCA	Global Coalition for Africa
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEMAP	Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme
GVL	Golden Veroleum Liberia
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
HMC	Hendrik Muller & Co.
IGNU	Interim Government of National Unity
INPFL	Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia
KLM	Royal Dutch Airlines
LAC	Liberian Agricultural Company
LACC	Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission
LAH	Liberian Association Holland
LAMCO	Liberian-American-Swedish Minerals Company
LAP	Liberian Action Party
LB	Liberia Basin
LBDI	Liberian Bank for Development and Investment
LDF	Lofa Defense Force
LECUSA	Liberian Episcopalian Community in the USA
LEITI	Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
LIBINC	Liberian Operations Inc
LISCO	Liberian Iron and Steel Company
LMC	Liberia Mining Company
LPC	Liberia Peace Council
LPN	Liberian Professional Network
LPP	Liberian People's Party
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MARCO	Morris American Rubber Company
MDA	Mineral Development Agreement
MICAT	Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
MOJA	Movement for Justice in Africa
MOPP	Maryland Oil Palm Plantation
NACMA	National Association of Cape Mountainians in the Americas
NDPL	National Democratic Party of Liberia
NEC	National Elections Commission
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NIOC	National Iron Ore Company
NKAA	National Krao (Kru) Association in the Americas
NOCAL	National Oil Company of Liberia
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NSA	National Security Agency
NTGL	National Transitional Government of Liberia
OAC	East Africa Company
OAU	Organization of African Unity
ODA	Official Development Assistance

OLM	Organization of Liberians in Minnesota
OTC	Oriental Timber Company
PACG	Pan African Capital Group
PAL	Progressive Alliance of Liberia
PIOM	Putu Iron Ore Mining Company
PPP	Progressive People's Party
PRC	People's Redemption Council
PSC	Production Sharing Contract
RIA	Robertsfield International Airport
RTC	Royal Timber Corporation
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SCSL	Special Court for Sierra Leone
SDPL	Sime Darby Plantation (Liberia)
SPA	Special Programme for Africa
SRC	Salala Rubber Corporation
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
TI	Transparency International
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TWP	True Whig Party
UL	University of Liberia
ULAA	Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas
ULIMO	United Liberation Movement for Democracy
ULIMO-J	United Liberation Movement for Democracy – Johnson faction
ULIMO-K	United Liberation Movement for Democracy – Kromah faction
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIBOA	United Bassa Organization in the Americas
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNOMIL	United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USAA	United Sarpo Association in the Americas
VOC	Dutch East India Company
WCL	Western Cluster Liberia
WIC	Dutch West India Company
WISCO	Wuhan Iron and Steel Group
WTC	World Trade Center

Key information on 50 selected persons¹

Anderson, Daniel, Superintendent Maryland County, convicted ritual murderer of Moses Tweh and executed, son of James Anderson

Anderson, James, National Chairman True Whig Party (TWP, ruling party), father of Daniel Anderson

Best, Kenneth, independent journalist, founder of the Daily Observer, brother of Gyude Bryant and Canon Burgess Carr, nephew of Albert Porte, uncle of Rodney Sieh

Blah, Moses, warlord NPFL, Vice-President to President Charles Taylor, 23rd President of Liberia

Blahyi, Joshua Milton a.k.a. General Butt Naked, priest-warlord, associated with Samuel Doe

Bockarie, Samuel a.k.a. General Mosquito, warlord NPFL, associated with Charles Taylor, murdered

Boley, George, Minister of State for Presidential Affairs, warlord, leader LPC, associated with Samuel Doe

Bryant, Gyude, Chairman Liberian Action Party (LAP), leader National Transitional Government, brother of Kenneth Best and Canon Burgess Carr

Carr, Canon Burgess, Secretary-General Nairobi-based All African Council of Churches (AACC), brother of Gyude Bryant and Kenneth Best

Conneh, Sekou Damate, warlord, leader LURD

Doe, Jackson, defeated presidential candidate Liberian Action Party (LAP) in 1985 elections 'won' (rigged) by Samuel Doe of the National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL), murdered

Doe, Samuel, leader coup 1980, Chairman PRC, 21st President of Liberia, murdered

Dokie, Samuel, co-founder Central Revolutionary Council (CRC), ex-NPFL, murdered

Fahnbulleh, Henry Boima, MOJA activist, university professor, Minister of Education, advisor to President Sirleaf

Gbowee, Leymah, peace and human rights activist, co-winner Nobel Peace Prize, Peace Ambassador

Horton, Romeo, Dean, College of Business and Public Administration, University of Liberia

Johnson, Martina, fighter NPFL, head Security RIA ('Robertsfield'), arrested in Belgium in 2014

Johnson, Prince Yormie, warlord, leader I-NPFL, ex-NPFL, Senator for Nimba County

Johnson, Roosevelt, warlord, co-founder and leader ULIMO-J

Kamara, Tom, independent journalist, publisher and editor-in-chief The New Democrat

Kosiah, Alieu, warlord/commander ULIMO-K, arrested in Switzerland in 2014

Kouwenhoven van, Guus, Dutch businessman, close to Charles Taylor, arrested in the Netherlands (2005), found guilty, acquitted (2008), decision overturned by the Supreme Court (2010), pending

Kromah, Alhaji G.V., journalist, Minister of Information, co-founder and leader-warlord ULIMO-K, university professor

Massaquoi, Francis, warlord, leader LDF

Matthews, Gabriel Baccus, Chairman Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL), Minister of Foreign Affairs

¹ The positions and other occupations of the 50 persons included here refer to the 1975-2015 period. For the sake of brevity, no specific years or periods during which positions were held are given. For more information see the main text.

Mayson, Dew, MOJA activist, university professor, businessman

Nelson, Blamoh, political activist, PAL member, old/closest friend of Charles Taylor, high ranking in NPFL, Chief of Cabinet of President Charles Taylor, Minister of Interior

Nimely, Thomas, warlord, founder and leader of MODEL

Porte, Albert, independent journalist, uncle of Kenneth Best, also blood relation of Rodney Sieh

Quiah, Oscar, Secretary General Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL), Minister of Local Government

Quiwonkpa, Thomas, Vice Chair PRC, Commanding General Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), murdered

Roberts, Joseph Jenkins, Governor Liberia Colony, 1st President of Liberia

Sawyer, Amas, co-founder MOJA, university professor, research scholar Indiana University (US), President Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU), founder and 1st Executive Director Center for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE), Chairman Governance Commission (GC)

Sieh, Rodney, independent journalist, publisher and editor FrontPage Africa, nephew of Kenneth Best, also related to Albert Porte

Sirleaf, Charles, Deputy Governor Central Bank of Liberia, son of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

Sirleaf, Ellen Johnson, Minister of Finance, political activist, UN official, 24th President of Liberia

Sirleaf, Fumba, Director, National Security Agency (NSA), son of President Sirleaf

Sirleaf, Robert, Chairman NOCAL, Advisor to President Sirleaf, son of President Sirleaf

Sirleaf, Varney, Deputy Internal Affairs Minister, nephew of President Sirleaf

Tarr, Byron, academic, political activist, Secretary General Liberian Action Party (LAP), Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs, Minister of Finance

Taylor, 'Chuck', head Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU), son of warlord-president Charles Taylor, convicted and sentenced to 97 years in prison (in US)

Taylor, Charles, warlord, co-founder and leader NPFL, 22nd President of Liberia, convicted and sentenced to 50 years in prison (Special Court for Sierra Leone)

Tipoteh, Togba-Nah, co-founder MOJA, university professor, Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs, Chairman Steering Committee National Vision 2030, uncle of George Weah

Tolbert, William, 20th President of Liberia, murdered

Tubman, William, 19th President of Liberia

Tubman, Winston, UN official, political activist, defeated presidential candidate NDPL in 2005 elections, defeated presidential candidate CDC in 2011 elections, nephew of president William Tubman

Weah, George, world famous soccer star, lost 2005 presidential elections, in 2011 vice-presidential candidate for Congress for Democratic Change (defeated), nephew of Togba-Nah Tipoteh

Woewiyu, Tom, warlord, co-founder CRC, co-founder NPFL, Minister of Defence, arrested in the US in 2014

Yancy, Allen, Vice-President of Liberia (resigned – slavery scandal)

Yancy, Allen, Member, House of Representatives (for Maryland County), convicted ritual murderer of Moses Tweh and executed, son of former Vice-President Yancy, cousin of president William Tubman

Map 1 Liberia, West Africa, Africa



Map 2 Political and administrative divisions (counties)



Map 3 Language and ethnic groups



Explanatory notes

Map 3 shows the country's official 16 tribes, the term used in Liberia to refer to an ethnic group. To some extent, they coincide with the number of languages spoken in the country, but there are more of the latter.² In Liberia, there are

² In his *Peoples of Africa: Ethno-linguistic Map* (Ed. Marc Léo Felix, Brussels, 2001), Charles Meur lists 31 different ethno-linguistic groups (map 12). The website of the Liberian Ministry of Information,

three main language groups, the Kru-speaking people, the Mande and the Mel or West Atlantic group. English and a local variant – Liberian pidgin English – are also spoken, nearly always as a second language besides the native language. The ten languages most commonly spoken are listed below (the figures in brackets are the numbers of speakers in 2015, as estimated by the author):

- 1) Kpelle (500,000 – 600,000)
- 2) Bassa (400,000 – 450,000)
- 3) Grebo (400,000 – 425,000)
- 4) Kru (250,000 – 275,000)
- 5) Mano (200,000 – 250,000)
- 6) Gio (175,000 – 200,000)
- 7) Loma (175,000 – 200,000)
- 8) Kissi (125,000 – 150,000)
- 9) Vai (100,000 – 150,000)
- 10) Gola (100,000)

A further ten languages are estimated to be spoken by fewer than 100,000 Liberians, more than half having a maximum of 15,000 speakers. The most common are Gbande (originally spoken by some 100,000 people, but during the civil wars an estimated 50,000 fled to neighbouring Guinea, and it is unknown how many have since returned), Mandingo, Krahn, Mende, Belle and Dei, the latter two by fewer than 15,000 people. All of these languages are also spoken in neighbouring Guinea, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone.

Lastly, below is an overview of different ways of spelling and alternative names of Liberian tribes:³

Bassa	Belle, Belleh, Kowaa, Kwaa, Kuwaa
Dei	De, Dey, Dewoi, Dewoin
Gbande	Gbandi, Gbunde, Bande, Bandi
Gio	Gyo, Ge, Gio-Dan, Dan, Da, Yacouba, Yacuba
Gola	-
Grebo	Gblou Grebo, (Gboloo), Wedeboo Grebo; central/northern/southern Grebo
Kissi	Kisi, Gisi, Gizi, Kissien
Kpelle	Kpele, Kpwessi, Gbese, Pessa, Pessy

Cultural Affairs & Tourism also states that 31 indigenous languages are spoken in the country (<http://www.micatliberia.com>).

³ Sources: Charles Meur, *Peoples of Africa: Ethno-linguistic Map* (Ed. Marc Léo Felix, Brussels, 2001); Teah Wulah *The Forgotten Liberian: History of Indigenous Tribes* (Bloomington/Indiana, 2005); <http://www.ethnologue.com>.

Krahn	Kran; northern, eastern, western Krahn/Kran; southern Krahn/Kran = Sapo/Sarpo/Sapan
Kru	Klao, Klaoh, Klau, Kroo, Kroumen, Krumen
Loma	Loghoma, Looma, Lorma, Bouze, Busy, Buzi
Mandingo	Manya, Manya Kan, Malinke
Mano	Mann, Maa, Mah, Mawe
Mende	Boumpe, Hulo, Kossa, Kosso
Vai	Vay, Vei, Vy, Gallinas, Gallines

Map 4 Infrastructure



Liberia's infrastructure in brief

Roads

Liberia's road network comprises some 6,250 miles, less than 450 miles of which are asphalted. The country's two main roads are asphalted and run from west to

east and north to south. The first goes from the town of Bo, on the border with Sierra Leone, via Monrovia and Harbel to Buchanan, in Grand Bassa County, covering a distance of almost 185 miles. The north-south road is about the same length and goes from Monrovia to Ganta, in Nimba County.

During and immediately after the rainy season, most roads are heavy going or impassable for motorized vehicles. Varying between the coast and the interior, this season lasts from May/June to October/November. Heavy rainfall, countless rivers and streams, and lack of maintenance contribute to the bad condition or even complete absence of bridges.

Railways

The country has three railway lines, with a total length of around 300 miles. All three were constructed to transport iron ore from the mines to the ports, and not to carry passengers. The oldest line was used to transport ore from Bomi Hills to the Free Port of Monrovia. Later, it was extended to the Mano River Mines (NIOC) on the border with Sierra Leone. It is 90 miles long in total. The second railway line is 45 miles long and ran from the iron ore mines in Bong County to the port of Monrovia. The third and longest line (165 miles) runs from Yekepa – in Nimba County, in the north of the country, where the country's largest iron ore mine was located near the border with Guinea – to the port of Buchanan in Grand Bassa County. As a result of the civil wars, iron ore production came to a halt and the railway lines were no longer maintained. Large investments are needed to make them operational again. At this stage, rehabilitation of the Yekepa-Buchanan railway line, which is being carried out by ArcelorMittal, is the most advanced.

Ports

Four ports are important for the country's imports and exports. From west to east, they are Monrovia, Buchanan, Greenville (Sinoe County) and Harper (Maryland County). Monrovia is the largest and best equipped, partly because of its general economic importance. Buchanan is primarily used to export iron ore. Greenville will also be mainly used to export ore once the planned production in the interior (Grand Gedeh County) has started but, until then – like Harper – the principal export product from Greenville is tropical wood.

The state of repair of all these ports is insufficient for current and future needs. All four require large investments due to overdue maintenance and to expand.

Airports

There are two airports with paved runways. The main international airport is Robertsfield, some 35 miles from Monrovia. The other is Spriggs Payne Airfield, located in the capital between the districts of Sinkor and Old Road.

Furthermore, there are some 50 airfields in the interior, often consisting only of an unpaved, sometimes improvised, airstrip.

Energy

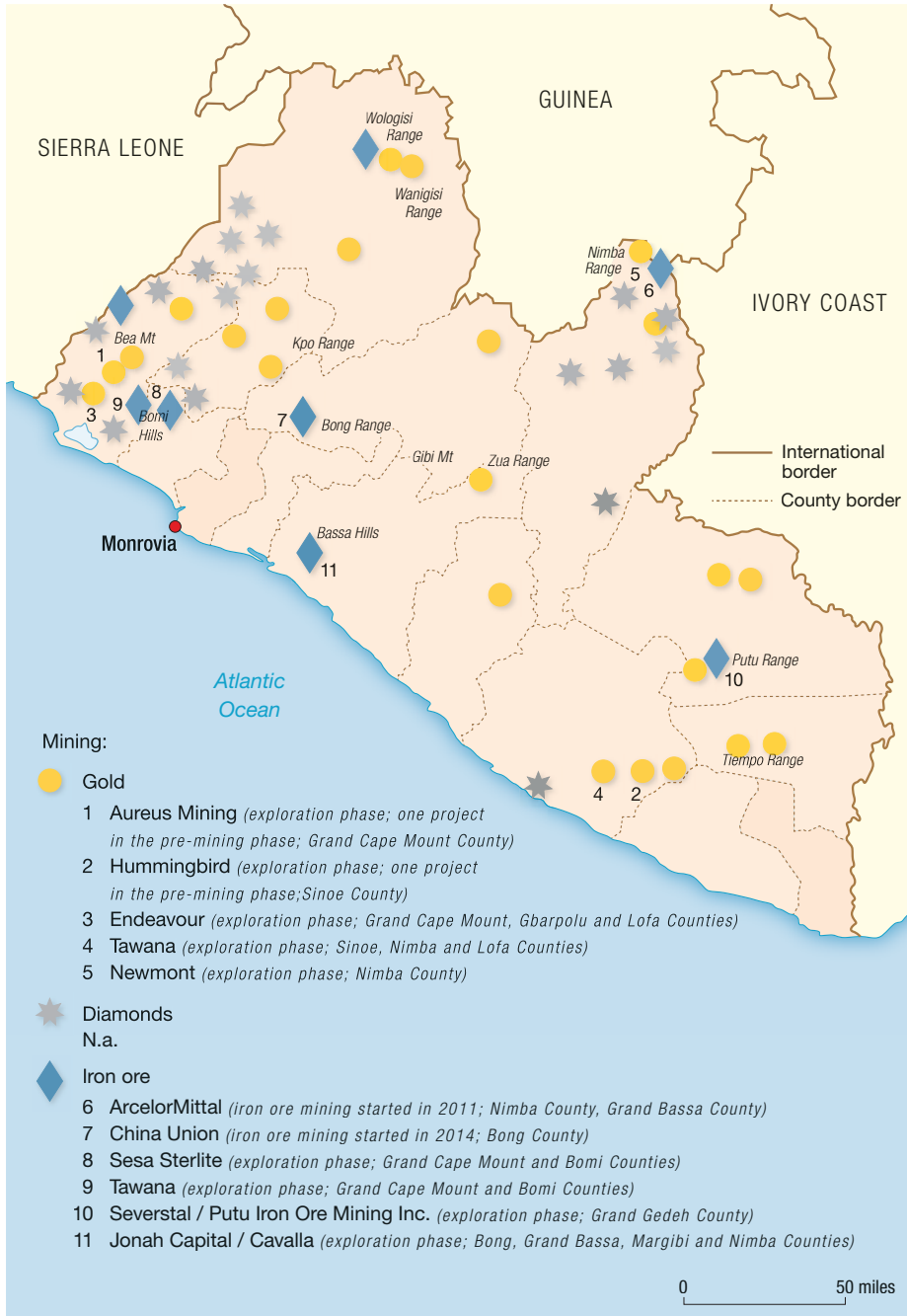
As a result of the destruction of the hydroelectric power plant in Mount Coffee during the civil wars, the public energy supply is practically non-existent. The reconstruction requires investments of more than \$200 million, the major part of which has been pledged by international donors and financial institutions. The countless rivers and rapids in the country present considerable untapped hydropower potential.

Map 5 Foreign investments in agriculture and forestry (2015)



For further information, see annex 3.

Map 6 Foreign investments in mining (2015)



For further information, see annex 4.

Map 7 Foreign investments in oil and gas (2015)



For further information, see annex 5.

Foreword

Liberia is the oldest independent republic in Africa. Yet few people could have pointed out this West African country on the map before the outbreak of the Ebola epidemic in 2014. Ten, twenty years earlier Liberia also dominated the international headlines because of the civil wars raging in the country, horrific even by African standards. The inhabitants of ports around the world regularly see ships coming and going that fly the Liberian flag. Liberia once even had the largest merchant fleet in the world, at least on paper. Just as it has long had the world's largest rubber plantation, and was once the biggest exporter of iron ore in Africa and ranked third in the world.

This book is a personal reflection by a Dutchman on Liberia, a country with which the Netherlands has always had close – though often little known – relations. As long ago as 1475, a ship from the Southern Netherlands ran aground on what was then known in Europe as the Pepper Coast. Around 1600, Dutch merchants had established themselves in the area of Cabo de Monte, now Cape Mount. After the originally American colony of 'Liberia' proclaimed its independence in 1847, merchants from Germany and the Netherlands were very active in the new country – much more so than their counterparts from the US, England or France – and close ties developed between the governments of Liberia and these two European countries. The loss of the First World War also meant the end of Germany's role in Africa, and thereby in Liberia. But Dutch merchants continued to play an important role in the country and, in their wake, came Dutch investors. It was a Dutch investment mission that discovered the rich deposits of iron ore in Bomi Hills in the 1930s, which would make Liberia the leading African producer of iron ore in the second half of the twentieth century. In this period, Dutch experts played a prominent role in Liberia's first iron mine, exploited by the Liberia Mining Company (LMC), and in the large rubber plantations. The robust economic ties between Liberia and the Netherlands also gave rise to state visits in both directions. One of Liberia's best known and longest serving presidents (27 years!) – William Tubman – was a regular guest of former Dutch Queen Juliana at her Royal Palace at Soestdijk and close and friendly relations developed between the two families.

However, this book is not about the Netherlands, or about the economic and other relations between the Netherlands and Liberia, at least not exclusively. It is primarily about people, mainly Liberians, some of whom I got to know well personally in the years I spent in the country and who made a great impression on me. I was working at that time at the University of Liberia. When my wife

and I first went there, Liberia was seen internationally as one of the most politically stable countries in Africa, albeit with a conservative regime, based on a one-party system, as was the case in practically all African states at that time.

With hindsight, Liberia proved to be a powder keg, which exploded when sergeant-major Samuel Doe committed a violent coup d'état, heralding a period of dictatorship, human rights violations and far-reaching economic decline. That was the prologue to 14 years of civil war. Only after the forced departure of warlord-president Charles Taylor and the election of his rival Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as president did greater political stability return to the country, partly thanks to a UN peacekeeping force. There was considerable optimism, too, about Liberia's economic prospects, but this has been somewhat tempered recently by the Ebola crisis. In 2012, Charles Taylor was sentenced to 50 years' imprisonment by the Special Court for Sierra Leone for his part in the civil war in Liberia's neighbouring country and he is currently serving that sentence in a maximum-security prison in northeast England. The election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was also historic: she was the first democratically chosen female president not only of Liberia, but of Africa. But the country is devastated and its four million people are heavily traumatized and more divided than ever.

What once started hopefully as the first African republic to be modelled on Western lines became a tragedy. The ideal of freedom of the American colonists – mulattoes, free-born blacks and former slaves – has been blown apart. The paradise on Earth that they dreamed of as they crossed the Atlantic proved an illusion. In 2015, some half a million Liberians even live outside their country because they have no confidence or future in their African homeland.

In this personally tinted account, I have tried to paint a picture of the country by identifying the origins and causes of many of its political problems. My intention was to write a book that was as readable as possible for a broad public. For that reason, I have used relatively few footnotes and source references in the text where the facts are widely known or available. This proved less possible in the case of recent events and developments added to this translation of the 2013 Dutch version; these additions are therefore supported by more footnotes with references to sources than were used in the original text.

This international edition in English largely follows the Dutch publication but, as mentioned, I found it both necessary and desirable to add a number of passages. In the first place, these are updates on important political events or developments and, of course, the current Ebola crisis. In addition, I have expanded more than in the Dutch version on president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's continuation of Liberia's economic 'Open Door Policy', which involves developing the country with the aid of foreign capital and expertise, attracted by favourable business conditions. One of the main conclusions from this closer examination of her policy is that president Sirleaf is following in the footsteps of

one of her illustrious predecessors, William Tubman. In this international edition, I have also devoted greater attention to how political and family ties are so closely interwoven in Liberian politics and society. This seemed a valuable addition, especially for an international readership.

I have already published some of the information in this book in one form or another in print or online. At several points, I have made use of my dissertation on Liberia, which began as a description of the dual economy of Liberia in the 1970s intended for the use of Liberian students.⁴ It eventually grew to become a treatise on the economic history of this West African country.⁵ Among the other sources, I refer specifically to the website *Liberia Past and Present* and the blog *Liberian Perspectives* (which I set up in 2001 and 2007 respectively). For more sources, please see the list at the back of the book, where there is also a list of recommended further reading for those who are interested.

In this foreword, a few words of thanks are called for. Many people have contributed, directly or indirectly, to the making of this book and I owe them all many thanks. They are a large and varied group, including those I interviewed and others who provided information both in Liberia and elsewhere, Liberians and non-Liberians, and those who contributed to the content in a more technical sense. I would particularly like to thank Ton Dietz, Stephen Ellis and Dick Foeken of the African Studies Centre (ASC) in Leiden for their comments and suggestions, which resulted in important improvements to the first, Dutch version. This international version has also benefited considerably from further insights and comments by Stephen Ellis. I would like to thank the ASC for consenting to publish this version of the book and ASC editor Harry Wels for his valuable and indispensable work. This English version would not have been possible without the astute translation by Andy Brown, with the invaluable assistance of Elinor Fuchs, and his seemingly limitless patience in the face of my countless changes and additions to the text. I believe that he has superbly preserved the readability of the original text, for which I cannot thank him enough. The translation was funded with the generous support of the National Academic Insurance Company. Thanks also go to those who took the photographs included in this book, who made their photos available with great enthusiasm and completely free of charge. Not only do the many pictures supplement and illustrate the text, but in themselves they ‘paint a thousand words’. The clear and informative maps are the outstanding work of Nel de Vink (DeVink Mapdesign). Lastly, my deepest thanks to my wife Els. She not only made an important contribution to our lives during the tumultuous 1970s in

⁴ De term ‘dual economy’ refers to the two separate ‘worlds’ of a modern economy modelled on Western lines – perhaps small in terms of employment, but overpowering through its monetary scale – and the predominantly self-sufficiency economy in which the majority of the population tries to survive.

⁵ *The Open Door Policy of Liberia: An Economic History of Modern Liberia* (Bremen, 1983).

Liberia, as I describe in this book, but her patience with my sometimes boundless passion for ‘Liberia’ has been of great value in my enduring interest in this West African country. She has also been an important and critical reader of my draft texts. Moreover, her continuous role as support and sounding board and as designer of the accessible website *Liberia Past and Present* is not to be underestimated.

The difficulties that Liberia has to overcome to take control of its own development are both numerous and daunting. They are a stark contrast to the country’s enormous natural wealth. A prominent Liberian, one of the country’s veteran politicians and an internationally renowned economist, Dr Togba-Nah Tipoteh, recently declared that, in terms of income per day, ‘the Liberian people are the second poorest people in Africa’.⁶ A high-placed Liberian government official – Assistant Minister of Health, Dr Saye Dahn Bawo – was recently quoted as saying that Liberia’s infant mortality is the highest in the world.⁷ As though that were not enough, in 2015 the UN identified Liberia’s capital Monrovia as the poorest city in the world.⁸ Clearly, there is much to be done.

Right at the top of the to-do list are national unity and reconciliation. Without these, there can be no political stability, no economic development and no social progress. That is why it is important not to ‘rock the boat’. The question that then arises is both logical and unavoidable: is president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on the right course? Opinions are divided on Sirleaf’s track record, both in Liberia and abroad. In this book, I endeavour to contribute to a well-founded opinion on her presidency. In the process, it became crystal clear to me that much of Liberia’s contemporary history is still in the writing. And in my opinion, it is absolutely necessary that this actually takes place. I am convinced that there are enough Liberians who have been – and still are – closely involved in their country’s recent history who would be perfectly placed to write this story and should do so. Their names are to be found in this book. I offer my sincere apologies to those who I have not mentioned who are also qualified to take on this task. This publication by no means professes to be an all-embracing overview of the political history and economy of Liberia.

I first set foot in Liberia 40 years ago. Since then, with undiminished interest, I have followed events in this country, whose history fascinates me, whose vast economic potential intrigues me, and whose people have continued to captivate me throughout all these years. Sometimes, it seems as though nothing

⁶ Source: ‘Liberia: Our people are still poor’, January 29, 2015. Originally published by *The News* (Monrovia): <http://allafrica.com/stories/201501301120.html>, retrieved March 26, 2015

⁷ Source: ‘Liberia records highest infant mortality’, March 25, 2015: <http://www.thenewdawnliberia.com/general/7001-liberia-records-highest-infant-mortality-rate>, retrieved March 26, 2015

⁸ Source: ‘Which is the poorest city in the world?’, March 12, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/mar/12/which-poorest-city-world?CMP=share_btn_fb, retrieved March 26, 2015

undertaken in this country ever succeeds, but then time and again I am astounded by the enormous resilience of its people to pick up where they left off and make a fresh start. If this book can help increase awareness and knowledge of Liberia and generate greater interest in and sympathy for its people, it will have achieved one of its most important aims. I wish you great pleasure in reading it.

Fred van der Kraaij

March 31, 2015



Illustration 1 The Liberian coat of arms, with the national motto 'The Love Of Liberty Brought Us Here'

'The Love Of Liberty Brought Us Here'

'The Love Of Liberty Brought Us Here'

Monrovia is the capital of Liberia, on the coast of West Africa. With my wife Els, I am high up in the sky on board flight KL585 from Amsterdam. It is February 1, 1975. KLM flies from Amsterdam to Monrovia and back four times a week and the plane, a DC-8, is always full. The reason is the close economic ties between Liberia and the Netherlands. Trade relations between the two countries have always been good and, after the Second World War, economic relations expanded and flourished as a result of Dutch investments in iron mines and rubber plantations, exploitation of the tropical rainforests and infrastructural projects. Cordial relations also developed between the heads of state of the two countries. William Tubman, the longest serving president of Liberia, was a regular guest at the Royal Palace at Soestdijk and his wife Antoinette was a personal friend of Queen Juliana (see illustration 2). As usual, the Queen's husband, Prince Bernhard, took care of contacts with the business community. In the heyday of economic relations between the two countries, at the end of the 1960s, there were almost 2,000 Dutch citizens living in Liberia, making it the second largest Dutch community in Africa, after South Africa.

In preparation for my stay in Liberia, I read a lot about this country, of which I knew very little despite being reasonably familiar with the rest of Africa. Some years earlier, I had travelled through the Sahel region, where I had become acquainted with the Francophone countries of West Africa and their colonial and post-colonial history. At secondary school, an enthusiastic teacher had taught me all about the run-up to political independence in the British colonies in East and Southern Africa. His lessons on the chaotic early years of independence in the former Belgian Colony of the Congo in Central Africa had

also left an indelible impression on me. But I knew nothing at all of Liberia; for me it was what cartographers call *terra incognita*, unknown land. My preparations took me to the African Studies Centre in Leiden. There, to my great surprise and delight, I found comprehensive documentation on Liberia. This was thanks to the long-standing close relations between the Netherlands and Liberia, but I was only to discover that later. As I read, I became more and more fascinated by this country and its history.



Illustration 2 President Tubman and his family at Soestdijk Palace, 1956. Next to Tubman is Queen Juliana and, on the extreme right, future Queen Beatrix.

In the early 19th century, there were between one and two million Americans of African origin in the United States and a movement emerged to promote the 'return' of freed slaves and free-born black and coloured people to Africa. It was called repatriation, but this was not accurate, as they had never set eyes on Africa. Their forefathers had been shipped to the New World as slaves and they themselves had been born and bred in the US. The first, largest and most important of these groups was the American Colonization Society, a national private organization supported by the US government. Similar

organizations were soon set up in individual states, including Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky and Mississippi. The white directors of these colonization societies had different reasons for wanting to help their black compatriots to return to the continent of their forefathers: Christian motives, humanitarian principles, political considerations, self interest and, of course, discrimination – even racism. After all, racial segregation was normal in all states of the US and only the white population enjoyed full civil rights.

The first colonists from the United States arrived on what was then known as the Grain (or Pepper/Malagueta) Coast, which would later be renamed Liberia, in 1821. Tens of thousands were to follow them. The original inhabitants of the region called them ‘Americans’, because they behaved like Americans, dressed as Americans, and ate American food provided by the colonization societies. They spoke English and none of the African languages.

After the US parliament had adopted a ban on the import of slaves into the country in 1807, the American navy patrolled the African coast to help enforce it. Slaves freed from intercepted slave ships were put ashore in the colony of Liberia (after 1847, the independent state of Liberia).¹ ‘Dumped’ is perhaps a better word, as they were left entirely to fend for themselves in an area that was completely unknown to them (see box 1). They often came from the Bight of Benin and the Slave Coast (now Nigeria) and from Central Africa, especially Angola and Congo, and were therefore known to the American colonists as ‘Congo people’. They spoke no English or any of the local African languages, had their own African eating habits and customs, and were in effect culturally displaced in an alien environment.

The Malagueta or Pepper Coast, where the American colonists settled, was already inhabited by some 20 different tribes.² According to oral tradition, the Gola have lived in the region for the longest. It is unknown when they first came, but they certainly originate from Central Africa. The Gola were mainly farmers and hunters. Other tribes came from the drier Sahel, to the north. Around 8,000 years ago, some of them succeeded in penetrating the dense and very inaccessible tropical jungle in the coastal areas and settling in the region. They were farmers and artisans – potters, smiths and weavers – and related to

¹ When the transatlantic slave trade was abolished, also in 1807, the British took the slaves freed by their navy to Freetown, the capital of their colony of Sierra Leone, while the French created a separate village called Libreville, in their colony of Gabon.

² In Liberia, the term ‘tribe’ is used to refer to an ‘ethnic group’, by both official bodies and the general public. The terms have different meanings and, from a scientific perspective, the use of ‘tribe’ is controversial. However, as Liberians themselves are more familiar with the term than with ‘ethnic group’, and because the difference between the two is a matter for specialists, I follow Liberian usage in this book.

each other culturally and linguistically. This group included the Kpelle, Loma, Gbände, Mende, Mano and Gio tribes.

Box 1 The captives from the slave ship *Pons* (1845)

In December 1845, the American navy intercepted a slave ship call the *Pons*, out of Philadelphia. On board were no less than 756 slaves. There had originally been more than 900, but 150 had already died during the 14-day voyage from Cabinda to the Pepper Coast.

The 756 recaptured Africans who were put ashore in Monrovia on 16 December 1845 were 'in a naked, starving, and almost dying condition, and all excepting 21 under twenty years of age'. The majority (735) were thus still children, between 10 and 20 years old. Almost all were boys, with only 47 girls. They were in such a bad state of health that a further 25 died within 14 days of landing.

This was not the first time that recaptured Africans had been dumped in the colony. There was even a specially appointed United States Agent for Liberated Africans living in Monrovia. The American Colonization Society had always paid the costs of supporting recaptured slaves from its own funds, without ever receiving remuneration from the American government, despite the ACS claiming that it was legally obliged to do so. In the case of the *Pons*, however, neither the ACS nor the colony had sufficient funds to provide support for the enormous number of recaptured slaves.

It cost the ACS on average \$30 per person to help emigrants arriving in Liberia until they were able to support themselves. The Society argued that it would cost them much more to provide for the freed slaves from the *Pons* until they could look after themselves since most of them were still children. They had nothing and they had arrived naked.

As it did not have the funds to provide such a large number of captives with accommodation, clothing, health care and basic necessities, the ACS finally decided to find them homes with settler families. In 1845, the colony was still small, housing no more than 3,000 colonists and less than 1,000 families. Consequently, practically every settler family was 'allocated' a captive as a ward. Officially, the ward was a member of the family but, in practice, they were often used as an extra pair of hands. This is clear from ACS correspondence:

'(...) we place them in families who want domestics, and where by their labor they can greatly aid in their support. But these captives filled almost every family in the colony; (...)'

Source: US Senate, 31st Congress, 1st Session, Rep. Com. No. 14, In Senate of the United States, January 22, 1850.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, more newcomers arrived in two waves. One came from what is now Ivory Coast, to the east of present-day Liberia. They migrated because of the disintegration of the large West African kingdoms of Mali and Songhai further to the north, and consisted of Bassa, Belle, Dei, Kissi, Kru, Grebo and Krahn. The second group comprised Vai and Mandingos and came from the northwest, present-day Guinea. The Vai settled in what is now the west of Liberia. Unlike the other animistic tribes, the Vai are Muslim and are mainly known for being one of the few peoples of tropical Africa to have developed their own handwriting. The Mandingos came from what is now Guinea and Mali, and are also Muslim. They settled initially in the west but

later, as a consequence of their trading activities, spread more widely throughout the region.³

The American colonists called their colony Liberia – after the Latin *liber*, meaning freedom – and the capital Monrovia, in honour of the US president, James Monroe. In 1847, 25 years after the first successful landing by colonists, they made history by declaring Liberia an independent state, with a constitution written by an American Harvard professor and a flag that looked like the American one. The indigenous population was excluded from citizenship. The colonists called themselves *Americo-Liberians*, or *pioneers*. The national motto became ‘The Love Of Liberty Brought Us Here’. The official emblem of the republic shows one of the sailing ships that brought the pioneers to Africa, a plough that they brought with them, a dove of peace and a palm tree. The first nine presidents of Liberia were all born in the United States. Liberia did not have a president born in the country until 1884, but he was still an Americo-Liberian.

During my preparations I read that, for some years, the president of Liberia had been William Tolbert, a Baptist minister. He was a small, modest and intelligent man. For 20 years, he had been vice-president in the shadow of conservative president William Tubman. Tubman had ruled the country for 27 years with an iron hand and had treated it as his personal property, in the fashion of Papa Doc in Haiti, Liberia’s sister republic in the Caribbean. During William Tubman’s presidency, men had to wear a top hat and tails or a tuxedo at all formal meetings, while the women had to dress in elegant gowns, long gloves and silk stockings – very uncomfortable in the tropical heat. All public expenditures higher than \$25 (the American dollar was and still is the national currency) had to be authorized personally by Tubman. When he suddenly died after being re-elected for the seventh time, he was succeeded by Tolbert who emerged as a reformer, despite being – like Tubman – an Americo-Liberian. I became increasingly curious about this oldest republic in Africa, which had once been dismissed by Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* as a ‘black operetta’.

After a nine-hour flight, including a stop in Freetown, Sierra Leone, we approached the airport at Monrovia. In the final hours before sundown, I had seen the landscape below us gradually change. The Sahara desert had given way to the Sahel, which in turn had made way for a compact green mass of vegetation, the tropical rainforest. The coastal region of Liberia, Sierra Leone

³ They form three large language groups: the West Atlantic (Mel) group in what is now the west of Liberia, consists of the Gola and the Kissi; the Mande group in the north and northwest are the Vai, Mende, Mandingo, Kpelle, Mano, Gio, Loma and Bandi; and the Kru-speaking people, who predominantly live in the southeast, are the Bassa, Belle, Dei, Kru, Krahn and Grebo. Some languages are spoken by fewer than 50,000 people. The ten languages spoken by the most people – i.e. by more than 100,000 – are, in order of importance: Kpelle, Bassa, Grebo, Kru, Mano, Gio, Loma, Kissi, Vai and Gola. English, or rather a local variant of it – Liberian pidgin English – is also spoken in the country.

and Guinea-Conakry is one of the wettest areas on the continent. Around 200 inches (5 metres) of rain a year falls in the west of Liberia, more to the east this is 'only' 160 inches (4 metres), mainly between May and October. In the interior, on the 'plateau' – so-called because of its height, between 1,000 and 3,000 feet above sea level – there is less rain, but still around 80 inches (2 metres) a year. All this rainwater drains off via fifteen rivers or catchment areas that are roughly equidistant from each other and run more or less parallel, almost exclusively from northeast to southwest, to the coast where they flow into the Atlantic Ocean. Two of these rivers mark the borders with neighbouring countries. In the west, the Mano forms the border between Liberia and Sierra Leone and, in the east, the Cavalla separates Liberia and Ivory Coast. The hydroelectric potential of these rivers is a blessing, but the excessive rainfall and the high humidity – 100% at the end of the rainy season – make the region one of the unhealthiest on the African continent, giving it the reputation of the 'white man's grave'.

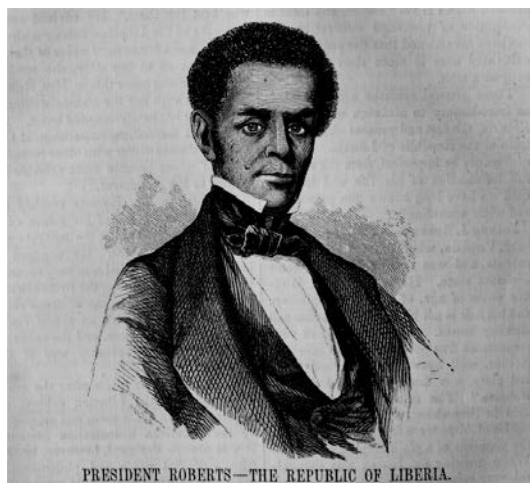


Illustration 3 President Joseph Jenkins Roberts, 1854

We landed exactly on time at Robertsfield International Airport, where KLM was the only overseas airline to have its own arrival and departure terminal. As we walked down the steps from the aircraft, the humid heat pressed down on us like a stifling, wet blanket. The temperature, around 85 degrees Fahrenheit, was a sharp contrast to the fresh air-conditioning in the plane. Robertsfield Airport is named after Liberia's first president, Joseph Jenkins Roberts (see illustration 3). Roberts was an exceptional man, originally from the state of Virginia in the US, who had come to Liberia as a small boy. He was an octoroon –

one-eighth black – and could hardly be distinguished from a white man. As an adult pioneer, he fought against both the indigenous population and the slave traders who contested the authority of the colonists, helped expand the territory of the colony, was a successful merchant and eventually led the colony to independence.

Joseph J. Roberts also founded Liberia College, which opened its doors in 1862 and was the predecessor to the University of Liberia. President Tubman signed the law founding the university in 1951. In my hand baggage, I had a contract with the State of Liberia, appointing me as a lecturer in economics at the College of Business and Public Administration, one of the six faculties at the university.

Monrovia, 1975

The telex message that I had sent from the Netherlands to the university's personnel department that we would be arriving on flight KL585 at 21.40 on February 1 had apparently not reached its intended destination. At least, when we arrived there was no sign of a representative from the university, not even after we had completed all the customs formalities and left the small KLM building. No problem – there were dozens of taxis waiting outside for potential customers and, before we knew it, our luggage had been loaded into the boot of one of them and we had little choice other than to get into the clapped-out Datsun.

Within a few minutes, we had left the lights of the KLM terminal behind and were driving along a dark road lit only by the taxi's headlights. The dark tropical night felt warm and humid, and a sultry wind blew in through the open windows. Robertsfield is 35 miles from Monrovia. The road passes the Firestone rubber plantation and Harbel, the village where the plantation workers live. The village is named after American rubber magnate and investor Harvey Firestone, who concluded an unbelievably advantageous agreement – for Firestone – with the Liberian government in 1926, and his wife Idabelle. Robertsfield's proximity to the large rubber plantation is no coincidence. The airport was constructed by the Americans in the Second World War to deliver Liberian rubber to the war industry in the US as quickly as possible.

The taxi driver was a talkative Guinean called Amadou Diallo. He inundated us with stories about Liberia, and between times about his own country, where the radical socialist Pan-African Sékou Touré ruled the roost. Guinea's first president, Touré had invoked the anger of the country's French colonial masters when Guinea elected for immediate independence in the historical referendum of 1958. Guinea was boycotted by France and isolated internationally. Amadou

told us that president Touré believed that the interests of the individual were subordinate to those of the community. According to Amadou, the ruling regime in Guinea considered nation-building so important that all means appeared to justify the ends, including repressing fundamental human rights. He said that the victims were mainly Peulh (Fulani), who suffered political and economic discrimination in favour of people from Sékou Touré's Malinké (Mandingo) tribe. Amadou Diallo was a Peulh who had fled his country and he made no secret of his dislike of Sékou Touré, who enjoyed considerable popularity in many young African countries. I was later to discover that Liberia, and Monrovia in particular, was home to many Guineans, who worked as taxi drivers, tailors and small-scale traders, and that most of them had fled to escape the hard hand of Sékou Touré.

Amadou Diallo drove us straight to the most prestigious hotel in Monrovia, the Ducor Intercontinental. It was not only the most luxurious hotel in the capital, and therefore Liberia, but in the whole of West Africa. Standing on Snapper Hill on Cape Mesurado, a rocky hill with a panoramic view across the city on one side and the Atlantic Ocean on the other, the ten-storey complex offered more than 200 rooms and suites (all air-conditioned of course, at a time when that was by no means to be taken for granted), three restaurants, a cinema, a tennis court and much more. It was an island of luxury in what would later prove to be an ocean of misery and poverty.

The following morning, I presented myself to my employer, the dean of the College of Business and Public Administration, Romeo Horton, a large and jovial man in his fifties. I had met him four months previously in the Netherlands, during a job interview that had taken place at the villa of a KLM director who was also a member of the Advisory Board of the college. The close relations between the KLM director and Romeo Horton were typical of the close ties between the Netherlands and Liberia, and illustrated the special status enjoyed by KLM in the country. It was not until later, in Liberia, that I realized that Romeo Horton was a very high-ranking Liberian, what they called a 'big shot'. My conversation with the light-skinned Horton was more of an introductory chat than a job interview; he laughed a lot and the decision to appoint me was made almost in passing.

The dean apologized for the fact that no one had been there to meet us at the airport to take us to Monrovia and made it clear that our stay at the Ducor would only be very temporary. The following day we moved to a more modest hotel, Traveller's Roost, strategically located downtown in the city's main thoroughfare, Broad Street. Not that there was a lot of choice. Monrovia had around ten modern hotels, with a total of 430 rooms. With a population of some 200,000, Monrovia was quite small, especially for a capital.

In most countries, an important trading centre or regional hub gradually evolved to become the capital. In Liberia, the reverse occurred: the country grew up around its capital. The first immigrants landed on a small island in the mouth of the Mesurado river. Originally called Dozoa, it was later renamed Providence Island. After a few weeks they settled on the nearby mainland, on Cape Mesurado, one of three capes in the country. For a short time, the settlement was called Christianopolis, but it was changed to Monrovia in 1824 as a token of gratitude towards American president James Monroe, who had made the whole migration venture of the former slaves possible.

The colony on Cape Mesurado, known as Liberia Colony, grew year by year as new waves of immigrants arrived from the United States and despite the lethal diseases and conflicts with the indigenous population. The expansion meant that new settlements arose, 20-odd miles inland. Colonization societies from various states in America also sent freed slaves and coloured people to the Pepper Coast, leading to the formation of three other colonies: Maryland in Africa, Mississippi in Africa and Bassa Cove. Eventually all four colonies merged to form the Republic of Liberia. Illustration 4, of Liberia Colony, shows which parts of the United States the colonists came from: from the north (Pennsylvania Colony) or to the south of the Mason-Dixon line, which marked the dividing line between the northern and southern states (such as Maryland, Mississippi and Louisiana).

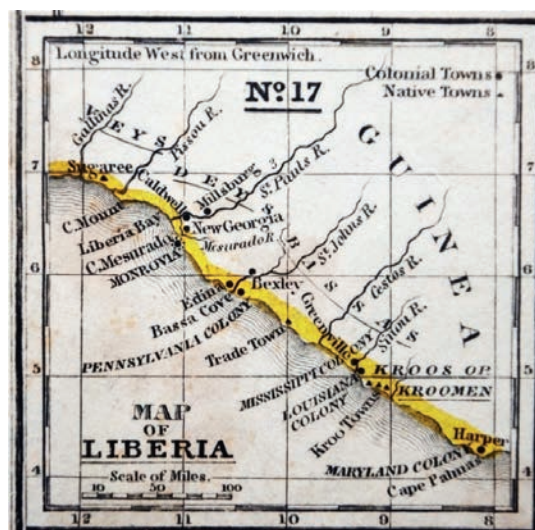


Illustration 4 Liberia Colony, showing the American colonization societies, 1839 (Mitchell)

Monrovia had around 1,000 inhabitants when the colonists declared independence. The population consisted of immigrants and slaves freed from intercepted ships, the 'Congo people'. The town grew slowly in the first decades after independence. Around 1900, it still only had an estimated 4,000 inhabitants, 2,500 of which were Americo-Liberians, who lived on the Cape, together with the Congo people. The indigenous people lived in a more northerly district known as Kru Town, which is now West Point.

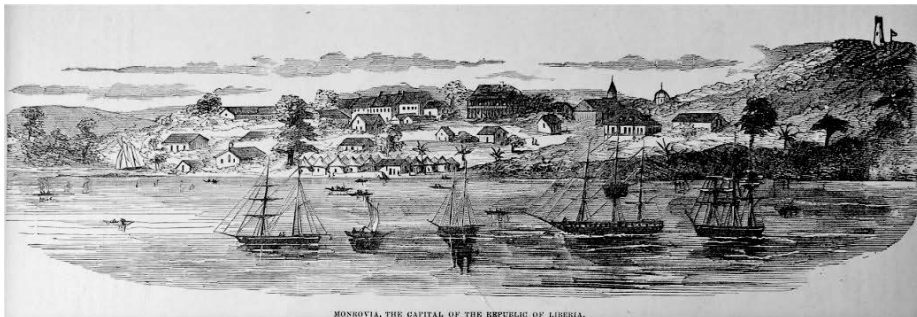


Illustration 5 Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, 1888

Box 2 The oldest foreign trading houses in Liberia

The oldest foreign trading houses in Liberia were German (E. Woermann) and Dutch (H. van Rijckevorsel and Hendrik Muller & Co: HMC). In 1862, HMC had offices in five coastal towns. In 1892, the *Oost-Afrikaansche Compagnie* (East Africa Company) took over HMC's trading activities in Liberia. The OAC still exists under the same name in the country, although it has changed owners several times, making it Liberia's oldest and best-known commercial enterprise.

Old Dutch maps of the Grain Coast already mention *het hujs van de Neerlanders* (the house of the Dutch) around 1600 in Cabo de Monte, the name given to the cape by the Portuguese. This probably refers to a trading post set up there by Dutch merchants in 1602. The Dutch West India Company (1621-1674, WIC I) also had a trading post in Cape Mount, in what is now Robertsport (see box 3).

The population of Monrovia grew with the expansion of modern economic activity. From the 1920s, the number of foreign merchants in Monrovia began to rise. There were Lebanese, American and European trading houses, especially German and Dutch. Both the wholesale and retail sectors in the country were in foreign hands. The Americo-Liberians kept their distance from commercial

Box 3 The oldest Dutch trade relations with West Africa: the Dutch West India Company

In 1505, Portuguese captain, explorer and cartographer Pacheco Pereira reported on a ship from Flanders that had been stranded on the Grain Coast in 1475, after which the 35-man crew had fallen into the hands of the cannibals that lived there. In referring to 'Flanders', Pacheco Pereira made no distinction between the Northern and the Southern Netherlands. In 1591, a captain from the Dutch town of Medemblik, Barent Erikszoon, was unfortunate enough to land on the island of Principe, in the Bight of Guinea, and was interned on the nearby island of São Tomé by the Portuguese. In 1593, after his escape, he organized a Dutch trading expedition to the area. Others from Holland and Zealand soon followed in his footsteps. Also in 1593, a Dutch captain called Cornelis Freeks Vrijer returned from Angola to his home port of Enkhuizen. The historical publications of Berent ten Broecke ('Paludanus', 1596), Pieter de Marees (1602) and Dierick Ruiters (1623) are important sources of information on these early contacts.

Around 1600, Dutch merchants had offices in both the Upper Guinea and Lower Guinea coastal regions: in Senegambia (the island of Gorée), and further south along the coast, in the present-day countries of Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ghana (Upper Guinea) and, even more south, at the mouth of the Congo River and in Angola (Lower Guinea). During those years, the first plans were floated for a West India Company, in the mould of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), which had been established in 1602. It took until 1621 for the First Dutch West India Company (WIC I) to open its doors. Its activities covered both the regular trade of goods and privateering: at the time, the Republic of the United Netherlands was fighting for its independence from Spain in what was known as the Eighty Years' War and, after Portugal was annexed by the Spanish Crown, also against the Portuguese. The WIC operated in the whole Atlantic area: the Americas, the Caribbean, and West Africa – both Upper and Lower Guinea.

One of the best-known feats of the WIC was the seizure of the Spanish silver fleet in the harbour of Matanzas, Cuba, by admiral Piet Hein in 1628. Much more important for the development of the WIC, however, was the conquest in 1637 of St. Jorge da Mina, the main Portuguese fort on the coast of West Africa, on the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana). The Dutch renamed the fort Elmina and it became the WIC's headquarters. Within a short period of time, the WIC obtained many other trading posts on the coast of Guinea, both by conquering them and by establishing them themselves, in the area between Arguin, in present-day Mauretania, and Benguela, in the south of Angola. Elmina would remain in Dutch hands until 1872, while the conquests of São Tomé (1641 – 1648), Angola (1641 – 1647) and Brazil (1630 – 1654) lasted for a much shorter period.

The Netherlands' strong trading position in Africa – that is, on the African coast – was accompanied by the rapid development of cartography, which produced famous Dutch cartographers like Blaeu, Doncker, Janssonius, Visscher, de Wit, Schley, van der Aa and many others. In 1668, Olfert Dapper from Amsterdam published his *Naukeurige Beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche gewesten* (Description of Africa), which became a national and international success. It was reprinted many times and translated into several languages. Like the famous cartographers, Dapper never visited Africa himself. They based their knowledge of Africa on ships' logs and talks with seamen. Dapper's famous book is probably based on the manuscript of a Dutch merchant who was in Cape Mount in the 1640s and it contains one of the first documented accounts of the Grain Coast.

activities, preferring a career in the civil service, politics or law. The indigenous population, predominantly Kru, Bassa and Vai, worked on foreign ships, as shop assistants and as domestic servants.

At the beginning of the Second World War, an estimated 12,000 people lived in the capital. The city was a poor sight at that time. There were no paved streets, electricity, sewers, running water, sanitary facilities or telephones. The big changes came in the second half of the twentieth century. After the war, a number of important infrastructural projects were carried out. A deep-sea port in Monrovia meant that it was no longer necessary to unload vessels at sea and transfer the cargo onto smaller boats to take it ashore. A bridge over the St. Paul River, just outside Monrovia, formed an important part of the rail connection between the country's first iron mine, to the northwest of the capital in the town of Bomi Hills, and the new port. Liberia's road network, which comprised little more than a road between the capital and the international airport, was considerably expanded with a road being built between Monrovia and Ganta, an important city near the border with Guinea, opening up the interior. All these projects were financed with American development funds.

When a census was carried out in 1962, for the first time since 1847(!), Monrovia counted 85,000 inhabitants, four times as many as in 1950. The vast majority of the newcomers were from the interior, while Americo-Liberians also moved to the capital. The distinction between the areas where the Americo-Liberians lived – mainly on the coast – and those where the indigenous population lived gradually faded. The latter settled more and more in the pioneering towns along the coast, from where Americo-Liberians increasingly moved to Monrovia.

More and more agricultural land around Monrovia had to make way for permanent habitation. The names of the new districts (Vai Town, Logan Town, Loma Quarter, Bassa Community, New Kru Town) clearly reflected the tribal origins of their inhabitants. With the Atlantic Ocean to the west and the numerous creeks and swamps on the other side of the Mesurado River to the east, the city was only able to expand to the north and south.

That is how Bushrod Island, to the north of Cape Mesurado, became part of the capital. The urbanization process swallowed up original pioneering cities like Brewerville and Virginia, some 12 miles from Monrovia. To the southeast, the same happened to places like Sinkor and Old Road. Even the town of Paynesville, originally 10 miles to the south of downtown Monrovia, became a suburb of the capital. In this way, an urban zone 20 to 25 miles long, shaped like an L with the corner pointing downwards, arose along the coast.

Map 8 Monrovia, 1960 and 2015



Map 9 Detailed map of Monrovia, 2015



The corner is a strip of land barely one and a quarter miles long with a connecting road, Tubman Boulevard, in the middle. To the south, the strip is bordered by the Atlantic, to the northeast by the Mesurado Laguna and extensive mangrove swamps. This creates a bottleneck that seriously disrupts the traffic every day between Bushrod Island in the north and downtown Monrovia, where the commercial centre and most of the ministries and other government services are located, and on the other side the more residential areas in the ever expanding southeast, including Sinkor and Old Road, and a little further out, Paynesville. Map 8 offers a clear picture of how Monrovia has developed in the past half a century, showing that it still covered only a small area in 1960 and how it has expanded enormously to the north and south.

Map 9 shows the capital's expansion in detail. A substantial part of the present-day population of Monrovia ('Greater Monrovia') lives in the area to the north of the mangrove swamps on the right bank of the Mesurado River. They live in suburbs with names that date back to the colonial era, such as Caldwell, New Georgia, Barnersville, Gardnersville and Paynesville. In this area, new urban agglomerations, like Chocolate City, have also grown up.

During my visit to Monrovia in 2012, I noticed that the immense growth of the city has been accompanied by an important shift. More and more ministries and other government services are now located in Sinkor, together with many service providers and the head offices of the numerous non-governmental organizations which have been active in the country since the civil war. The luxury villas that housed Monrovia's well-to-do citizens – Americo-Liberians, Lebanese and western expats – until the outbreak of the civil war have been replaced by hotels or offices, or have fallen into disrepair. Downtown Monrovia, 'on the hill', once the bustling heart of the capital, has become an area inhabited by those who cannot afford anything better. Because of its high population density, it is still an area of shopkeepers and independent craftsmen and there is a lively street trade, in which respect Monrovia is just like any other African capital.

When we arrived in 1975, almost a quarter of a million of people lived in Monrovia, a threefold increase in less than fifteen years. The vast majority had a tribal background, while the descendants of the pioneers and the founders of the republic – the Americo-Liberians – made up hardly 10% of the city's population. Their minority position was not evident from their grip on national politics and their share in the modern economy. It did not take me long, however, to discover that Liberia's much-praised political stability was only skin-deep and that I had arrived in a powder keg.

The University of Liberia

The oldest university in Sub-Saharan Africa is Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, founded in 1827, followed by the University of Cape Town in South Africa (1829). I am talking here about modern universities with a Western curriculum and am not counting old Islamic universities like that of Timbuktu, in northern Mali, where tens of thousands of students studied at the end of the Middle Ages and which was famous deep into the Arabic world.

Liberia College, which was integrated into the University of Liberia in 1951, was founded in 1862, making it one of the continent's oldest universities. In the mid 1970s, 1,600 students were enrolled at the university, divided over six faculties. In total, Liberia had some 2,000 university students. Cuttington College, in the interior near the city of Gbarnga, was the only other institute of higher education in the country.

Four faculties of the University of Liberia were housed on the narrow strip of land between the two parts of the capital ('the bottleneck'), diagonally opposite the Executive Mansion, the official residence of the country's president. The College of Business and Public Administration was one of these four faculties, and was also one of the youngest, being established in the early 1970s. It consisted of a management and economics department and an Economics and Management Research Center, which issued *The Liberian Economics and Management Review* twice a year. The majority of the more than 20 staff members were lecturers in management. After I arrived, the economics department comprised three members: a Liberian, who was head of the department, a Southern Rhodesian (or – as we would say nowadays – a Zimbabwean) who would become a very close friend, and myself. We taught some 400 students: 150 first-years, 125 second-years, 75 third-years and 50 fourth-years. Later, two Ghanaians joined the faculty staff, followed much later by three more from the Netherlands.

The students' great enthusiasm and immense eagerness to learn contrasted sharply with the physical facilities that were available. Our classrooms housed the bare minimum of furnishings. The students sat on old wooden school chairs, some of which had no writing board, a worn old wooden table served as a lectern at the front, and if we were lucky a ceiling fan circulated the warm, humid tropical air. In the rainy season, gusts of wind lashed the rain inside because the windows could not close or were simply missing. There was no chalk or erasers for the blackboards. I had to take them from one classroom to the other and, if I forgot, they would disappear in no time. Almost all of the students worked to pay for their studies themselves. Many of them taught at a small school in the capital, where chalk and erasers were as scarce as at the university. But worst of all was the lack of textbooks.

The university library extended over three floors of the main building and, according to the proud librarian, contained over 80,000 books. The Africana section contained some 5,000 publications, several hundred of which were about Liberia. Although the library could seat 200 to 300 people and was open 14½ hours a day, it was always busy. To my amazement, I soon realized that not a single student in my classes possessed any textbooks. Everything they read was either borrowed from the library or from a fellow student. Halfway through the first semester, I found out that the library had only three copies of the compulsory textbooks for first-year students of macroeconomics and microeconomics. I could hardly believe it: three textbooks for two groups of 75-80 students! For third and fourth-year students of international economics & trade and international financial institutions there were no textbooks available at all! It was not until later that I learned that the university had been placed on a publishers' blacklist for not paying for previously bought books. The man responsible for purchasing the books had embezzled the money.

The students had to make do with the notes they took during the lectures. Of course, that was not sufficient and I had to do something as I could not do my work properly. I decided to try a different approach. The compulsory textbook by a famous American professor, Paul Samuelson, was no doubt very suitable for American students. The long chapters on the American economy and juggling with billions of dollars, however, seemed unsuitable and certainly irrelevant for students in an African country with an annual national budget of hardly \$100 million. In the weeks that followed, I went searching for documents on the Liberian economy and public sector. I visited the ministries in downtown Monrovia, especially Finance and Planning & Economic Affairs, went to their publications and reproductions departments, and even talked my way into the offices of deputy ministers and sometimes even ministers. It was very stimulating to experience how the words 'University of Liberia' opened doors for me. I could borrow or get whatever I wanted – reports, studies, annual reports – some of them even with the ink still wet. The week after the foundation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in July 1975, I walked into the office of the Deputy Minister for Planning and Economic Affairs and left a little later carrying the original documents of the conference, which he had been kind enough to lend me.

In the evenings, I wrote a syllabus for the students about the Liberian economy, based on these reports. I found it very interesting and enjoyable, and fortunately it really appealed to the students, too. The majority of them were from the interior, and only a few had an Americo-Liberian background. The children of the wealthy elite did not study at the University of Liberia, but went abroad. Very occasionally, I managed to incorporate some more controversial material in my lectures, such as when the country's president, William Tolbert,

bought himself a Boeing 737 which cost more than the combined budget of all the country's primary and secondary schools. I cautiously nourished a political discussion which, at the same time, I would not allow – could not allow – during my lectures. I had every reason for this. A year before I arrived, the university's Board of Governors, headed by one of the country's biggest big shots and conservative hardliners, Richard Henries, had dismissed a critical lecturer from the College of Business and Public Administration. Unbeknown to me, I had taken his place. My predecessor's name was Togba-Nah Tipoteh and, in the decades that followed, I would hear much about and from him.

There was also another way to tackle the textbook problem. My wife, who worked at the Dutch Embassy, told me there were Dutch development funds available to buy textbooks for poor developing countries. In consultation with the university, I drew up lists of books missing from the university library which were necessary or useful for the economics students. This did not entail large sums of money, but for the University of Liberia and the students they were an important addition and offered certainty. The Dutch government donated the books to the university and I made sure that 'my' students were given priority when borrowing them. The university and the students were able to benefit from this effective and inexpensive support for several years in succession. It taught me that good development aid does not have to cost much. Later, I would discover many more possibilities like this.

My search for information on the Liberian economy also had another consequence. The contacts I made within ministries and the local offices of UN agencies provided me with a lot of useful data on the nature and structure of the economy and the public sector. It soon became clear to me that the national economy actually consisted of two distinct parts, with few mutual ties. On the one hand, there was the modern economy, primarily centred around exploitation of the country's rich iron mines, the plantations – mostly rubber – and the export of timber. Parallel to this was the self-sufficiency economy of the large majority of Liberians in the interior. There was a huge divide between these two parts of the economy, almost as large as the one between the population groups that derived their livelihoods from them. And there was a third group which played an important role in this economic system: foreign investors and the owners of the mines, plantations and timber export companies. I found out that there was a very complex and delicate network of relations, interests and intrigues between the local elite and the foreign investors. The more I came to know, the more it fascinated me. I began to expand my document search in Monrovia with interviews and visits to plantations, iron mines and timber companies, which took me to all corners of the country. Seven years later, this resulted in a dissertation on the economic

history of Africa's oldest republic.⁴ But before that came about, something completely different occurred.

The modern economy

Liberia's modern economy began with the arrival of Firestone and foreign traders in the 1920s, but only really took off with the exploitation of the vast reserves of iron ore that the country proved to possess. It was a Dutchman, H. Terpstra, who 'discovered' the ore. The oldest inhabitants of the area that is now Liberia of course already knew that the ground contained iron and also made use of it, but it was Dutch geologists who came across an enormous deposit of very high-quality iron ore in the Bomi Hills area in 1934 and made their discovery known to the outside world. It heralded a new era for the country, although it would still be some time before the ore was actually mined.

When that happened, it did not take long for Liberian iron to acquire international acclaim. In the 1960s, Liberia became the largest iron ore exporter in Africa and the third largest in the world. Four large mines accounted for the country's entire production of iron, and all of it was exported.⁵ Everything was in foreign hands, although the Liberian government officially owned 50%. The foreign investors included the largest German investor in tropical Africa and the largest post-war Swedish overseas investor, and American investors were also active in the mining industry. A substantial investment by the Dutch enterprise Wm. H. Muller & Co. in Liberia's first iron mine in Bomi Hills fell through at the last moment because of post-war exchange restrictions imposed by the Dutch government. But the American investors who did end up owning the mine mainly hired Dutch personnel for technical and administrative jobs (the first local General Manager was a Dutchman), a large part of the Bomi Hills ore went to the Dutch steel plant Hoogovens, and Dutch traders made a good deal of money out of it. Wm. H. Muller & Co. owned the exclusive sales rights for all countries outside of the United States and the non-exclusive rights within the US.

The Netherlands was well represented in the plantation sector, too. The main product was rubber, but there were also serious attempts to produce coffee, cacao, bananas and palm products on a large scale. The biggest investors were

⁴ The economic policy of developing the country on the basis of foreign capital, expertise and know-how is known in Liberia as the 'Open Door Policy'. This explains the title of my dissertation: *The Open Door Policy of Liberia, An Economic History of Modern Liberia* (Bremen, 1983).

⁵ The Liberia Mining Company (LMC), the National Iron Ore Company (NIOC), the Liberian American-Swedish Minerals Company (LAMCO) and the Bong Mining Company (BMC). See chapter 3.

Illustration 6 House of pioneers, colonists and Americo-Liberians



Illustration 6a
Americo-Liberian house, near
Bentol, Montserrado County,
1975



Illustration 6b
Americo-Liberian house, near
Bentol, Montserrado County,
1975



Illustration 6c
Americo-Liberian house,
Careysburg, Montserrado
County, 1975

Illustration 7 The four pillars of power in Liberia



Illustration 7a Executive Mansion, Monrovia



Illustration 7b Capitol Building, Monrovia



Illustration 7c Temple of Justice, Monrovia



Illustration 7d Masonic Lodge Palace, Monrovia

Illustration 8 University of Liberia



Illustration 8a
Stone monument, main entrance,
Monrovia campus



Illustration 8b
Campus, 1975. The white building now
houses the Business College (2014)



Illustration 8c
Academic procession with later Interim-
President Amos Sawyer (on the right,
wearing the dean's robe), 1977



Illustration 8d
Classroom in 2012, hardly different from
1975

Illustration 9 Views of Monrovia, 1975



Illustration 9a
Downtown Monrovia with Broad Street, panorama from the Ducor Hotel, 1975



Illustration 9b
City centre, Waterside with the Ducor Hotel in the background, 1975



Illustration 9c
West Point and Bushrod Island (back right) from the Ducor Hotel, 1975



Illustration 9d
Providence Island in the Mesurado River, 1975

American – headed by Firestone and Goodrich – but German and Dutch investors were also active. With its historic concession agreement dating from 1926, Firestone owned the world's largest rubber plantation and also the world's largest latex factory in Liberia. Dutch knowledge and experience – for the most part gained in Indonesia, where the Dutch were no longer welcome after 1957 – were much in demand, especially at Firestone and B.F. Goodrich, which were short of expertise in the field of tropical agriculture. To a lesser extent, the Dutch were involved in timber extraction, which mainly took off in the 1970s, when the tropical forests in neighbouring Ivory Coast were becoming depleted.

Gold and diamond mining in the country used to – and still does – take place in a setting strongly reminiscent of the late nineteenth century American Wild West, where lawlessness abounded and outlaws held sway. Gold can be found more or less throughout the country, though in varying quantities. Reports on gold deposits are very unreliable, as those involved have no reason whatsoever to be open about it. The unremitting interest of foreign investors, adventurers and traders is an unmistakable sign of the profitability of this industry. The same goes for diamond mining. The majority of the diamonds seem to be found in the west of the country, in the bed of the Lofa River and the area between the Lofa and the Mano River, bordering on Sierra Leone. Initially, the Dutch used to be active here too. The team of geologists that discovered the iron ore in the Bomi Hills in 1934 was actually looking for gold and diamonds. Official production and export statistics are very unreliable because many of the diamonds mined in neighbouring Sierra Leone are smuggled out of the country and find their way via Liberia to diamond-cutting factories in Europe, especially in Antwerp and Amsterdam.

The strong increase in foreign economic activity during president Tubman's period of office (1944-1971) – investments by Liberians were scarce – led to a substantial growth of government revenues, though this was far from optimal due to the generous investment conditions: without exception, all foreign investors enjoyed immunity from taxation for many years. And if they did have to pay tax, the rates were very low, for example for registering foreign enterprises ('tax haven') and ships ('flag of convenience'). On paper Liberia had, and still has, one of the world's largest merchant fleets, although the majority of the ships registered in Liberia never call at this West African country.

The success of the Open Door Policy – attracting foreign capital and knowledge at favourable conditions – led to a spectacular growth and transformation of the Liberian economy. At its peak, Liberia had one of the world's highest rates of economic growth, over 10% a year. A team of American experts researching these changes, however, came up with a very harsh judgment: there was growth, but without development. President Tubman's

government was not pleased. Even harsher was the judgment on the distribution of economic growth. Almost 90% of national income went to less than 3% of the population, then consisting of one and a half million inhabitants. These were the 45,000 descendants of the founders of the republic, the Americo-Liberian community. It was obvious that this situation was untenable, but the elite did not seem to care.

Serious problems arose when the economy declined in the second half of the 1970s. The modern economy, and government revenues, relied heavily on three export products: iron, rubber and timber, but exports suffered severely from the international recession, whereas imports considerably increased in value because of the rising price of oil, consequent international inflation, and the instability of the US dollar, Liberia's currency. So while government revenues were under great pressure, public spending rose sharply and, as a result, the budget deficit increased rapidly. To finance the public sector, including many unprofitable state-owned companies, more and more money had to be borrowed – at very unfavourable conditions. A considerable sum of money was also borrowed in 1979/80, when Liberia hosted the Organization of African Unity (OAU), estimated at \$100 to 200 million. By way of comparison: the annual budget at that time amounted to little more than \$300 million. A large part of the extra expenses went on a conference complex in Virginia, near Monrovia, the Africa Hotel with a swimming pool in the shape of the African continent and 51 adjacent bungalows for the visiting heads of state, a new building for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the capital and a presidential airplane. Inflated and fake invoices pushed up the costs even further. Only a small part of the money went to the construction of roads, bridges, and other useful infrastructural projects.

President Tolbert's government borrowed irresponsibly to finance all of this, rapidly pushing up the national debt. An interesting detail is that president Tolbert had promoted Deputy Minister of Finance Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to Minister of Finance in August 1979. In both positions, she was therefore responsible for the government's expenditure policy, including its policy on debts. In her autobiography *This Child Will Be Great*, the later president Sirleaf writes about this 'unwise, if not downright dangerous' behaviour and her futile resistance to president Tolbert's underestimation of economic and political reality. Later, as president, she would persuade Liberia's creditors to cancel the country's debts on a large scale.

Characteristic of president Tubman's and president Tolbert's policies was that, in the 1944-1977 period, total foreign loans (bilateral, multilateral and commercial credits) exceeded government revenues from concessions to foreign companies.

It was in this context of economic decline, rising national debt and unequal distribution of the profits of economic growth that the indigenous population increasingly took a public stand against the country being governed by a minority, raised its voice against the corruption, nepotism and the one-party system, and began to demand more political freedom and participation.

Illustration 10 The three pillars of the modern economy, 1975



Illustration 10a
Rubber: tapping rubber trees,
Firestone plantation, Harbel



Illustration 10b
Iron ore: LAMCO open cast
mining, Yekepa, Nimba County



Illustration 10 c
Timber: logging, Maryland
County

'The day Monrovia stood still'

As already mentioned, political power was in the hands of a relatively small number of families of Americo-Liberian origin and economic power was in the hands of foreigners who worked closely with the governing elite. In reality, the two parties needed each other. The foreign investors were bent on securing their economic interests – the supply of raw materials – and the Americo-Liberian political leaders on staying in power and skimming off part of the profits from exploitation of the country's natural resources.

The Americo-Liberian elite consisted of no more than 30 families, although they were never in power at the same time. During President William Tubman's reign, it was the Tubman, Padmore, Barnes, Grimes, Sherman, Weeks, Anderson and Yancy families who were pulling the strings. After William Tolbert succeeded Tubman, they were replaced by the Tolbert clan, comprising the Tolbert, Hoff, David, McClain, Holder and Pierre families. The political machine they all used was the True Whig Party, which had essentially been in power since 1878. Other political parties surfaced sporadically but since 1955 Liberia had in fact been a one-party state. The True Whig party had close ties with the Liberian Masonic Lodge, set up in 1867 and of which only Americo-Liberians could become members.

To the amazement of many, president Tolbert proved to be a reformer during the first years of his presidency. He criticized foreign investors and began to revise the concession agreements with them, starting with the hated Firestone contract from 1926. Furthermore, he changed the rigid anti-communist foreign policy of his predecessor and replaced the official Western dress norms with African clothing. Soon, he introduced slogans like 'Humanistic Capitalism', 'From Mat to Mattresses', 'Total Involvement for Higher Heights', 'Rally Time' and 'War Against Ignorance, Disease and Poverty'. Tolbert encouraged investments in agriculture, especially the production of rice, Liberians' main crop. Integrated rural development and self-help projects became key terms. His relatively progressive ideas and policies met with resistance from the more conservative elements in the True Whig Party and the families they belonged to. As a result, he could not evade the rivalry between the Americo-Liberian families and he responded by appointing more and more family members to official posts. And as the Tolbert family was one of the largest families in the country, all the key posts were soon taken by direct or indirect members of his family.

Box 4 How Vice-President William Tolbert became President Tolbert

William Richard Tolbert Jr came from one of the largest Americo-Liberian families in the country, not least because his father, William R. Tolbert Sr, had more than 20 children. William R. Tolbert Jr, an ordained Baptist pastor, was president Tubman's modest ('invisible') vice-president for nearly 20 years. He succeeded William Tubman, Liberia's president for 27 years (1944-1971) on July 23, 1971 after Tubman had died in a London clinic. Two months earlier, the two men had been re-elected in elections in which they were the only candidates – their party, the True Whig Party, being the only political party allowed under law. William Tolbert not only served out Tubman's truncated term of office but, after a minor legal adjustment, continued as president for the following four years.

Vice-president Tolbert succeeded president Tubman in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Liberia but, although the succession was peaceful, it did not go as smoothly as is usually reported. When President Tubman went to England for medical treatment, he had left the reins of government in the hands of a confidant, Secretary of State Rudolph Grimes. After Grimes received a telegram announcing the demise of Tubman on Friday July 23, he attempted to become installed as acting president. He argued that vice-president Tolbert, who had left Monrovia for a weekend at his Bellafanai farm in Bong County, about 200 miles from the capital, could not be expected to return to the capital within the prescribed term of 24 hours specified in the Constitution. However, Grimes met with fierce opposition to his plans from other cabinet members, notably Postmaster General Mac DeShield, and others loyal to vice-president Tolbert, including the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Richard A. Henries.

In the early evening of July 23, William Tolbert arrived in Monrovia in a borrowed Volkswagen – his own car had broken down – and, still wearing his short-sleeved safari suit, he was sworn in as Liberia's 20th president. Since that day, the open-necked cotton suit has been known as the 'swearing in' suit and, on most ceremonial occasions, has replaced the tuxedos and top hats that his predecessor liked so much.

One of his brothers, Frank, was the president pro tempore of the Senate and swore William in as president in 1976, after presidential elections in which he was the only candidate. Another brother, Stephen ('Steve'), was Minister of Finance, and owner of a conglomerate of companies holding monopolies in various areas. As finance minister, Steve Tolbert conducted the important negotiations with Firestone until he died in a mysterious plane crash. One of William Tolbert's daughters, Christine, was Deputy Minister of Education and

Illustration 11 President William R. Tolbert, Jr



Illustration 11a
Monrovia, with President Idi Amin of
Uganda, 1975



Illustration 11b
Visit to Mano River Mines, NIOC,
Grand Cape Mount County,
1977



Illustration 11c
Visit to Harper, Maryland County, 1978



Illustration 11d
Visit to Sanniquellie, Nimba County,
1980

had the monopoly on the import and sale of school books. Tolbert's eldest son (better known by his initials A.B.) was a prominent and influential member of parliament and president of the national trade union federation. The Minister of Defence, Burleigh Holder, was a son-in-law, the Minister of Information, Johnny McClain, was the adopted son of his eldest sister Florence, and the mayor of Monrovia Edward David, a nephew of his wife. The mayoress of Bentol, Tolbert's native village, was Lucia Tolbert, a niece. The Superintendent of Montserrado County was also a Tolbert, while the President of the University of Liberia was Advertus Hoff, another cousin. The Chief Justice, the highest judge in the country, was James Pierre, the father-in-law of his brother Steve. The list is much longer but too long to include in its entirety.

William Tolbert, who started out as a reformer, had already become corrupt after a couple of years by favouring relatives, protecting their economic interests and silencing those who criticized him for doing so. When finance minister Steve Tolbert abused his position during the negotiations on the purchase of a large plantation from its German owners,⁶ sidelining other potential Liberian buyers, one of Liberia's best-known and most honourable journalists, Albert Porte, wrote a scathing protest, describing the minister's acts as 'indistinguishable from open thievery, highway robbery and daylight burglary'. Porte was convicted of libel and given a heavy fine. The opposition magazine *The Revelation*, for which he worked, was banned – the court reaching this decision was presided by one of Tolbert's relatives – and the editors were jailed. When I interviewed Albert Porte about the purchase and some other cases a few years later in his modest house in Crozierville, he explained to me that behind the controversial takeover was a power struggle between the leading Americo-Liberian families, which the Tolbert clan won. After Steve Tolbert's untimely death, the court case against Albert Porte petered out, but it was too late. Not long afterwards, the situation came to a head and calls for political reform became increasingly vocal. Protests broke out, especially at the University of Liberia and at Cuttington College.

One of the most active organizations was the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA), founded by Togba-Nah Tipoteh, Amos Sawyer and Dew Tuan Wleh Mayson – intellectuals combining an academic role with that of political activist. Togba-Nah Tipoteh, known in Liberia simply as 'Tipoteh', is a Kru from the southeast of the country and was my predecessor at the university's Business College until he was dismissed by the political hardliners of the regime. Remarkably, and not without political significance, is the fact that for the first 30 years of his life he went by the name of Rudolph Nah Roberts. Amos Sawyer was one of my most cordial colleagues at the university. At the time he lectured in

⁶ The African Fruit Company (AFC). See chapter 3 and annex 3.

political science and he was, and still is, one of the greatest experts on the country's political culture and history. With his popular current affairs and discussion programme FORUM, broadcast on national television, he was much-loved among the inhabitants of Monrovia – in those days national television did not extend any further into the country. During the first civil war he would act as interim president for a couple of years. His background is unclear, but many Liberians believe he is an Americo-Liberian. This is probably because his mother grew up in an Americo-Liberian family in Sinoe County, but her tribal origin is Sarpo, one of the Kru-speaking people from the southeast of the country. His father is from Sierra Leone and only came to Liberia later in his life. It is unknown whether he has a Creole or a tribal background. Whatever the truth is, to me Amos Sawyer represents the 'real' Liberian, irrespective of background and prejudices.

Dew Mayson was a Cuttington College professor, born and raised in poor circumstances in the interior of Sinoe County. A fourth prominent MOJA activist, Boima Fahnbulleh, also a university professor, was a Vai from the west of the country. These four men – Tipoteh, Sawyer, Mayson, and Fahnbulleh – have been playing an important role in Liberian national politics for 40 years, and are still active. In 2014, as I write, MOJA still exists and Tipoteh is still its president.

Abroad, too, progressive Liberians started to rebel. In the United States, a group of Liberian students founded the Progressive Alliance of Liberia. PAL, too, had members of tribal origin, as well as Americo-Liberians. The organization was led by Gabriel Baccus Matthews. Among the many Liberian members with a tribal background were PAL's secretary-general Oscar Quiah, a Sarpo from Sinoe County, and Marcus Dahn from Nimba County. Later leading figures in Liberian politics Charles Taylor, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Winston Tubman were also involved in the organization, although they did not play a prominent role. Their participation shows just how much Liberian politics is a family affair, something I will return to later. PAL would go on to play an important role in the call for a multi-party system.

In the late 1970s, PAL registered as a political party in Liberia, encouraged to do so by president Tolbert for reasons which are unclear. Once established in Liberia, the political agitators could no longer be stopped. PAL fiercely attacked foreign investors, accusing Firestone of exploiting thousands of rubber tappers and calling for independent industrial action. It referred to the country's first iron mine, the Liberia Mining Company, as a symbol of capitalist exploitation and demanded that mining and timber companies immediately stop the degradation of the environment for which they were held responsible. The party newspaper *The Revolution* sold like hot cakes in the streets of Monrovia. But PAL's biggest success was a purely domestic affair: the price of rice.

Rice is the staple food of Liberia. The country had once been self-supporting, but that was before foreign companies employed tens of thousands of Liberians on the plantations and in the iron mines. Combined with a government policy that neglected agriculture, this led to more than 25% of national rice consumption being imported. Imported rice was mainly consumed in the urban coastal regions, while the interior remained self-supporting. In his early years, president Tolbert had already propagated higher domestic rice production, but to no avail. In the second half of the 1970s, he launched a new slogan: 'It's no joke, no more imported rice after 1980'. At the end of the 1970s, the government announced that it was going to raise the price of rice. The price of imported rice would go up from \$22 to \$30 per 100-pound bag, and that of locally produced rice from \$22 to \$25. A family uses at least one bag a month. With an average monthly income of \$80, this imposed a huge burden on the purchasing power of the Liberians. It was even worse for the unemployed. Monrovia alone had over 75,000 unemployed in a population of a quarter of a million.

I became directly involved in this issue. Together with a Ghanaian colleague at the College of Business and Public Administration, I was a part-time advisor at the Ministry of Finance. We worked for the Office of Fiscal Policy and Planning, which at the time fell under the Deputy Minister for Fiscal Affairs, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Although the proposal to raise the price of rice came from the Ministry of Agriculture, headed by minister Florence Chenoweth, we advised on this within the finance ministry. We had a number of substantive objections and some political reservations. We were not convinced by the argument that the low price of rice discouraged a production increase. In the last few years, domestic rice production had increased, albeit it slowly. Besides, in the past, price increases had never led to spectacular production increases. Furthermore, the number of commercial rice producers was small, so that they in particular would benefit from a price increase and not the self-sufficient rice farmers. But our biggest objection was of a political nature: president Tolbert was the country's largest rice producer. The public would certainly interpret the measure to be to his advantage. Moreover, the country's largest importer of rice was Daniel Tolbert, one of his many brothers (their father William R. Tolbert Sr had more than 20 children; see box 4). Our advice to deputy minister Sirleaf was short and sharp: abandon the price increases.

The city's people were indeed outraged about the proposal. PAL leader Baccus Matthews and others called on the Monrovia to protest against the proposed rise in the price of rice. It was April 14, 1979. "First they took our land. Then they took our money. Now they want to take our rice. No way!!" could be heard in the streets of Monrovia.

The demonstration, banned by the authorities, ended in a bloodbath. Liberia's indigenous population protested in a way they had never done before. The police fired at the demonstrators with live ammunition. There was large-scale looting; not a single shop was spared and government buildings, too, were ransacked. When I bought some Liberian pepper at a market in one of Monrovia's suburbs a couple of days after the event that went down in history as the Rice Riots, it was wrapped in a letter from a foreign investor that had come from the adjacent building of the Forestry Development Authority (FDA), which had been looted by the frenzied crowd. When the dust settled, 70 lives had officially been lost and more than 400 people injured, but the real numbers are probably much higher: 400 killed and some 1,000 wounded. We will never know the exact figures. There has never been an official investigation into what exactly happened on *'The day that Monrovia stood still'*, as Albert Porte aptly put it in a document some time later, in which he accused the political leaders. During the serious rioting, protesters would stop passers-by in the street and ask them to speak a tribal language. This had never happened before and it was clearly an attempt to identify Americo-Liberians, who hardly ever spoke a tribal language. The indigenous population apparently no longer accepted the rule of a minority denying them almost all rights and keeping them in poverty. But things would only get much worse.

The Maryland murders and their political context⁷

Ritual killings have probably taken place in the area that now forms the republic of Liberia as long as people have lived there. And the practice is not limited to this country; it also occurs in other African countries and on other continents. In traditional communities, there is a widespread belief that ritual human sacrifice is necessary to protect or advance the interests of the community. When the coastal area where Liberia now lies was still known as the Malagueta, Grain or Pepper Coast, it was infamous for its secret societies, ritual human sacrifices and even cannibalism.⁸ The 'Poro Society', for boys and men, and the 'Sande Society', for girls and women, form the backbone of tribal communities especially in Liberia and Sierra Leone, but also in parts of Guinea and Ivory Coast. What happens during the initiation ceremonies is secret and violations of

⁷ This section is based on *Ritual Killings – Past and Present, From Cultural Phenomenon to Political Instrument from the website Liberia: Past and Present of Africa's Oldest Republic* (published in 2005 by the author, based on personal observations and research, including interviews).

⁸ As reported by Olfert Dapper (*Naukeurige Beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche gewesten*, 1668), Willem Bosman (*Naukeurige beschrijving van de Guinese Tand- Goud- en Slavekust*, 1703) and Chevalier des Marchais (published by J.B. Labat as *Voyage du Chevalier des Marchais en Guinée, Isles Voisines, et à Cayenne*, en 1725-27, 1731) and others.

the pledge of secrecy are punishable by death. All initiates, as well as non-initiates, in these countries know that. An estimated half of the Liberian population is a member of a secret society and it is not unusual for the country's president to be among this number.

The Poro Society and the Sande Society are legal in Liberia, although some practices are forbidden or have been modified, like restricting the number of years of bush school, a period of initiation into the rituals and secrets of the tribe, usually at an isolated location in the jungle. Secret societies – like the Leopard Society, which could be found all over the area, the Snake Society and the Crocodile Society – in which ritual human sacrifice plays a central role are, however, forbidden by law. That does not mean that they no longer exist. On the contrary: for a long time, the government in Monrovia enacted laws but had no control over compliance with them in the interior. Consequently, traditional organizations and rituals, including ritual killings and cannibalism, could continue to exist almost without interference for a long time.⁹ The belief that consuming human flesh gives the individual special powers and protects the community proved to be still widespread and deep-rooted in Liberia in the second half of the last century. Remarkably, this was not restricted to traditional tribal communities; members of the Americo-Liberian elite also engaged in such practices. For them, as is clearly shown below, the main concern was not common interest but personal gain. The Masonic Lodge played a secretive role in all this, which was spoken of only in whispers.

This was, however, substantially different from earlier tribal rituals. In the second half of the twentieth century, what had once been a traditional cultural phenomenon became a political instrument. Public revelations in newspapers and on radio and television about the involvement of politically prominent people and candidates for prestigious political positions, including members of the Americo-Liberian establishment, shocked the nation. The two most notorious cases were the Maryland and the Sinoe murders, named after the areas where the ritual killings took place: Maryland County, in the southeast of the country, and Sinoe County, more centrally located on the coast. But such killings also occurred elsewhere in the country, especially during election time, as has been seen in other African countries in recent years.

In 1976, I interviewed a Dutch doctor who worked at the hospital in Robertsport, the capital of Cape Mount County in the west of Liberia, where the German doctor Werner Junge had worked 40 years earlier (see footnote 9). Six months previously, he had performed an autopsy on a young girl who had been

⁹ See, for example, Harry Johnston (*Liberia*, 1906), Richard Strong (*The African Republic of Liberia and the Belgian Congo – Based on the Observations Made and Material Collected During the Harvard African Expedition 1926-27, 1930*), Graham Greene (*Journey without Maps*, 1936), Werner Junge (*African Jungle Doctor – Ten Years in Liberia*, 1952) and Abe Guenter (*Jungle Pilot in Liberia*, 1992).

murdered and who was missing a number of organs. The police had quickly arrested a man and a woman who confessed to having committed the ritual killing at the request of a member of parliament representing Cape Mount County in Monrovia. The two alleged perpetrators had subsequently been transferred to the capital by order of 'Monrovia', after which nothing more was ever heard about the murder case. It had been completely hushed up.

In the second half of the 1970s, much happened in Liberia in political terms. In 1976, president William Tolbert was again sworn in after elections in which he had been the only candidate. A new term of office meant a new cabinet and, consequently, new political careers. Furthermore, there were parliamentary elections, for both the Senate and the House of Representatives. This, too, presented new opportunities for ambitious politicians. In addition, four prominent political leaders died within a short period of time: Steve Tolbert, the Minister of Finance and brother of the president, Everett Jonathan Goodridge, the powerful national chairman of the True Whig Party (TWP) and also minister of the interior (officially called the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Urban Reconstruction), vice-president James A. Greene, who hailed from Sinoe County, and McKinley A. DeShield, the mighty Secretary-General of the TWP and Postmaster-General with rank of minister in Tolbert's cabinet. These vacancies had to be filled. On top of that, the deceased vice-president and the two TWP big shots came from large Americo-Liberian families on which president Tolbert relied heavily. His power base was under threat, so he had to act swiftly, but politically he was walking a tightrope. While he wanted to increase the political participation of indigenous Liberians, at the same time he had to reassure the conservative forces within the party – who refused to contemplate sharing power with indigenous Liberians – that he would continue to act in their interests.

President Tolbert chose Bennie Warner, a bishop of the United Methodist Church in Liberia, as his new vice-president. Warner's father, Charlie Zeon Zeonbartaye, was a member of the Bassa tribe from Bong County and his mother, Eli Nboramba, came from Namibia, but he had been raised in a well-known Americo-Liberian family: the Warners (descendants of Liberia's third president, Daniel B. Warner). Moreover, through his marriage to Anna Harmon – also from a well-known Americo-Liberian family – he was firmly rooted in the Americo-Liberian establishment. In addition, the deceased Secretary-General of the TWP, McKinley DeShield, was his godfather. It was a remarkable choice on the part of Tolbert. It was only the second time in Liberia's history that a non-Americo-Liberian had become vice-president. More than 50 years earlier,

Charles King – one of Liberia’s most controversial presidents¹⁰ – had chosen Henry Too Wesley, a Grebo from Maryland County, as vice-president for his second term of office (1924).

In addition, Tolbert made changes at the top of the TWP. James Anderson from Maryland County, who had been the vice-chairman until then, became the new national chairman. During the Tubman period, members of the Anderson family had held important political positions but, as mentioned before, the 30 Americo-Liberian families that were traditionally in charge in Liberia never ruled at the same time, and the Anderson family, together with other families related to Tubman, disappeared to the back of the political stage after Tolbert’s take-over. As new vice-chairman of the TWP, Tolbert appointed a political confidant, Reggie Townsend, who would also deputize for him in his absence. At the same time, a new office of second vice national chairman was created. This position went to a politician from Nimba County, Senator Jackson Doe (no relation to the later president). Doe was a Gio and had been raised in one of the country’s most famous Americo-Liberian families, the Grimes family, which was one of the main pillars of Tolbert’s predecessor, president Tubman.

At that time, the national newspapers were crammed with cases of ritual killings, often ‘enlivened’ with pictures. The lifeless bodies that had been dumped somewhere were always missing vital organs or body parts. These killings occurred all over the country: in the interior and on the coast, but also in the capital. Not a single area was spared: Maryland County, in the east of the country, seemed to be worst affected, but cases were also reported in Cape Mount County in the west, in Lofa County in the northwest, in Nimba County, Bong County and Grand Bassa County in central Liberia, and even in Montserrado County and Monrovia. By way of illustration, I have included a number of articles from Liberian newspapers (see illustration 12). The cases reported in the media are probably only the tip of the iceberg. The alleged perpetrators were hardly ever arrested, and trials were even rarer. There were, however, two remarkable and notorious exceptions: the trials of the killers of Moses Tweh in Maryland County and of Princelett Hilton Teah in Sinoe County.

¹⁰ In 1930, president King and his then vice-president Allen Yancy resigned under international pressure after a commission of the League of Nations had determined their involvement, and that of the country’s political elite, in a forced labour and slavery scandal.

Illustration 12 Selection of newspaper articles on ritual killings, 1976-1980



Illustration 12a Liberian Star, July 15, 1977



Illustration 12b Sunday Express, November 6, 1977



Illustration 12c The Liberian Inaugural, October 3, 1979



Illustration 12d The Sunday People, March 30, 1980

‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’

In Maryland County, fourteen people were killed within a short period of time. It was clear that these were ritual killings, as all of the bodies were missing a number of organs or other body parts which, as every Liberian knows, are used for *juju*, a ‘medicine’ which gives power and strength. Even by Liberian standards this was a high number of murders. After the mutilated and lifeless body of Moses Tweh, a fisherman and popular singer, was found on the beach in Harper, the county capital, Tolbert decided that enough was enough. He initially fired Superintendent Daniel Anderson, his personal representative in Maryland County, for not having reported anything to him about the fourteen killings, taking insufficient action and even obstructing the police investigation,

and then the Superintendent and eleven others were arrested and accused of the ritual killing of Moses Tweh. Anderson was the son of the national chairman of the TWP. One of the other suspects was Allen Yancy. Yancy represented Maryland County in the House of Representatives and was a cousin of president William Tubman. He was the son of the former vice-president of the republic (see footnote 10) and had been presented with many national and international decorations, including – interestingly enough – one from the Netherlands.

It was as though the country had been hit by an earthquake, albeit a political one. Never before in the country's history had such big shots been accused of ritual killings, arrested and tried. The inhabitants of Harper and other parts of Maryland County lived every day in fear of becoming the victims of ritual killing. We lived in Harper at that time, in one of the most dreaded areas, on the peninsula at the end of an unlit road leading to the lighthouse. Between the start of this road, near the Masonic Temple, and a few hundred yards further down, just past the yellow painted mansion of the late president Tubman, Harper's inhabitants walked in fear at night. Too many people had disappeared without a trace and those who had been found later all shared the same fate: they had been mutilated before being killed. For the power of the *juju* lies in 'harvesting' the organs and other body parts while the victim is still alive and then consuming them.

Daniel Anderson, Allen Yancy and five other suspects – the others had died or were spared as state witnesses – were sentenced to death by hanging. Their convictions were upheld by the Supreme Court, presided over by James Pierre, the country's highest justice and also a member of the Tolbert clan. They were executed at dawn on February 16, 1979.

At 5 o'clock that morning, together with more than 15,000 people from Harper and the surrounding area, I stood in front of the gallows which had been erected a few days earlier. The crowd was excited and was making a lot of noise, despite the early hour. Next to me stood an Irish priest who commented without prompting on what was about to happen. 'They deserved it,' he said, with a fixed expression. We were less than a mile away from the prison where the convicted murderers had spent their last night. When the bus with the prisoners arrived, the chattering crowd fell silent, as if by magic. The silence was unreal and absolute. It was one of the most impressive experiences I had during all my years in Africa. Shivers ran down my spine and I had goose pimples. But before long I would have an even more impressive and more unforgettable experience.

Illustration 13 Selection of newspaper articles on ritual killings in Maryland County, 1977-1979



Illustration 13a Sunday Express, August 28, 1977

Illustration 13b The Liberian Age, October 28, 1977

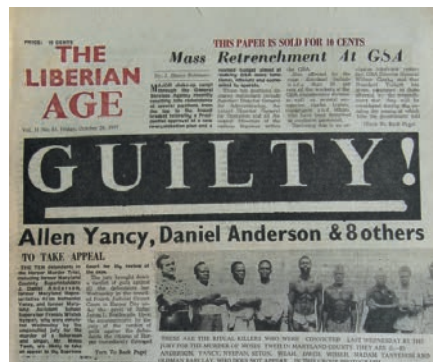


Illustration 13c The New Liberian, February 8, 1979



It was almost six o'clock and the sun was coming up. The sheriff started the countdown. Exactly on the stroke of six, the hangman performed his duty and the seven bodies dropped down with a jolt as the hatch under their feet was pulled away. The crowd remained dead silent for at least another ten minutes, then people started talking again, more and more and louder and louder. They walked over to the gallows where the seven lifeless bodies hung. The hoods that had covered their heads had been removed so that everyone could see who they were. People started dancing in the streets and shouting slogans. 'When you kill, the law will kill you,' my neighbour said, and he walked away.

A few days later, the TWP's national chairman James Anderson resigned, embittered because neither the party nor president Tolbert had supported him in his efforts to save his son. He vowed revenge. Within the TWP two clear camps emerged, dividing the 30 largest Americo-Liberian families. For outsiders, this demarcation line was difficult to see or to understand due to the numerous intermarriages and other personal ties. One of Tolbert's daughters, for instance, married one of William Tubman's sons, and another daughter had been married to a Yancy. Liberian politics is a family affair. At least, it used to be, until 1980.

Did the ritual killings stop after the execution of the 'Harper Seven'? Far from it. A few months after the executions in Harper, the mutilated body of Princelett Hilton Teah was found on the beach in Greenville, the capital of Sinoe County. In this case, too, big shots and high-ranking politicians and civil servants were suspected and arrested, as well as the 'Chief Boyo', as ritual killers are called in Liberia. The following year, I heard a BBC radio report on ritual killings in Maryland County. Among those arrested was the mayor of Harper...



Illustration 14 Public execution of the 'Harper Seven', Harper, February 1979

The following decades, too, saw many victims of ritual killings, although no one will ever know how many. They continued during the dictatorship of Samuel Doe (1980-1990), the two civil wars (1989-1997 and 1999-2003) and the presidency of Charles Taylor (1997-2003); and even during the presidency of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first democratically elected female president.

The military coup

At the end of the 1970s, there were two main opposition groups agitating against the Tolbert government and the ruling elite. In addition, there were a few critical civil society organizations, often with one specific aim, like the Citizens of Liberia in Defense of Albert Porte (COLIDAP), and a number of student organizations that were politically active. Some student leaders and journalists were also not shy in expressing their criticism. At first, the Tolbert government was remarkably tolerant, there was reasonable freedom of the press, and opponents and critics came from mixed backgrounds. The fact that some of them came from the Americo-Liberian establishment probably assured them a certain amount of protection and sympathy from the political elite, from which opponents with a tribal background also benefited.

The oldest opposition movement was the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA), whose most prominent members were Tipoteh, Sawyer, Fahnbulleh and Dew Mayson. As I mentioned before, MOJA was not a political party but rather a precursor of what would later be called a civil society or grassroots organization.

The second opposition group was the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL), led by Baccus Matthews, Oscar Quiah, Marcus Dahn and Chea Cheapoo, the adopted son of a prominent Americo-Liberian, Joseph Chesson, Minister of Justice under president Tolbert.¹¹ In early 1980, PAL had transformed itself into

¹¹ According to unconfirmed rumours and 'gossip' circulating around this time, Baccus Matthews had been a ward of president Tolbert. Author James Ciment mentions this without further elaboration in his recent book *Another America. The Story of Liberia and the Former Slaves Who Ruled It* (New York, 2013, p.231). However, the truth of this relationship is neither clear nor confirmed. According to a well-informed Liberian source, Matthews' grandmother was secretary of the Senate for many years – when William Tolbert (as vice-president) was its president pro tempore. According to this source, William Tolbert sent Gabriel Baccus Matthews to the US on a scholarship with a post at the Liberian Consulate in New York (vice consul) to save Matthews from arrest. So there may be some truth in the rumours. It is interesting to note that in the mid-1970s Gabriel Baccus Matthews had returned to Liberia where in 1975 he was editor-in-chief of *The Revolution*, an opposition magazine (see above). It is also alleged that George Boley, a Krahn who would make a rapid political career after 1980, had been adopted by William Tolbert. It is always difficult to find confirmation for rumours like these, for which Liberia is notorious, unlike the adoption of Chea Cheapoo by Minister of Justice Joseph Chesson, mentioned in the main text, which is widely known.

an official political party, the Progressive People's Party (PPP). This was an important event, signifying the formal end of the unofficial single-party state that Liberia had become under president Tubman. There were all kinds of links between MOJA and PPP, and the leading figures of the two movements had close ties. Yet, there were differences and disputes between certain individuals, both between and within each of these organizations.

When the PPP demanded that president Tolbert resign and its political leaders called the population out on general strike to back up their demand, they were arrested for wanting to overturn the government by force. It was March 1980 and these events were still unfolding when my wife and I arrived in Monrovia with our two-year-old son on the last day of the month.

We had left the country shortly after the Rice Riots in 1979. My sabbatical year in Harper, Maryland, was over, though I was far from finishing my dissertation. In the meantime I had found a new job with a rural development project in Burkina Faso, one of the poorest and least developed countries in the Sahel, in fact on the whole African continent. Like most Sahel countries, Burkina Faso did not have a seaport. The closest port was at Abidjan, in Ivory Coast, some 700 miles from Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso and soon to be our new home. At the time it was customary for expats to clear their private cars through customs themselves, something I was not looking forward to. Earlier experiences, in the port of Monrovia, had taught me that you need a good dose of patience to not blow your top in the face of all the Kafkaesque bureaucratic obstacles, and a thick skin to resist corrupt customs officers, to bring the clearance procedure to a successful conclusion swiftly and without paying extra. As I had got to know Monrovia well by then and knew that many of my former students worked in the port, I thought it would be easier to clear our car through customs in Monrovia than in the unknown city of Abidjan. We would then drive to Burkina Faso via the north of Ivory Coast.

Tensions rose quickly after the government had set a substantial price on the heads of PPP members and imprisoned a number of them. Tolbert was under great pressure from the hardliners of the regime to not give in. From conversations I had in the evenings in Monrovia with friends, former university colleagues and former students, it became clear to me that considerable problems were to be expected on April 14, the first anniversary of the Rice Riots. In the meantime I had been able to pick up our new car from the port without too much trouble – indeed with the help of former students. It was a Peugeot 304 family model, as Els was five months pregnant with our second child.

It seemed more sensible not to wait for Monday April 14, and we decided to leave for Ouagadougou the day before. We would stock up with provisions, fill up the car for the more than 650-mile drive and buy CFA Francs, and leave early

on Sunday. Buying the groceries did not take long. As the car did not have air-conditioning, we could only take non-perishable food and a good supply of drinking water. On Waterside, in the commercial centre of Monrovia near the port, I bought almost 160,000 CFA Francs for 700 dollars from money changers in the street. That would be enough for the first couple of days in Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso. We were ready to go.

On Saturday April 12, we awoke to the sound of gunfire - individual shots and the rattle of automatic firearms. My initial reaction was surprise, followed by disbelief. Immediately, I turned on the radio and there was the inevitable, almost unbelievable news. Cold shivers ran down my spine, despite the tropical heat and humid air, as I heard the newscaster read out the text in a monotonous, nasal voice:

God is tired. After 133 years the enlisted men of the Liberian Army led by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe have toppled the Government because of rampant corruption and the continuous failure of the Liberian Government to effectively handle the affairs of the Liberian people. No plane is allowed to come in. No plane is allowed to go out.

Luckily enough, we were staying with Judy Sims, the American Deputy Resident Representative for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Through her, we soon found out what had happened. In the early morning of April 12, 17 enlisted men and non-commissioned officers of the Armed Forces of Liberia, the official army, had forced their way into the Executive Mansion, shot their way through to the bedrooms of president Tolbert and his wife Victoria, and killed – or rather, slaughtered – the president on the spot.

The coup resulted in the first president of tribal origin in the history of the country. It is tragic that William Tolbert, who started his presidency as one of Liberia's most progressive presidents – he was even one of the first presidents who spoke a tribal language – became the victim of the conflict that had typified relations between the Americo-Liberian colonists and the Afro-Liberian population since the colonists had set foot ashore in 1821.

The coup and Tolbert's death were also surprising for a different reason. President Tolbert hardly ever spent the night at the Executive Mansion. He almost always stayed in his native village of Bentol, near Monrovia. According to persistent rumours, this was because he was superstitious. He was firmly convinced that his predecessor, President Tubman, had ordered ritual ceremonies to be performed at the Mansion that would bring him bad luck if he were to spend the night there. There is no clear explanation for why, on this night of all nights, he unexpectedly stayed at the Executive Mansion. The coup came as a surprise to everyone. Even the otherwise well-informed American embassy, with well over 500 employees one of the largest in Africa and most

probably the CIA's headquarters on the continent, had been completely surprised by it, according to American ambassador Julius Walker, who I interviewed on the matter later. And yet rumours soon circulated in Monrovia that, during the night of the coup, white men speaking non-Liberian English had been seen around the Executive Mansion, which was only a few hundred yards away from the American embassy.

According to other unconfirmed rumours, president Tolbert's days were numbered anyhow, as two competing military groups were out to depose him. It is not clear to what extent these groups knew of each others' plans. "One group had the blessing of the Americans," Tom Kamara, one of Liberia's best-known journalists, told me one month before his unexpected death. "That group was under the command of Major William Jarbo and had planned to ambush the presidential convoy between Monrovia and Bentol and overpower the president. The second group consisted of a small number of lower-ranking officers and ordinary soldiers, here in Monrovia. When Tolbert decided at the last moment to spend the night in the Executive Mansion, it was they who struck during the night and killed him."

This interpretation is in line with the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up after Liberia's second civil war (1999-2003). The report describes president Tolbert's foreign policy, which was very different to that of his predecessor, William Tubman – whose policy had been strictly anti-Communist – and which the US felt was undesirable and threatening. On the economy, too, Tolbert had indicated that he would follow a completely different policy than Tubman, demanding that the generous concession agreements with foreign investors, including American companies (Firestone!), be revised. Was president Tolbert's refusal to permit the US to make use of military facilities in Liberia the final straw? According to the report, 'In 1979 Tolbert refused to allow the bunkering of the US Rapid Deployment Force at Roberts International Airport. This refusal embarrassed both the CIA and the Pentagon who were now prospecting for leadership change in Liberia, lending support to Major William Jarbo, a US trained Ranger.'¹²

After the coup

That morning of April 12, we were glued to the radio. Judy was constantly on the telephone – by some miracle, the telephone connections had remained intact – and we tried to obtain as clear a picture as possible of what had happened. Military coups were by no means uncommon, but a violent regime

¹² Republic of Liberia, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final report, Volume II: Consolidated Final Report*, 2009, p. 111.

change in which the head of state was killed was exceptional, even in Africa at that time. I could remember only a few cases (see box 5).

During the day there was incessant gunfire. We could only guess that they were shots of joy by power-drunk soldiers or attempts at intimidation by the new rulers. It did not sound like fighting and this was confirmed by the information Judy received on the telephone. Going out in the street to size up the situation ourselves was completely out of the question. We were safe in a compound inhabited by UN personnel and family members of the Liberian owner, a former Minister of Finance. In downtown Monrovia, hundreds of people were arrested, including virtually the whole cabinet and the TWP leadership. Clearly the day of reckoning predicted back in 1947 by the American Raymond Leslie Buell had come to pass.¹³ The witch hunt for Americo-Liberians was in full swing.

Box 5 Violent military coups in Africa

I estimate the number of successful and unsuccessful military coups in Africa between 1960 and 1980 at around 200. The number of really unsuccessful coups is hard to determine because of often politically motivated accusations. In most cases, after a successful coup, the deposed president fled abroad and only a few ended badly for the incumbent president.

President William Tolbert was the fourth African president not to survive a military coup. In 1963, president Sylvanus Olympio of Togo was killed during a coup. In Madagascar, Colonel Richard Ratsimandrava was shot after having been president for only one week in early 1975. A few months later, coup perpetrators killed president François Tombalbaye of the Central-African country of Chad.

In two other countries, the incumbent presidents did not survive a military coup, even though the coups were unsuccessful. In Nigeria, this is how General Ironsi met his end in 1966 and a decade later, in 1976, General Murtala Muhammed. A year later, president Marien Ngouabi, also a high-ranking army officer, died in Congo-Brazzaville during an unsuccessful coup.

In two other African countries, the heads of state were killed after successful coups. The Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie was killed a year after the successful military coup of 1974 by his successor, Mariam Mengistu, the 'Red Emperor'. And dictator Francisco Macias Nguema of Equatorial Guinea was deposed by his cousin Teodoro Obiang Nguema in 1979 and executed after a mock trial.

While we were having lunch, there was suddenly a loud and insistent ringing of the doorbell. In the doorway stood a nervous young Americo-Liberian woman, a daughter of the house owner, holding a large box wrapped in brown

¹³ Raymond Leslie Buell, *Liberia: A Century of Survival 1847-1947* (Philadelphia, 1947). See recommended reading.

paper which she held out to Judy. “These are our family jewels,” she said. “Diamonds, gold and silver. Please keep them for us. If the soldiers come to get us we will certainly lose them. They are in safe hands with you, you’re with the UN, and we will get them back from you later.” Judy was shocked by the suggestion of using the diplomatic status of the UN to protect the material interests of this rich family and refused to accept the valuable box of jewels, no matter how much the woman pleaded with her. “I cannot do that,” she said. “I have a responsibility towards my guests, too.” She pointed to us. “A small child and a heavily pregnant woman.” The Americo-Liberian woman left and I wondered what was going through her mind. An hour later, four army vehicles crammed with soldiers entered the compound, their rifles and other firearms pointing into the air from all sides. They stopped in front of the house of the owner of the compound. We did not wait to see how events unfolded and sought the safety of the bathroom, in case the situation turned violent. Through a small window, I could see the owner’s family being taken away. It was a shocking experience. Three jeeps left the compound with the prisoners, while another stayed behind. The soldiers entered the house. I thought about the jewels and wondered where they were.



Illustration 15 Soldiers arrest the Americo-Liberian family in our compound, Congo Town, Monrovia, April 12, 1980

Two days later our curiosity got the better of our fear and caution. We – that is Judy, Els (five months pregnant), our two-year-old son Anton and myself – left the compound, which was situated on the outskirts of the capital, in a car with a UN license plate and drove slowly and carefully to the centre. Everywhere in the

streets of Monrovia we saw people dancing and singing “Finally we are independent!” The display of military power was still in evidence everywhere, with soldiers behaving as if they were invincible.

In the days that followed, I returned to the city on several occasions and it was not unusual, if I was in a taxi, for it to be stopped by a soldier waving his rifle. Most of the time they just wanted a free ride, which I did not like at all, but for different reasons than the taxi driver. When I was sitting in the back with someone, which was usually the case, the soldier would sometimes casually sling the rifle over his shoulder, the barrel pointing towards the back seat. If I were sitting in the front and he took a seat in the back, I would not feel comfortable either as I did not know in which direction his rifle was pointing. But it did not stop me from driving around: I had to find out when and how we could best leave the country for Ouagadougou.

The journey almost did not go ahead at all. On the fourth day after the coup, soldiers turned up in the compound. Judy was at work at the UNDP offices, and Els and I had stayed behind at her house with our son. We saw the soldiers starting to requisition the cars in the courtyard, where our brand-new Peugeot was also parked. When they demanded the car keys, Els swiftly motioned to me to keep out of their sight. Then she walked towards them, sticking her round belly out as far as she could, and started to cry uncontrollably. In Liberian pidgin English, she sobbed “My husband gone-oh. He not there and he took the car keys”. I held my breath, anxious to see if the tragicomedy would be successful and if the trick would work. I heard a male voice say “Missie, you don’t cry-oh, no mayah! You don’t cry, missie.” Then they drove off in the confiscated cars. In most cases, the cars were found later with an empty tank, and some were severely damaged as most soldiers had never driven a car before.

The day after the coup the leader, Sergeant Samuel Doe, had announced on the radio that he was the new head of state and introduced his cabinet. It consisted of previously unknown soldiers – who, without exception, promoted themselves to considerably higher ranks – and civilians, including a number of well-known PPP and MOJA leaders who had been freed from prison. Baccus Matthews was hastily appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chea Cheapoo became Minister of Justice, and Tipoteh Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs. Fahnbulleh became Minister of Education and Oscar Quiah Minister of the Interior. Most of them heard about their appointments on the radio. George Boley became Doe’s right-hand man (see footnote 11). Like Doe, who had in the meantime promoted himself to General, Boley was a Krahn. This tribe lives in the east of the country, on the border with Ivory Coast. It is one of the country’s smallest tribes, comprising 50,000 people at the most.

How many people fell victim to the coup will probably never be known. President Tolbert’s body was dumped in a mass grave in downtown Monrovia

together with twenty others. In the first few days, anarchy prevailed and there were lootings, murders and rapes.



Illustration 16 The new cabinet, April 19, 1980, Weekend News

Later, when I interviewed Julius Walker, who was the American ambassador in Liberia at the time of the coup, he told me that, in those first few weeks, nobody knew where they stood, neither he nor his Russian colleague. Colonel Gaddafi's Libya was the first country to recognize the military government, but it was not clear whether the coup had been ideologically inspired. It was the time of the Cold War and there was a lot at stake for the US. The American

embassy was a stepping stone for CIA agents to the rest of the African continent. Just outside Monrovia were the transmitting stations of the Voice of America, which broadcast all over Sub-Saharan Africa. In one of the capital's suburbs, there was the huge Omega communication tower, used to monitor shipping in the Atlantic Ocean. The world's largest rubber plantation, owned by Firestone, was located in Liberia. A few days after the coup, Walker was summoned to meet Samuel Doe, the brand-new general and head of the People's Redemption Council, as the perpetrators of the coup called themselves. To Walker's dismay, he recognized the ostentatious watch the 28-year-old new head of state was wearing as having belonged to his recently killed predecessor. Walker told me during our interview that at the end of his conversation with Doe, during which it became clear that the coup had not been aimed at the Americans and their interests, he cautiously mentioned the watch. Fortunately, Doe was not offended at his remark and, during later conversations, he wore a different watch.

Well over a week after the coup, the borders were re-opened. This meant that we could leave, but obviously we wanted to make sure first that the situation in the interior was safe and stable. When I went to the Bureau of Immigration to collect our exit visa, they told me that an armed escort was compulsory. Of course, this cost extra money and I wasn't sure about the legitimacy of the new rule, but I was in no position to question it. I had no choice. Besides, it did have its advantages: with an armed policeman in the car we would be less easy prey for eager soldiers after our possessions, including our new car.

Our farewell to Monrovia was neither difficult nor emotional. We felt only relief when we drove out of the city around mid-morning. Liberia's road network consists mainly of unpaved roads, which are heavy going in the rainy season. Between Monrovia and Totota, a provincial capital located in the central interior, there is 90 miles of asphalted road. This road ends at president Tubman's large farm, on the outskirts of Totota. The remaining 160 miles to the border, in Nimba County, are less comfortable and rather unpleasant because of the many potholes and the clouds of red sand caused by other road-users. But we were happy to put up with the discomfort. Our escort decided not to drive with us all the way to the border with us, leaving us 60 miles earlier in Ganta, where he turned out to have relatives. This was no coincidence, of course, but at that moment I didn't care.

We reached the border at four o'clock in the afternoon, well in time for the six o'clock curfew, which was still in force. When we produced our passports, one of the military border guards pointed at our car and the luggage on the roof, without saying a word. The silent hint meant that he expected a 'dash' in exchange for not checking our luggage. A dash is the Liberian term for a small

bribe which, according to tradition, was introduced centuries ago by the Dutch on the Pepper Coast to ease business transactions. I had never given anyone in Liberia a dash, and I had no intention of doing so now. My stubborn refusal meant that I had to take all of our carefully tied down suitcases, bags and boxes off the roof rack. By then, the border guards had realized that they were not going to get any money and hardly looked at the pile of luggage, after which I carefully put everything back on the rack and tied it down safely. Boiling on the inside but polite on the outside, I accepted the stamped passports and, with a great sense of relief, we finally crossed the rickety wooden bridge forming the border with Ivory Coast.

When we arrived at the Ivorian customs office, we discovered that it was shut. It had closed at five o'clock and would not open again until the next day. There was nothing we could do but turn around and drive back to the Liberian border post. By now, it was dark and the curfew was in force – something which should not be taken lightly in Liberia, as we had learned from experience in Monrovia. We were stuck on the border, and we couldn't go forward or backward. There was nothing else for it than to spend the night in the car, a rather uninviting prospect because of the mosquitoes. To our amazement, the soldiers who had made our lives so difficult before came over and offered Els one of the small rooms at the border post for the night. They were clearly awestruck by her round belly. "Missie, you got belly, s'pose you deliver tonight. No mammie, you cannot sleep in the car." We had not expected this kindness after their failed attempt to extract money from us only a couple of hours before. Nevertheless, we decided to turn down their offer and stayed in the car. The soldiers walked around the car the whole night long, which was very reassuring. What harm could come to us now? The next morning we cheerfully thanked our involuntary hosts for taking care of us and crossed the border for the second time. This time we were successful.

In the afternoon we took a short break and I listened to my favourite BBC programme *Focus on Africa*. It was April 22, ten days after the coup. The reporter described a mass execution in Monrovia. On the beach between the Executive Mansion and the Barclay Training Center, where the soldiers' barracks were located, thirteen people had been publicly executed in a horrendous manner after a 'trial' barely meriting the name. All were Americo-Liberians, former members of Tolbert's cabinet and high-ranking TWP officials. Only four ministers had been lucky enough to escape, including Minister of Finance and later president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

Those executed included leading figures of the regime: the chairman of the TWP, E. Reginald Townsend, the treasurer of the TWP, P. Clarence Parker, the speaker of the House, Richard A. Henries, the president of the Senate, Frank Tolbert (brother of the president), the chief justice, James A. Pierre, also a

member of the Tolbert clan, plus a number of ministers and former ministers (see box 6).

Among those executed was the Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs, David Franklin Neal. I knew him quite well and thought he was a competent and rather likeable man, despite the distance I usually kept when meeting big shots who had close ties with the regime. During one of our conversations at the house of Romeo Horton, dean of the Business College and my 'boss', Neal had once confided to me that he realized that he was part of a corrupt and elitist regime, but that he had no choice and tried to make the best of it in the circumstances. I thought about this conversation while I was listening to the BBC's report on the executions.

Box 6 The mass execution at Redemption Beach, Monrovia, April 22, 1980

Vice-president Bennie Warner and four ministers escaped the firing squad: Estrada Bernard (Minister of Labour Youth and Sports), Elwood Dunn (Minister of State for Presidential Affairs), Johnny McClain (Minister of Information) and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Minister of Finance).

Vice-president Bennie Warner and ministers Johnny McClain and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf were the only high-ranking government officials with tribal roots, though all three were firmly rooted in the Americo-Liberian establishment. Johnny McClain was raised by President Tolbert's sister. Bennie Warner was raised by the Warner family (see above). Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's tribal roots and Americo-Liberian background are described in chapter 3. It is interesting to note that minister Estrada Bernard is the brother-in-law of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

Below is the list of executed government officials and TWP leaders (based on the autobiography of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf).

The thirteen men executed on the beach were:

- 1) Frank E. Tolbert, President pro tempore of the Senate, brother of President William Tolbert
- 2) Richard A. Henries, Speaker of the House
- 3) E. Reginald Townsend, National Chairman of the True Whig Party
- 4) P. Clarence Parker, General Treasurer of the True Whig Party
- 5) James A. Pierre, Chief Justice
- 6) Joseph J. Chesson, Minister of Justice
- 7) C. Cecil Dennis, Minister of Foreign Affairs
- 8) Frank J. Stewart, Director of the Budget
- 9) James T. Phillips, former Minister of Agriculture and of Finance
- 10) Cyril Bright, former Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs
- 11) David F. Neal, Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs
- 12) John W. Sherman, Assistant Minister for Commerce and Trade
- 13) Charles T.O. King, Deputy Minister for Agriculture

Source: Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, *This Child will be Great. Memoirs of a Remarkable Life by Africa's First Woman President*, p.102.

After the accused men had been tried by the military tribunal in the Barclay Training Center, found guilty and sentenced to death, they were taken to the beach behind the Center, where nine poles had been erected. To the cheers of thousands of spectators, the first group of condemned men were tied to the poles and, without being blindfolded, shot. Their ropes were then cut loose and the four remaining men were tied to the poles, with their dead colleagues still lying at their feet. These four, too, were shot to loud cheering, after which the firing squad and the young new head of state, 28-year-old General Samuel Doe, posed triumphantly with the executed men, while they were photographed and filmed by members of the national and international press.

The gruesome pictures soon went all around the world. Once again, Liberia made history, but not in a positive or peaceful way. Today, films of the execution on the beach near Redemption Road and the mock trial that preceded them can be downloaded from YouTube. In one of these films, to my horror, I recognized with some difficulty that one of the unshaved men wearing dirty clothes on trial before the military tribunal seven days after the coup was David Franklin Neal. He and his unfortunate colleagues had no right of defence, no right of appeal. It was the swift justice of the victors.

The situation in Liberia would become much worse and more barbarous, but nobody could know or even suspect that then. We continued our journey to Burkina Faso, where we arrived two days later without any trouble. I continued to follow the further course of events in the troubled country from abroad.

‘Paradise Lost’

Sergeant-president Samuel Doe 1980 – 1990¹

After the military coup of April 12, more details gradually emerged about Samuel Doe. He had been born Samuel Kanyon Doe in Tuzon, a village in the east of the country, probably on May 6, 1951. First reports after the coup said that it had been led by a 28-year-old sergeant of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL). His parents were farmers and very poor. In 1979, he underwent short military training in the United States and in October of the same year he was promoted to the rank of sergeant. As he was the highest in rank of the 17 conspirators – mainly Gio, Kru and Krahn from the north and the east of the country – he became the leader of the coup and later the chairman of the People’s Redemption Council (PRC).

At the time of the coup, Samuel Doe was attending evening classes in Monrovia; he was in the fourth grade at the Marcus Garvey Memorial High School, run by the Liberian National Student Union. Interestingly enough, Togba-Nah Tipoteh and Amos Sawyer were teachers at this school, but it is unclear whether – and if so, to what extent – this played a role in the events, or if it was just coincidence. According to the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the Marcus Garvey High School was ‘a place of academic training and consciousness for members of the AFL at night by volunteer teachers - members of MOJA’.² Furthermore, Doe’s first official

¹ This section on president Doe is partly based on *President Samuel K. Doe (1980-1990): The master sergeant-president*, from the website *Liberia: Past and Present of Africa’s Oldest Republic* (published in 2004 by the author on the basis of personal research including interviews) and partly on the author’s blog *Liberian Perspectives*.

² Republic of Liberia, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final report, Volume II: Consolidated Final Report*, 2009, p. 144.

speech was written on the campus of the University of Liberia by Amos Sawyer and others at the request of George Boley, Doe's Minister of State for Presidential Affairs.³

Already in the first week after the coup, Samuel Doe announced that he would not change the country's economic policy. When asked in a BBC interview in June of that same year whether Liberia would remain a capitalist country, he responded with an enthusiastic "Yes!". But there was at least one major difference with the previous regime: although the cabinet had many highly-educated ministers, including some with a PhD, the country was being run by a high school kid. Doe repeatedly reiterated the army's pledge to return to the barracks and, to mark the first anniversary of the coup, a constitutional commission led by Amos Sawyer was set up to prepare Liberia's revert to a genuine democracy.

But things would change in the years that followed. Doe acquired a taste for luxury and power. He increasingly surrounded himself with people of his own tribe, the Krahn, who were hardly more numerous than the deposed Americo-Liberian elite. The nepotism and corruption of the new leaders led to murmurings of discontent and dissatisfaction among the people, which in turn led to increasing oppression. Gradually, the internal political climate and respect for human rights deteriorated. But the Cold War was still raging and the US – under president Ronald Reagan – gave Doe's government unprecedented political, military and economic support, so keen was it to keep Liberia in the western camp. In the 1980s, Liberia even became the highest per capita aid recipient in SSA and Doe the highest recipient ever, much more than that received by all previous Liberian government administrations combined.⁴

Although, initially, there was doubt within the People's Redemption Council whether to take a pro-Soviet or a pro-US stance, chairman Doe finally decided to go with the Americans. This led to a schism, with Doe on one side and the more radical, left-wing vice-chairman of the Council, Thomas Weh-Syen – a Kru from the southeast of the country – on the other. When, in mid-1981, Weh-Syen returned from a visit to Libyan leader Colonel Gaddafi – who was also paying court to the new rulers – he and four other 'progressive' PRC members, including 22-year-old Nelson Toe, the youngest perpetrator of the coup, were arrested. They were accused of plotting against Doe and executed shortly after. To what extent the accusations were well-founded has never been determined. It did, however, lead Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs Togba-Nah Tipoteh – who was known for his left-wing, 'progressive' ideas and, like Weh-Syen, a Kru – to decide to not return to Monrovia after a visit abroad. He was granted asylum in the Netherlands.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

Despite the cooperation of the records department at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague, I have been unable to find out why the Netherlands decided to recognize Tipoteh as a refugee (he was even granted the highest status). At the ministry's expense, Tipoteh – who holds a PhD in economics – was taken under the wing of the Institute of Social Studies, also located in the city. ISS allowed him to share the spacious office of Professor Bas de Gaay Fortman. Although the latter had no connections with Liberia or Tipoteh, as he told me during a telephone conversation in September 2011, a close friendship developed between the two which continues to this day. Tipoteh eventually stayed in the Netherlands for a number of years, where we would speak to each other when I was on holiday (I was working in Burkina Faso at that time). During these conversations, it was clear that he had not changed and remained more a politician than an academic. He did not shy away from ideological discussions. Whenever the subject of my dissertation came up – foreign investors in Liberia – there was no stopping him. But he never spoke about the internal political situation in his country. This probably had something to do with his refugee status. The fact that he was granted asylum once again illustrates the special and close relations between the Netherlands and Liberia.

The year after the execution of his fellow coup perpetrator and right-hand man Weh-Syen, Samuel Doe announced a decree banning all intellectual criticism of the PRC. The following year he accused another strong man on the Council, Thomas Quiwonkpa, a Gio from Nimba County, of an attempted coup and plotting to depose him. Quiwonkpa is sometimes seen as the brains behind the coup against Tolbert. As a corporal, he was second in rank of the perpetrators of the coup and Samuel Doe became chairman of the Council rather than him. Quiwonkpa became Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. He was a better communicator than Doe, spoke better English (Doe had hardly any command of English and spoke Liberian English, a pidgin variant), got along well with the press and embassies, and was also very popular with the ordinary soldiers. Doe was most likely jealous of him. Besides, they held different opinions. In one-to-one talks as well as publicly, Quiwonkpa urged him to bring back civilian government. Although Doe later pardoned him – demoting him at the same time – Quiwonkpa eventually fled abroad as he no longer felt safe in a country ruled by Doe. The People's Redemption Council became increasingly divided along tribal lines, a trend that Doe encouraged by appointing more and more fellow Krahn to prominent posts in the army and having officers of Mano and Gio origin transferred to unimportant positions and areas.

In the meantime, Doe also started to work on his 'democratic' election as president of Liberia. He created his own political party and asked Amos Sawyer to be his vice-president during the elections, but Sawyer declined. That cost him dearly. His house was burnt down and his Liberian People's Party (LPP) was banned from taking part in the elections. Sawyer was arrested and Harry

Moniba became Doe's running mate. In another remarkable development, Doe had his year of birth changed, to 1950, so as to comply with the new constitution, which had been drawn up by a committee led by Sawyer and stipulated that the president of Liberia had to be at least 35 years old.

In October 1985, Doe won the elections with 51% of the votes. International observers claimed that the elections had been rigged and had been won by the candidate of the Liberian Action Party, Jackson Doe (no relation to Samuel).⁵ Like Quiwonkpa, Jackson Doe was a Gio from Nimba County. He had been raised in one of the most prominent Americo-Liberian families – that of Louis Arthur Grimes – and had been Minister of Education under President Tolbert. In the United States, the Reagan administration was delighted with the official result declaring Samuel Doe the winner.

One month later, Quiwonkpa entered the country from Sierra Leone with a group of armed supporters to depose Doe and to install the real winner of the elections, Jackson Doe, as the legitimate president. It is important to mention that according to some sources (including Tom Woewiyu, see below), Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Charles Taylor were involved in this attempted coup, although they themselves deny this. The small army led by Quiwonkpa even managed to make it to the capital, but their plot failed, partly because of lack of support from the US. Quiwonkpa was captured, killed and partly cannibalized by Krahn soldiers who had remained loyal to Samuel Doe. His mutilated body was publicly exhibited in Monrovia. After this failed attempt to replace Doe, the Krahn-led Liberian army took widespread reprisals against alleged supporters of the conspirators. Hundreds of innocent civilians were killed. Just being associated with Quiwonkpa's Gio or the ethnically related Mano was enough to be liquidated by Doe's army.

Killing Quiwonkpa and publicly exhibiting his body is part of an old tradition and is even understandable to some extent: it enables the victor to display his power and remove any doubt that his opponent is really dead. The hope is that this will nip any seeds of new rebellion in the bud. Parts of Quiwonkpa's body were used for ritual purposes, including being consumed by his enemies. This was extra reason to exhibit his mutilated body publicly. All Liberians would be impressed with the *juju* it had given Samuel Doe and his collaborators. *Juju* is generated by traditional rituals which sometimes require human sacrifice. *Juju* protects, gives prestige and power, and is instrumental in bringing about success.

⁵ It is noteworthy that Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was the initial candidate for the vice-presidency under Jackson Doe on the ticket of the Liberian Action Party in the 1985 elections. After being politically harassed and sentenced to ten years in prison for sedition by the Doe regime, she was granted a 'generous' presidential pardon, but was subsequently removed from the presidential ticket.

We are justified in wondering if these practices – human sacrifice, ritual traditions and cannibalism – still exist nowadays or whether these reports are simply unconfirmed rumours. I have already mentioned ritual killings in the section on the ‘Maryland murders’. Let Milton Blahyi’s story below speak for itself. It is taken from Blahyi’s 2008 testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Milton Blahyi (born 1971) is, by his own account, a traditional priest of the Sarpo-Krahn. Again, by his own account, he was chosen (‘predestined’) for this role as a young child, in accordance with the rituals of his Sarpo tribe, which lives in Sinoe County but is related to the Krahn of Grand Gedeh County. He was taken away from his mother almost immediately after his birth. From the age of seven, he was tutored in the rituals of the traditional priesthood by the tribal elders. When he was eleven years old, he performed his ‘initiation sacrifice’. This entailed killing a young girl ‘delivered’ by the elders, removing her heart, other organs and vital parts, and eating them. These rituals were performed for the good of the tribe. According to Blahyi, he would ritually kill someone for this purpose every month in the years that followed. He also recounted that, in 1982, as an eleven-year-old, he performed ‘black magic rituals’ for Samuel Doe at the Executive Mansion to protect him.

Does this sound implausible? Is it inconceivable? Is it true? How reliable are Milton Blahyi’s revelations? They were recorded by a prominent Liberian government commission, turned into a documentary by American filmmakers, and described in several books and articles.⁶ I can confirm from my own observations that such high priests exist in Liberia. Many aspects of his story correspond with what I experienced in Half-Graway, a village near Harper, during my stay in Maryland County. But my observations were superficial and say nothing about the truth of Blahyi’s allegations of human sacrifice – although there is no doubt that this does take place in Liberia.

In his book *Trading Priesthood for Priesthood*, which he wrote after his conversion to Christianity, Milton Blahyi has more to tell. Much more, in fact far too much to examine in greater detail here – with one exception: Blahyi claims that Samuel Doe used the black knives of his Sarpo priesthood on the night of April 12 to commit the ritual killing of William Tolbert. Since the murder, the

⁶ See Blahyi’s book *Trading Priesthood for Priesthood: A Testimonial Account of a Liberian Brutal War General and a Traditional Priest that Dramatically Met Christ and is Now Christ’s Ambassador* (Lagos: C.R.M. Press, 2006, ISBN 978-072-683-7); Stephanie Horton’s review of this book, *The Confessions of General Butt Naked* (*Sea Breeze Journal of Contemporary Liberian Writings, An Electronic Publication of Liberian Arts and Letters*; 2008); his website <http://joshuamiltonblahyi.com>; the transcript of his testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (January 15, 2008); the documentary *The Redemption of General Butt Naked* by filmmakers Eric Strauss and Daniele Anastasion (the documentary was a cooperative project as part of ‘The Economist Film Project’, an initiative of The Economist and PBS Newshour, and was broadcast by the Documentary Channel in the United States on January 22, 2012); and countless news and website articles on Blahyi.

knives are said to have disappeared without a trace. This story sounds too incredible to be true, but I feel it is important to mention it. Much of what outsiders might consider unlikely in Liberia should nevertheless be taken seriously. According to the official account of the coup, William Tolbert was brutally killed with a knife by a soldier, Harrison Pennue.

Will we ever know the truth? Probably not. But the foregoing is important for what follows, as we will see later on.

The reprisals against Gio and Mano people by Doe's soldiers – which occurred all over the country, but especially in Nimba County, where they originally lived – cost the lives of an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 people. It would become an important factor in and breeding ground for the next armed incursion, led by Charles Taylor, in December 1989.

The civil wars⁷

Any attempt to describe the two civil wars in Liberia in only a few pages is doomed to failure if it aims to give a true or full picture of what happened. Anyone interested in the subject is referred to the publications of Stephen Ellis, Douglas Farah, Mark Huband, George Kieh, Jeremiah Kugmeh, Arthur Kulah, Jeremy Levitt, William Powers and Colin Waugh (see recommended reading), although only few publications deal with both civil wars systematically and from the same point of view. According to the United Nations, the wars resulted in over 250,000 deaths and more than 500,000 wounded and traumatized victims. Ellis, an authoritative expert on Liberia, believes that the number of deaths is significantly lower, maybe by as many as 100,000. We will probably never know the exact number. More than 700,000 Liberians fled abroad and around the same number fled elsewhere within the country to escape the violence. The population of the capital rose to over one million people. The Liberian civil wars were of unprecedented cruelty, even by African standards.

The prelude to the first civil war

The inauguration of Samuel Doe as president of Liberia in 1986 heralded the official beginning of the Second Republic. It did not bring political stability or

⁷ The sections on the civil wars and those on Charles Taylor are largely based on the following internet publications: *President Charles Gankay Taylor 1997-2003. The warlord-president, Part I*; *President Charles Gankay Taylor 1997-2003. The warlord-president, Part II, Taylor and Al Qaeda*; *Charles Taylor: 1st African Head of State Before War Crimes Tribunal*; and *Taylor and the Special Court for Sierra Leone from the website Liberia: Past and Present of Africa's Oldest Republic* (published between 2002 – 2011 by the author based on personal research) and partly on the blog *Liberian Perspectives*.

economic progress. On the contrary, the situation in the country continued to deteriorate. With their typical sense of humour and self-mockery, Liberians renamed the now defunct PRC 'People Repeating Corruption', in reference to the unbridled corruption typifying the first five years of Doe's regime. The country's leaders treated the state coffers as their personal property. The national debt continued to rise and, when the country persistently failed to pay back either the principal or interest, the World Bank, the IMF and the US blacklisted Liberia and granted the country no new loans. The preferential treatment of the Krahn people also created widespread ill-will. Real or alleged coup attempts followed, like that in July 1988 led by Nicholas Podier, who had taken part in Doe's coup in 1980, and in March 1989 by Minister of Defence Gray Allison. Domestic political oppression increased and respect for human rights reached an all-time low. The United States turned a blind eye to the dictatorship and the human rights violations in the country it had helped to create more than 150 years earlier.

Resistance to president Doe increased both within and outside Liberia. Liberians living abroad felt an ever stronger desire to end his dictatorial and corrupt regime. In the United States, they established the Association for Constitutional Democracy in Liberia (ACDL), a non-violent advocacy group lobbying the American authorities for support for peaceful democracy in Liberia. One of the founders and later chairman of the ACDL was Tom Woewiyu. Shortly afterwards, a military organization called the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) was set up, also in the US, under the leadership of one Charles Taylor. A number of other ACDL members were sympathetic to the founding of the NPFL or actively supported it. They included not only Tom Woewiyu, but also other prominent figures like Amos Sawyer and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. As chairman of both the ACDL and the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA), Woewiyu was a key figure and the only one to openly participate in the armed activities of the NPFL. In early 1990, the supporters of armed violence were in the majority within the ACDL.

Charles Taylor

Who was Charles Taylor? Initially he was just as unknown as high school kid Samuel Doe, the young sergeant who made history with a violent and successful coup in 1980. Eventually, Taylor became more feared and notorious than Samuel Doe, both within Liberia and elsewhere in Africa – and even far beyond the continent.

Charles Taylor was born in the colonial town of Arthington, near Monrovia. His father was an Americo-Liberian judge. His mother was a Gola woman who had only attended a few years of primary school and worked in the household of the Taylor family. Before he was one year old, little Charles Taylor went to

live with a well-known Americo-Liberian family, who raised him. He studied economics in the United States where, as chairman of the radical Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas, he criticized president Tolbert but, on Tolbert's invitation, he returned to Liberia in early 1980. A few months later, Tolbert was murdered. Taylor's role during this period is unclear. Shortly after arriving in Monrovia, he married a Gio woman he had met in the US. Enid Boakai, better known as Tupee, was a relative of no one less than Thomas Quiwonkpa, linking Taylor directly with one of the most important perpetrators of the coup. According to his own later testimony before the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague, Taylor openly chose the side of the conspirators immediately after the coup. Not long after that, Doe made him Director of the General Services Agency, which was responsible for all government purchases. In 1983, after Doe accused him of embezzling almost \$1 million, Taylor fled to the United States. There he met Quiwonkpa again, who had also fled to the US after being accused by Doe of wanting to depose him.

At the request of Samuel Doe – who was on good terms with the Reagan administration – Taylor was arrested in the US. Pending his extradition, he spent 15 months in an American prison, until he miraculously managed to escape towards the end of 1985. According to some sources, he used the classic method of sawing through the bars and climbing down a rope of knotted sheets. Many years later, in July 2009, I heard Taylor declare under oath before the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague that this was not true and that he had left the maximum-security prison by walking through the front door and getting into a black car that had been waiting for him. Immediately after his 'escape', unconfirmed but persistent rumours circulated that American intelligence services falling under the Pentagon and the CIA were involved in his escape and that Taylor had made a deal with them to gather information on Colonel Gaddafi in Libya. Whatever the case may be, it is certain that no attempts were ever made to recapture him and it is astounding, to say the least, that it is apparently so simple to escape from an American prison. In 2012, I heard the true story from two Liberian friends – journalist Tom Kamara and political activist James Fromoyan, both of whom had lived with Charles Taylor and his girlfriend Agnes Reeves (who would later become Taylor's second wife) in the same house in Accra, Ghana in the mid 1980s. The two men independently confirmed that Charles Taylor had spoken the truth when he gave evidence on his 'escape' before the Sierra Leone tribunal.

Two months after Taylor's miraculous escape, Quiwonkpa made his failed coup attempt. There is no telling whether this was just a coincidence but, whatever the case may be, in the years that followed, Charles Taylor did indeed turn up in Libya(!), and in West Africa. In Ivory Coast, he had contact with military attaché Bob Richards at the American embassy. In 1987 he got into

trouble in Ghana and ended up in prison, but was released after the intervention of Henry Fahnbulleh, a good friend of Ghanaian president Jerry Rawlings. He then gained a firm foothold in Burkina Faso, and had a house at his disposal in the capital of Ouagadougou, which he used as a base for travelling back and forth to Libya. The rent was paid by Colonel Gaddafi, who had close ties with Blaise Compaoré, who became president of Burkina Faso after the murder of his predecessor Thomas Sankara in 1987. Sankara and Compaoré – both former army captains – had seized power in Burkina Faso in 1983. By some inexplicable twist of fate, I was in the country when this coup took place. I could never have suspected then that one of these two men was to play a very prominent role in the Liberian civil war.

The first civil war, 1989-1997

The civil war began as a rebellion against president Samuel Doe, at the end of December 1989, with an incursion by 200 armed rebels of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, led by Charles Taylor. The group entered Nimba County from Ivory Coast at the point where the borders of Guinea, Ivory Coast and Liberia meet. After Quiwonkpa's failed coup, Doe's army had caused havoc among the Manos and Gios, who mainly live in this region. The small invading army, which consisted of Mano and Gio combatants and Burkinabé soldiers, had been trained in Libya between 1987 and 1989 and was financed by Libya, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, and Liberian opponents in the US. Libya's support was in line with Gaddafi's policy of supporting anti-Western rebels no matter where in the world, but especially in Africa. In his eyes, Samuel Doe was merely a puppet of the US. President Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Ivory Coast nurtured personal feelings of revenge against Doe. Not only had Doe killed his friend and colleague William Tolbert, but also Tolbert's oldest son 'A.B.', who had been dragged by Doe's soldiers from the French embassy in Monrovia, where he had sought sanctuary after the coup. A.B. Tolbert was married to Houphouët's adopted daughter Daisy. I will return later to the reasons for Burkina Faso's support for Taylor.

Doe's attempt to stamp out the incursion using military force backfired. More and more Liberians, who had had enough of his repressive, corrupt and increasingly violent regime, joined the NPFL. It would later emerge that Charles Taylor also deployed drugged child soldiers. Within six months, the NPFL had taken over practically the whole of the interior and the government forces (the Armed Forces of Liberia) had been driven back to Monrovia. Both parties were guilty of horrific war crimes. In July 1990, the AFL cold-bloodedly massacred 600 Liberians who had taken refuge in a church in the capital.

The American government sent warships, which moored off the coast. The US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Herman Cohen, publicly declared that the solution to the conflict was a Liberian affair and that the ships were there purely to evacuate American civilians. It is incomprehensible why the US kept its distance and left an old ally to descend into chaos. But the Berlin Wall had only recently fallen, and the Cold War was over. In addition, the First Gulf War was about to break out.

Box 7 Herman 'Hank' Cohen: diplomat and lobbyist

Herman Cohen is well known for his secret diplomatic deals with African leaders in trouble – in countries including Angola, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sudan and Somalia – which he describes in part in his book *Intervening in Africa: Superpower Peacemaking in a Troubled Continent* (New York, 2000). Less well known is that, after leaving diplomatic service, Cohen was involved in lobby activities and paid consultancy services. During my work for the Global Coalition for Africa (GCA, 1999-2001, at the World Bank in Washington), I happened to discover that, in the second half of the 1990s, Cohen – my predecessor as Senior Advisor at the GCA (1993-1998) – was also a paid advisor to presidents Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, José Dos Santos of Angola, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Laurent Kabila of Congo-Kinshasa, and.... Charles Taylor.

In 2008, Herman 'Hank' Cohen would testify before Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission that, in the first half of the 1990s, his government had agreed with NPFL leader Charles Taylor – officially an escaped prisoner – that he would assume power in Liberia after president Doe's 'voluntary' departure (that is, under pressure from the US). Before the plan could be put into practice, however, the US changed its standpoint for reasons Cohen did not clarify and abandoned Liberia to its fate.

The chaos turned into anarchy. A breakaway group of the NPFL led by Prince Johnson, a Gio from Nimba County and former aide-de-camp to Quiwonkpa, started to fight against both Doe and Taylor. The conflict acquired a much stronger tribal nature, and more and more Doe supporters defected to one of the militias. Those who stayed used excessive violence, especially against Manos, Gios and Americo-Liberians. Hundreds of thousands of refugees flooded into the neighbouring countries of Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and even Ghana, threatening to destabilize the entire region. In August 1990, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) took action and sent a peacekeeping force to Liberia. The force, known as ECOMOG, initially consisted of 4,000 men (this would later grow to 12,000), primarily from Nigeria. One possible explanation for this intervention may have been the close business relations between Samuel Doe and the Nigerian ruler, General Ibrahim

Babangida (1985-1993). Its main objective was to uphold the status quo, in other words, to keep Samuel Doe in power.



Illustration 17 President Samuel Doe, 1990

When, in September, Doe attempted to visit the ECOMOG headquarters in Monrovia, he was taken prisoner by warlord Prince Johnson. What happened next became one of the most bizarre episodes of the civil war. Johnson had Doe tortured to death and the assassination filmed, showing him drinking beer while his prisoner was being interrogated and tortured. The gruesome video later became widely popular in West Africa and can still be found on YouTube. Johnson had Doe's mutilated body publicly exhibited, just as Doe had done with Quiwonkpa's corpse five years earlier. Some of Doe's body parts were missing, suggesting that in this case, too, the victors had used their victim for *juju*.

The chaos after the murder of Samuel Doe could not have been greater. Prince Johnson claimed to have been the country's president for three months, until the warring parties reached a first ceasefire agreement in November. In fact, there was already an interim government, which had been formed at a conference of Liberian politicians held in Banjul, Gambia. The interim government was headed by Professor Amos Sawyer. He was and still is one of the most authoritative and honourable Liberian politicians; his handicap was perhaps that he was more an academic and politician than a military man. He was better known for his vast knowledge and analytical skills than for being tough and hard-handed. Moreover, he lacked the military and other resources

to enforce decisions. In the years that followed, many more ceasefires and peace agreements would be concluded and just as easily broken again.

Two factors complicated the situation even more. First, the number of warring parties increased. What had started as a conflict between Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia and Doe's government army, the Armed Forces of Liberia, gradually turned into a fight between ten parties. Prince Johnson had become the leader of a militia of Manos and Gios formerly belonging to the NPFL, called the Independent National Patriotic Front (INPFL). Three other NPFL leaders – Tom Woewiyu, Sam Dokie and Laveli Supuwood – also broke away and created the Central Revolutionary Council (see box 8, Samuel Dokie).

After Samuel Doe's death, former soldiers from the AFL formed the United Liberation Movement for Democracy (ULIMO). In mid-1992, ULIMO successfully attacked Charles Taylor's NPFL – which at the time controlled 90% of the country – from Sierra Leone, probably with the support of ECOMOG. The ULIMO fighters proved every bit the equals of the NPFL rebels in terms of cruelty and violating human rights. Disagreement between the movement's leaders led to a split along tribal lines, resulting in a Krahn faction led by General Roosevelt Johnson (ULIMO-J) and a Mandingo faction led by Alhaji Kromah (ULIMO-K).

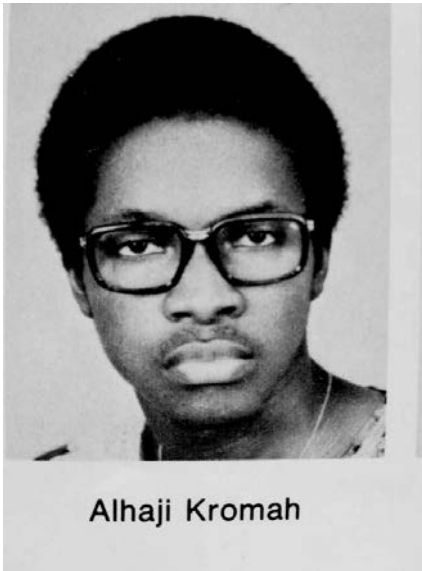
ULIMO-K's leader, Alhaji Kromah, was a Mandingo – by his own account, of royal descent. I had taught him at the university for some years, so I knew him well. He was a remarkable student. Though his grades were above average, they were not brilliant. It was his ambition that made him stand out, which explains his later opportunism and political choices: he worked for both William Tolbert and Samuel Doe, who appointed him Minister of Information. Alhaji Kromah is probably the only warlord who never fired a weapon or directly killed anyone. However, as a militia leader he was ruthless, as can be seen from the many human rights violations committed by his troops, including deploying child soldiers, torture, summary executions of captured members of enemy groups, and the killing of many innocent civilians. As leader of ULIMO-K, Alhaji Kromah was responsible for the atrocious acts, human rights violations and war crimes committed by his militia men. During a later hearing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, on September 22, 2008, a witness even told of forced cannibalism in Lofa County in 1993. In all my contacts with Kromah and our countless conversations, I could never have suspected that he would be capable of leading a militia that committed such war crimes.

Box 8 Samuel Dokie

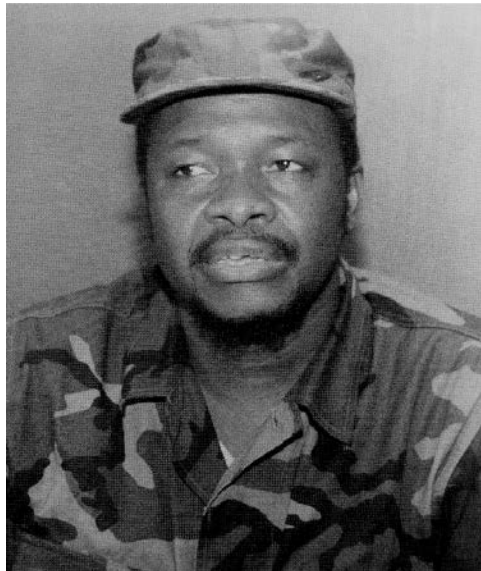
When Samuel Dokie entered my office at the Dutch embassy in Dakar, Senegal, in the spring of 1990 he did not come across as a revolutionary willing to take up arms. On the contrary, he made an almost timid impression. We had met through James Tarpeh, a good colleague of mine from the University of Liberia who I had met shortly before in Dakar. Tarpeh was in close contact with Amos Sawyer, who would be elected leader of the interim government a few months later, at the conference in Gambia in August. Not surprisingly, my conversation with Samuel Dokie was about the situation in Liberia and the NPFL incursion. He cautiously mentioned the need to rid Liberia of Samuel Doe, by political pressure or military force. The NPFL, of which Dokie was one of the leaders, was clearly short of cash, as he asked me for money for his journey back to Liberia.

Samuel Dokie and his family were killed in 1997. According to a witness before Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the murders were committed by General Christopher Vambo and commissioned by General Benjamin Yeaten – both members of the NPFL – on 'orders from above', by which he probably meant Charles Taylor, who was by now president (Witness Mustapha Allen Nicholas, a.k.a. 'Arab Devil', TRC, Monrovia, January 15, 2008). On June 4, 2010, in the Special Court for Sierra Leone, a witness for the prosecution declared under oath that Taylor – together with another NPFL fighter – had eaten Dokie's liver (which Taylor denied).

Former warlord Alhaji Kromah still walks the streets of Liberia a free man. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf even gave him a well-paid job as Ambassador-at-Large. At the beginning of November 2014, he gave up this position to take part in the Senate elections planned for the end of the year, after the president had called on all members of the Executive qualified by the National Elections Commission to participate in the elections to resign their posts. Also in November 2014, ULIMO-K commander Alieu Kosiah was arrested in Switzerland. The arrest was partly the result of the efforts of Civitas Maxima, a legal advocacy organization based in Switzerland, working together with a Liberian non-governmental organization, the Global Justice and Research Project. Alieu Kosiah is accused of involvement in and responsibility of human rights abuses and war crimes committed in Voinjama, Foya, Kolahun and Zorzor from 1993 to 1995. This was not the first and only time in Liberia that the smaller fish have been apprehended while their leaders escape punishment.

Illustration 18 Alhaji Kromah**Alhaji Kromah***Illustration 18a*

As a student at the College of Business and Public Administration, University of Liberia, 1977

*Illustration 18b* ULIMO-K militia leader

ULIMO fought not only against Charles Taylor's NPFL but also, in the northwest of the country, against a splinter group, the Lofa Defense Force. The LDF's leader, François Massaquoi, had close ties with the NPFL. Another splinter movement based in the centre of the country, the Bong Defense Front (BDF), fought against the NPFL and was allied to Alhaji Kromah. Lastly, Doe's former confidant and right-hand man George Boley led the Liberia Peace Council (LPC), also consisting of former AFL soldiers. The LPC, which fought against the NPFL from the east of the country, was also guilty of war crimes, human rights violations and recruiting and deploying child soldiers. After the war, Boley settled in the US, where he was arrested in 2010, prosecuted and convicted for using child soldiers. He was eventually deported under the 2008 Child Soldiers Accountability Act, which denies persons responsible for recruiting and deploying child soldiers entry to and residence in the US.

Why this list of all the warring parties? Analysts have often explained the Liberian civil war in terms of economic motives and perspectives. In a statement to the American Congress in June 1996, William Twaddell, a high-ranking official at the US State Department, said that in the years from 1990 to 1993 alone, Liberian warlords had stolen diamonds, timber, rubber, gold and iron ore to the

value of \$422 million a year. They had sold these illicit goods in Europe and, as far as is known, used the revenues to buy weapons, again mostly in Europe. The arms were shipped to Liberia via Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast (for Charles Taylor's NPFL), Guinea (for Alhaji Kromah's ULIMO-K) and Nigeria (for Roosevelt's ULIMO-J). The revenues of this illegal export will undoubtedly also have found their way into the bank accounts of warlords but in my opinion, economic motives were not the main reason for the proliferation of warring parties and the ruthlessness and cruelty of the war.

For the warring militias, the war was primarily a tribal conflict. Belonging to a 'hated' tribe was reason enough to kill, torture, mutilate, rape or rob an opponent. Many refugees literally had to flee for their lives. I heard this directly from people involved. While in Washington in 1999, I met one of my former students, a Krahn. At his request I will not mention his name here, but he told me in detail about the atrocities taking place in Liberia. He said that Charles Taylor and the NPFL were out to eradicate the Krahn completely. He had been lucky to escape.

It was a pointless, insane and cruel war. The secession of part of the country, splitting up Liberia, was never the main reason for fighting for any of the warring parties. The warlords' only aim was to eliminate the threat from other tribes; they were after total power, symbolized by the Executive Mansion in Monrovia. What makes the Liberian civil war even more bitter is that the leaders of all the warring factions knew each other well. With a population of three to four million, Liberia is a small country. The principal warlords were Charles Taylor, Prince Johnson, Alhaji Kromah, Roosevelt Johnson and George Boley. And there were notorious local warlords, too, like General Butt Naked (a.k.a. Milton Blahyi) and the feared female rebel leaders Black Diamond and Martina Johnson (see box 9).

The leading warlords combined their military role with political ambitions. People like Tom Woewiyu and Samuel Dokie were pushed into the background, but still held important positions. Liberian politicians who did not play an active part in the fighting, like Jackson Doe, Henry Boima Fahnbulleh, Baccus Matthews, Amos Sawyer, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Byron Tarr, Togba-Nah Tipoteh and Winston Tubman, also knew each other and all the warlords. To understand internal Liberian politics, it is necessary to understand the relations between all these leading figures.

Box 9 Martina Johnson

Martina Johnson had already joined Charles Taylor's NPFL in 1990. She owes her cruel reputation partly to her role in the notorious Operation Octopus (see p. 69), the large-scale, four-month-long offensive on Monrovia in 1992 aimed at getting Taylor into the Executive Mansion. She was feared for the atrocities against Krahns and Mandingos, including torture and murder, that had taken place under her command at a checkpoint called Dry Rice Market, in a suburb of the capital. She was probably also involved in the murder of five American nuns in October 1992. After the first civil war, president Charles Taylor appointed her head of security at Robertsfield international airport. When Taylor was forced to step down in 2003, she fled to Belgium, where she was arrested in Ghent at the end of September 2014. She was released after several weeks, but fitted with an electronic bracelet and placed under house arrest.

After her arrest, Martina Johnson was accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Belgian legal authorities have a 'universal competence' to report genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity wherever they occur, as long as there is a link with Belgium. In this case, the link was Martina Johnson's presence on Belgian territory. The charge against Johnson was submitted by three Liberian victims and her arrest was made possible with the aid of Civitas Maxima and the Liberian NGO Global Justice and Research Project (GJRP). It is worth noting that Martina Johnson was only the second person to be charged for crimes committed during Liberia's civil war. The other was Charles' Taylor's son, Chuck (see pp. 72-73). Two months after Johnson's arrest ULIMO-K fighter Alieu Kosiah was arrested in Switzerland on the same accusations (see above).



Illustration 19 Six militia leaders. From right to left: Sam Dokie (CRC, former NPFL), Tom Woewiyu (CRC, former NPFL), George Boley (LPC), Hezekia Bowen (AFL), François Massaquoi (LDF) and Roosevelt Johnson (ULIMO-J)

All of the warring factions committed mass murder, summary executions, torture, mutilation, rape, looting and arson. The legal system had collapsed and the government had hardly any authority, if at all. Anarchy and lawlessness ruled everyday life in Liberia, and crimes committed by militias remained unpunished. The 'power' of the interim government led by Amos Sawyer did not reach beyond the capital, and even that was only due to the presence of ECOMOG. The Black Beret militia created by the interim government could do little to change the situation.

The second complicating factor was the role of ECOMOG. Although the international military force could initially pride itself on its successes, it was gradually drawn into the conflict and became one of the warring parties. This process took a significant step forward in late 1992, when Charles Taylor's NPFL attacked Monrovia. The offensive, known as 'Operation Octopus', left thousands of the city's inhabitants dead and only ECOMOG prevented Taylor from capturing the capital. This marked the end of ECOMOG's role as peacekeeper; it became a peace enforcer and was therefore no longer a neutral arbitrator. Although this change from keeper to enforcer of the peace was very questionable in itself, most of the people of Monrovia were relieved. There was a widespread feeling that, without ECOMOG's protective intervention, there would have been an unimaginable bloodbath in the capital. The words 'Thank God for ECOMOG' could be heard everywhere.

The countless peace talks conducted under the wing of ECOWAS to reach a political solution to the civil war, soon fell into a familiar pattern. First ECOMOG and the interim government concurred with NPFL demands, including expanding ECOMOG with troops from other ECOWAS countries than Nigeria and the arrival of UNOMIL, the UN observer mission in Liberia. Next, a ceasefire was agreed. Sometime after that, the NPFL violated the agreements and hostilities resumed until new peace talks led to new agreements, and so the whole cycle would be repeated. Later, during an in-between phase in 1994, President Amos Sawyer's interim government was replaced by a transitional government which consisted of the three main parties (the interim government, the NPFL and ULIMO). But this, too, did not prevent fighting from breaking out again: within ULIMO and between Boley's LPC and Taylor's NPFL. It was a hopeless situation. In addition, it was becoming increasingly clear that the Liberian conflict was spilling over into neighbouring Sierra Leone (see box 10, The Revolutionary United Front).

In July 1997, presidential elections were held in Liberia. According to international observers, they were free and fair but nobody doubted that voters had been intimidated. Charles Taylor won the elections, with 75% of the votes. "He killed my ma, he killed my pa, but I voted for him," Liberians said out loud, tired of war and afraid of it flaring up again if Taylor lost. Taylor's main opponent, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, came second with 10% of the votes, and

warlord Alhaji Kromah third, with 4%. Warlord George Boley won a mere 1% of the votes.

Box 10 The Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone

It might just be possible that Sierra Leone's covert support for ULIMO was the reason why Charles Taylor began to support the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led by Foday Sankoh, a former corporal of the national army. But this was most probably just an excuse, as Taylor and Sankoh knew each other from Libya.

The RUF had been fighting against President Momoh's government in Freetown since March 1991. At stake were the country's diamond-rich areas, mainly on the border with Liberia. Taylor and Sankoh had met in Libya where they – and RUF and NPFL fighters – had received training at the military base in al-Mathabh al-Thauriya al-Alamiya, Gaddafi's revolutionary headquarters in Benghazi. The RUF rebellion triggered the military coup of April 1992 in Sierra Leone, during which 25-year-old army captain Valentine Strasser deposed President Momoh and subsequently became one of the world's youngest heads of state. By then, Taylor had become a wealthy man due to the illegal sale of timber, gold, diamonds and rubber and payments by foreign investors to ship goods over land through Liberia. The RUF became notorious for cutting off the limbs of adults and children, and other crimes against humanity.

Charles Taylor's role in the civil war in Sierra Leone eventually led to him being tried at the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) for war crimes and crimes against humanity, for which he was convicted in 2012. The civil war in Sierra Leone ended in 2002 after a military intervention by the former colonial power, the United Kingdom.

The unofficial winner of the 1985 presidential elections, Jackson Doe, did not run this time - he had already been killed at the beginning of the civil war, in 1990. It remains unclear who actually murdered him, but there are indications that it was done on Charles Taylor's orders, with the knowledge of other leading NPFL figures. According to an interview Tom Woewiyu gave to the Liberian newspaper *The New Democrat* in June 1994, Jackson Doe was slaughtered with a bayonet, after which his blood was taken to Charles Taylor, who drank it during a *juju* ritual. Liberia expert Stephen Ellis also mentions this in his book about the first civil war, *The Mask of Anarchy* (1999, p. 85).

In August 1997, Charles Taylor was sworn in as president of Liberia, with Enoch Dogolea as vice-president. Taylor succeeded Ruth Sando Fahnbulleh Perry, a Vai from Grand Cape Mount County, who had led the transitional government since September 1996. A former senator, businesswoman and peace activist, the relatively unknown Ruth Perry had been appointed and not democratically elected, but still she made history as the first female head of state of Liberia (and of Africa, though this is a little-known historical fact).



Illustration 20 Charles Taylor, president, 1997-2003

President Charles Taylor's inauguration was a festive occasion attended by the presidents of eight ECOWAS member states. Liberia was exactly 150 years old, but the country was back to square one. Monrovia was in ruins. More than 100,000 Liberians had been killed and many more wounded, and many hundreds of thousands more had fled to neighbouring countries or become internally displaced. Many government buildings had been destroyed, and the infrastructure was severely damaged, especially water and electricity supplies. The modern economy had almost disappeared, as had the foreign investors. What future lay ahead for the country?

The second civil war, 1999-2003

Anyone who thought that, under president Charles Taylor, Liberia would recover from the effects of the civil war were wrong. While the war years are a dark chapter in the country's history, the years that followed would be at least as bad, if not worse. The drama in Liberia once again dragged several countries in the region along with it and ultimately threatened the stability of almost the whole of West Africa.

At first sight, things looked promising in 1997: the anarchy of the previous years had made way for a single structure of authority – although the democratic nature of the government showed some cracks because of the

questionable way in which Charles Taylor had won the elections. Campaigns to disarm the previously warring parties seemed successful and the combatants handed in their weapons, if reluctantly. There was even a functioning parliament, though it was mostly a charade as Charles Taylor's political party held the majority. And there continued to be many problems. The refugee situation was still disastrous, with hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons and as many refugees in neighbouring countries. Economically, the country was on the brink of ruin. Foreign investors had left the country during the war. Mines had been closed and plantations abandoned. No one was making investments. The consequence was more than 80% unemployment and widespread, bitter poverty. The international donor community poured millions of dollars into the country to alleviate the suffering, but the money disappeared into the pockets of Taylor, his loyal followers and his protégés. And there were allegations that Taylor was 'doing business' with the rebels of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone, led by his comrade-in-arms Foday Sankoh, in exchange for 'blood diamonds'.

In 1999, a group of armed Liberian rebels entered the country from Guinea – probably with the support of the Guinean government – and soon took control of a large area in the west of Liberia. They were mainly Mandingo and Krahn rebels, former members of ULIMO-K and ULIMO-J, who had joined up with other opponents of Taylor to form Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), led by Sekou Conneh. Taylor sent former NPFL combatants – often drugged child soldiers – to fight the rebels, 'encouraged' and 'guided' by the Anti-Terrorist Unit, under the leadership of his son Chuck. The ATU was an elite unit, notorious and widely feared for its cruelty. The resurgent war was once again characterized by widespread atrocities, murder, rape and arson, and the deployment of child soldiers. And, as in the first civil war, there were reports of cannibalism. The cruel actions of Chuck Taylor and the ATU merit more detailed mention here.

The Anti-Terrorist Unit

President Charles Taylor created the Anti-Terrorist Unit in 1997, shortly after his inauguration, to protect government buildings and installations. After the LURD incursion, the ATU also joined in the fighting and soon became the best-equipped unit in Charles Taylor's security apparatus. The ATU had its headquarters at the notorious Gbatata base in the jungle of Bong County, 55 miles to the north of Monrovia. At the base, critics of president Taylor and alleged rebels and opponents were tortured, beaten to death, raped and/or burnt alive. The ATU, under the leadership of Chuck Taylor, is also held responsible for summary executions of civilians and prisoners, abduction, and recruiting and deploying child soldiers.

Chuck Taylor

It is not publicly known how many children Charles Taylor Sr has, but the oldest and youngest are probably the best known. His youngest child, a daughter, was born in the Netherlands in February 2010. The oldest is his son Charles McArthur Emmanuel, a.k.a. Chuck.

Chuck Taylor was born in Boston, Massachusetts, where his father studied, and grew up in Florida. He came into contact with the law at an early age because of violence, car theft, robbery and resisting arrest. For the first twenty years of his life, he had hardly any contact with his father. For several years, he even took on the name of his stepfather, calling himself Roy Belfast Jr. After his biological father became president in 1997, he joined him in Liberia.

Chuck followed in his father's footsteps and became a warlord. He ordered victims to be tortured or tortured them himself. He gave orders to kill and killed with his own hands. He engaged in illicit arms trafficking with notorious arms dealers like Leonid Minin and in the blood diamond trade in Sierra Leone, which resulted in a UN travel ban. As head of the ATU and son of the president, Chuck was above the law. When his driver hit a dog in Monrovia in 2002 and damaged his luxurious car, Chuck ordered him to be beaten to death.

In 2003, Chuck Taylor followed his father to Nigeria (see below), but then fate turned against him. When Charles Taylor was extradited by Nigerian president Obasanjo in 2006, Chuck took the plane to Miami, Florida, with the intention of resettling in the US. But things turned out differently than he had planned. When he arrived, Chuck – one of the most notorious and feared Liberians – was arrested and indicted on the basis of a 1994 law which the American judicial authorities invoked for the first time – much to the delight and approval of human rights organizations.

Witnesses testified under oath that Chuck Taylor had tortured, raped and burned victims alive. He became the first person to be indicted for war crimes during the Liberian conflict and the first American citizen to be prosecuted under the 1994 law prohibiting American citizens from being involved in torture outside the United States.

In 2009, an American judge sentenced Chuck Taylor, who was then 31, to 97 years in prison for torturing opponents of his father in Liberia. A year later he was also ordered to pay more than \$22 million in compensation to five victims.

Escalation of the second civil war

In 2000, when the Guinean government army had to beat off an attack by Taylor's troops from Liberia, and by RUF combatants entering the country with Guinean rebels from Sierra Leone, the Liberian conflict threatened to spread to these neighbouring countries. One consequence was that, from then on, the

LURD could count on the support of Sierra Leone's government, which was already anti-Taylor because of his involvement with the RUF rebellion.

Early in 2003, Liberian opponents of president Charles Taylor, mainly Krahn fighters, invaded the east of the country from Ivory Coast. They were probably supported by the government of president Laurent Gbagbo of Ivory Coast, who wanted to take revenge on Taylor for his support for Ivorian rebels fighting against his regime (see box 11: Ivory Coast). The Liberian militia, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) led by Thomas Nimely, soon took control of a large part of the east of Liberia. Once again, there was much bloodshed, villages and harvests were destroyed, and tens of thousands of Liberians fled the hostilities.

Box 11 Ivory Coast

After the death of president Félix Houphouët-Boigny (1960-1993), Ivory Coast entered a period of political instability and increasing violations of human rights. Houphouët's successor, Henri Konan Bédié, was deposed in a military coup at the end of 1999 which brought General Robert Guéi to power.

The run-up to the presidential elections of 2000 was accompanied by increased tension between the north and the south of the country, which were divided along ethnic and religious lines. Traditionally, the power in Ivory Coast was in the hands of predominantly Christian communities from the south. The people in the north, who feel marginalized, share – besides being Islamic – traditional tribal and family ties with communities living in the neighbouring countries of Mali and Burkina Faso

The presidential candidate from the north, Alassane Ouattara, was partly of Burkinabé descent and was excluded from standing in the 2000 elections. Robert Guéi, also from the north, lost the elections to Laurent Gbagbo, a southerner, who was inaugurated as president in October 2000. This did not bring political stability. In 2001, president Gbagbo had to deal with a failed coup and, the following year, mutiny in the armed forces. This led to a civil war between predominantly Islamic rebel groups from the north and the government army from the predominantly Christian south.

In July 2003, a fragile peace was established, but this could not prevent a second civil war. Gbagbo's refusal to acknowledge his electoral defeat in 2010 exacerbated the hostilities, which were accompanied by much cruelty. The fighting came to a definitive end when Gbagbo was arrested in April 2011. Laurent Gbagbo was accused of crimes against humanity and, in November of that year, he was transferred to The Hague where, at the time of writing (2014), he is appearing before the International Criminal Court to account for his actions. In the meantime, in May 2011, Alassane Ouattara had been inaugurated as president of Ivory Coast.

Within a short period of time, a third of Liberia – in the west – had fallen into the hands of the LURD. MODEL ruled another third, in the east. Charles Taylor's government had been driven back to the remaining third of the country, in the centre. The LURD and MODEL increased the pressure on Monrovia and, in the

summer of 2003, they launched an attack. The fighting in the capital destroyed the last of what had remained standing and caused thousands of deaths and tens of thousands of refugees.

In this second civil war, too, more international intervention was inevitable. ECOWAS again tried to find a diplomatic solution to the conflict. During one round of these negotiations, in Accra, Ghana, Liberian women led by Leymah Gbowee – who would later be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize – protested to put pressure on the warlords, including president Taylor, to agree to a lasting peace. Eventually, the US sent troops – to protect the American embassy – and ECOWAS sent in a Nigerian peacekeeping force, ECOMIL.

President Taylor, not only against the wall because of the military defeats but also facing an indictment and a warrant for his arrest issued by the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) in April 2003, resigned under severe international pressure in August of the same year and was granted asylum in Nigeria. He was succeeded by vice-president Moses Blah, who thus became the second Liberian president of tribal descent. But not for long. After three months he passed the baton on to a transitional government led by businessman Gyude Bryant until the general and presidential elections. Rebels continued to call the shots in the major part of the country, however.

After Taylor's departure, the warring parties came to a Comprehensive Peace Agreement on August 18, 2003, in Accra, which marked the official end of the second civil war (see annex 2 for a comprehensive list of peace agreements). In the autumn of 2003, the UN set up a peace mission, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), which incorporated ECOMIL. UNMIL would eventually consist of 15,000 military and civilian personnel, and its main tasks were to disarm the warring parties, coordinate humanitarian aid and maintain a fragile peace in a turbulent region with porous borders.

From August 2003, former president and warlord Charles Taylor stayed in a comfortable villa in Calabar, in the southeast of Nigeria, under the protection of president Olusegun Obasanjo, as specified in the asylum agreement. Taylor himself, however, violated the agreement by clandestinely resuming his political activities. He telephoned Liberian sympathizers from Calabar and met Liberian politicians there and, in February 2005, he was seen in Burkina Faso. In May 2005 an authoritative American organization, the Coalition for International Justice (ICJ), revealed that Taylor was financing a small army and was still interfering in Liberian politics.⁸ Through a network of businesses – especially in the diamond and timber trades – straw men, former combatants and sympathizers, he 'earned' money which he used to finance his subversive activities in Liberia and in neighbouring countries.

⁸ *Following Taylor's Money. A Path of War and Destruction* (ICJ, 2005).

Box 12 Liberian politics: a family affair

Gyude Bryant's background once again shows how much Liberian politics is a family affair. Bryant has a number of very prominent relatives, including Canon Burgess Carr, Kenneth Y. Best and Dr. Kate Bryant.

Canon Burgess Carr, Gyude Bryant's eldest brother, was a well-known theologian and priest. He was a renowned champion of the struggle against apartheid and oppression in Southern Africa and, in the 1970s, was General Secretary of the Nairobi-based All African Council of Churches (AACC). Bryant's younger brother Kenneth Y. Best, founder and owner of one of Liberia's leading newspapers, the *Daily Observer*, is among the country's best-known independent journalists. He initially served in the Tolbert administration as a Director at the Ministry of Information and Cultural Affairs (MICAT). Another brother, Keith Neville A. Best, was Director of Information for Monrovia City Corporation in the same period. It is interesting to note that he was a former editor of the opposition magazine *The Revelation* in the 1970s, together with one of Liberia's most famous journalists, Albert Porte (see 'The Day Monrovia Stood Still' in chapter 1). Porte was a cousin of Bryant's.

Canon Burgess Carr (1935-2012), Kenneth Y. Best (1938) and Charles Gyude Bryant (1949-2014) are brothers through their mother, CeRue Carr (later Henderson), who came from a well-known Americo-Liberian family. The father of Canon Burgess Carr, Kenneth Y. Best and Keith Neville A. Best was George S. Best, from the settler-town of Crozierville. Gyude's father had a Grebo background.

To conclude this spotlight on Liberian politics, Canon Burgess Carr had a total of five brothers and eight sisters, of whom Dr. Kate Bryant is the best-known. She was Liberia's first pathologist and served as Minister of Health and Social Welfare in the Tolbert administration for several years.

One of Taylor's most important financiers and thus the mainstay of Taylor's regime was his Dutch business associate, Guus van Kouwenhoven. Through Van Kouwenhoven, 'the Netherlands' once again played an important role in Liberia. Who then was Guus van Kouwenhoven? What role did he play? And what happened to him?

Guus van Kouwenhoven

Guus van Kouwenhoven first cropped up in Liberia in the mid-1980s, during president Samuel Doe's regime. He became general manager of the luxurious Africa Hotel, just outside Monrovia, built by president Tolbert in 1979 when Liberia hosted the Organization of African Unity (OAU). He imported luxury cars and was active in the lucrative timber trade. Liberia is one of the few African countries still largely covered with pristine primary forest, full of valuable tropical hardwood. In the Netherlands, Guus van Kouwenhoven was in the Quote 500 list of the 500 richest people in the country.

From 1999 to 2003 Van Kouwenhoven, better known there as 'Mr Gus', was the most important foreign timber trader in Liberia. He was chairman of the

Oriental Timber Company (OTC), a Malaysian company with obscure owners which held the country's largest timber concession, and managing director of the Royal Timber Corporation (RTC). He was also on the board of the Liberian Forestry Development Authority (FDA), a government body responsible for monitoring the sustainable exploitation and sound management of the country's rich rain forests. The managing director of the FDA was Robert Taylor, Charles Taylor's brother.

In 2000, the UN's Expert Panel Report on Sierra Leone claimed that Guus van Kouwenhoven was part of Charles Taylor's inner circle and was allegedly closely involved in arms smuggling. He was subsequently issued with a UN travel ban although, according to a 2002 UN monitoring report, like many others on the list, he more or less ignored the ban and simply used a Liberian diplomatic passport. Later, the UN ordered international banks to freeze his assets. That seemed to have little effect either, despite the fact that the EU endorsed both UN resolutions. Van Kouwenhoven continued to travel in and out of Liberia, and to and from Europe.

In its final report of 2009, the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission stated that timber companies and individual timber traders had illegally paid millions of dollars to government officials and warlords. OTC was mentioned twice, in connection with a payment of \$7.9 million made directly into Charles Taylor's bank account and \$13.4 million in other payments to unknown bank accounts, including \$1.9 million to known arms traffickers.⁹ Why had these payments been made to Charles Taylor and other individuals and not to the Liberian treasury?

According to the report, OTC paid for and organized numerous weapons deliveries to Liberian militias and the RUF regime in Sierra Leone, through the port of Buchanan. The TRC has identified at least eight of these arms shipments. In addition, the report stated that OTC paid for at least four arms shipments in 2001. And OTC was not the only company involved in such activities. At least seventeen logging companies either supported militias and participated in or facilitated illicit arms trafficking. The financing of the war through the timber trade or payments from timber traders led the UN to impose an embargo on trade in timber from Liberia.

Moreover, the TRC report alleged that OTC's armed security service committed gross violations of human rights and that these 'security forces' could hardly be distinguished from regular NPFL fighters. The report also accused Guus van Kouwenhoven of an impressive series of economic crimes: violations of forestry regulations, illegal logging, tax evasion, bribery, corruption and discrimination against Liberian personnel.

⁹ Republic of Liberia, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final report, Volume II: Consolidated Final Report*, 2009, p. 337.

In March 2005, 'Mr Gus' was arrested at a railway station in Rotterdam on suspicion of participating in war crimes in Liberia, supplying weapons to Charles Taylor despite the UN arms embargo imposed on the country, and violating the UN travel ban.

In 2006, a district court in the Netherlands sentenced him to eight years in prison for supplying arms to Charles Taylor illegally between 2001 and 2003, and breaching the UN arms embargo against Liberia. He was acquitted of the charge of participating in war crimes.

In 2008, in the appeal court, the Public Prosecutor requested 20 years' imprisonment and a fine. Severely criticizing the Public Prosecutor and calling the witnesses too unreliable to give valid evidence, the judges acquitted 'Mr Gus' of all charges. The Public Prosecutor lodged an appeal against the verdict at the Dutch Supreme Court, which in 2010 referred the case to another Court of Appeal. Consequently 'Mr Gus' will have to stand trial again and, meanwhile, remains a free man. Five years later, the case is apparently still pending. Dutch judges are clearly impartial and meticulous, but not fast.

Former President Charles Taylor in The Hague: the Special Court for Sierra Leone

Early in 2006, shortly after her inauguration as Liberia's first democratically elected female president, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf asked her Nigerian counterpart to extradite Charles Taylor. It was one of her first decisions as president. President Obasanjo agreed, albeit reluctantly and under severe international pressure.

Taylor tried to escape but was apprehended at the Nigerian-Cameroon border. He was arrested and extradited to Liberia, which passed him on to the Special Court for Sierra Leone. As the SCSL was working with the International Criminal Court (ICC) on Taylor's case, Liberia's former president arrived in The Hague in March 2006 in handcuffs – a temporarily ignominious end to a spectacular career.

The role of Burkina Faso

As I mentioned before, in the second half of the 1980s Charles Taylor had acquired a base in Ouagadougou, a house in the district of Zogona, in the east of the city. He stayed there openly when he was in the country, moving around the city at great speed in a car with flashing lights, followed by an open pick-up truck with heavily armed bodyguards. Or he could be seen at the local supermarket, accompanied by the same dangerous-looking bodyguards with sunglasses.

Dr Stephen Byron Tarr, a well-informed Liberian academic and politician – he is a former Secretary-General of the Liberian Action Party – has provided a detailed account of how Charles Taylor ended up in Burkina Faso. In 1993, Tarr published an article in the authoritative *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* on the ECOMOG intervention in the first Liberian civil war (1989-1996), which included a report on Taylor's activities and his comings and goings in the region, especially in 1987.

According to Tarr, in 1987, Charles Taylor contacted the Burkinabé ambassador in Accra, Ms Mamouna Ouattara – a supporter of Blaise Compaoré – for help in overthrowing the government of president Samuel Doe. A short time later, Taylor turned up in Ouagadougou. Tarr draws attention to the fact that, not long after Taylor's arrival in the capital of Burkina Faso, Thomas Sankara was murdered. He suggests that, in exchange for Taylor's help in the assassination of Sankara, Compaoré promised to support Taylor, who was putting together a military group to depose Doe. According to Tarr and other sources, Compaoré put Charles Taylor in touch with Colonel Gaddafi, after which Taylor and a group of like-minded rebels went to Libya. They received military training that would later prove crucial, and formed an alliance with Gaddafi, who helped Taylor to overthrow Doe.

Taylor's comrade-in-arms in those years, Prince Johnson, publicly declared in an interview with Radio France International (RFI) in October 2008 that he and other Liberian rebels had committed the murder of president Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso in 1987. "The number two, Blaise Compaoré, asked for help in removing Thomas Sankara from power," Prince Johnson alleged. "He said that it was the only way for us to live safely in Burkina. And Sankara was killed. We did it because it was the only way for us to stay in Burkina and prepare our attack against Doe. We didn't want to be sent back to Liberia where we'd be chased by the police, so we were obliged to carry out the request of the number two, Blaise Compaoré, and oust Sankara from power. This is how he came to be assassinated."¹⁰

It was not the first time Prince Johnson admitted killing President Sankara. A few months earlier, in August, he had testified in Monrovia before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that he had been involved in the assassination of Thomas Sankara though then he did not disclose who had given the orders. In his interview with RFI in October, however, he did make that clear. He confirmed that Compaoré was behind the assassination, and that former president of Ivory Coast Félix Houphouët-Boigny was aware of the murder and approved it. Houphouët-Boigny supported Sankara's elimination because the latter opposed the presence of the Liberians in Burkina. The Ivorian president supported the Liberian rebels because Samuel Doe had murdered his friend

¹⁰ See http://www1.rfi.fr/actuen/articles/106/article_1979.asp.

president Tolbert and Tolbert's oldest son, A.B. Tolbert, Houphouët-Boigny's son-in-law.¹¹

There is, however, some dispute about this version of the events.¹² Furthermore, in the 1980s, the authoritative magazine *Jeune Afrique* regularly published detailed articles on the revolution in Burkina Faso under the leadership of Thomas Sankara and Blaise Compaoré, on the assassination of president Sankara on October 15, 1987, and on Compaoré's presidency (1987-2014). There was, however, never any mention at all of the possible involvement of Charles Taylor or Prince Johnson in Sankara's murder. The same applies to a December 2014 issue of the magazine, that devoted considerable attention to the murder of the popular president and the possible role of his successor Blaise Compaoré, who had fled Burkina Faso shortly before after a popular uprising.¹³ Well-informed *Jeune Afrique* journalist Sennen Andriamirado, who published a book on the murder of Thomas Sankara and his assassins in 1989, said nothing at all about a Liberian connection.¹⁴

How president Sankara met his end and who was involved remains a mystery. There is little doubt that Blaise Compaoré was responsible. But there is no evidence that Prince Johnson or Charles Taylor played a direct role in the events. There is at most circumstantial evidence of a Liberian connection. Whatever the case may be, after Sankara's murder in October 1987, Blaise Compaoré – the man that Sankara had trusted most, his friend and 'blood brother' – had become president.¹⁵ In the years that followed, Blaise Compaoré flagrantly supported Charles Taylor in the Liberian civil war and even in his interventions in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

As I said before, Burkinabé soldiers were part of the small group of NPFL fighters that invaded Nimba County at the end of December 1989, heralding the onset of the first Liberian civil war. Burkina's support for the NPFL invasion and in the years that followed contributed to the persistent but unconfirmed rumour that circulated in West Africa that Blaise Compaoré and Charles Taylor had agreed to help each other to depose the incumbent presidents of their respective countries: Taylor would help Compaoré to get rid of president Thomas Sankara and Compaoré would help Taylor to eliminate president Samuel Doe. However likely or unlikely this agreement may be, the presence of Burkinabé soldiers in the small incursion army has been established. Moreover, the special relationship between Taylor and Compaoré and the role of the latter as president of Burkina Faso in the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone through

¹¹ See http://www1.rfi.fr/actu/fr/articles/106/article_73998.asp.

¹² See Carina Ray, 'Who really killed Thomas Sankara?', in: *Pambazuka News*, January 15, 2008; <http://www.pambazuka.net/en/category/features/45420>.

¹³ *Jeune Afrique*, No. 2813, December 7-13, 2014, pp. 23-27.

¹⁴ 'Il s'appelait Sankara. Chronique d'une mort violente', Jeune Afrique Livres, Paris, 1989.

¹⁵ He would rule for 27 years until he was deposed in a popular revolt in October 2014.

arms trafficking and the trade in 'blood diamonds' have been documented in detail, and with many examples, by a group of experts who investigated the situation at the request of the UN Security Council.¹⁶ It is a blood-curdling account that clearly illustrates the greed and ruthlessness of the leading figures in this drama.

The United Nations and Liberia

Initially, the UN played a very limited role in the Liberian conflict. Almost three years after the beginning of the civil war, the Security Council adopted the first resolution on Liberia (UN Resolution 788 of November 19, 1992), imposing an arms embargo on the country (with the exception of ECOMOG), and decided to send a Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Liberia (Trevor Livingston Gordon-Somers). However, a UN commission would not monitor compliance with the arms embargo until 1995. In March 1993, the Security Council passed a resolution condemning the attacks on ECOMOG. In August, it created the UN Trust Fund for Liberia and, a month later, decided to establish the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL).

In later years, UN intervention in Liberia was directly related to the civil war in Sierra Leone (see box 10). The report of the Panel of Experts on the link between trade in diamonds and trade in arms in Sierra Leone, written at the request of and presented to the UN Security Council, played a particularly crucial role.¹⁷ Box 13 briefly examines the various UN embargos and sanctions.

The main findings of the report of the Panel of Experts describe how Sierra Leonean RUF leader Foday Sankoh increased his personal fortune through the illegal sale of diamonds to European buyers via Liberia, and the involvement of Liberian government officials at the highest level in this trade. The report also clarified the active role played by Charles Taylor in fuelling the civil war in Sierra Leone and his support for the RUF (including logistical support, training, weapons and other military equipment, and providing a base from which to launch attacks and a safe haven for retreat and recuperation) and the role played by Burkina Faso in the shipment of arms to Liberia and Sierra Leone. It gives many examples to back up its findings.

¹⁶ United Nations (2000), *Panel of Experts on Sierra Leone Diamonds and Arms, S/2000/1195*. New York, United Nations.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Box 13 UN embargos and sanctions

With the arrival of UNMIL, the end of the civil war and the resignation of president Taylor in 2003, the 1992 arms embargo was relaxed but remained in force. In 2009 it was lifted provisionally, under specific conditions, notably the obligation to notify the UN Sanctions Committee on Liberia in advance of shipments of arms and related materials to the government of Liberia while extending the arms embargo on all-non-governmental entities and individuals operating in Liberia for 12 months. Since then, the UN Security Council has extended these two provisions every year. The last time was in December 2014 and until August 8, 2015.

In 2001 the UN imposed a ban on diamond exports from Liberia (which was lifted in 2007) and a ban on timber exports (lifted in 2006) in order to ensure that the revenues would not be used to finance, and therefore prolong, the war. The UN also published a list of persons (Charles Taylor, his son Chuck and other relatives, employees and international contacts) who had been placed under a travel ban – which was broadly ignored – and bank accounts and other assets belonging to Charles Taylor were frozen. In 2007, a spot check revealed that not a cent of the \$20 million of taxpayers' money Taylor had embezzled had been frozen. In December 2014, the UN Security Council extended the arms embargo, the travel ban and the asset freeze on Taylor, his family and associates for a further nine months.

The disclosure that Charles Taylor still had substantial funds at his disposal led to a Panel of Experts being set up to monitor compliance with the UN embargos and sanctions. In 2014, the Security Council decided to prolong the activities of this panel by a further ten months.

The report also mentions a number of arms merchants by name, including Viktor Bout, with whom Charles Taylor cooperated to evade the UN ban on arms imports to Liberia and Sierra Leone. Taylor's help included issuing Bout and his cohorts with Liberian passports and allowing his fictitious companies to make use of the Liberian aviation register.

In 2002, the UN and the Sierra Leonean government created the Special Court for Sierra Leone, a tribunal to prosecute those who had committed crimes during the civil war in the country. It was before this court that Charles Taylor had to answer to seventeen charges (later reduced to eleven). The charges included war crimes and crimes against humanity. But this was not all that Charles Taylor was accused of.

Charles Taylor – agitator in West Africa

The other accusations against Charles Taylor were no less harsh. In 2002, investigators had already concluded that after the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, Taylor had harboured Al Qaeda terrorists at the Gbatala base and the torture centre led by his son in Bong County, for which he had received \$1 million. The same investigators also mentioned president Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso in this context. In 2005, the Chief Prosecutor of the SCSL, David Crane, accused Charles Taylor of maintaining contact with Al Qaeda

terrorists and having accepted Al Qaeda money in order to create political turmoil in various West African countries. In 2004 and 2005, there were reports that former NPFL combatants were being recruited for a rebellion in Guinea. Early in 2005, the country's president, Lansana Conteh, escaped an assassination attempt. Crane accused Taylor of masterminding the attack, as well as being involved in a conspiracy to overthrow President Gbagbo's government in Ivory Coast. Gbagbo alleged that Charles Taylor and Burkina Faso were supporting rebels in the north and west of Ivory Coast. Even the small country of Gambia was drawn into the turmoil: Taylor was accused of wanting to acquire a base in Banjul, the capital, through arms dealer and smuggler Viktor Bout, who did business with Gambian military dictator Yahya Jammeh. The account of the controversial American investigative journalist Wayne Madsen reads like a gripping thriller featuring notorious Eastern European arms smugglers, obscure Israeli diamond dealers, Mafioso drugs dealers, greedy American lobbyists, right-wing religious organizations in the United States and the by then most wanted man in West Africa, Charles Taylor.¹⁸

At the request of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Charles Taylor had already been placed on Interpol's most wanted list in 2003. In that same year, the American Congress offered a reward of \$2 million for Taylor's capture. In 2005, both the European Parliament and the American Congress asked Nigeria to extradite Taylor so he could appear at the SCSL. The African Union received a similar request from 300 African and other international civil society organizations. At the end of 2005, the UN Security Council extended UNMIL's mandate, giving it the authority to arrest Taylor if he entered Liberian territory and hand him over to the Special Court. When in March 2006 president Obasanjo of Nigeria succumbed to international pressure and extradited Charles Taylor to Liberia, the curtain fell – for the time being – for West Africa's most wanted man.

Within an hour of arriving at Robertsfield International Airport, handcuffed and wearing a bulletproof vest, Liberia's former president was transferred to the SCSL in Freetown. For security reasons – escaping from prison in Freetown would be very easy for someone as wealthy as Charles Taylor – he was transferred to the Netherlands a few months later. The Dutch government had agreed to Taylor being tried in The Hague, on the condition that another country was willing to detain the former head of state should he be convicted. When the UK declared itself prepared to take on this responsibility, Taylor was transferred to The Hague. He was imprisoned there from the end of June 2006

¹⁸ Source: 'Additional ties between southern Christian fundamentalists, Texas oil interest, and Russian-Israeli mobsters and weapons smugglers uncovered', December 11, 2005, Special Report, <http://milfuegos.blogspot.nl/2005/12/additional-ties-between-southern.html> (retrieved March 18, 2015) quoting The Wayne Madsen Report, <http://www.waynemadsenreport.com/>

until his definitive conviction on appeal in 2013 in comfortable, even luxurious, surroundings that his victims never enjoyed.



Illustration 21 Former president Taylor on his way to The Hague in handcuffs, 2006

The charges for which Charles Taylor was tried in The Hague only concerned crimes committed in Sierra Leone after November 30, 1996. It is important to be aware that, because of these limits of location (only in Sierra Leone) and time (only after 1996), the charges do not include Taylor's role in the Liberian civil wars and his responsibility for the atrocities committed in the country. The government of Liberia had decided not to use an international tribunal to prosecute those accused of committing crimes during the two civil wars, opting instead for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission along the lines of post-apartheid South Africa.

The crimes for which Charles Taylor is held responsible or accused of are far too numerous to list here in detail. Yet I cannot refrain from mentioning them briefly.

Experts estimate that Charles Taylor stole as much as \$100 million in Liberia alone. Jacques Klein, the UN's representative in Liberia, accused Taylor of having stolen \$3 million earmarked for the demobilization and disarmament of ex-

rebels when he left for Nigeria in 2003. A UN inquiry into the origins of money deposited into the private account of then president Charles Taylor at the Liberian Bank for Development and Investment between 2000 and 2003, revealed that \$20 million came from the government of Taiwan, which was hoping in this way to ensure diplomatic recognition by the Liberian State. According to the Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the money was earmarked for development projects. During his trial, Charles Taylor admitted that it had been used to purchase weapons and for other military expenditures which could not be checked – which led Taiwan to express its “deep regret”.¹⁹ Experts estimated the total fortune of the former president at \$375 million.

Stephen Rapp, Chief Prosecutor of the SCSL, claimed in 2008 to have evidence that Charles Taylor had illegally channelled hundreds of millions of dollars to various banks. Two accounts maintained in his name in the United States showed total transfers of \$5 billion during his presidency, Rapp told the BBC during an interview on May 2, 2008. By way of comparison: in the 2001-2003 period, Liberia’s annual budget was between \$45 and 75 million.

Besides economic crimes, the charges against Charles Taylor involved violations of human rights in Liberia, gagging the press and restricting the freedom of expression, tortures, summary executions, killings of innocent civilians and ECOMOG soldiers, the unexplained, sudden death of the country’s vice-president Enoch Dogolea in June 2000 – according to witnesses after being beaten up by Taylor’s security troops – and countless accusations of active involvement in ritual killings and even cannibalism. These latter accusations were made by former fellow combatants of the NPFL and his closest colleagues, including Taylor’s right-hand man and former minister of Defence Tom Woewiyu, in interviews with journalists and investigators, as well as by witnesses before the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Monrovia.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone

The Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) was set up jointly by the government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations in 2002, after the civil war in the country (1991-2002). From 2002 to 2013, the Court had its official seat in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. Exclusively for the trial of Charles Taylor, the Special Court for Sierra Leone worked together with the International Criminal Court (ICC), which has its seat in The Hague, and was housed in the ICC building. The SCSL did not become operational until 2004 and was funded from voluntary contributions. Although some 50 countries contributed, the US, the UK, the Netherlands and Canada were the largest donors. The total costs of the Special

¹⁹ *The New York Times*, May 30, 2010.

Court amount to an estimated \$250 million. During the years in which the Court was operational, eight former RUF leaders were tried, found guilty and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, ranging from 25 to 50 years. RUF leader Foday Sankoh died in prison from natural causes. After the conviction of Charles Taylor in 2013, the Special Court for Sierra Leone was disbanded. Its continuing legal obligations are overseen by the Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone.

The accusations against Charles Taylor also included financing and supporting the armed rebellion of the Revolutionary United Front, supplying the RUF with arms and trading in 'conflict diamonds'. The RUF rebels were notorious for their deliberate mutilations, hacking off the limbs of innocent civilians with machetes, killing them, raping them, setting their houses and huts on fire, and pillaging their possessions.

The eleven charges against Charles Taylor fell into three categories: crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law:

- 1) Acts of terrorism
- 2) Murder
- 3) Violence to life, health and physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular murder
- 4) Rape
- 5) Sexual slavery and other acts of sexual violence
- 6) Outrages upon personal dignity
- 7) Violence to life, health and physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular cruel treatment
- 8) Other inhumane acts
- 9) Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years into armed forces
- 10) Enslavement
- 11) Pillage

The trial against Charles McArthur Ghankay Taylor began in June 2007 in the ICC building in Voorburg, a suburb of The Hague. Coincidentally, the evaluation department of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where I had been working since 1995, had been temporarily housed in the same building, from 2003 until the summer of 2005. Back then, I could not have imagined that Charles Taylor would walk these same corridors handcuffed, on his way to the high-security courtroom built especially for the trial, where the Public Prosecutor would read the charges against him, hundreds of witnesses would be heard, and the judges

would eventually give a verdict. Was the evidence conclusive? Was Taylor guilty or not guilty?

The trial was a spectacle, at times theatre, often a show. Of course, I attended a number of sessions. After all, the surroundings were very familiar to me, too. Words cannot describe what I felt as I sat there, face to face with the man at the centre of the proceedings.

The first time I attended a hearing of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, also known as the Taylor Tribunal, was in April 2009.²⁰ In the previous two years, a large number of witnesses had been heard; on that day, a technical aspect was being addressed. Taylor's defence team asked the judges to formally declare the charges against their client inadmissible as the Public Prosecutor had rendered insufficient evidence to back up the charges.

At 9 am, well before the hearing started, the public gallery was already packed, primarily with what looked like foreign law students and a number of journalists. I was part of a group of close friends who had worked in Liberia at the same time and become infected with what we call the 'Liberia virus', an inexplicable love for the country and its inhabitants. The public gallery was separated from the courtroom by a wall of bulletproof glass. We had intentionally taken seats directly opposite Taylor's defence, so that we would be facing the accused.

Five minutes before the hearing opened, at 9.25 am, Charles Taylor entered the court. He was impeccably dressed. He wore a classic double-breasted suit, a silver grey tie with blue dots and gold-rimmed, tinted glasses. A large gold ring sparkled on both his hands. Relaxed, he shook the hands of his defence lawyers, looked at the public for a moment and sat down – less than fifteen feet from where we sat, but separated by the glass. When our eyes met, he seemed to greet me, and I automatically greeted him back.

After the hearing opened, while one of Taylor's defence lawyers argued at length, I observed the man I had heard and read so much about. The man who had sown death and destruction, not only in his own country, but also in neighbouring countries. Had he really been a CIA agent, as the stories claimed? Had he really accepted money from Al Qaeda? Had he really stolen millions of dollars? Supplied weapons in exchange for diamonds? Been trained in Libya, where he had met Foday Sankoh, with whom he had connived later on to gain control of the diamond-rich regions in the east of Sierra Leone? Had they agreed to help each other to bring down the incumbent governments of Samuel Doe in Liberia and Joseph Momoh in Sierra Leone – an agreement similar to the one he had made with another 'rebel' he had met in Gaddafi's training camp, Blaise Compaoré?

²⁰ This section is based on the author's blog *Liberian Perspectives*.

The accused showed little emotion during the hearing. He listened attentively to his defence lawyers and continuously took notes. I could not but have great admiration for his defence team. Charles Taylor was defended by top lawyers, who were very competent, very eloquent – and paid for by the international donor community: Mr Taylor, as he was called in the courtroom, said he had no money to pay for his defence.

I only saw Taylor looking uneasy on two occasions. The first was when his lawyer was elaborating on the charge of recruiting and deploying child soldiers. The former Liberian president shifted nervously in his chair, clearly feeling uncomfortable. The second time was when his lawyer spoke of the death of Samuel Bockarie, a.k.a General Mosquito. Taylor frantically took notes during this part of the defence's argument. Samuel Bockarie had been one of Taylor's top commanders, both in Sierra Leone and in Liberia, and had also been involved in the conflict in Ivory Coast, where he had killed one of the rebel leaders at Taylor's request. In March 2003, the prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone indicted Samuel Bockarie of crimes against humanity, at which General Mosquito threatened to 'spill the beans' if he were handed over to the SCSL. It is widely believed that he was subsequently killed on the orders of Charles Taylor, who was still president of Liberia at that time. Taylor's troops also killed his wife, his mother and three of his children. The government of Liberia, where the murders took place, promised to investigate but the circumstances surrounding the deaths have never been clarified.

The testimonies the counsel referred to that day had been heartrending, the atrocities described by the witnesses unbelievable. One of Taylor's close associates had testified that Taylor had ordered soldiers to eat their victims. Another witness declared that Taylor had ordered him to bury a pregnant woman alive 'for reasons only he can tell'. Witness 'Zigzag' Marzah – an NPFL combatant from the very beginning and who had been part of the group that had invaded Nimba County in December 1989, heralding the onset of the first Liberian civil war – had testified under oath that Charles Taylor ate human hearts, as part of a ritual of the secret Poro Society of which both were members.

Taylor's lawyer acknowledged that terrible things had happened in Sierra Leone, but denied that Charles Taylor had played a role in planning or committing the atrocities that had led to the deaths of tens of thousands of people and left an unknown number of people mutilated. The judges rejected the defence's application to declare the charges against the former warlord and Liberian president inadmissible.

Charles Taylor – conviction and sentence

April 26, 2012, was the day of reckoning. The Special Court for Sierra Leone delivered its verdict. The Court declared former president Charles Taylor guilty of all eleven charges. He was also convicted of planning attacks on cities in Sierra Leone, including the ‘diamond city’ of Kono in late 1998 and the capital of Freetown in 1999. The Court ruled unanimously that Taylor had aided RUF and AFRC rebels in committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sierra Leone. The judges were convinced that Charles Taylor had helped the rebels by supplying arms and ammunition and giving them operational and moral support. This made him responsible for their crimes. More than 50,000 people are estimated to have died in Sierra Leone during the 11-year civil war.

It was a historic decision and, once again, Liberia made history. It was the first time since the trials of prominent Nazis in Nuremberg at the end of the Second World War that a head of state had been convicted. The conviction by the SCSL also made Charles Taylor the first African head of state to be found guilty of serious crimes by an international tribunal.

The Court delivered its sentence a few weeks later. On May 30, 2012, 64-year-old former president Charles Taylor was sentenced to 50 years in prison, minus time already spent in custody.

There were mixed reactions to the verdict in Liberia, Sierra Leone and elsewhere. People responded with joy and relief, anger and frustration, resignation and indifference. There were emotional responses, often from victims. Supporters of Taylor accused the SCSL of making a politically motivated decision, of being anti-Taylor, of bias, even of racism.

Personally, I felt relieved. Ever since the beginning of the trial against Taylor in 2006, I had been following developments closely, largely through the websites of the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the Open Society Justice Initiative.²¹ I was convinced of Taylor’s involvement and guilt – not only in relation to the charges brought before the SCSL but also for the events in Liberia between 1989 and 2003 – but it seemed difficult to provide convincing legal evidence to back this up. Much of the communication had been verbal, almost nothing had been written down. However, the judges had obtained important confidential information from the American and British intelligence services, acquired through telephone taps that provided conclusive evidence of Taylor’s involvement.

Both Taylor’s lawyers and the Public Prosecutor, who had requested a jail term of 80 years, appealed against various aspects of the judgment and sentence. Pending the appeal, the execution of the sentence (in an English prison) was postponed and Charles Gankay Taylor remained in the well-secured and comfortable prison in Scheveningen, in the Netherlands. On September 26,

²¹ <http://www.sc-sl.org> and <http://charlestaylortrial.org>, respectively.

2013, the sentence was upheld in appeal. The trial had taken seven years and cost an estimated \$250 million.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in May 2005 under the terms of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Accra in August 2003. The signatories had agreed that the Commission would investigate the impunity of the crimes committed during the civil wars. It would also give both the victims and the perpetrators of human rights violations the opportunity to exchange experiences so that the past could be recorded accurately. This was considered necessary to settle disputes and allow the parties to become reconciled. The broad mandate of the Commission is reflected in its main goal – to promote national peace, security, unity and reconciliation – and the investigation period, which was primarily from January 1979 until October 14, 2003, but could be extended at the request of the parties involved.

The TRC worked on its report for more than three years. It collected more than 20,000 written statements, conducted many dozens of interviews, held more than 500 public sessions during which witnesses, including political actors, perpetrators and victims, could speak freely, organized regional consultations with stakeholders and rounded off the investigation with a large national conference on national reconciliation and the future of Liberia. The public hearings started in January 2008 and were the most sensational part of the process. In June 2009, the Commission released a voluminous report and presented it to president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who in 2005 had become the first woman in Africa to be democratically elected as president of an African country. The report comprised three volumes published in 11 parts.

Readers interested in the full content of the report are advised to read Volume 2, the Consolidated Final Report, which can be found on the TRC website.²² This volume presents the full report together with the Commission's findings, conclusions and recommendations.

The report rocked Liberia. Insiders and outsiders, in Liberia and abroad, were surprised by the findings and recommendations of the investigators. Comments ranged from a 'travesty' and a 'mockery of justice' to 'an incomplete report', and the headlines pulled no punches: 'Liberian Opinion divided on Truth and Reconciliation findings', 'War Crimes Group Wants Ellen To Resign', 'Civil War Panel Seeks to Ban President from Politics', and much more.

²² <http://trcofliberia.org/resources/reports/final/trc-of-liberia-final-report-volume-ii.pdf>

It is worth taking a closer look at the Commission's recommendations, as they invoked the fiercest responses. There are very many of them, so I have had to make a selection. The TRC made the following recommendations, in accordance with its mandate:

- 1) The establishment of an Extraordinary Criminal Tribunal for Liberia to try all persons recommended by the TRC for committing human rights violations, war crimes, economic crimes and a wide range of other offences.

The following former warlords and militia leaders were named: Charles G. Taylor, Prince Y. Johnson, Roosevelt Johnson, Alhaji G.V. Kromah, George Boley, Thomas Yaya Nimely, Sekou Damante Conneh and François Massaquoi. The TRC also recommended that a number of people not be prosecuted, although they were responsible for crimes, because they had cooperated with the Commission and the process of establishing the truth. They included Joshua Milton Blahyi, known during the civil war as General Butt Naked, because he committed his crimes – to which he confessed – stark naked, and Thomas Boye, one of the commanders of the MODEL militia.

- 2) Not to prosecute a number of other individuals but to subject them to public sanctions, with the purpose of redressing the prevailing impunity and restoring confidence in the integrity of the public service. This referred to all those who had been associated with militias in some way, including warlords, commanders, foot soldiers, organizers and financiers. The most extreme of these sanctions was being barred from holding public office. The most remarkable and prominent name on the provisional list of around 50 individuals was that of president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. The Commission recommended that, at the end of her tenure of office, she would not be eligible to contest or hold public office in the future.

Other well-known Liberians on the list were Allen Brown, Kabineh Ja'neh, Harry Greaves, Maxwell Kaba, Dew Mayson, Toga McIntosh, Grace Minor, Byron Tarr, Laval Supuwood and Tom Woewiyu.²³

- 3) To make use of traditional jurisdiction and reconciliation & conflict resolution mechanisms like the Palava Hut – where members of the community resolve disputes between individuals – for less severe crimes committed during the civil wars. This method of accounting for one's actions, imposing sanctions or granting forgiveness will be applied where appropriate in districts, towns and villages.

²³ I interviewed one of them – who prefers to remain unnamed – who informed me that 'The TRC report mentions my name; I wrote Verdier on several occasions. I was NEVER asked to appear. I think that is a major failing in the report: I was denied due process. I hope an occasion will rise to have it corrected.' (February 2015).

Further recommendations related to economic crimes (with the nationalization of all unlawfully acquired assets put forward as an option), reparation and restitution, for example by establishing a national holiday to commemorate and honour the victims and setting up a reparation trust fund for the war victims. The remaining recommendations can be found in the report.

I would now like to take a look at two of the most sensational and controversial cases addressed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report: the testimonies of murderous warlord General Butt Naked, Joshua Milton Blahyi (January 2008) and of president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (February 2009), starting with the latter.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

When Ellen Johnson Sirleaf testified before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Monrovia on February 12, 2009, she had been the president of Liberia for three years. She denied having been a co-founder of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) or ever having been a member of this or any other militia. She admitted having donated \$10,000 to the NPFL, but said that she had distanced herself from Charles Taylor at an early stage of the Liberian conflict. She used her appearance before the Commission to apologize once again to the Liberian people. She had previously done the same during her presidential campaign in 2005, when she also confessed to the donation to the NPFL.

Critics and opponents of Sirleaf, however, have a different story. They allege that Charles Taylor was the military leader of the NPFL and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf the political leader – until a split turned them into opponents. Sirleaf's testimony before the TRC was contradicted by a witness who testified to having seen her in the Liberian jungle dressed in a military uniform.

One of the president's most prominent critics is Tom Woewiyu. In two open letters to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf – one dated August 30, 2005, the other February 6, 2008 – he accused her of having played an important role in the failed coup by Thomas Quiwonkpa in 1985 and in the subsequent establishment of the NPFL some years later in the US. Woewiyu called Sirleaf the key mastermind and financier of the 'revolution'. His references to Liberians – not only the obvious mentions of Charles Taylor, but also Jackson Doe, Samuel Dokie, Amos Sawyer, Gayweah MacIntosh, Byron Tarr, Randall Cooper and Dew Mayson, to name but a few – show that he has a thorough insider's knowledge of the recent events in the country. The mass of other details in these open letters is both astonishing and impressive. But Charles Taylor's former right-hand man and former Minister of Defence is not the most reliable or objective source of information, considering his involvement in founding the NPFL and in the civil war. Observers of Liberian politics said that Woewiyu's public actions might

have been part of his strategy to increase his 'market value'. He was, after all, one of the few former aides of Charles Taylor who, until then, had not benefited financially from Ellen Johnson Sirleaf becoming the country's president in 2006.

In January 2014, Sirleaf appointed a new Board of Directors of the Forestry Development Authority (FDA). The president's action was a delayed response to an extensive scandal relating to fraud, corruption and mismanagement in the forestry sector, which had led in 2012 to the resignation of the head of the FDA (see p. 109). One of the new Board members was Tom Woewiyu. This was a controversial appointment for many reasons, not least because of the very dubious role of the timber companies in financing the civil war, and especially payments they made to the NPFL, of which Woewiyu was one of the most important leaders (see p. 77). Four months later, Tom Woewiyu was arrested in the United States (see box 14).

Charles Taylor publicly distanced himself from Ellen Johnson Sirleaf statements on at least two occasions and contradicted her testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The first time was when he was still president of Liberia in 2001, and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was in the opposition: 'Oh come on. (...) We met in Paris and we discussed it. She came into Nimba in the bushes from La Côte d'Ivoire during the war while we were fighting. (...) They raised money and they delivered money to me.'

I mention this in detail, because Ellen Johnson Sirleaf also writes about it in her autobiography, published in 2009. She describes her visit to Taylor in the Liberian jungle, in May 1990 – before their split in July of that year. Charles Taylor added 'Ellen and I have been involved in two armed ventures in Liberia'. Here, he was referring to the failed coup by Quiwonkpa in 1985 and the establishment of the NPFL. According to the same source, Liberian newspaper *The News*, he concluded with another salient detail: 'We're from the same region and from the same tribe.'²⁴

The second time Taylor explicitly mentioned Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's role in the organization of the rebellion against president Doe was before the Special Court for Sierra Leone, in The Hague, in July 2009. The former president of Liberia said 'Ellen is a founding member of the NPFL (...)', adding that she was NPFL's international coordinator until 1994.

How reliable is Charles Taylor's testimony here – and elsewhere during his trial? Even if we assume that it is true that Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was a founding member of the NPFL, the fact is that numerous high profile political opponents of Samuel Doe in the diaspora were well disposed towards or actively supported the founding of the NPFL, hoping to restore democracy in Liberia and put a halt to human rights violations. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf repeatedly says that she

²⁴ *The News*, February 9, 2001.

Box 14 The arrest of Tom Woewiyu

Tom Woewiyu – Charles Taylor’s former right-hand man, co-founder of the NPFL, warlord and, during Taylor’s presidency, president pro tempore of the Liberian Senate – was apprehended at Newark International Airport on May 12, 2014, and was charged on no less than 16 counts, including fraudulently attempting to obtain citizenship (2 counts), fraud in immigration documents (4 counts), false statement in relation to naturalization (3 counts) and perjury (7 counts). He was specifically accused of lying about his participation in the NPFL and the CRC, and about whether he had ever been involved in an attempt to overthrow the government of a country.

Tom Woewiyu’s arrest caused great consternation in the US, in Liberia and around the world. It was certainly surprising. Woewiyu had held legal permanent status in the US since 1972. He travelled widely and often both within the US and abroad, leaving the country no less than 38 times in between 2000 and 2014. He lived in the state of Pennsylvania, owned a house, held a Green Card, and his family lived there. It is unclear why the US authorities decided to charge him with these offences at this particular time: they had information about his involvement in these crimes as early as 2009/2010, when his application for US citizenship/naturalization – submitted some years previously – was rejected. He was refused bail because of the risk of him fleeing from justice. If he was found guilty, he could have been sentenced to 110 years in prison. His arrest and the reasons underlying it resemble those of two earlier cases. Chuck Taylor was originally arrested in the US for passport fraud. He was later convicted for the crimes he had committed in Liberia while his father, Charles Taylor, was president and sentenced to 97 years’ imprisonment for torture, which he is serving in an American prison (see p. 73). Warlord George Boley was also arrested in the US, where he was tried and convicted for recruiting and deploying child soldiers. He was eventually extradited to Liberia in 2012, where he has since walked the streets as a free man (see p. 66).

Woewiyu’s arrest led many in Liberia to ask ‘Who’s next?’. Around the same time, three high-ranking government officials (Associate Justice Kabineh Ja’neh, Minister of Youth & Sports Lenn Eugene Nagbe and senator Geraldine Doe-Sheriff) were denied access to the US at the last minute, despite possessing the required diplomatic visas. All three had a history of involvement in the civil war: Nagbe and Doe-Sheriff were members of the NPFL and Ja’neh an executive member of rebel group LURD. The only explanation that the US gave for not allowing them to enter the country was it had ‘obtained additional information which contradicts their visa applications.’

This begs the question whether Woewiyu’s arrest and denying three high-ranking Liberians – from the three branches of government: executive, legislature and judiciary – admittance to the country are indications that the US, supported by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and the head of UNMIL, the UN peacekeeping force in Liberia, is increasing the pressure on Liberia to put a stop to impunity and finally take the TRC report seriously. See also chapter 3.

Sources:

- ‘Accused African war criminal, a Delaware Co. resident, arrested’, May 13, 2014;
http://www.philly.com/philly/news/breaking/Accused_African_war_criminal_a_Delaware_Co_resident_arrested.html#H5KpUhcceohJPtMPy.99;
- ‘Indictment’; Date filed January 30, 2014;
<http://www.ice.gov/doclib/news/releases/2014/140513philadelphia.pdf>;
- ‘War crimes trap: Who’s next on sanctions after Ja’neh, Nagbe?’ by Rodney D. Sieh, July 22, 2014;
<http://frontpageafricaonline.com/index.php/politic/2373-liberia-s-war-crimes-trap-who-s-next-on-sanctions-after-ja-neh-nagbe>;
- ‘War crimes court looms? Top officials visa rejected’ by Rodney D. Sieh, July 21, 2014;
<http://frontpageafricaonline.com/index.php/politic/2367-war-crimes-court-loom-for-liberia-top-officials-visa-rejected>.

distanced herself from this rebel organization at an early stage, as soon as she discovered Charles Taylor's true character as an unscrupulous, greedy crook and that the incursion into Nimba County in December 1989 was not the beginning of a revolution that would bring democracy to Liberia. In saying this, she is distancing herself from the accusations and denying that she was a founding member of the NPFL. In her autobiography she states that she stopped supporting Taylor at the end of July 1990, at the same time as a number of other members of the ACDL.

Sirleaf's autobiography, with the gripping title *This Child will be Great* and subtitled *Memoir of a remarkable life by Africa's first woman president*, was published in April 2009. She provides information on her relations and conversations with Taylor and other leading figures of the NPFL, her position on the NPFL, and her ultimate loathing for Charles Taylor. It is a fascinating book in many ways, definitely to be recommended (see recommended reading).

Joshua Milton Blahyi – General Butt Naked

Many testimonies before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission clearly illustrate the insanity, murderousness and atrocities of the civil wars, but probably none give as great an insight into the spiritual, tribal character of the violence as that of Joshua Milton Blahyi, a.k.a. General Butt Naked, a member of the ULIMO-J militia under the supreme command of Roosevelt Johnson.

On January 15, 2008, the fifth day of the public hearings, Joshua Milton Blahyi – by his own account a traditional Sarpo-Krahn priest²⁵ – appeared before the Commission. His full testimony, made under oath, can be found on the TRC's website. The account is blood-curdling, heartrending and disconcerting. For outsiders, it is unbelievable, incomprehensible. I was astounded that none of the commissioners expressed any doubts about the truth of his descriptions of the nature and the origin of the tribal ritual practices, including human sacrifices, that he had performed and which – according to him – had cost the lives of 20,000 people during the period from his initiation sacrifice in 1982 to 1996, when he abandoned these practices. The commissioners also expressed no surprise or disbelief at the *juju* he performed around president Samuel Doe, for whose spiritual protection he was responsible.

²⁵ Like the Krahn, the Sarpo are one of the many Kru-speaking peoples living in Liberia and Ivory Coast. Experts disagree about the exact distinctions between the various Kru-speaking peoples in the southeast of Liberia. Liberian experts claim that there is no actual difference between the Krahn, who live in Grand Gedeh County, and the Sarpo in Sinoe County. The Kru-speaking peoples in Liberia comprise the Kru (Klao), Bassa, Dei, Grebo, Krahn, Sarpo (Sapo) and Niffu. Distinguishing between them is made even more difficult because Kru refers to both an ethnic group ('tribe' in official Liberian jargon) and a language group. The latter group is to be found in the southeast of Liberia, while the former lives between the Cestos River en Cape Palmas. See map 3.

At the core of Blahyi's testimony – apart from the atrocities – was his obligation to protect the interests of the Krahn; not only president Samuel Doe, but all the members of the tribe. And that required human sacrifices. Everywhere he fought – completely naked except for his shoes as, in his words, “material is a serious hindrance to every spiritual side” – human sacrifices to the deities, mostly children, were carried out before and after the fighting. Political leaders like general Roosevelt Johnson knew about it, as did his opponents. In Liberia, belief in these practices is widespread and Blahyi was notorious and feared during the war. When asked about the role of president Samuel Doe, the witness responded that Doe also took part in the rituals. In fact, Doe was one of Blahyi's sub-priests. Together, they had set up an altar in the Executive Mansion, and had buried a *juju* pot that would protect Doe and render his opponents powerless.²⁶

During a BBC interview after his testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Blahyi repeated his confessions and regret over the ritual murders and cannibalism. “I ate children's heart,” ex-rebel says, proclaimed the BBC News on January 22, 2008. His account of human sacrifices during the civil war was one of the first and most detailed stories to be made public, but it was not new. Rumours had been circulating since the beginning of the war, causing the Roman Catholic Church authorities in Liberia to issue a formal denunciation of such practices as early as 1994. But these gruesome actions, sometimes performed by child soldiers, ‘simply’ continued, encouraged and/or tolerated by political leaders. Impunity and anarchy had become the norm in Liberia. There are several films on YouTube showing members of Liberian militia, some still children, publicly engaging in these cannibalistic practices.

The most sensational accusation was Tom Woewiyu's allegation that Charles Taylor, too, had been guilty of such practices. In his 1999 book *The Mask of Anarchy* (see recommended reading), Liberia expert Stephen Ellis concludes ‘True or not, such claims are widely believed’. The accusations caused president

²⁶ On July 26, 2006 – apparently due to an electrical fault, though the cause has not still been determined conclusively – fire broke out at the Executive Mansion, where president Sirleaf was celebrating the 159th anniversary of Liberia's independence in the company of foreign heads of state and other guests. A number of floors were severely damaged, including the fourth, which housed the president's official offices. Following the fire, the Executive Mansion was closed and the president moved into the nearby Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Seven and a half years later, she had still not returned, despite a total of \$14.9 million being reserved for its renovation in the budget, spread over a number of years. Sirleaf's reluctance to move back to the Executive Mansion is therefore not due to lack of financial resources. Superstitious Liberians are quick to point out that, since the Mansion was built in 1964 while president Tubman was in office, not a single occupant – Tubman, Tolbert, Doe, Taylor – has left it peacefully or alive and that the building is cursed. Opponents claim that this is why president Sirleaf prefers to stay in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is located next to the UNMIL headquarters and is therefore strongly guarded.

Charles Taylor to instigate legal proceedings against Ellis in 2000. Later, Taylor withdrew the charge without further explanation.

In 1996, General Butt Naked abruptly put down his AK-47 and converted to Christianity. Today, he is a preacher and he travels around Liberia to convert people and condemn cannibalism. He is an evangelical minister, and he asks for forgiveness for his crimes. His intriguing testimony before the TRC and his book *Trading Priesthood for Priesthood* inspired two American filmmakers, Eric Strauss and Daniele Anastasion, to document his life for five years. Their documentary *The Redemption of General Butt Naked* was presented in January 2012. If it were not so horrific and sad, it could have been comical.

Joshua Blahyi – as he calls himself nowadays, preferring to use a Christian name – received death threats after his testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and initially fled to Ghana, where his family still lives. For some years now, he has been back in Liberia. Despite his conversion, he is still feared. The TRC concluded that he was responsible for his crimes but recommended that he should not be prosecuted because he had cooperated with the Commission's investigation.

What happened to the Commission's report, which had invoked such a tumultuous response? It disappeared into a drawer, the recommendations were never discussed in parliament, and president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf put it aside. Impunity continues in Liberia. Former warlords and militia members, perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity, walk and drive around freely in Monrovia and elsewhere in the country. Some have even been elected to parliament, including Prince Johnson, the murderer of president Samuel Doe and – by his own account – of president Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso. We could almost have forgotten that.



Illustration 22 Interim-president Amos Sawyer and the author, The Hague, 1995

A new start

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

The first time I heard of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was while I was a lecturer at the College of Business and Public Administration at the University of Liberia. It was during a conversation with the dean, Romeo Horton. He knew her well: she had been a lecturer at the College until a few years earlier. He said that she was one of the most intelligent and honourable people in the Tolbert administration, in which she was then Deputy Minister of Finance. I met her in person and got to understand her good reputation better when I was a part-time advisor at that ministry during the discussions on raising the price of rice.

I met her again many years later, in the early 1990s in Paris. At that time she was Director of the UN Development Programme's Regional Bureau for Africa (1992-1997). I was working as a macroeconomist at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We were in Paris for a meeting of the Special Programme for Africa, a multi-donor programme run by the World Bank. Although it is some twenty years ago, I can recall her appearance so vividly that it seems like yesterday. To me, she looked worn out, showed little interest in the discussions, and did not take an active part in the meeting. Her thoughts seemed far away, and this proved to be true. For a short time, we spoke about the civil war that was raging in Liberia, but she did not say anything of significance about that either. Back then, though, I did not know what I know now. She was, and still is, a very astute politician.

Who is Ellen Johnson Sirleaf?

During my stay in Liberia, because of her light skin and her name, I simply assumed – like everyone else – that Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was an Americo-

Liberian. In those years, it was very unusual for anyone to refer to their non Americo-Liberian identity in Liberia. It was not until much later that she herself ended this misconception by publicly disclosing her background.¹ I would like to go into that a little deeper, not only because of her historical importance, but also because her background is a good illustration of a certain social and political class in Liberia.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's father was the son of a Gola Chief named Jahmale and one of his wives, Jenneh, in the village of Julejuah, in Bomi County, 25 miles northwest of Monrovia. Jahmale was sent to the capital, where he changed his name to Johnson, after Hilary Johnson, the first president of Liberia to be born in Liberia and Africa (1884 - 1892). He was raised as a ward by an Americo-Liberian family called McGritty. Like many other 'country boys' who ended up with Americo-Liberian families, Ellen's father was treated as an unpaid house servant. But the McGrittys paid for his education and he would eventually become a successful lawyer and even the first native representative in the National Legislature.

Sirleaf's mother came from Greenville, in Sinoe County, more to the south and on the coast. She was the daughter of a poor market vendor, Juah Sarwee, and a German trader (which explains the family's light skin). As her mother could not take care of her, she was sent to Monrovia, to an Americo-Liberian family who also humiliated her and treated her as an unpaid servant. Later, she was adopted by a childless Americo-Liberian woman, Cecilia Dunbar, who raised her as if she were her biological child.²

Ellen Johnson was born on 29 October 1938 in Monrovia where, at the age of 17, she married James Sirleaf. The marriage ended in divorce and her former husband later died. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, as she continued to call herself, now has four sons and eleven grandchildren.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf studied economics and public administration at Harvard and, after finishing her studies, she returned to Liberia and worked for the Tolbert government. At the time of Samuel Doe's coup she was Minister of Finance. President Tolbert had promoted her to that position in August 1979, making her the country's first female finance minister. It is not clear why she was not arrested during the coup. In her autobiography, Sirleaf writes that she was not at home on the night of April 12, but was staying with a friend. She goes on to describe her firm belief that it was her reputation as a 'rebel' who had

¹ This section is partly based on *Ellen Johnson Sirleaf: 1st elected female African President* from the website *Liberia: Past and Present of Africa's Oldest Republic* (published between 2005 and 2011 by the author, based on personal research) and partly on the blog *Liberian Perspectives*, also by the author. Other facts have been taken from Sirleaf's autobiography (written with Kim McLarin), *This Child will be Great* (2009).

² Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, *This Child will be Great: Memoirs of a Remarkable Life by Africa's First Woman President*, p.10-12

criticized both president Tubman and president Tolbert that had saved her skin.³ Her autobiography also elaborates in detail her stormy relations with Samuel Doe, with whom she only worked for a short time. It was only a matter of time before she clashed with the ‘high-school kid’ president. She was placed under house arrest and eventually ended up in prison, but miraculously managed to escape. The story of those years reads like an exciting thriller, but makes the skin creep, as the reader knows that it is not fiction.

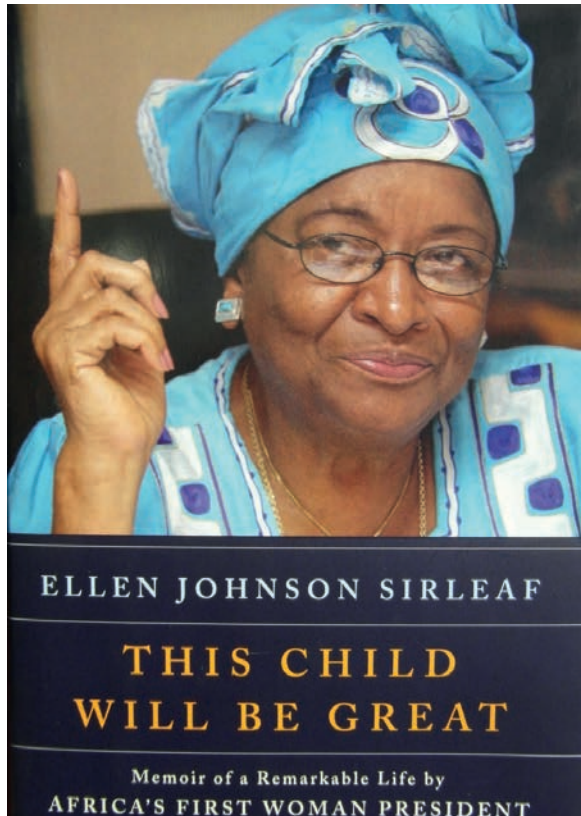


Illustration 23 The cover of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf’s autobiography, *This Child will be Great*, 2009

Sirleaf’s life has been a succession of ups and downs. She lost the presidential elections of 1997 to her – by then – big rival, Charles Taylor. When he was forced to resign in August 2003, she was there when his successor was chosen in Accra, Ghana. According to insiders like Tom Woewiyu, she made her

³ *Idem*, p.99.

presence very much felt and had clear ambitions: the highest prize, i.e. the presidency. She confirms this in her autobiography,⁴ but in the end the prize went to someone else: businessman and chairman of the Liberian Action Party (LAP) Gyude Bryant. Bryant became the interim leader, leading the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL).

Two years later, she competed again in the presidential elections. Her main rival was George Weah, a world famous soccer star, who had won the African Footballer of the Year award three times. In 1995, he was named not only African Footballer of the Year, but also European Player of the Year and FIFA World Player of the Year. He was a wealthy man, who proved willing to share his wealth with others on many occasions. As an ex-footballer, Weah was an especially popular presidential candidate among young people in Liberia.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf beat Weah in the second round of the elections by a wide margin and, in January 2006, she was sworn in as Liberia's, and Africa's, first democratically elected woman president. By then she had earned the nickname of the 'Iron Lady', which speaks for itself after the foregoing account. Despite announcing during her election campaign that she would not run for a second term, she took part in the presidential elections in 2011. Sixteen candidates were in the race for the presidency, including notorious former warlord Prince Johnson and political veteran Togba-Nah Tipoteh. A salient detail that once again illustrates just how much Liberian politics is a family affair: Tipoteh is the uncle of George Weah.

Once again, George Weah was Sirleaf's main rival, but this time he stood for the vice-presidency and had secured himself an imposing running mate as presidential candidate, Winston Tubman. Tubman, a 'veteran' of Liberian politics, is the nephew of former president William Tubman and studied law at Harvard. He had been a successful lawyer in Liberia before pursuing an international career with the United Nations.

Sirleaf and Tubman are practically the same age and know each other well. Like Sirleaf, Tubman has firm roots in the political establishment, the Americo-Liberian elite, although unlike her, he has no tribal roots. In the US, both had attended meetings of the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL) which had instigated the call for the end of the one-party state, heralding the fall of Americo-Liberian hegemony. In 1985, Winston Tubman had been a member of the National Constitutional Commission, chaired by Amos Sawyer, which had drafted a new constitution on the orders of PRC chairman Samuel Doe. Like Sirleaf, Winston Tubman had been in Banjul, Gambia, in 1990 when an interim government had been formed under the leadership of Amos Sawyer. He had also made a bid for the presidency in 2005, as a candidate for Samuel Doe's old party, but had lost. So now he was running again, this time under the flag of

⁴ *Idem*, p. 241.

Weah's party. Liberian politics seemed to have gone back to square one, with leading roles for the well-known families.

At the end of 2011, after a sometimes stormy run-up to the elections, the Iron Lady once again emerged the winner. On the eve of the second round of voting, she was jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in far-off Stockholm, together with fellow Liberian and peace activist Leymah Gbowee and Yemeni journalist, politician and human rights activist Tawakkol Karman. This gesture was ill-received by her opponents in Liberia.

In January 2012, now 73, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was sworn in for a second six-year term of office. By the end of her second term, in 2018, she will be Liberia's longest-serving president since 1971.



Illustration 24 On November 9, 2012, president Sirleaf received an Honorary Doctorate Degree from Tilburg University. On the left, Liberian ambassador Francis Karpeh, on the right, chairman of the foundation board of Tilburg University, Ruud Lubbers

A controversial president with an impressive list of achievements

In most African countries, the government is identified with the president and Liberia is no exception. Parliamentary elections are held together with presidential elections, but regardless of the outcome – whether the president's party has a majority, even an absolute majority – the result is usually a rubber stamp parliament. In Liberia, elections are held at only three levels: for the presidency, for parliament, and for traditional representatives at village level. The country's president decides on all other appointments, at all other levels.

Parliamentary approval of legislation and the annual budget (including possible amendments to it), as well as the debates conducted within this institution, have a highly ritual character. This places a special responsibility on the president, who takes decisions but has to rely on the members of the cabinet she has appointed, government bodies, state corporations and other government services, including the police and the army, to carry them out. Insufficient separation of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary and their inefficient functioning, together with the absence of an effective system of checks and balances, are the greatest obstacles to creating and maintaining the rule of law.

Against this background, during her first term and the beginning of her second term, president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has chalked up an impressive list of achievements – and has invoked considerable criticism. In general, friend and foe agree that, in this period following the devastating civil wars, Liberia could not have had a better person running the country. Some even go as far as calling her the best president the country has ever had. That does not alter the fact that Liberians' criticisms of her are harsh and even seem to be increasing. Internationally, her authority and image also seem on the wane. Let us take a look at the facts.

International debt cancellation

Her greatest achievements are a consequence of her competence and experience, and her impressive international network of relations with key figures in government and international institutions. Right at the top of the list is the cancellation of the country's \$4.6 billion debt, which hung around Liberia's neck like a millstone. The country could not pay back the interest, let alone the principal, and this made it a huge obstacle to acquiring new capital. About one third of the total foreign debt was due to multilateral creditors, primarily the Bretton Woods institutions in Washington DC – the IMF and the World Bank – and two thirds to bilateral and commercial creditors (\$1.5 billion and \$3.1 billion respectively).

Being a former World Bank official, Sirleaf and Antoinette Sayeh – who had worked with the World Bank in Washington DC before becoming Minister of Finance in Sirleaf's first cabinet – succeeded in making Liberia eligible for debt relief as part of the joint IMF-World Bank Enhanced HIPC Initiative, which aimed to reduce the debt burden of the most highly indebted countries. Once the debt cancellation process had been set in motion, Sayeh returned to Washington and was appointed Director of the IMF's African Department in May 2008. In 2010, Liberia met the criteria to reach the HIPC 'completion point', and the \$4.6 billion debt relief came into force. The IMF's contribution of \$730 million was the highest ever within the HIPC initiative.

An economic 'Open Door Policy'

Another of president Sirleaf's major achievements has been to attract foreign investors. This has largely been made possible by the cancellation of the country's debts. Before the civil wars, Liberia's modern economy was based on the plantation and mining sectors, both of which were in foreign hands. The open hostilities had caused a mass exodus of investors. The country is well endowed with natural resources: gold, diamonds, iron ore and tropical hardwood. Oil has been recently discovered, though not yet in amounts that would make extraction commercially viable. Liberia also has huge agricultural potential, especially for the cultivation of rubber and palm oil. Sirleaf has succeeded in concluding concession agreements with foreign investors which – if they materialized – would result in investments of at least \$20-25 billion – an indisputably impressive achievement. But, as can be seen from what follows, all that glitters is not gold.

Maps 5, 6 and 7 show the many plans and activities in the various economic sectors, with detailed overviews in annexes 3, 4, and 5, respectively.⁵ If they all come to fruition, these investments can play a key role in the country's economic recovery. They may even lead to a recurrence of the spectacular economic growth of the 1960s, creating tens of thousands of jobs, important in a country where an estimated 90% of the working population is unemployed. Government revenue could double, enabling it to perform its public tasks – for example, in education, health care, infrastructure, and law and order – more effectively. All this would depend, of course, on Liberia avoiding the mistake it made in the past, of achieving 'growth without development'.

⁵ Map 5 presents the foreign investors in large-scale rubber and oil palm plantations. Map 6 shows the mining companies exploring for and exploiting the country's mineral wealth: gold, diamonds and iron ore. Map 7 focuses on oil and gas, a promising new economic sector in Liberia.

*The agricultural sector*⁶

In the plantation sector, spectacular agreements have been made with foreign investors. The most important is a concession agreement signed with Malaysia-based agro-industrial conglomerate Sime Darby for the development of oil palm and rubber plantations in the west of the country which may lead to investments totalling \$3.1 billion and create tens of thousands of jobs. The multinational is the biggest industrial group in Malaysia and the world's largest palm oil producer. In 2009, Sime Darby signed a 63-year concession agreement with the government of Liberia entitling it to large areas of land in Grand Cape Mount, Gbarpolu, Bomi and Bong Counties. Sime Darby Liberia has already made a start on exploiting the plantations in Grand Cape Mount County, planting the first oil palms in 2011, and plans to do the same in the other three counties. However, this has led to problems and conflicts with local communities regarding rights of ownership of land that has in some cases been used by villages for centuries in a crop rotation system where some of the farmland temporarily lies fallow. In the wake of the 2014 Ebola epidemic, Sime Darby had to postpone the construction of a mill for its plantation, which was earlier due for completion in mid-2015. Construction will resume once the evacuated Malaysian staff have returned to the country.

At the end of 2010 another oil palm developer, Golden Veroleum Liberia (GVL), started investing in oil palm plantations and a palm oil complex in the southeast of the country which could amount to \$1.6 billion. GVL has financial and technological ties with related companies in Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea), including Golden Agri-resources Ltd, which belongs to the Indonesian Sinar Mas Group. GVL and Liberia signed a 65-year concession agreement for the development of plantations on land still to be designated in Sinoe, Grand Kru, River Cess, River Gee and Maryland Counties. Observers are concerned that the contracts do not include a requirement to inform local residents that their land has been selected for the plantation development. Work started in Sinoe County in December 2010.

The Sirleaf administration has succeeded in interesting two more multinationals in investing in oil palm plantations in the country. The amounts of the planned investments have not been made public.

Equatorial Palm Oil Ltd (EPO), from the UK, and the Liberian government agreed on a 50-year concession agreement in 2006, which was ratified two years later. The agreement granted EPO rights to land in Grand Bassa and Sinoe Counties, with a possible extension in River Cess County. In 1965, oil giant Paul

⁶ See map 5 and the accompanying overview of rubber and oil palm plantations in annex 3. For the sake of brevity, not all 11 rubber and oil palm plantations presented in the overview are discussed here. The overview also briefly focuses on the forestry sector and logging activities.

Getty ('Getty Oil Company') had been granted a concession for oil palm cultivation in the same area in Grand Bassa County, operated by his company, Liberian Operations Inc (LIBINC). EPO planted the first oil palms in the county in 2011, which led to conflicts with the local population. In 2014, villagers of District #4 accused EPO of land-grabbing. In late 2013, Malaysian palm oil giant KL-Kepong International acquired a majority interest in EPO.

In 2011, the Liberian government and SIFCA Rubber and Oil Palm Plantations agreed on a 25-year lease for the rehabilitation of an old, neglected oil palm plantation in Maryland and River Gee Counties formerly owned by Decoris Palm Oil. Abidjan-based SIFCA is substantially owned by Singapore's Wilmar International and Olam International, two of Asia's leading agro-businesses.

In the rubber sector, Firestone Liberia passed into Japanese hands on the eve of the civil war in 1988, when the American Firestone Tire & Rubber Company was purchased by the Bridgestone Corporation. The Japanese corporation paid \$2.65 billion for the legendary American company. The fighting disrupted the regular plantation and production activity not only of Firestone but also of the other large foreign plantation companies. Buildings and other infrastructure were bombarded and looted, and no new investments were made. During the conflict, foreign owners left the country and, in many cases, the rubber was illegally tapped by warlords and poor Liberians.⁷

Bridgestone had already resumed its activities on the well-known Harbel plantation, near Robertsfield International Airport, before Sirleaf's election in 2005. With an area of around 160,000 acres planted, Firestone Liberia ('Harbel') still constitutes the world's largest continuous rubber plantation. Shortly after taking office, president Sirleaf concluded new agreements with the Japanese owners of the Bridgestone Group, which replaced the agreement reached with the corrupt transitional government of Gyude Bryant that preceded her. Eighty years after Firestone first started operating in Liberia in 1926, the company thus made a new start. The company claims that, since the end of the second civil war, it has invested nearly \$150 million, some 85 million of which since 2006.

President Sirleaf's success in attracting foreign capital and manpower to initiate productive activities in the country has not been limited to the above.

⁷ According to a Frontline/ProPublica documentary released in 2014, *Firestone and the Warlord: Introduction to the tragedy of Liberia*, the management of the Harbel rubber plantation and warlord Charles Taylor had reached an agreement in the early 1990s that made it possible to continue rubber operations in exchange for allowing Taylor and his NPFL to use the area as a military base and hideout, and paying 'taxes' to the National Patriotic Reconstruction Assembly Government (NPRAG), Taylor's rebel government. Taylor later declared under oath that the money received from Firestone in the early stages of the first civil war had been the 'most significant' source of foreign exchange. Presumably, these funds enabled the NPFL to buy weapons abroad. The management and owners of Firestone-Liberia denied the allegations. (source: <http://thenewslab.com/news/highlights/1754-npfl-captured-firestone-against-our-wishes>). In an interview with Frontline/ProPublica on the role played by Firestone in Liberia, president Sirleaf said 'It's a mixed story' (source: <http://www.ocsignal.com/2015/02/firestone-and-the-warlord/>).

She has also managed to interest three other foreign investors in rehabilitating and possibly expanding four old rubber plantations.

As mentioned above the Liberian government and the Malaysian Sime Darby Group concluded a concession agreement in 2009 for the development of rubber and oil palm plantations in the west of the country. The Sime Darby rubber plantation is a continuation and rehabilitation of the old B.F. Goodrich plantation – developed on basis of a 1954 concession agreement – and renamed the Guthrie plantation after the departure of the American owners. It is located in Bomi and Grand Cape Mount Counties.

The second investor is the Salala Rubber Corporation (SRC) in Margibi County. The Belgian owners reached an agreement with the Sirleaf administration in 2007 for rehabilitation of an old Dutch-owned plantation, developed on basis of a 1959 concession agreement. The Belgian investors have also been operating another old rubber plantation since 2007, the Liberian Agricultural Company (LAC) in Grand Bassa County, based on a original 1958 concession agreement. LAC is the second largest rubber plantation in terms of workforce size and acreage under cultivation. Lastly, in the southeast of the country the SIFCA Rubber and Oil Palm Plantation operates the Cavalla Rubber Plantation, previously owned and operated since 1926 by the Firestone Plantations Company (for SIFCA, see also the preceding section on oil palm plantations). It is interesting to note that, in granting these concessions, president Sirleaf is following in the footsteps of president Tubman (1944-1971). The concessions in the agricultural sector, notably for the production of rubber but also for some oil palm plantations, are for the same plantations as those granted by Tubman in the 1950s and 1960s.⁸ The concessions of the 1950s and 1960s were, however, granted to European and American investors, whereas Asian investors have now taken their place. Unfortunately, in both cases, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that the rights and interests of the local people were not sufficiently protected and that, clearly, Liberia has made little significant progress in the past 50 years – at least not in this respect.

We continue with the exploitation of Liberia's rich tropical forests. The country has the largest untouched primary rainforest of West Africa, accounting for 43% of the Upper Guinean Rainforest, with an estimated 250 different species of trees. More than 40% of the country (4.3 million hectares) is covered with tropical forest. Liberia also has a rich fauna, including rare species threatened with extinction and, with over 600 different species of birds, it is an ornithological paradise.

In 2006, two weeks after her inauguration, president Sirleaf cancelled all forest concession agreements granted by previous governments. Her decision

⁸ Based on F.P.M. van der Kraaij, *The Open Door Policy of Liberia: An Economic History of Modern Liberia* (Bremen, 1983). See also map 5.

followed the disclosure by the Forest Concession Review Committee that nearly two and a half times the entire forested surface area of the country had been granted in concessions. Again, I was struck by the repetition of previous practices. In my 1983 study on foreign investments during the governments of presidents Tubman and Tolbert, I had also arrived at the conclusion that more timber concession area had been given to investors than was available in the country.⁹

President Sirleaf's decision helped persuade the UN Security Council to lift the 2003 embargo on timber exports from Liberia. Subsequently, exports gradually resumed and first steps were taken to reform the forestry sector.

In 2012, Global Witness announced that logging concessions had been granted for more than 60% of the country's rainforests in the preceding six years. The report claimed that logging in Liberia is typified by fraud, corruption and mismanagement, leading the government to order an investigation. Of the two people holding primary political responsibility, only the director of the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) resigned, while Minister of Agriculture Florence Chenoweth stayed on. Critics of president Sirleaf pointed to her close ties with the minister, who had been her colleague in president Tolbert's government in the 1970s (see 'The Day Monrovia Stood Still' in chapter 1).

*The mining sector*¹⁰

The first of a series of large deals with big investors in the mining sector was with ArcelorMittal, the world's largest steel producer, in 2006, shortly after Sirleaf had taken office as Liberia's first female president. As had been the case with Firestone, president Sirleaf found it necessary to renegotiate the agreement that the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) and ArcelorMittal had reached in 2005. On the basis of the 2006 Mineral Development Agreement (MDA) the European-Indian steel concern will exploit the rich iron ore reserves in Nimba County, restore the former Yekepa mine owned and operated by the Liberian-American-Swedish LAMCO mining company since 1960, reconstruct the railway from Yekepa to the port of Buchanan, and asphalt the 45 miles of road between Yekepa and Ganta. By the end of 2013, ArcelorMittal claimed that it had spent some \$800 million on infrastructure during its first phase of operations, and it plans to spend \$1.8 billion in the second phase.

In 2011, the first – symbolic – shipment of iron ore from Liberia since the civil war took place. The last shipment had been in 1992. During this first phase, ArcelorMittal is producing five million tons of iron ore a year. The company's

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 276.

¹⁰ See map 6 and the accompanying overview of foreign investments in the mining sector in annex 4. For the sake of brevity, not all 11 mining companies presented in the overview are discussed here.

target was to produce 15 million tons of ore during the second phase, starting in 2015. However, the expansion program has been delayed due to the Ebola crisis.

Illustration 25 Liberia: 80 years of supplying commodities



Illustration 25a Despite 80 years of producing rubber...



Illustration 25b It is still not processed locally...

Furthermore, in 2009 the Liberian government reached an agreement with China Union on the exploitation of iron ore in the Bong Range, where the German Bong Mining Company had previously been active, from the early 1960s onwards. The investments could amount to \$2.7 billion. The Wuhan Iron and Steel Group Corporation (WISCO) of Hong Kong, the world's biggest iron ore mining company, is now a majority owner of China Union. The first shipment of iron ore took place in 2014. Because of the Ebola outbreak it is uncertain whether the plans to export 10 million tons of iron ore in 2016 will be realized.

In addition, president Sirleaf succeeded in attracting investors for the important iron ore reserves in Western Liberia and in the Putu Range in the east of the country. The president is also in an advanced phase of negotiations with investors seriously interested in exploiting the rich iron ore reserves in the Wologisi Mountains, in the northwest of the country.

The Western Cluster project is part of a concession agreement reached with foreign investors in 2009. In 2012, these investors sold their interests to Sesa Gao, part of the Vedanta Resources Group, India's largest iron ore exporter, and renamed Sesa Sterlite in 2014. Western Cluster consists of three mining projects, in the iron ore reserves in Bea Mountain, Bomi Hills and at Mano River on the border with Sierra Leone. It is interesting to note that two of these sites were previously exploited by the Liberia Mining Company (LMC) and the National Iron Ore Company (NIOC), on the basis of concession agreements granted by the Tubman administration. Besides the mining infrastructure, the mega Western Cluster project includes construction of a railway line and a port. Investments costs could easily reach \$1-2 billion. The first phase of the project focuses on Bomi. The initial plans to start exporting iron ore at the end of 2014 have been delayed by the Ebola outbreak.

In 2008, the large Russian steel concern Severstal bought the mining rights for the Putu Range from Mano River Resources for, allegedly, \$200 million. Mano River Resources owned mining rights for gold, diamonds and iron ore in various parts of the country but never undertook any serious action. In 2010, the Putu Iron Ore Mining Company (PIOM), 100% owned by Severstal, signed a contract with the Liberian government to exploit the iron ore reserves in the Putu Range, the second largest in the country. It had been known for a long time that this area, in Grand Gedeh County, has large iron reserves but previous governments had been unable to attract investors. Severstal has committed itself to constructing a railway from Putu to the port of Greenville, in Sinoe County, from where the iron ore will be exported. The company will also build an all-weather road from Putu to Greenville. Realization of the initial plans to start production in 2017 is doubtful, as the Ebola epidemic in 2014 prevented the start of a number of important activities. For the time being, the sum invested remains relatively modest and is estimated not to exceed \$100 million.

Three more major mining projects are underway. The first is the Mofe Creek Iron project, described by the Australian owners as 'Africa's most exciting new iron ore project'. Reportedly, the iron ore deposits at Mofe Creek in Bomi County have an iron content of 64-68% , nearly as high as the fabulous Bomi Hills deposits exploited by Liberia's first iron ore mining company, LMC (1951-1977), which are the richest in the country. The Mofe Creek deposits are located at the end of LMC's mine, only 12 miles from the coast. The Australian mining company, Tawana Resources, which owns the Mofe Creek Iron project, started a pre-feasibility study in 2014 but suspended its activities in August 2014 due to the Ebola outbreak. A feasibility study is a prerequisite for a MDA, so nothing is certain yet, as Liberia's history of dealing with serious and less serious foreign investors has shown that investors' promises and ownership of concession rights can easily change.

The second project is being run by Cavalla Resources, which is wholly owned by Jonah Capital, a South African investment company. In 2010, The Sirleaf administration and BHP Billiton Iron Ore Holdings signed a 25-year MDA for operations in Nimba, Bong, Grand Bassa and Margibi Counties. BHP Billiton announced that investments could be as high as \$3 billion. However, in 2014, the company sold its rights to Jonah Capital, making the latter – once the sale has been approved by the Liberian Government – the largest holder of iron ore concessions in the country. Cavalla Resources had planned to commence production in 2016. This will require the construction of a new iron ore berth at the port of Buchanan, but the Ebola crisis will likely make it necessary to change this planning.

Thirdly, negotiations are underway between the Sirleaf administration and the Indian Jindal Steel and Power Ltd Group (JSPL) on exploitation of the iron ore reserves of Wologisi, in the northwest of the country, which are expected to be Liberia's largest iron ore reserves.¹¹ JSPL is the largest coal-based producer of sponge iron in Asia and the second in the world. The negotiations, which have already been going on for two years, could lead to anything. At the time of writing, all options are still open, from the start of a successful and fruitful relationship between the Republic of Liberia and the Indian investors, to the loss of the present hopeful prospects. JSPL is, however, not the only party interested in Wologisi; Chinese investors have also shown an interest. Investments could easily be as high as \$2 billion, which is not surprising as the greater part of the Wologisi Range is still covered by primary rainforest and the deposits are some

¹¹ Plans for exploitation of the Wologisi iron ore reserves are not new. In 1967 the Liberian government granted a 70-year concession for the Wologisi Range to one of the most famous adventurers/investors in Liberia's economic history, the American Lee Edgar Detwiler. To exploit the concession, Detwiler created the Liberian Iron and Steel Corporation (LISCO). The project never materialized. *Op. cit.*, pp. 250-259.

140 miles from Monrovia, as the crow flies.¹² An important side-effect of JSPL's involvement is that the Indian company might be willing to invest in Liberia's energy sector, which is still in shambles ten years after the end of the second civil war.

Besides iron ore, Liberia also has gold, diamonds and oil. Gold and diamonds have been extracted by traditional means in unknown quantities since time immemorial. Foreign investors have also always shown an interest in Liberia's potential as a source of these two high-priced products, which has led in the past to more than one shady deal with the government. This was the case during both the Tubman and Tolbert administrations,¹³ and in the country's more recent past (see annex 4).

Two large foreign companies are currently making plans to turn Liberia into an important gold-exporting country. The most advanced in terms of pre-mining operations is Aureus Mining, from Canada, whose New Liberty project involves exploiting Liberia's first commercial gold mine in the Bea Mountain area of Grand Cape Mount County. The second investor, the English company Hummingbird Resources owns three concessions on the other side of the country, in the southeast, including the important Dugbe gold project in Sinoe County.

Two other companies are still in an early exploratory phase. Tawana Resources, which also owns the Mofe Creek Iron Ore concession, was granted three gold licenses in 2011, in Sinoe, Nimba and Lofa Counties. Endeavour Mining, an investment company registered in the Cayman Islands, acquired three licenses in 2015, one for an area adjacent to Aureus' New Liberty project in Grand Cape Mount County, and in Gbarpolu and Lofa Counties.

Lastly, the Newmont Mining Corporation, one of the largest gold companies in the world and at present the largest US gold company, has also shown interest in Liberia's gold potential. Precise information on the company's exploratory activities in Liberia is unavailable, apart from its 100% ownership of a subsidiary, Euronimba Liberia Ltd, which appears to be more involved in the exploitation of iron ore reserves in neighbouring Guinea than in Liberia's gold potential (see annex 4).

The diamond sector is an altogether different story. This shadowy world still escapes inspection by Liberian government officials, who at times give the impression of connivance – or at least tacit collaboration – with dubious or outright illegal practices. Recent examples include the Liberian-owned Jungle

¹² The various options for transporting the ore to the coast considered in the late 1960s and early 1970s by LISCO are still valid. They ranged from constructing a railway directly to the coast or to Yekepa, linking it to the Nimba-Buchanan railway, or a slurry pipeline to the Port of Monrovia, and the development of a new harbour at Williamsport, between Monrovia and Robertsport. *Op. cit.*, pp. 257-258.

¹³ *Op. cit.* chapter 6, 'Gold and diamond mining', pp. 138-162.

Water Company, Italgems (which has Italian connections) and American Mining Associates, a US-owned company (see annex 4). The acknowledgement in 2013 by the Minister of Lands, Mines and Energy that the government is only capable of tracing an estimated 60% of the exported diamonds to their production areas speaks volumes. In fact, this estimate was just a wild guess. The Ministry estimated, also in 2013, that over 75% of diamonds extracted in Liberia's western region are being illegally exported to neighbouring Sierra Leone.¹⁴ These admissions invoked a heated international response. The Liberian government was reprimanded by the UN for not supervising diamond production in the country and therefore failing to comply with the agreements made as part of the Kimberley Process. This is a joint initiative of governments, the diamond industry and civil society to combat trade in 'conflict diamonds' by ensuring that all diamonds traded on the international diamond market have a government-validated Kimberley Process Certificate.

*The oil and gas sector*¹⁵

The Sirleaf administration has without doubt been the most active, or rather the most innovative, in the oil and gas sector. In the second half of the twentieth century, foreign investors were also interested in the possible presence of oil and gas reserves, but no concrete action was ever taken (see annex 5). New technological developments and the proven presence of oil off the Liberian coast and elsewhere in the Gulf of Guinea led to renewed interest from foreign investors, including the usual adventurers and fortune-hunters, but also serious, world-renowned oil companies.

The legislation in Liberia relating to the oil and gas sector is still in its early days, but an important step was taken in 2000 with the creation of the National Oil Company of Liberia (NOCAL), which is responsible for implementing government policy on the exploration and exploitation of oil and gas reserves, both offshore and onshore. The area off the coast, the Liberia Basin, is divided up into 30 blocks. Since 2004, NOCAL has awarded ten offshore production sharing contracts (PSCs) to five foreign companies. However, due to the proliferation of ownership shares and financing constructions, as many as a dozen companies are actually involved. Because of the large sums involved in seeking and exploiting oil and gas fields and because the stakes are high for all parties involved in the award of contracts to whatever degree – foreign investors, the Liberian state, government and parliament, local authorities, civil society – the oil and gas sector is a source of conflicts, shady deals and dubious practices. Closer examination of the most important PSCs (see below) leads to

¹⁴ Source: New Democrat (Monrovia), 'Liberia loses diamonds to Sierra Leone', see: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201301151166.html>

¹⁵ Also see map 7 and the accompanying overview of the oil and gas sector in annex 5.

the unavoidable conclusion that parliament does not perform its supervisory and legislative roles as it should.

The main ins and outs of contacts with potential investors and the contracts (PSCs) that arise from them are described in annex 5. Here we shall look at them only in brief. Awarding contracts without an international bidding or procurement process, signing contracts with companies with little experience in the oil sector or which are financially unstable, selling on of concession rights for substantial amounts by concession-holders who are not interested in actually exploiting them (i.e. speculators), dubious payments that smack of corruption – these are all practices that have occurred and still occur in 2015, which are not in the interests of the Liberian state or its people. NOCAL of course bears a great responsibility in this respect. The way in which a number of NOCAL managers have been in the news in recent years – accused of bribery and corruption, nepotism, conflicts of interest – raises questions about the requirements they have to meet in terms of integrity and unimpeachable conduct. They include Fodee Kromah and Christopher Nyor, former Presidents/CEOs of the company, and Robert Sirleaf and Clemenceau Urey, Chairs of the NOCAL Board of Directors.¹⁶ On at least three occasions, NOCAL made payments to members of parliament ‘to expedite matters’, which the Auditor General denounced as bribery. The latest news at the time of writing was the mysterious death of whistleblower Michael Allison, who had drawn attention to the irregularities at NOCAL.¹⁷ The account reads like a crime novel, but this is how business is done in Liberia.

The African Petroleum Company, one of the five offshore license owners, discovered oil off the coast of River Cess and Sinoe Counties in 2012. This discovery was the first to prove the existence of a working petroleum system in the central Liberia Basin. Although it has yet to be proven that the quantities found are commercially exploitable, the find has increased the interest of other major players, notably Anadarko, Chevron and ExxonMobil. Anadarko already had four 25-year PSCs in the Liberia Basin, granted in 2008 and 2009. In a controversial deal, Chevron bought a 70% interest in three deepwater blocks from a small Nigerian company in 2010. Later it sold 25% to the Italian oil company Eni. The three blocks cover an area of about 2.4 million acres, making

¹⁶ In February 2015, a number of former managers and executive staff members of NOCAL were indicted, accused of economic sabotage, bribery and criminal conspiracy. Among them were the former Chairman of the Board of Directors, Clemenceau Urey, four former members of the Board of Directors, and Fodee Kromah, former President/CEO. The accusations were related to events in 2006 and 2007 but it was not disclosed which oil blocks and/or oil companies had been involved.

¹⁷ Michael Allison, whose real name was allegedly Nkrumah Mozia Madin and was a consultant to NOCAL, was reportedly involved in irregular payments. His revelations involved the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Alex J. Tyler, and led to an investigation by the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC). Michael Allison was found dead on a Monrovia beach on February 13, 2015, under circumstances that led to speculations of foul play.

the PSC between Chevron and the Liberian Government the largest concession in the country's history. The expected investments – \$10.7 billion – would be the highest amount ever invested in Liberia for a single operation. ExxonMobil also acquired its exploration rights indirectly from a small company with a weak financial status and no prior experience in the oil sector.

In December 2014, NOCAL announced that the winner of the 2014 Liberia Basin Bid Round for one of the two blocks on offer was the Liberty Petroleum Corporation, a US-registered company. A few days later, a Liberian newspaper reported that members of the legislature had allegedly received bribes to the tune of \$3 million for ratifying the contract. When, shortly afterwards, plans for the Liberty Petroleum Company – a small, junior company with reportedly no more than seven employees and no extensive experience in the oil sector – to resell the contract were leaked, there was a storm of protest. Observers recalled two previous cases, when two companies that owned oil exploration rights had sold their licenses for large sums of money to more robust investors, Chevron and ExxonMobil.

Lastly, the case of Simba Energy Inc, a Canadian oil company, once more clearly illustrates the complexity and unusual, at times irregular, nature of some of the dealings described. In 2009, International Resource Strategies Liberia Energy Ltd was granted an onshore Hydrocarbon Reconnaissance License, the only known reconnaissance permit for an onshore block in the country. Gold Star Resources Corporation – which later changed its name to Simba Energy – immediately bought 90% of IRSLE's interests in the oil block. Much is unclear about Simba's license: was it granted by the Ministry of Lands and Mines (and not by NOCAL) – which would have been illegal – and who authorized the survey that Simba carried out in part of its license area, around Marshall City and Robertsfield International Airport in 2010? NOCAL certainly does not mention Simba Energy on its website presenting the status of granted licences, but in 2011 NOCAL representatives entered into negotiations with Simba Energy to convert the reconnaissance license to a PSC. The outcome of these discussions was never published.

Concluding remarks

In summary, the list of prospective and actual investors is impressive. Their eagerness to invest in Liberia reflects on the one hand the potential of the country and on the other hand their trust in its post-war future. Without any doubt, the latter to a very large extent is to be credited to president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and her views on the development of Liberia. My conclusion on president Sirleaf's economic policy is essentially that, probably influenced by her experience and memories of the way in which presidents Tubman and Tolbert pursued the Open Door Policy, she follows in the footsteps of her

illustrious predecessors. Like Tubman and Tolbert, president Sirleaf does not focus first on the development of Liberia's own potential, in particular its human resources. All her decisions point to her being convinced that Liberia cannot develop without external support, at least not quickly or not quickly enough. Foreign capital, manpower and knowhow can be accessed by awarding concession agreements to foreign investors. This explains her decision to exploit the country's substantial natural resources with the aid of foreign capital and manpower to generate revenue for the state, create employment, and build up a modern economy. But in reality this proved easier said than done. Where her predecessors had neglected the interests of the indigenous population, possibly for historical reasons, elements have also found their way into the concession agreements concluded by president Sirleaf that conflict with the interests of the local people in areas where foreign companies seem to wave the sceptre. Local farmers feel that their means of subsistence are under threat. This creates a significant source of conflict that is jeopardizing political stability.

Questions also arise about the size of the concession areas (see annexes 3, 4 and 5, the overviews of the agricultural, mining and oil & gas sectors). As during the Tubman and Tolbert administrations, the areas recently awarded to foreign investors are larger than necessary or desirable. Moreover, in Tubman's time, adventurers, mavericks and speculators like Christie, Detwiler, Stettinius, LeTourneau and Juan Jesus Ramos – to mention but a few – succeeded in acquiring important concessions despite having little money or experience. In the twenty-first century, the activities of companies like Elenilto, Oranto, Broadway and, more recently Liberty Petroleum – again to name but a few – have been no less questionable than those of the adventurers and speculators of the past, despite legal provisions aimed at avoiding or banning such constructions and situations.

Furthermore, bribery, corruption, shady deals, and a lack of transparency and accountability are rife. Despite the existence of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, the General Auditing Commission – even the Supreme Court and the National Legislature – unwholesome practices are far from an exception. As long as effective anti-corruption legislation and enforcement, and the separation of the legislature, executive and judiciary are not part and parcel of the Liberian system, then transparency and accountability must be seen as far-off goals and bribery and corruption daily practice.

Lastly, to bring this summary to close, a practical suggestion. As is the case in other oil-producing countries, it is advisable to introduce the statutory requirement that all revenue from the oil and gas sector should be recorded on a separate account. Income and expenditure on this account should be closely monitored by an independent body. In effect, it is worth considering expanding

the mandate of this body to all revenues from the concession sector. These could then be used to promote the long-term development of the country.

However, irrespective of the above, it should be said that – unlike cancellation of the country’s debts – these concession agreements, important as they are, hardly benefit Liberia directly in the short term as almost all of them involve long-term investments. Producing both natural rubber and palm oil takes several years. Rubber trees only start to produce after some seven years. Oil palm trees require a little less, three to four years. A lot of time and money has to be invested in infrastructure before an iron ore mine becomes productive, as many iron deposits are located in remote areas. And it takes a good five to seven years before oil can be extracted in commercially viable quantities. Furthermore, much depends of course on the international economic situation, especially commodity prices, which are by no means favourable at the moment (2015). Nevertheless, the IMF has estimated that, in the following ten years, these investments could yield the Liberian treasury some \$2 billion in tax revenues and royalties. The investments will also create extra jobs, more in agriculture than in mining. The most important employers in Liberia in the private sector are currently Firestone (8,000-10,000 employees), ArcelorMittal (4,000), Golden Veroleum Liberia (3,500), Sime Darby (3,000) and LAC (3,000). All these figures are approximate and were valid prior to the Ebola outbreak.

The Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP)

From her predecessor, interim leader Gyude Bryant, president Sirleaf also inherited a controversial cooperation programme with a group of international donors (the African Union, the UN, the EU, ECOWAS, the World Bank and the US) aimed at institutional reform. This sounds good, but the donors saw it primarily as a way of fighting corruption in the context of the country’s reconstruction, whereas critical Liberians interpreted it as humiliating neo-colonialism.

In September 2005, six months before Sirleaf was sworn in as president, Bryant – who had not been democratically elected but ‘chosen’ by a select group – had signed an agreement which became known by its abbreviation GEMAP (Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme). GEMAP granted foreign financial experts joint authority in signing for the expenses of a number of key ministries and institutions, including the Central Bank of Liberia, state-owned corporations and other government bodies. In addition, the income of these state-owned corporations went into separate accounts to keep it out of the hands of unscrupulous politicians and government

officials. The foreign experts were authorized to manage the corporations' management contracts and international tender procedures for the procurement of goods and services. Clearly, Liberia had effectively been placed under guardianship.

President Sirleaf had little other choice than to execute the programme according to plan. Not only did she know very well that it is politically unwise to rub donors up the wrong way, but she needed them badly for the debt cancellation programme and the continued presence of UNMIL. She also needed the time to get her own people into position. At the end of 2009, the mainly American foreign experts handed the authority to sign for public expenses back to their Liberian counterparts, bringing this controversial part of the cooperation programme to an end. Other parts of the programme, primarily relating to institutional reform and capacity development, continued.

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

Lastly, we come to UNMIL, the United Nations Mission in Liberia, which had been sent to the country following president Charles Taylor's departure in 2003. At its height, UNMIL consisted of 15,000 military personnel and 1,200 police officers.

On September 17 2012, the Security Council decided to decrease UNMIL's military strength by about 4,200 personnel, in three phases between August 2012 and July 2015. The mission's military strength would be at about 3,750 personnel by July 2015. At the same time, the Council decided to increase the number of UNMIL's authorized formed police units by some 420 personnel for a new authorized ceiling of 1,795 personnel.¹⁸ However, on December 15 2014, the Security Council decided that UNMIL's authorized strength should remain at up to 4,811 military and 1,795 police personnel. The reduction in UNMIL's military strength announced in 2012 was made dependent on progress made in combating the Ebola epidemic. Nevertheless, the Council expressed its expectation that the Liberian government would assume fully its complete security responsibilities from UNMIL no later than 30 June 2016.¹⁹

The UN troops are much needed. In 2003, Liberia no longer had an independent, competent, effective and reliable national army. But it needed one to disarm the warring parties, demobilize the militias and prevent the resumption of hostilities. As Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, with the rank of Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, Sirleaf was

¹⁸ Resolution 2066 (2012) Adopted by the Security Council at its 6,834th meeting, on 17 September 2012.

¹⁹ Resolution 2190 (2014) Adopted by the Security Council at its 7,340th meeting, on 15 December 2014.

familiar with how the UN system worked and she had access to key figures in this sometimes cumbersome machine, especially Kofi Annan, the Ghanaian Secretary-General of the organization. After his departure in 2007, she successfully conducted business with his successor Ban Ki-Moon, in which she received much-needed support from the government of the United States, which had placed peace and political stability in Africa in general, and in West Africa (and the Horn of Africa!) in particular, high on the political agenda. On the one hand, the US wants to prevent the emergence of failed states that are attractive bases for terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda and transit ports for drugs, mainly cocaine from South America. Somalia and Guinea-Bissau are obvious examples, and Mali may also follow suit as a result of the political vacuum and anarchy in the country after the military coup in 2012. On the other hand, West Africa – and Nigeria in particular – holds an important position in the American strategy of decreasing its dependence on Arab oil.

When I talked about this with a Liberian friend, he shrugged but sounded bitter when he said “We have foreign experts in key positions in government institutions. We need foreign investors to develop the country. We need foreign troops to keep the peace. Where is our independence? Liberia is a paradise lost.”

The Liberian diaspora

Hundreds of thousands of Liberians obviously agree and have literally ‘voted with their feet’. According to some estimates, more than ten years after the end of the second civil war and the departure of Charles Taylor, the Liberian diaspora amounts to half a million people. Nearly 100,000 of these emigrants have sought refuge in the United States (see box 15).

According to estimates from Liberian umbrella organizations, 500,000 Liberians live abroad, dispersed over all continents. Although this may be an exaggeration and the true number may be much lower (see below), in many cases those who have left are Liberia’s best-educated and best-trained people, with the most professional experience. An estimated 30 to 40% of educated Liberians have left the country to work abroad. They include architects, academics, doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, bankers, managers, business people and IT and telecom experts. Each year, Liberian emigrants transfer between \$100 and 350 million to Liberia, equal to 10-30% of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP).

It should be noted here, however, that it is not easy to obtain a precise picture of the scale and dispersion of the Liberian diaspora for three reasons. First, interest groups might overestimate the size of the Liberian community in a country (or state, in the case of the US) to increase their own importance.

Second, the size of a Liberian community in a country or state is not fixed but depends on the mobility of individuals, which may be influenced by restrictive local or national legislation. Third, not all Liberians in a country or state may join one of the many organizations of ex-pat Liberians, for various reasons.

Box 15 The dispersion of Liberians around the world

In the United States

There is a staggering number of organizations of Liberians abroad, partly because of the various ways in which Liberians organize themselves. Most seem to have been founded on a tribal basis, at least in the United States. The largest of them are the United Bassa Organization in the Americas (UNIBOA), the National Krao (Kru) Association in the Americas (NKAA) and the Federation of Liberian Mandingo Associations in the USA (FELMAUSA).

These are umbrella organizations with branches in various states. UNIBOA, for instance, has chapters in twelve different states and in the federal capital of Washington; FELMAUSA has the same number, but not in the same states, and NKAA has chapters in nine states, plus Washington DC. UNIBOA and NKAA, founded in the early 1970s, are among the oldest Liberian organizations and were a source of inspiration for other Liberians with tribal roots. Most organizations of Liberians in the US, however, like the United Sarpo Association in the Americas (USAA), were set up more recently, often by Liberian refugees.

Other organizations are based on the regions their members stem from, like the National Association of Cape Mountainians in the Americas (NACMA) or their religion, e.g. the Liberian Episcopalian Community in the USA (LECUSA). In addition, there are profession-based organizations, like the Association of Liberian Lawyers in the Americas (ALLA) and the Association of Liberian Ministers in the USA (ALIMUSA). According to its own website, the Liberian Professional Network (LPN) has more than 5,000 members dispersed over all continents.

Many organizations are named after the city or state in the US where their members live. Internet research shows that Liberians live in at least 22 states and in the federal capital of Washington, though there are probably Liberians living in almost all states. The state of Minnesota has perhaps the largest Liberian community in the United States, represented by the Organization of Liberians in Minnesota (OLM). They even issue their own newspaper, *The Liberian Journal*. Other large Liberian communities live in the states of New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island.

The total number of Liberians living in the United States is estimated at around 100,000. Most of them are in some way represented in the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA), the national umbrella organization of all Liberian organizations in the US (and Canada), with 23 branches in at least 13 states and in Washington.

There are serious internal tensions between and within the local organizations and their chapters, and between individual members. Liberians abroad seem to be equally as divided as their families and tribe members in their home country; the discussions between Liberians on internet forums like the Liberian Diaspora Forum, the Coalition of Concerned Liberians and the OnLiberianMedium Group are living proof of these differences.

*Outside the United States*** Europe*

ULAA's European sister organization is the European Federation of Liberian Associations (EFLA), which is located in Ghent, Belgium. It comprises national organizations in 13 European countries: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Switzerland.

It is not known how many Liberians the affiliated national organizations represent. Even the total number of Liberians in these (and other) European countries is unknown. Personally, I would make a tentative estimate of no more than 25,000 to 30,000 Liberians in Europe. The Netherlands is probably home to the largest Liberian community in Europe. In any case, during the civil wars, some 3,000 Liberians lived in the country and, according to the website of the Liberian Association Holland, *Liberians in Holland* (www.liberiansinholland.com), the association still has around the same number of members. The LAH is located in Amsterdam and is affiliated to the EFLA.

** Africa*

An unknown number of Liberians still live in Liberia's neighbouring countries Ivory Coast, Guinea and Sierra Leone. Large numbers also live in the English-speaking West African countries Ghana and Nigeria. After the second civil war in Liberia ended in 2003, I myself met Liberians in Johannesburg, South Africa. There are even Liberians in French-speaking countries like Senegal and Morocco, who have already been living there for many years.

Most Liberians in these countries fled during the civil wars. Originally, this amounted to many hundreds of thousands of people. In early January 2013, the United Nations Refugee Agency UNHCR repatriated the last group of Liberian refugees abroad from Guinea, marking the official end of the UN-sponsored return programme. An unknown number of Liberians preferred, for various reasons, not to return to their Land of Liberty. This could be some 100,000 to 200,000 people, some of whom have already adopted the nationality of their new country.

Mounting criticism of president Sirleaf*National reconciliation*

During her first term, president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf already faced serious criticism in Liberia. Initially, this came mainly from her political opponents, of which there were many. Although she had clearly defeated George Weah – winning 60% of the votes against 40% for Weah – his supporters were predominantly poor young people with few opportunities who could easily be mobilized for protests and demonstrations. In addition, Charles Taylor still had a large following in the country, among both prominent politicians and his voters from 1997. The criticism grew steadily during Sirleaf's first term, and picked up momentum during the election campaign in 2011 and during her second term. It is very much to Sirleaf's credit that she did not use the criticism as an excuse to curtail the freedom of expression and of the press. These human rights are

still respected more than ever before in the history of Liberia – and more so than in most African countries.

Recently, unfortunately, the government's good reputation has been somewhat tarnished and freedom of the press has come under threat. The arrest and subsequent treatment of editor and journalist Rodney Sieh and the closure of his *FrontPage Africa*, Liberia's largest independent newspaper in August 2013 attracted much attention in the country and abroad.²⁰ Despite being a serious attack on press freedom, the affair – as usual in Liberia – fizzled out.

Unfortunately, this action against *FrontPage Africa* and its publisher was not a one-off. President Sirleaf has also been criticized for restricting press freedom and freedom of speech in her response to the Ebola crisis in 2014. In early September 2014, the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) denounced the forced and illegal closure of the *National Chronicle* newspaper, the arrest of several of its staff, and the harassment of the editors of the *Women Voices* newspaper.

The main domestic criticism of Sirleaf is aimed at her role in the civil war and the lack of follow-up to the report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Although she led her 2005 election campaign with the promise to run only for one term, once president she changed her mind. One of the TRC's recommendations was to ban her from politics for 30 years after the completion of her term because of her role in starting the civil war. Obviously these two things – her personal ambition and the commission's recommendation – were not compatible. This is one explanation for her putting aside the report. It is possible, even probable, that other reasons, too, played a role – like the public resistance of former warlords who still play an important part in politics and public life – but this is not easy to prove. It is also possible that she wanted to postpone discussion of the report until after a second presidential term, for reasons of political stability or self-interest. Whatever her reasons, the result is that the important issue of national reconciliation remains up in the air.

Shortly after she had been sworn in for her second term, none other than former chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Jerome Verdier expressed strong criticism of Sirleaf in an open letter published in February 2012. In his '*Letter to Liberia. Re: Know Your Head of State – A War Maker or Peace Maker?*', he even accused her of not having told the whole truth to the TRC, although he did not produce sufficient evidence for this and other accusations. National and international observers of Liberian politics agree that it would be best for president Sirleaf to give the issue of national reconciliation as much priority as that of economic recovery, where she has achieved such great successes.

²⁰ It is interesting to note that Rodney Sieh is a nephew of Kenneth Best, one of Liberia's leading independent journalists.

Illustration 26 Rule of law, freedom of the press, freedom from fear



Illustration 26a Justice for all without national reconciliation is unthinkable



Illustration 26b Newspaper seller, Monrovia



Illustration 26c Newspaper seller, Harper



Illustration 26d Walking on the street without fear

Controversial appointments

Another much-heard criticism of Sirleaf is directed at her policy of public appointments. Critics point to the fact that she increasingly surrounds herself with confidants, acquaintances, friends and close relatives. To a certain extent, appointing trusted persons to politically important positions is understandable: partly because of the need for a confidential relationship between the Chief Executive and the public officials who implement her policies, and also because

the group of competent and honest Liberians is small. But here, too, the lack of a well-functioning system of checks and balances does not tend to encourage people to account for their actions and may encourage rather than prevent abuses of power.

Shortly after the start of her second term, there was considerable commotion about the appointments of four Sirleafs – three sons and a nephew.²¹ In the press and on the streets, president Sirleaf was strongly criticized for appointing her sons Charles as Deputy Governor of the Liberian Central Bank, Fumba as Director of the National Security Agency and Robert as Chairman of the National Oil Company of Liberia,²² and her nephew Varney as Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs. Though few people doubted the competence of the relatives she appointed, her political opponents drew attention to the fact that previous presidents Charles King, Arthur Barclay, William Tubman and William Tolbert had been criticized precisely for their nepotism. The fact that the appointments gave the Sirleaf family a firm grip on the country's banking, oil and security sectors feeds the criticism all the more.

There are many other familiar faces in the president's political and administrative surroundings. This is not surprising, given the close-knit nature of Liberian society. For instance, the now former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Olubanke King-Akerele, is a good friend of the president. Minister of Agriculture Florence Chenoweth held the same position in president Tolbert's cabinet, in which Sirleaf herself was Minister of Finance. The current Minister of Commerce and Industry, Miatta Beysolow, was one of her close assistants at that ministry. Her brother-in-law Estrada Bernard is one of her close legal advisors. Another advisor is Amos Sawyer, who is also the chairman of the Governance Commission, while fellow old-timer in Liberian politics, Togba-Nah Tipoteh, is chairman of the important subcommission of the Governance Commission, Vision 2030, which is to outline the country's path to development and poverty reduction policy until 2030. And finally – though this list is intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive – Henry Boima Fahnbulleh is president Sirleaf's political advisor on national security.

To avoid any misunderstanding, I do not wish to say that these Liberians are not competent. Far from it, they are very experienced and intelligent. What I want to make clear is that president Sirleaf has surrounded herself with people

²¹ The appointment of relatives was not new. One particular case was the appointment of President Johnson Sirleaf's brother Ambulai Johnson as Internal Affairs minister. He was fired in 2010 after the disappearance of funds for county development.

²² Robert Sirleaf was appointed Chairman of the Board of Directors of NOCAL by his mother in March 2012. His appointment led to a wave of criticism in Liberia. President Sirleaf was accused of nepotism. Moreover, Robert also served as her Senior Advisor. In September 2013, he tendered his resignation as chairman of the NOCAL board. Despite initial denials he ran for the Senate in the elections of December 2014 but was convincingly defeated by former soccer star and CDC candidate George Weah.

who depend on her – certainly financially, given the high monthly salaries and allowances they receive. And they are not the only ones; other high-ranking officials and all members of parliament are also paid very well. This of course, has its political repercussions.

A third category of appointments that invoked criticism are those of former supporters of Charles Taylor, fellow combatants in his NPFL militia, and those of other warlords and related people. Here, too, I will not provide a complete list, but confine myself to four striking examples.

The first example is that of Alhaji Kromah, warlord and leader of the notorious ULIMO-K militia. In its final report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommended that he be prosecuted, along with the other important warlords (see chapter 2). In April 2012, president Sirleaf appointed Kromah Ambassador-at-Large at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, based in Monrovia. The appointment caused much furore and gave new impetus to the discussion on impunity.²³ The second example is LeRoy Urey, former Deputy Minister and Deputy Attorney General under Charles Taylor. The 2001 UN report on Sierra Leone calls him a key figure in supplying arms to the rebels. From September 2010 until his resignation in May 2013, he was the first Chair of Liberia's Human Rights Commission, responsible for the follow-up to the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee. This report, as we have seen, ended up – at least for the time being – in a drawer. It is thus no surprise that Urey remained silent after the conviction and sentence of former president Charles Taylor in May 2012.²⁴

Thirdly, in 2006 president Sirleaf rewarded a former executive member of rebel group LURD and NTGL Justice Minister, Kabineh Ja'neh, for supporting her candidacy in the 2005 presidential elections by appointing him Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. Opponents accused Ja'neh of being involved in violations of human rights during the second civil war.²⁵ And lastly, Blamoh Nelson is one of Charles Taylor's oldest friends, and studied with him in the United States. There, he was also active in Liberian politics and one of the key figures in the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL). When Taylor became head of the General

²³ In November 2014 Alhaji Kromah tendered his resignation as Ambassador-at-Large following a presidential directive requesting all members of the Executive willing to participate in the 2014 Senatorial elections to resign their posts. Kromah was not successful in the elections, which were held in December 2014.

²⁴ In May 2013 Cllr. Leroy R. Urey resigned as Chairman of the Independent National Human Rights Commission (INCHR). He died on July 18, 2013.

²⁵ In May 2014 Associate Justice Kabineh Ja'neh was denied access to the US despite possessing a visa, because the US government 'had obtained additional information which contradicts his visa application' (see box 14). It is interesting to note that in 2011 the Supreme Court ruled that some recommendations made by the TRC were unconstitutional, in particular the 30-year ban from politics imposed on president Sirleaf and a number of politicians and individuals. Although this does not suggest that the Supreme Court is not objective, it would have been more advisable to avoid even the faintest suggestion of partiality.

Services Administration in 1980, Nelson became his right-hand man and he was closely associated with Taylor in the NPFL. When Taylor became president, Nelson became his Chief of Cabinet. In January 2012, at the start of her second term, president Sirleaf appointed him Minister of Internal Affairs. By doing so, she revived speculation and discussion about her role in the founding of the NPFL and her relations with its leading figures.²⁶

Corruption

Lastly, another important point of criticism: the corruption in the country. During her 2005 election campaign, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf declared corruption 'public enemy number one'. But she is now under fire for not taking enough action against this national plague, despite her setting up an anti-corruption commission and the ceaseless rhetoric that seems targeted at a predominantly international audience. Suspects of corruption usually lose their jobs, often high positions in government or public bodies, but they are seldom prosecuted; and the recovery of embezzled money or the proceeds of criminal activities is unheard of. In its 2010 Human Rights Report on Liberia, the US State Department said that the Liberian legal system is corrupt – a severe accusation. And in the same year Transparency International, which monitors corruption in different countries, ranked Liberia the world's most corrupt country.

Not much has improved since then. In July 2013, Transparency International announced that 75% of Liberians who responded to a TI survey on global corruption admitted having paid a bribe to a public body in the last year – the second highest number out of 107 countries. A month later, Afro Barometer – a comparative series of public attitude surveys, covering up to 35 African countries – showed that some 88 % of Liberian government officials are corrupt. The head of the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) responded laconically, saying that the report only repeated the conclusions reached by Global Witness. Specific reports of corruption in the legal system, and about police corruption, patronage, bribery, abuse and embezzlement in the educational system, are the order of the day. As became even clearer during the Ebola crisis, the same applies to the health sector. Corruption in the oil and gas sector is addressed in the overview to map 7 in annex 5.

Liberia's international partners, including UNMIL, the USA and the EU, have become increasingly vocal about the need to address corruption. However, in its 2014 World Report, Human Rights Watch noted that the LACC has secured only two convictions since it was established in 2008.

A serious blow for president Sirleaf was the criticism by peace activist and fellow winner of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize, Leymah Gbowee, at the end of 2012. Gbowee publicly criticized the president for her failing anti-corruption

²⁶ Blamoh Nelson was fired in May 2013 for reasons not disclosed by the presidency.

policy and the increasing nepotism in her public appointments. She stepped down as head of the Peace and Reconciliation Commission set up by Sirleaf, leaving a vacuum that was soon filled by George Weah, Sirleaf's beaten political opponent. Weah accepted the appointment as Peace Ambassador and Chairman of the National Reconciliation Commission.

Without wishing to gloss over the corrupt practices prevalent in the Liberian government, I would like to make a side-note here. In 2006, when Ellen Johnson Sirleaf started her term of office, she 'inherited' an astonishingly low annual budget of \$85 million. The ministers she appointed did not have even the most essential office equipment or furniture, and the salaries of the civil servants were correspondingly low. By halfway through her first term, the annual budget had risen to some \$300 million. A rather sobering detail in this regard is that, at the end of the 1970s, when Sirleaf was Minister of Finance, the expenditures of the Tolbert government amounted to \$325 million – compared to \$225 million in revenues.

With a budget of \$660 million for the 2014/2015 fiscal year, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is doing better than in 2006, but the country is still not doing well. One of her first measures in the first year of her second term was to introduce a minimum salary for civil servants of \$100 a month. This is still no fortune, but public service jobs are highly sought after. In 2013, per capita gross national income (GNI) in Liberia, corrected for purchasing power – roughly income per person – amounted to an estimated \$790 (source: World Bank). This makes Liberia – with the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi and Burundi – one of the five poorest countries in the world.

In reality, most people are worse off than the average income suggests. They have no work, no income, no education, no modern care or medical services, no proper housing, no sanitary facilities, no sewers, no clean water, etc., etc. And there is no rule of law and no justice. The list is too long and too painful to continue. Even the prospects for Liberians are depressing: a divided country, a fragile peace, greedy politicians, a corrupt society and dependency on foreign donors who have proved very unpredictable. It is not surprising that perhaps as many as 500,000 Liberians prefer to live abroad (see box 15). This is all in sharp contrast to Liberia's potential and that of the four million Liberians who have stayed in the Land of Liberty. For most of them, the country's motto 'The love of liberty brought us here' has become 'The lack of money has kept us here'.

Illustration 27 Monrovia, street scenes, 2012



Illustration 27a
Bridge over the Mesurado River, connecting
Bushrod Island and Downtown Monrovia

Illustration 27b
Tubman Boulevard, with the UNMIL
building (centre), the University of Liberia
(left) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
(right)

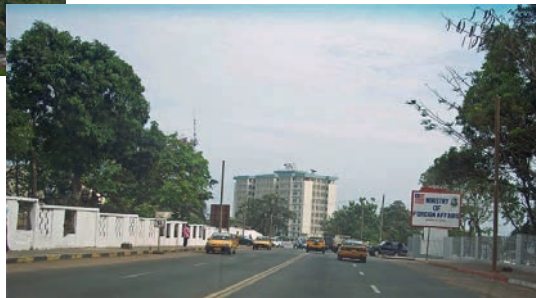


Illustration 27c
Nancy Doe Market (named after Samuel Doe's
widow), Jorkpentown

Illustration 27d
St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Sinkor



Illustration 28 Visible signs of the violence of war



Illustration 28a On the right, the ruined EJ Roye building



Illustration 28b All that remains of the Ducor Hotel is a concrete shell



Illustration 28c The Masonic Lodge Palace was spared either



Illustration 28d Another ruined building on Crown Hill, Monrovia



Illustration 28e House in a suburb of Monrovia, with bullet holes as silent witnesses to the violence



Illustration 28f Unfinished palace of the late Samuel Doe in Zwedru

Illustration 29 Travelling in the interior, 1973, 1980, 2012



Illustration 29a Nimba County, 1973



Illustration 29b Lofa County, 1980



Illustration 29c Grand Bassa County, 2012

Epilogue

In 2012, I had the opportunity to travel to Liberia and stay in the country for a short while. It was a strange experience to be back, 32 years after having left the country in the latter days of Samuel Doe's coup. Unfortunately, I did not have the time to travel to the interior and my visit was limited to the capital. Monrovia seemed unchanged, but it was different. The population had quadrupled to over a million, both because of natural growth and as a result of the two civil wars which had caused many people to flee from the interior to the capital. As a result of this large increase in the number of inhabitants, the city itself had also grown, and was now an urban area stretching along the coast for 20 to 25 miles. Transport is one of the biggest problems for the city-dwellers, besides the lack of clean drinking water, a functioning sewer system and a public electricity supply. In 2012, there was not a single traffic light in the capital of Liberia, which makes it an exception – even on the African continent.

What impressed me most was the situation in the education sector, especially at secondary and university level. I became aware of this very quickly, as the reason for my visit took me to the University of Liberia. From an institute of higher education with some 2,000 students at the time I lectured at the Business College, it had turned into a university with over 24,000 students. Almost half of the 44,000 students receiving higher education in Liberia are students at the University of Liberia. In 2012, 2,500 students graduated from this university alone, and 25,000 secondary school children applied for the entrance exams. Some 8,000 of them will belong to the privileged group who are admitted to this university; many more will go to the country's other educational institutions.

The number of pupils in secondary and primary schools is many times the number of students in higher education. In 2012, 55,000 pupils of the country's 1,300 secondary schools sat for their exams. Some 25,000 of them are school-leavers. However, these high numbers clearly say nothing about the quality of the education, which is very poor, even by African standards. One third of the country's teachers are not qualified to teach. Liberian public schools are known for their overfull classrooms, lack of materials and the low quality of the teachers. This is partly a consequence of the 2001 Education Act, which made primary education compulsory, and the abolition of school fees in 2006. The overfull classes not only have a detrimental effect on the quality of the education, but are also a health risk, especially in light of the Ebola epidemic of 2014/2015. After all the 25,000 secondary school pupils who took the admission

Illustration 30 Education



Illustration 30a Morning ceremony, Ricks Institute, Montserrat County, 2009



Illustration 30b Pupils at a school in Paynesville, Montserrat County, 2011



Illustration 30c A classroom in Harper, Maryland County, 2011



Illustration 30d Pupils, Cape Palmas High School, Maryland County, 2011

examination for the University of Liberia in August 2013 had failed(!), president Sirleaf admitted publicly that ‘education is a mess’.²⁷ This abominable situation deteriorated even further when the government was forced to close all schools in the country because of the Ebola outbreak.

The high numbers for school and university attendance are a sign of the great importance Liberians attach to education, but they are also the result of the civil wars, when educational activities – like those in other sectors of society – almost came to a standstill. Everyone now wants to make up for that lost time. But where will all these school-leavers and university graduates find a job? As illustration 31 shows, that same question – ‘Where do they go from here?’ – was already being asked as early as 1978.

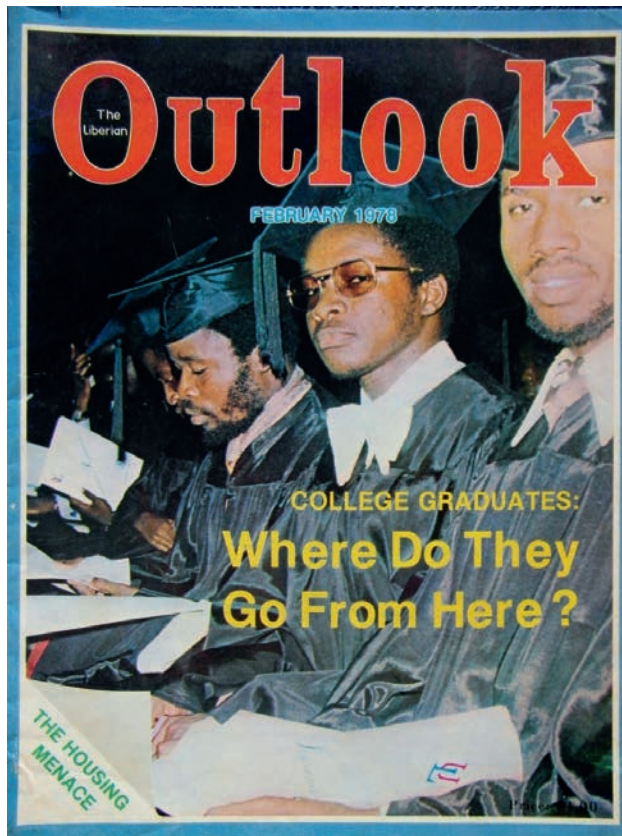


Illustration 31 The graduate with tinted glasses is Alhaji Kromah (*Outlook*, February 1978)

²⁷ Liberia’s education system ‘a mess’ - President Sirleaf (August 29, 2013): <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/08/29/us-liberia-education-idUSBRE97SOTO20130829>

The Ebola crisis

In August 2014, a year after the president's damning condemnation of the education sector and with the Ebola crisis ravaging the country, the same proved to apply to the public health sector. The epidemic, which was causing such havoc throughout Liberia, destroyed what little had been built up in the country's more than 150 years as an independent state. Worse still, Ebola proved to be much more than solely a health crisis. But first, the facts.²⁸

The crisis started in March 2014 with two Ebola cases in Foya, Lofa County. By the time the deadly virus entered Liberia from Guinea, it had already killed nearly 60 people there. Experts immediately warned that there was a very serious risk of the very contagious virus rapidly spreading to Monrovia, in view of the busy border traffic between the two countries and the trade in Guinean products in Monrovia. The government of Liberia's response was, however, one of indifference, with hindsight we would even say recklessness. President Sirleaf did not change her agenda and went on a foreign trip. A month or so later, the disease appeared to be confined and under control. Then, on May 25, another outbreak of Ebola was reported, again in Foya. This time the virus came from Sierra Leone. The government's initial reaction was not much different than in March-April, even though the virus had already led to the deaths of a number of health workers, who had not been given protective gear and were not at all trained or prepared to deal with the highly contagious disease.

This second wave of Ebola proved much more serious than the first. Nevertheless, it was nearly two months before the government took serious action, and by then it was 'too little and too late'. When it did respond, the government panicked, closing all schools across the country, declaring a state of emergency and imposing a curfew. The government's inexperience, incompetence and inappropriate, top-down attitude are convincingly illustrated by the infamous quarantine of West Point, a overcrowded slum in Monrovia where Ebola was rife, and the suppression of the slum-dwellers' protests by the Liberian Army and police forces, which led to the death of at least one victim, 16-year old Shakie Kamara. The case of Patrick Sawyer also speaks volumes. He was a public health officer for ArcelorMittal and consultant for the Ministry of Finance. Although both knew that he might have contracted Ebola – his sister had recently died of it – the ministry gave him permission to attend a regional ECOWAS meeting in Lagos, Nigeria – a city with some 12 to 15 million inhabitants – where he died shortly afterwards of Ebola. As a consequence, the virus was introduced into Nigeria, with 175 million people the most densely populated country in Africa.

²⁸ This section is based partly on the author's blog *Liberian Perspectives*, 'Ebola in Liberia: More than a health crisis', dated September 24, 2014.

By the end of August the epidemic was completely out of control. It was not long before all counties reported Ebola cases. But the situation was worst in densely-populated Monrovia, making this outbreak of Ebola different from previous ones in Central Africa, which had been mostly restricted to remote rural areas.

After initially denying the existence of Ebola and accusing the government of a plot, the general public gradually became aware of the existence and aggressive nature of the virus. Cases came to light of sick people being locked up, illegal burial of people suspected of dying of the disease, and bribing health workers not to give Ebola as the cause of death. With the public health services lacking the capacity to collect dead bodies, victims lay in the streets for days, creating another health hazard. Hospitals and clinics began turning new patients away, partly through lack of personnel, while sick people and other Liberians in need of medical care increasingly started avoiding them, too scared of going to hospital, for fear of contacting Ebola and the horrible death associated with it. International airlines stopped services to Liberia and most expats left the country. Foreign investments were halted.

The situation became chaotic. In my opinion, the disaster had three main causes. First and probably foremost, was the underestimation of the danger by the Liberian government and its lack of experience to deal adequately with such a situation. Second was the absence of a viable, efficient and effective public health system. By way of illustration, in the 2013/2014 national budget, only \$70 million of the total of \$583 million was allocated to the health sector – mainly for salaries, which health personnel and the general public see as too low and which have certainly not always been paid in time in the past. The public health sector has never scored high on the government's development agenda. The third cause was the huge divide between the government – still widely perceived as consisting of an elite that thinks only of its own interests – and the population. President Sirleaf's handling of the Ebola crisis has led to much criticism. The chaos and misery even led some people to call for her resignation. A number of diaspora Liberians in the US – an increasing number it seems – went as far as to propose the creation of an interim government. Key Liberian Senators openly asked for the country to be placed under international trusteeship. Certainly, these reactions can partly be explained by internal politics, but there was good reason for the discontent.

The full social, economic and political consequences of the Ebola crisis are not yet known. The chaos and human suffering, as well as the fear of further deterioration of the situation which seemed to culminate in the third quarter of 2014, led to a massive international aid response. In early 2015, the end of the epidemic seemed in sight but it is still too early at the time of writing to celebrate and consider the war against Ebola won.

The consequences of the epidemic will gradually – and perhaps abruptly – become visible. They will most certainly be severe and should not be underestimated or ignored. Here, I will only briefly say something about two of them: the consequences for the public health sector and the governance crisis that has emerged as a result of the government's handling of the Ebola epidemic.

Many hospital beds are nowadays empty or nearly empty. With hundreds falling prey to Ebola, there is a devastating shortage of doctors and other medical staff, while Liberians have no confidence at all in the public health service. A journey to a public hospital is seen as a journey to a certain death. At the peak of the epidemic, it was not possible to use the public health service for illnesses other than Ebola or to give birth, and that situation continues for the time being. There are almost no vaccinations against diseases that, until recently, seemed relatively under control. That causes both short and longer term risks for public health, with fears of greater numbers of victims than were caused by the Ebola virus.

In addition, the governance crisis has worsened. Since the creation of the republic, ordinary people have had no confidence in 'their' government – which was not 'their' government at all, at least until 1980. It seems justified to say that this feeling still exists nowadays. Political and economic discrimination, neglect, mistrust, lack of communication and sometimes coercion have always characterized relations between those who govern and those who are being governed. Moreover, many Liberians have become disappointed with President Sirleaf. After the epidemic had claimed more than 4,000 lives (due to under-reporting, we will never know the exact number), she acknowledged that she and her government had made serious mistakes in combating Ebola. 'We didn't know what we were dealing with,' she said in March. 'It was an unknown enemy. People attributed it to witchcraft. We did not know what to do. We were all frightened. I was personally frightened.'²⁹ The World Health Organization has also admitted that it made mistakes, did not sufficiently recognize the severity of the epidemic and was too late in sounding the alarm internationally about the outbreak in West Africa (in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone), leading to unnecessary additional victims. Be that as it may, the widespread disappointment with president Sirleaf's response to the situation comes on top of disillusionment with her inadequate efforts to combat corruption, continuing nepotism and cronyism, the absence of progress in national reconciliation, and the lack of improvement in the economic difficulties

²⁹ 'Security crackdown error' – Pres. Sirleaf Admits Mistakes', *Frontpage Africa*, March 13, 2015: <http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/index.php/news/4714-security-crackdown-error-sirleaf-admits-mistakes>; and: 'Liberian Leader Concedes Errors in Response to Ebola', *The New York Times*, March 15, 2015: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/12/world/africa/liberian-leader-concedes-errors-in-response-to-ebola.html? r=0>

confronting ordinary Liberians. This has led to a strong decline in her popularity, both inside and outside Liberia.

Liberians within and outside the country, the international community and sympathizers with Liberia and its people like myself are becoming increasingly worried about the future of the country after the end of president Sirleaf's second term. Presidential elections are expected in 2017. How politically stable will the country prove to be? Who will succeed her? What prospects are there for the Liberian people in the immediate future to improve their lives?

A country where an estimated 90% of the population do not have a paid job primarily needs labour-intensive economic development. Employment will therefore have to come from agricultural and agro-industrial activities. This calls for investment, also in infrastructure. That means roads, bridges, ports, airports and an electricity supply – all of which the country has precious little. Liberia has only 6,250 miles of roads, less than 450 miles of which are asphalted. During the heavy rainy season, most roads are impassable. If there were bridges at all, they have been washed away. The country's four ports are all in urgent need of repair. The same applies to Liberia's only hydroelectric power plant, in Mount Coffee, which was destroyed during the civil war.

Liberia relies heavily on foreign investors and, in recent years, has increasingly become dependent on foreign aid. Official development assistance amounted to \$952 million in the 2010-2012 period, compared to 'only' \$384 million in 2000-2009. The figures for subsequent years, especially 2014, are expected to be substantially higher, as a consequence of the Ebola crisis. This does not include the costs of UNMIL, the armed peacekeeping force, which amount annually to some \$400-500 million. But what will happen after UNMIL has left?

The list of Liberia's top priorities is daunting. Achieving national reconciliation and national unity seems to be at the top, but without peace and political stability, it is impossible. And realizing the ultimate goal depends on achieving these four objectives – peace, political stability, national reconciliation, national unity – that precede it. The ultimate goal is economic development and the fair distribution of its fruits, among both the present generation and those that will follow in the future.

Liberia made a new start after the departure of Charles Taylor, which ended the second civil war. It made another new start with the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as the country's first female president. And it will have to make yet another new start after the end of the Ebola epidemic. In a few years time, it will be 200 years since the first colonists from the US landed on the shores of

what was to become Liberia and started the process of nation-building, hoping to achieve political freedom and economic progress. How this all unfolds will determine whether Liberia becomes the country it was intended to be or will prove to be a 'paradise lost'.

Annex 1 Presidents and interim leaders of Liberia
July 26, 1847 – present

	<i>Term(s)</i>	<i>Place of birth</i>
1. Joseph J. Roberts ¹	1848 - 1856	Norfolk, Virginia, USA
2. Stephen A. Benson	1856 - 1864	Cambridge, Maryland, USA
3. Daniel B. Warner	1864 - 1868	Baltimore, Maryland, USA
4. James S. Payne	1868 - 1870	Richmond, Virginia, USA
5. Edward J. Roye ²	1870 - 1871 **	Newark, Ohio, USA
6. James S. Smith	1871 - 1872	Charleston, South Carolina, USA
7. Joseph J. Roberts	1872 - 1876	Norfolk, Virginia, USA
8. James S. Payne	1876 - 1878	Richmond, Virginia, USA
9. Anthony W. Gardiner	1878 - 1883 #	Southampton, Virginia, USA
10. Alfred F. Russell	1883 - 1884	Fayette County, Kentucky, USA
11. Hilary R. W. Johnson ³	1884 - 1892	Monrovia, Montserrado County
12. Joseph J. Cheeseman	1892 - 1896 *	Edina, Grand Bassa County
13. William D. Coleman	1896 - 1900 #	Fayette County, Kentucky, USA
14. Garretson W. Gibson	1900 - 1904	Talbot County, Maryland, USA
15. Arthur Barclay	1904 - 1912	Bridgetown, Barbados, British West Indies
16. Daniel E. Howard	1912 - 1920	Buchanan, Grand Bassa County
17. Charles D. B. King	1920 - 1930 #	Monrovia, Montserrado County
18. Edwin J. Barclay	1930 - 1944	Brewerville, Montserrado County
19. William V.S. Tubman	1944 - 1971 *	Harper, Maryland County
20. William R. Tolbert, Jr.	1971 - 1980 **	Bensonville, Montserrado County
Chair, PRC, Samuel K. Doe	1980 - 1986	
21. Samuel K. Doe ⁴	1986 - 1990 **	Tuzon, Grand Gedeh County
<i>Interim-President</i>		
Amos C. Sawyer	Nov. 1990 - August 1993	Greenville, Sinoe County
Chairs, Council of State ⁵		
Bismarck Kuyon	August - November 1993	Gbarnga, Bong County
Philip Banks	Nov. 1993 - Febr. 1994	?
David G. Kpormakor	Febr. 1994 - Sept. 1995	Bomi County
Wilton G.S. Sankawulo	Sept. 1995 - Sept. 1996	Haindi, Bong County
Ruth S. Perry	Sept. 1996 - August 1997	Grand Cape Mount County

¹ Governor J.J. Roberts was elected president on September 27, 1847 and was sworn in as Liberia's first president in January, 1848.

² Roye was forcibly removed from office in late October 1871 by a group of colonists who thus staged Liberia's first coup d'état. However, in November 1871 Roye's vice president James Skriving Smith was sworn in as Liberia's sixth president. The exact circumstances surrounding Roye's deposition are not known. Also, no agreement exists on the day and cause of his death. In any case Roye did not die a natural death.

³ First non-American, Liberian-born president.

⁴ First Liberian president of pure indigenous origin.

⁵ Allegedly, neither Bismarck Kuyon nor Philip Banks were ever actually inaugurated into office as Chairman of the Council of State. The unclear and contradictory information underscores my earlier plea for Liberians to write, if possible without delay, the contemporary history of their country.

22. Charles M. G. Taylor#	1997 -2003 #	Arthington, Montserrado County
23. Moses Z. Blah ⁶	2003 (3 months)	Toweh Town, Nimba County
Chairman, National Transitional Government		
Charles Gyude Bryant	Oct. 2003 - Jan. 2006	Monrovia, Montserrado County
24. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf	2006 - present	Monrovia, Montserrado County

Resigned

* Died in office (natural death)

** Died in office (violent death)

⁶ Liberia's second president of pure indigenous origin.

Annex 2 Comprehensive list of peace agreements

1. Banjul Communiqué, ECOWAS plan, August 7, 1990
2. Bamako Ceasefire, November 28, 1990
3. Banjul Joint Statement, December 21, 1990
4. Lomé Agreement, February 13, 1991
5. Yamoussoukro I Accord, June 30, 1991
6. Yamoussoukro II Accord, July 29, 1991
7. Yamoussoukro III Accord, September 17, 1991
8. Yamoussoukro IV Accord, October 30, 1991
9. Geneva Ceasefire, July 17, 1993
10. Cotonou Agreement, July 25, 1993
11. Akosombo Agreement, September 12, 1994,
12. Acceptance and Accession to Akosombo Agreement, December 21, 1994
13. Accra Clarification of Akosombo Agreement, December 21, 1994
14. Abuja Agreement (I), August 19, 1995
15. Supplement to Abuja Agreement (II), August 17, 1996.
16. Ceasefire Agreement, June 17, 2003
17. Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement, August 18, 2003

Source: Republic of Liberia, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final report, Volume II: Consolidated Final Report*, 2009, p. 159/160.

Annex 3 Foreign investments in agriculture and forestry, 2015 (map 5)⁷

A large number of the concession or lease agreements presented here build on or succeed agreements made with foreign investors during the administration of president Tubman (1944-1971). Where these are referred to use is primarily made of the author's 1983 study on foreign investment in Liberia, *The Open Door Policy of Liberia: An Economic History of Modern Liberia* (Bremen, 1983).

This map and the explanatory notes provide additional information on the section on foreign investments during the presidency of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (2006-present) in chapter 3, 'A new start'.

I Agriculture

The soil and the damp tropical climate make Liberia excellently suited to growing banana, cacao, coffee, mangos, palm oil, rubber and other tropical products. The country by no means takes full advantage of this potential, however, largely through a lack of production and supply chain expertise, and of capital and labour.

Company-owned and large-scale rubber plantations⁸

Producing natural rubber is a long-term activity. It takes some seven years for a rubber tree to start producing rubber and their productive life is approximately 25 years.

1. The Sime Darby Plantation (Liberia) Inc (SDPL) was previously operated by B.F. Goodrich (1954), then Guthrie Plantations Inc (1981), in Bomi and Grand Cape Mount Counties. In 2009, the Sime Darby Plantation, owned by the Malaysian-owned Sime Darby Group, signed a concession agreement with the Liberian government for the development of oil palm and rubber plantations. The Sime Darby Group was formed in 2007, from a merger of Kumpulan Guthrie, Kumpulan Sime Darby and Golden Hope Plantations. The official concession area of some 770,000 acres (more than 300,000 hectares) is spread over Bomi, Grand Cape Mount, Bong and

⁷ This overview does not claim to be exhaustive. Firstly, it is not relevant to include all companies that have ever been active in these economic sectors, partly because some of them have disappeared from the economic scene. Secondly, access to relevant sources in Liberia was less than optimal, so that some information may not have been included. Thirdly, much information was obtained from internet sources, and it cannot be guaranteed complete or correct. As far as possible, this overview describes the situation at the end of January 2015. Experience has shown that the behaviour of investors in Liberia can change substantially in the short term, especially – though not exclusively – financing constructions and the ownership relations linked to them.

⁸ In addition, there are many Liberian-owned rubber plantations, usually referred to locally as 'rubber farms'. They vary widely in age, scale, productivity and profitability. The largest is the Morris American Rubber Company (MARCO) in Todee District, Montserrado County, which covers around 10,000 acres, 6,000 of which are cultivated. Most Liberian-owned rubber farms – often family businesses – are however small in size and poorly managed and have low, bad quality production. They often supplement other economic activities.

- Gbarpolu Counties. SDPL started activities in Grand Cape Mount County in 2009, where it has since become the county's largest employer. See also 8, under Oil Palm plantations).
2. The Liberian Agricultural Company (LAC), originally an Italian-owned concession (1959) in Grand Bassa County, was sold to a US company, UNIROYAL, in 1965. LAC changed hands several times afterwards, sometimes under dubious circumstances. Nowadays it is fully owned by the Belgian *Société Financière des Caoutchoucs* (SocFin) and operates under a 2007 agreement. LAC is the second largest rubber plantation in terms of workforce size and acreage under cultivation. Also see Salala Rubber Corporation (below, under 4).
 3. The Bridgestone Group (Firestone Liberia) is currently the parent company of the Firestone Plantations Company, which has been a full subsidiary of the Firestone Tire & Rubber Company (USA) since 1926. The Japanese-owned Bridgestone Corporation bought the Firestone Tire & Rubber Company in 1988 for \$2.65 billion. Firestone Liberia operates the 'world's largest single natural rubber operation' in Margibi County (Harbel), covering 160,000 acres (approximately 650 square kilometres). The company shut down operations twice due to the civil wars (June 1990-March 1992 and October 1992-February 1997). It resumed its activities in 2005 and the concession agreement was renegotiated in 2006. With more than 8,000 employees, 99.6% of whom are Liberian, Firestone Liberia is the largest private employer in Liberia.
 4. The Salala Rubber Corporation (SRC) was created in 2007 through the merger of the Weala Rubber Company – officially called Allan L. Grant (Liberia) Inc, a rubber processing factory (1962) – and the Salala Rubber Company, a rubber tree plantation (1959) – both Dutch-owned. Since 2007, it has been rehabilitating the 'old' plantation on the basis of the 1959 concession agreement with the Salala Rubber Company in what is now Margibi County. SRC is 90% owned by Agrifinal N.V. (Belgium) and 10% by Intercultures (Luxembourg), a subsidiary of the Belgian *Société Financière des Caoutchoucs* (SocFin), which also owns LAC (see above).
 5. The Cavalla Rubber Plantation is part of SIFCA Rubber and Oil Palm Plantations and is operated by the Cavalla Rubber Corporation Inc (CRC) in Maryland and River Gee Counties. In 2011, SIFCA signed an agreement with the Liberian government to expand its rubber plantations from 20,000 acres (8,000 hectares) to 90,000 acres (36,000 hectares) in the two counties – previously owned by the Firestone Plantations Company (1926-1984), then sold to the Cavalla Rubber Corporation, and subsequently held by various other owners. SIFCA is owned by investors from Ivory Coast, with Wilmar International and Olam International from Singapore also holding a substantial interest.
 6. Nimba Rubber Inc was formerly the COCOPA Rubber Plantation, owned by the Liberia Company (LibCo, 1947). The plantation, in Nimba County, initially grew cacao, but later changed to rubber. It resumed production on a small scale in 2002. Although the Liberian government still recognized the original 1947 concession agreement in 2007, a series of difficulties led eventually to the agreement being annulled and, in 2013, the plantation company was taken over by the State of Liberia.
 7. The Sinoe Rubber Corporation, formerly the African Fruit Company (AFC), is officially the largest single agricultural concession in Liberia, covering 600,000 acres (more than 240,000 hectares) in Sinoe County, on the basis of a Statement of Understanding signed between German investors and the Liberian government in 1952. This was, however, never followed by a formal concession agreement. In 1974, in a highly controversial deal, the Mesurado Group of Companies, owned by Minister of Finance Steve Tolbert, bought the AFC (see p. 30). Mesurado Plantation Industries leased the Sinoe Rubber Corporation to the Liberian government in 1983. Since the civil wars, ownership has been disputed and nowadays the plantation remains neglected.

Company-owned and large-scale oil palm plantations⁹

Laying out a plantation and planting palm trees is a long-term activity. Generally, palm trees do not produce for the first three or four years, and peak production occurs between the 10th and twentieth years. They can produce for around 25 years.

8. In 2009, the Sime Darby Plantation (see 1) signed a 63-year concession agreement with the Liberian government for about 770,000 acres of land (more than 300,000 hectares) to be developed into oil palm and rubber plantations, more than 500,000 acres (220,000 hectares) of which were for oil palm plantations in Bomi, Bong, Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount Counties. So far, activities have been limited to Cape Mount County (since 2009). With a workforce of 3,000, excluding contractors, Sime Darby is the largest employer in Cape Mount County. In 2011, the company started planting its first oil palm trees.
9. Equatorial Palm Oil Ltd was formerly Liberian Operations Inc (LIBINC). It was then owned by oil giant Paul Getty (Getty Oil Company), who signed a concession agreement in 1965 for oil palm cultivation in Grand Bassa County through a subsidiary, the Tidewater Oil Company. In 2006, Equatorial Palm Oil (EPO) of London, UK, and the Liberian government agreed a 50-year concession agreement – enacted into law in 2008 – that granted EPO rights to 85,000 acres (35,000 hectares) in Palm Bay (Grand Bassa County), 135,000 acres (55,000 hectares) at Butaw (Sinoe County) and an expansion area of 200,000 acres (80,000 hectares) in River Cess County. In 2011 the first new oil palms were planted in Palm Bay and production of crude palm oil commenced from Liberia's only commercial oil palm mill. In December 2013, Malaysian palm-oil giant KL-Kepong International Ltd, a wholly owned unit of Kuala Lumpur Kepong Berhad, acquired a majority interest in Equatorial Palm Oil.
10. Golden Veroleum Liberia (GVL) Inc signed a 65-year concession agreement with the Liberian government for the development of more than 500,000 acres (220,000 hectares) of oil palm plantations in Sinoe County in 2010. GVL has links with companies in Malaysia, Indonesia and Papua-New Guinea, including Golden Agri-resources Ltd, a member of the Indonesian Sinar Mas Group. The concession area covers parts of River Cess, Sinoe, Grand Kru, River Gee and Maryland Counties. Work started in Sinoe County in December 2010.
11. Maryland Oil Palm Plantation (MOPP) is part of SIFCA Rubber and Oil Palm Plantations. In 2011, the Liberian government and SIFCA signed a 25-year lease agreement for the rehabilitation of a 20,000-acre oil palm plantation in Maryland and River Gee Counties, formerly owned by Decoris Oil Palm, a poorly managed Liberian state-owned plantation. Abidjan-based SIFCA is owned by investors from Ivory Coast, with Singapore's Wilmar International and Olam International, two of Asia's leading agro-businesses, holding a substantial interest. Rehabilitation operations started in 2011.

II Forestry

Liberia is home to the largest primary rainforest in West Africa. More than 40% of the country (some 10.6 million acres (or 4.3 million hectares) is covered in tropical forest.

On February 6, 2006, two weeks after her inauguration, president Sirleaf cancelled all forest concession agreements entered into by previous governments – approximately 70 – after the Forest Concession Review Committee had determined

⁹ Practically all large-scale activities were suspended during the civil wars (1989-1997; 1999-2003). What remained was small-scale household/family production, distributed throughout the country, typically with bad management and low production and primarily aimed at supplementing family incomes.

that nearly two and a half times the entire forested surface area of Liberia had been granted in concessions and that concession owners did not meet their financial obligations to the Liberian government. It is interesting to note that this was not the first time that more timber concession area appeared to have been allocated to investors than was available in the country. The present author arrived at the same conclusion in his 1983 study *The Open Door Policy of Liberia: An Economic History of Modern Liberia* (Bremen, 1983). President Sirleaf's decision persuaded the UN Security Council to lift its embargo on trade in timber, imposed in 2003. In the course of 2006, the export of timber gradually resumed and first steps were taken to reform the forestry sector. These efforts were, however, hampered by fraud, corruption and bad management. The abuse of so-called Private Use Permits (PUPs) led in 2012 to the suspension of all PUPs, the resignation of the Director of the Forestry Development Authority (FPA), and the suspension of the reform of the forestry sector. See also chapter 3.

Because of these and other unclear facts, no individual companies or activities are included here.

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Annex 4 Foreign investments in mining, 2015 (map 6)¹⁰

A number of the concession or lease agreements presented here build on or succeed agreements made with foreign investors during the administration of president Tubman (1944-1971). Where these are referred to use is primarily made of the author's 1983 study on foreign investment in Liberia, *The Open Door Policy of Liberia: An Economic History of Modern Liberia* (Bremen, 1983).

This map and the explanatory notes provide additional information on the section on foreign investments during the presidency of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in chapter 3, 'A new start'.

Mining: diamonds, gold and iron ore

Despite many studies and reports, the geology of Liberia and the economic offshore zone have never been systematically charted. In the east of the country, the rock is mainly Birimian, with potentially rich deposits of gold and diamonds. The rock in the west is Archaean and contains diamonds, gold, manganese, nickel, palladium, platinum, uranium and iron ore. Recently, exploration has produced strong evidence for the presence of gas and oil in commercial quantities.

Gold and diamonds

Gold

Gold is to be found in nearly all counties, albeit in varying quantities. Reliable data are hard to find. Local, traditional gold seekers and diggers use simple tools and methods in primitive and sometimes dangerous circumstances, and mostly without official permits. This results in a lack of data on how much is produced, how much it is worth, how many people work in the sector and how much they earn. A small percentage of the production is used locally, but most of it finds its way to foreign buyers through unofficial channels.

Diamonds

Diamondiferous areas are known to exist in Grand Cape Mount, Gbarpolu, Lofa, Montserrado, Nimba, Grand Bassa and Sinoe Counties. All diamond production is small-scale and comes from artisanal alluvial mining. Because much diamond mining is illegal, there is no reliable data on its scale, value or location or its impact on the

¹⁰ As with the overview for map 5, this overview does not claim to be exhaustive. As far as possible it describes the situation at the end of January 2015. Experience has shown that the behaviour of investors in Liberia can change substantially in the short term, especially – though not exclusively – financing constructions and the ownership relations linked to them.

local economy (employment and income). The diamonds are exported illegally to Europe (especially Belgium and the Netherlands) and South Africa.

An estimated 20,000-30,000 artisanal miners are involved in the extraction of gold and diamonds. Only a fraction of them (less than 5%) are officially registered and possess a Class C license.

Foreign investors

At the time of writing (2015), a number of foreign investors are actively interested in the potential for gold and diamond mining in Liberia. Some focus exclusively on gold, others on diamonds, while a few are interested in both. Two mining companies are currently setting up operations for gold mining. In some of these concession areas, foreign companies have been active in the past (gold, diamonds; twentieth century).

Around the turn of the century, two companies undertook exploration activities in the west of the country: Mano River Resources Inc from the UK (gold, diamonds and iron ore) and the Canadian company Diamond Field International Ltd (gold and diamonds). In 2008, the latter lost its license to search for gold in the Henry Town area of Gbarpolu County when the Liberian government awarded the license to a local firm. The Canadian company protested against the decision but lost its appeal.

In 1996, Mano River Resources acquired an exploration license for the Mano River area. In 2001, it concluded a Mining Development Agreement (MDA) with the government. This was followed in 2009 by a Class A mining license for a concession area of 457 square kilometres (113,000 acres) in the Bea Mountain area. In the same year, the company – which also had rights to extract iron ore in the Putu Range – became part of African Aura, part of which split off to become the Aureus Mining Company in 2011 (see 1, below).

These developments were positively influenced by the lifting of the 2001 UN embargo on diamonds from Liberia in 2007. Despite the embargo, a UN Panel of Experts reported in 2002, 2003 and 2004 that a large Class B commercial alluvial diamond mine was active in the Gbapa-Nimba area, run by the Jungle Water Company, founded by combatant-turned-businessman Tomah Sehe Floyd, now one of Liberia's richest businessmen.

In January 2005, the government of Liberia banned all diamond mining but continued to allow exploration activities. Some companies, however, made little effort to retain the fine line between exploration and actual mining, as can be seen from the activities of Italgems (which had Italian connections) and of American Mining Associates, a US-owned company (2004-2008). According to Felix Gerdes (see Sources), despite it now being the twenty-first century, both companies were guilty of the kind of misconduct customary during the Tubman administration in the previous century.

This introduction closes with the Liberty International Mineral Corp. (Liberty). According to its own data, Liberty started exploration activities (for gold, diamonds and iron ore) in Liberia in 2004 and claims to have acquired initial concession rights for no less than 21,950 square kilometres, almost 20% of the surface area of the

entire country! In 2005, this was reduced to 9,050 square kilometres, the equivalent of 8.5% of Liberia's land area. The 18 gold projects in this area were brought under six 100% owned subsidiaries. When and why Liberty disappeared from the scene in Liberia is not clear, but in 2015 there was no trace at all of the company. Whether this is due to bad records or for political reasons is unknown.

The list below contains five foreign companies, two of which (Aureus, Hummingbird) are at the pre-production stage, two (Endeavour, Tawana) at the exploration stage and one (Euronimba) whose status, though official, is unclear.

1. Be a Mountain Mining Corp., a subsidiary of Aureus Mining Company (from Canada), is the successor to Mano River Resources in the 457 square kilometres (approximately 113,000 acres) 25-year Be a Mountain Mining License concession area in Grand Cape Mount County. Aureus Mining has three projects here. The New Liberty gold project – Liberia's first commercial gold mine – is currently at the pre-mining stage. Small-scale traditional mining was formerly practised in this area. In the area around Weaju, AMC's second gold project, traditional and commercial mining has been taking place since the 1950s. The third project is the Ndablama gold project.
2. Hummingbird Resources (UK) has three concessions, all three 100% owned. The most concrete and most advanced, in terms of development, is the Dugbe gold project in Sinoe County (Dugbe Shear Zone), although recently Hummingbird appears to be giving greater priority to its Yanfolila gold project in Mali. In 2005, Hummingbird acquired the rights to a concession area of 3,200 square kilometres (around 800,000 acres). The area is a source of great biodiversity. In addition, in 2010, Hummingbird acquired an exploration license for gold in Maryland, River Gee and Grand Gedeh (Dugbe Shear Zone) covering a total area of 1,835 square kilometres (approx. 450,000 acres). The third concession, the Mount Ginka iron ore project, is in Nimba County, near ArcelorMittal. Hummingbird was awarded a license for this project, covering an area of 155 square kilometres (approximately 38,000 acres), in 2010. In 2011, the company entered into a joint venture with Petmin Ltd and transferred the exploration license to a new subsidiary, Iron Bird Resources Inc, which then initiated exploration activities.
3. In 2011, the Endeavour Mining Corporation (Australia, Cayman Islands) merged with Adamus Resources Ltd from Ghana. The merger was conducted according to Australian law, where the new company is registered, but its headquarters are in Vancouver, and its operations centre in Accra, Ghana. In 2015, the merged company (Endeavour) acquired three mineral reconnaissance licenses for gold in an area of more than 3,000 square kilometres. The three license areas are near the towns of Mambo in Grand Cape Mount County (adjoining Aureus' New Liberty project), Bopulu in Gbarpolu County and Fasama in Lofa County, and are 580 square kilometres (approx. 145,000 acres), 1,190 square kilometres (approx. 295,000 acres) and 1,368 square kilometres (approx. 338,000 acres) in size respectively, totalling 3,138 square kilometres (approx. 775,000 acres).
4. Tawana Resources Ltd (South African capital; registered in Australia) is an iron, gold and manganese exploration company. Tawana has three gold projects in Liberia: in Sinoe County (400 square kilometres/100,000 acres, granted in 2010), Nimba County (995 square kilometres/245,000 acres, granted in 2011) and Lofa County (596 square kilometres/150,000 acres, granted in 2011), in total a concession area of some 2,000 square kilometres (490,000 acres). It also owns the Mofe Creek iron ore project in Western Liberia (see under Iron Ore, 9).
5. Euronimba Liberia Ltd is a 100% subsidiary of the Newmont Mining Corporation, one of the largest gold companies in the world and at present the largest US-based gold company. There are unspecified and grossly unconfirmed reports of exploration activities by Newmont. However, besides occasional mentions of gold exploration activities, it was only possible to trace the company's involvement in the exploitation of iron ore deposits in Guinea through its subsidiary Euronimba Liberia Ltd and subsequent evacuation of the ore using the railway running from

Yekepa, Nimba County, to Buchanan in Grand Bassa County, for which permission is required from ArcelorMittal. Reportedly, in 2014, ArcelorMittal acquired a 43.5% interest in Euronimba Ltd, which holds a 95% indirect interest in the huge Mount Nimba iron ore project in neighbouring Guinea. Euronimba Liberia Ltd is located in Nimba County.

Iron Ore

Of the six international investors listed below, two mining companies (ArcelorMittal and China Union) have already exported iron ore, in the case of one (Sesa Sterlite) it is uncertain when it will achieve the production target initially planned for 2014, and the other three (Tawana, PIOM/Severstal and Cavalla/Jonah Capital) have not yet announced their planning for the first production year.

6. ArcelorMittal Liberia was preceded in Nimba County by LAMCO J.V. (Liberian American-Swedish Minerals Company Joint Venture). The original concession agreement dated from 1953 and was amended in 1958. In 2005, ArcelorMittal, the world's largest steel producer, and the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) chaired by Charles Gyude Bryant, concluded a 25-year Mineral Development Agreement (MDA), which was renegotiated by the Sirleaf administration in 2006/07. The agreement included the re-opening of the Tokadeh, Gangra and Yuelliton iron mines in Nimba County, rehabilitation of the Yekepa-Buchanan railway and renovation of the port in Buchanan. The first (symbolic) consignment of iron ore was exported in 2011. ArcelorMittal exports five million tons of iron ore per year. Its plans to expand the annual output of the iron mines to 15 million tons by 2015 ('phase 2') have been adjusted in response to the Ebola epidemic. ArcelorMittal has interests in the exploration and exploitation of iron ore in neighbouring Guinea (see 5, Euronimba Liberia Ltd).
7. The China-Union Investment (Liberia) Company Ltd (China Union), owned by the China-Union (Hong Kong) Mining Co., Ltd, was preceded in Bong County by DELIMCO (Deutsch-Liberian Mining Company) and its operating company Bong Mining Company. The original concession agreement dated from 1958. China Union Investment Co. Ltd took Bong Mines over and concluded a 25-year MDA with the Liberian government in 2009. After the company got into financial difficulties, the Wuhan Iron and Steel (Group) Corporation (WISCO) from Hong Kong, the world's largest iron ore mining company, stepped in and is now the majority owner of China Union. Phase 1 was completed in mid-2013 and full-scale iron ore mining could start. The first iron ore was exported in 2014. The Ebola outbreak has made it uncertain whether the plans to export 10 million tons of iron ore in 2016 will be successful.
8. Sesa Goa Ltd, a subsidiary of Vedanta Resources PLC, India's largest iron ore exporter, became the sole owner of the Western Cluster Ltd (Western Cluster Liberia, WCL) in 2012 after buying out Elenilto Minerals Mining for \$123 million. In 2009, Elenilto and the Liberian government had concluded a 25-year MDA for the development of this mega iron ore project. In 2014, Sesa Goa merged with Sterlite Industries. The new company, Sesa Sterlite, became one of the world's largest diversified natural resource companies. The Western Cluster project comprises three mining concessions in the west of the country: the iron ore deposits of Mano River, Bea Mountain and Bomi Hills, in Grand Cape Mount and Bomi Counties. Liberia's very first iron ore mining companies, the Liberia Mining Company (LMC, 1951-1977) and the National Iron Ore Company (NIOC) had been active here previously. LMC held the exploration rights for the Bea Mountains and the Mano River area (1957), which were later transferred to NIOC (1958). Besides the mining infrastructure, the Western Cluster project includes construction of a railway line and a port. The first phase of the project focuses on Bomi. The initial plans to start exporting iron ore at the end of 2014 have been delayed by the Ebola outbreak.

9. The Australian mining company Tawana Resources Ltd (see 4 above) owns the Mofe Creek Iron Project – labelled ‘Africa’s most exciting new iron ore project’ – in Grand Cape Mount and Bomi Counties. It covers an area of 285 square kilometres (approximately 70,000 acres) and is located only 12 miles from the coast, which limits transportation costs. The superrich iron ore deposits at Mofe Creek (as high as 64%Fe – 68%Fe) are located at the end of Liberia’s first iron ore mine, the abandoned Bomi Hills mine (operated by the Liberia Mining Company, LMC). Tawana started a pre-feasibility study – a prerequisite for any MDA – in 2014, but suspended its activities in August, due to the Ebola outbreak. It announced resumption of its activities in early 2015.
10. In 2010, the Putu Iron Ore Mining (PIOM) Inc concluded a 25-year MDA with the Liberian government for the Putu Range in Grand Gedeh County. The iron ore deposits in the Putu have been estimated at 4.4 billion tons, with an average ore content of 34%. This makes them the second largest deposits in Liberia (Wologisi being the largest). The exploration rights in the Putu Range (a concession area of 425 square kilometres/approximately 100,000 acres) were first held by Mano River Resources (see above, under Gold and Diamonds). It delegated these rights to the African Iron Ore Group Ltd, which was bought in 2008 by OAO Severstal, a leading Russian integrated steel and mining company, allegedly for more than \$200 million.
 Since its partner Afferro Mining was bought out in 2012, PIOM has been 100% owned by Severstal. After approval of the feasibility study by the Liberian government in March 2014, PIOM was granted a Class A Mining License later in the same year to mine iron ore in the Putu Mountain Range, but the Ebola outbreak prevented further activities. This also makes it doubtful whether the initial plans to start production in 2017 are now feasible. Export will require a road or rail link, or some other way of transporting the ore from the mining site to the coast, which is 75 miles away, and upgrading of the port facilities in Sinoe County.
11. Cavalla Resources Ltd (Cavalla) is 100% owned by South African investment company Jonah Capital, which in 2014 bought the Liberian iron ore interests of BHP Billiton Iron Ore Holdings PTY Ltd BHP Billiton acquired the interests in 2010, following exploration work carried out since 2005 based on exploration rights acquired in that year. The 2010 MDA between BHP Billiton and the Liberian government was heralded as a ‘landmark’ agreement for iron ore operations in Nimba, Bong, Grand Bassa and Margibi Counties. It was announced that the investments involved could amount to as much as \$3 billion. The 2014 deal with Jonah Capital included exclusive rights over four exploration areas: the Goe and Fantro Ranges (Bassa Hills, Grand Bassa County), Kitoma (Nimba County), St John River South (Grand Bassa County), and Toto Range (Bong County) – all four close to the Yekepa-Buchanan railway line – and a further exploration license, Kitoma II (Nimba County). It is unclear whether the Liberian government approved this transaction. The Ebola crisis probably delayed or hampered the decision-making process and/or the start of concrete activities. Cavalla also owns two exploration licenses, at Gbarnga (Bong County) and Kalasi (Nimba County), in a joint venture with Kumba Iron Ore, a member of the Anglo-American group (Kumba). This means that Cavalla has six exploration licenses – for iron ore and gold – covering approximately 4,000 square kilometres (around one million acres), making it the country’s largest holder of mineral concessions. Cavalla has completed a definitive feasibility study for its Buchanan Project, which is expected to commence production in 2016. For this purpose, Cavalla will construct a new iron ore berth within the port of Buchanan (Grand Bassa County).

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Annex 5 Foreign investments in oil and gas, 2015 (map 7)¹¹

This map and the explanatory notes provide additional information on the section on foreign investments during the presidency of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in chapter 3, ‘A new start’.

Oil and Gas

In the second half of the twentieth century, several companies undertook exploration activities in the hope of striking oil but the results were disappointing. These activities ceased after 1989. The companies that showed an interest in Liberia’s possible oil wealth included the Ashland Petroleum Company, the Chevron Oil Company of Liberia, the Frontier Liberia Oil Company, Universal Minerals and Oil Ltd and the Crystal Oil Company. There are only two known cases of foreign investors concluding a concession agreement for the exploitation of oil with the Liberian government, in 1956 and 1964 respectively. Neither of the two resulted in any oil production or other concrete action, and the names of both concessionaires – J.J. Simmons Jr from Oklahoma, USA (1956) and John E. Francis, a Canadian national resident in Spain (1964) – have disappeared from the Liberian records without leaving a trace (Source: Fred van der Kraaij, *The Open Door Policy of Liberia: An Economic History of Modern Liberia*, Bremen, 1983). Significantly, the overview of the history of Liberia’s oil sector presented by the National Oil Company of Liberia (NOCAL) on its website omits their names and the concession agreements.

In 2000, a Petroleum Law was enacted establishing NOCAL with 30 oil blocks off the Liberian coast, constituting the Liberia Basin. Reform of the oil sector started in 2011 with the development and subsequent endorsement of a petroleum policy. Nationwide consultations resulted in a new Petroleum Law in 2013. The next step will be to formulate draft Acts on Local Content and Petroleum Revenue Management, as announced by president Sirleaf in her 2015 Annual Message.

Since 2004 NOCAL, which is responsible for regulating the sector, has awarded ten offshore production-sharing contracts (PSCs) to five – perhaps six – foreign investors, but in all nearly a dozen international oil companies are active off the Liberian coast. One foreign company has been granted an onshore reconnaissance license.

It is worth noting that the available documentation on one offshore PSC – for blocks LB-16 and LB-17, originally signed with a Spanish oil company, *Repsol Exploracion* (see below) – is ambiguous, contradictory and very likely incomplete. The most recent information is that NOCAL awarded block LB-16 to a consortium of three companies headed by a small US company, Liberty Petroleum Corporation in

¹¹ As with the overviews for maps 5 and 6, this overview does not claim to be exhaustive. As far as possible it describes the situation at the end of January 2015. In addition, it is important to note that, also with companies in the oil and gas sectors, financing constructions and ownership can change quickly and radically as a result of mergers and farming in and out.

December 2014. Available documentation on the only company to be awarded onshore rights, the Canadian-owned Simba Energy, also contains significant gaps (see below).

The Liberia Basin

The Liberia Basin consists of 30 concessionary blocks. Seventeen of these blocks are located from the continental shelf to depths of between 2,500 and 4,000 metres (8,000-13,000 feet). Thirteen are considered 'ultra deep', at depths of as much as 4,500 metres (15,000 feet).

As of January 2015, 10 blocks had been leased to the following five concession holders of offshore rights:

African Petroleum Corporation Ltd : 2 PSCs (blocks LB-8, LB-9)

Anadarko Liberia Company: 2 PSCs (blocks LB-10, LB-15)

Chevron Liberia Ltd: 3 PSCs (blocks LB-11, LB-12, LB-14)

ExxonMobil: 1 PSC (block LB-13)

Repsol Liberia B.V. : 2 PSCs (blocks LB-16, LB-17)¹²

It is interesting to note that all projects are still engaged in the exploration phase. Three operators have gone beyond the stage of collecting geological and geophysical data and have drilled one or more wells. These are the African Petroleum Corporation, in one of the two blocks it owns (through its 100% owned subsidiary European Hydrocarbons Ltd), Anadarko Liberia, also in one of its two blocks, and Chevron Liberia, in all three of its blocks.

ExxonMobil and Repsol Liberia have undertaken limited exploration activities. In 2012 and 2013 Anadarko transferred its operating interests in blocks LB-16 and LB-17 to its Spanish business partner Repsol. Repsol thereby became the full owner of the rights to these blocks, which it acquired by signing the PSC in 2004. In 2013, ExxonMobil bought an 80% interest in the rights to block LB-13, which Canadian Overseas Petroleum Ltd had bought from Peppercoast Petroleum in a controversial takeover (see chapter 3). The Ebola crisis of 2014 undoubtedly led to a delay in exploration activities, but it is not clear why little was done before the outbreak.

Lastly, there is some concern whether four of the agreements were concluded after a due process of competitive bidding, as prescribed by the Petroleum Law. These are Oranto (bought by Chevron, see 3 below), Peppercoast Petroleum (bought by Canadian Petroleum, see 4), Repsol (see 5) and Simba Energy (see 7).

1. The African Petroleum Corporation Ltd (APCL) is an independent oil and gas exploration company based in Australia, operating offshore in five countries in West Africa: Ivory Coast, Liberia, Senegal, Gambia and Sierra Leone. In Liberia, APCL holds a 100% interest in PSCs for LB-8 and LB-9 and operates through its wholly-owned subsidiaries Regal Liberia and European Hydrocarbons. The latter is the operator for blocks LB-8 and LB-9, which APCL obtained in 2008 from the Liberian government in a 25-year PSC. Blocks LB-8 and LB-9 are located off the coast of

¹² The status of Repsol for blocks LB-16 and LB-17 is unclear and controversial. See 5 and 6 below.

Sinoe and River Cess Counties and cover a concession area of 5,350 square kilometres (approximately 1.3 million acres). During the 2011-2013 period, the operator drilled three exploration wells in block LB-9, off the coast of River Cess and Sinoe Counties, where it discovered oil in 2012. This discovery was the first to prove the existence of a working petroleum system in the central Liberia Basin, improving the chances of success elsewhere in the area. Subsequent activities suffered a setback in 2014 due to the Ebola epidemic.

2. The Anadarko Petroleum Corporation is one of the world's largest publicly traded oil and gas exploration and production companies, with activities in more than 15 countries. Since 2008, it has owned four 25-year PSCs in the Liberia Basin. Two of them were fully transferred to its Spanish partner Repsol in 2012/2013 (see 5). The remaining two blocks – LB-10 (acquired in 2009) and LB-15 (acquired in 2005/2008) – are operated jointly by Anadarko (USA, 80%), Mitsubishi (Japan, 10%) and Repsol (Spain, 10%). Block LB-10 is located off the coast of River Cess County and LB-15 off the coast of Montserrado and Bomi Counties. The local operator Anadarko Liberia Ltd collected geological and geophysical data in both blocks and in 2013 drilled one exploration well in block LB-15. In April 2014, Anadarko reached a farm-out agreement with CEPESA (*Compañía Española de Petróleos S.A.*), the Spanish oil company owned by Abu Dhabi's International Petroleum Investment Company, giving CEPESA a 30% stake in block LB-10. Under the agreement, CEPESA will participate in the drilling of two exploratory wells before August 2016.
3. US oil giant Chevron is the world's third-largest oil producer by market value. In 2010 Chevron bought a 70% interest in three deepwater blocks (LB-11, LB-12 and LB-14) off the coast of Liberia from Oranto Petroleum Ltd, a Nigerian company registered in the British Virgin Islands. Oranto had acquired the 25-year exploration concession rights (PSC) in 2007. According to a US State Department report from that year, *Doing Business in Liberia*, the offshore concessions to Oranto Petroleum and to Repsol Exploracion had been awarded without bidding. If this is true, it would constitute a violation of Liberia's 2000 Petroleum Law. Furthermore, NOCAL paid Liberian legislators 'lobbying fees' for the ratification of two PSCs: one with Oranto Petroleum, the other with Peppercoast Petroleum, which is registered in the Isle of Man (see 4, ExxonMobil). Oranto also paid legislators to have the PSC passed. Liberia's Auditor General John S. Morlu II qualified the lobbying fees as bribes. Eager to get the oil giant on board, president Sirleaf reassured alarmed Chevron executives, who had hurried to Liberia after all the tales of corruption – which jeopardized their compliance with the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act – that she would not follow up on Liberia's General Auditing Commission's recommendation to nullify the contracts.

In 2012, Italian oil and gas firm Eni acquired a 25% interest in blocks LB-11, LB-12 and LB-14, reducing Chevron's equity to 45%. Chevron is the operator through its 100% owned subsidiary Chevron Liberia Ltd. Blocks LB-11 and LB-12 are located off the coast of Grand Bassa County, block LB-14 off the coast of Margibi and Montserrado Counties. The three blocks cover an area of about 9,600 square kilometres (2.4 million acres) making the PSC between Chevron and the Liberian government the largest concession in the country's history.

4. ExxonMobil is the major owner and operator of Block LB-13, but the history of exploration rights for this block is outrageous. In 2005 a small company, Broadway Consolidated, obtained from the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) chaired by Charles Gyude Bryant and represented by NOCAL, a 25-year PSC for block LB-13, off the coast of Margibi and Grand Bassa Counties. Block LB-13 covers an area of approximately 2,400 square kilometres (approximately 600,000 acres). Broadway Consolidated, which later changed its name to Peppercoast Petroleum, had no prior experience in the oil sector and was a small company with a weak financial status. Reportedly, the company was formed in 1993, trading in cocoa and coffee and operated mining concessions during the civil wars.

It is clear that Broadway – and Oranto for blocks LB-11, LB-12 and LB-14 – acted as middlemen, speculating to sell the PSCs they obtained at a later stage for a lot of money to more professional and experienced oil companies with sufficient funds to finance exploration works and actually exploit any oil found in commercial quantities. Consequently, Peppercoast

Petroleum, lacking both the experience and financial capability to operate an oil concession, never started any serious exploratory work. Pressed by NOCAL for that reason to look for a more serious business partner, Peppercoast Petroleum eventually sold its rights for block LB-13 to an international (junior) oil and gas exploration and development company, Canadian Overseas Petroleum Ltd (COPL). To illustrate the amounts involved: Canadian Overseas Petroleum and Peppercoast Petroleum agreed on a purchase price of \$85 million (under certain conditions). In 2013 ExxonMobil acquired a 70% interest in the block – with COPL retaining 30% – paying COPL an unknown amount, but estimated at close to \$100 million. By the end of 2014 ExxonMobil held a 83% working interest in block LB-13 and COPL 17%. As the major owner and operator, ExxonMobil planned a drilling programme in late 2014/early 2015, but the Ebola epidemic caused a considerable, as yet unknown, delay. Hence, more than 10 years after exploration rights for block LB-13 were first granted, nothing has yet happened.

5. In 2004 the Spanish oil company Repsol YPF and the National Transitional Government of Liberia reached an agreement for offshore oil exploration near the border with Sierra Leone. According to the 2007 US State Department Report *Doing Business in Liberia*, the agreement was reached without competitive bidding. The first major exploration agreement after 14 years of civil war, it related to blocks LB-16 and LB-17, off the coast of Grand Cape Mount County. The 25-year PSC between the Liberian government, represented by NOCAL, and Repsol granting an eight-year exploration period was ratified in 2005 but only became effective in 2008. Repsol also acquired an interest in block LB-10 (10%) and block LB-15 (27.5%) which are held by Anadarko Petroleum (see above). At one stage Anadarko, UK exploration company Tullow Oil and Repsol co-owned the rights for blocks LB-16 and LB-17, with Anadarko as the largest 'shareholder'.

Anadarko relinquished its rights for blocks LB-16 and LB-17 in 2012 and 2013, but it is not clear whether Repsol subsequently became the owner, despite repeated claims by the Spanish oil company, the latest in January 2014. NOCAL's website seems to confirm this, saying 'Anadarko withdrew from blocks LB-16 and LB-17 giving its operating interest to Repsol'. Elsewhere on the site, specifying the status of blocks LB-8 to LB-17 in the Liberia Basin, NOCAL presents Repsol as the operator and owner of blocks LB-16 and LB-17, and again in its List of Liberian Oil Block Operators and Partners.¹³ Repsol's ownership of and activities in relation to blocks LB-16 and LB-17 are also confirmed in an overview of Liberia's oil sector as of July 2014 by an independent US-based investment company, the Pan African Capital Group, LLC (PACG).

This appears, however, to be contradicted by the Liberia Basin Bid Round 2014 for four undrilled offshore petroleum exploration blocks, launched by NOCAL in August 2014, which included blocks LB-16 and LB-17. In October of the same year, NOCAL stated that 'Anadarko, Repsol and Tullow had relinquished all their rights for blocks LB-16 and LB-17 in 2012 and 2013 and (...) the blocks have therefore become available again'. This evidently contradicts Repsol's claim. In January 2013 and January 2014, the Spanish company reported its co-ownership (together with Tullow, which later withdrew) of blocks LB-16 and LB-17, a concession area of 6,375 square kilometres (approximately 1.5 million acres).

6. In December 2014, NOCAL announced that the Liberty Petroleum Corporation had won the bid for block LB-16 in the Liberia Basin Bid Round 2014, which closed in November. Liberty Petroleum (90% share) submitted the bid together with Pillar Oil Ltd from Nigeria (5% share) and the New Millennium Corporation, owned by five Liberian citizens. NOCAL justifies its hasty decision because '(...) it was the best bid received for this block. (...) The total amount to be received from the transaction for LB-16 is \$22 million. (...) This provides essential revenue for Liberia in its time of economic crisis due to Ebola.'¹⁴

In a surprising move, president Sirleaf immediately requested the legislature to postpone its end-of-the-year-adjournment to enable it to ratify the block LB-16 oil contract before the end of

¹³ NOCAL web site <http://www.nocal.com.lr/>, retrieved February 20, 2015.

¹⁴ Source: 'NOCAL Executives provide more details on 2014 Bid Round' Press Release 12/19/14: <http://www.nocal.com.lr/news-and-media/MICAT%20Presentation-final-111.pdf>, retrieved February 20, 2015

December. The legislature ratified the PSC a few days later. The present status of the PSC with Liberty Petroleum is not known with certainty. Given president Sirleaf's request to the legislature, it is assumed that she will not have delayed signing the PSC after which it officially became effective.

A Liberian newspaper, *The Heritage*, reported on December 29 that members of the legislature had allegedly received bribes to the tune of \$3 million for ratifying the contract. Shortly afterwards, plans for the Liberty Petroleum Corporation – allegedly a small, junior company with no previous experience in the oil sector – to resell the contract were leaked and there was a storm of protest in Liberia. Observers recalled the cases of Broadway Consolidated and Oranto, two companies that had been granted oil exploration rights which they sold, for large sums, to more robust investors, a common practice in Liberia (see 3 and 4).¹⁵

7. Simba Energy Inc, a Canadian company formerly known as the Gold Star Resources Corporation, has been the owner of the onshore Hydrocarbon Reconnaissance License NR-001, the only known reconnaissance permit for an onshore block in the country, since 2009. The license was originally granted to International Resource Strategies Liberia Energy Inc in January 2009, which immediately sold 90% of its interest in the block to Gold Star. In 2010, Gold Star changed its name to Simba Energy.

Block NR-001 consists of a coastal strip of 1,366 square kilometres (approximately 350,000 acres) lying within the Roberts and Bassa Basins – in Margibi and Grand Bassa Counties – and is located onshore adjacent to offshore blocks LB-12, LB-13 and LB-14. It is unclear whether the agreement was based on competitive bidding. It was in any case not made immediately public, which is in violation of the prevailing legislation (the Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative/LEITI). Some sources report that the license for NR-001 was issued not by NOCAL but the Ministry of Mines and Energy,¹⁶ which would also be in violation of existing legislation. In 2010 Simba carried out an extensive oil seep survey in an area covering 125 square kilometres (about 30,000 acres) around Marshall City and Robertsfield International Airport. The following year, Simba executives started negotiations with NOCAL to convert the reconnaissance permit to a PSC, a request to which NOCAL responded positively. Unfortunately, the present status of the company's activities in the country is unknown, and NOCAL does not mention Simba Energy on its site.

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COPL, 'Liberia Update', Press Release, published November 27, 2014:

<http://www.marketwatch.com/story/canadian-overseas-petroleum-ltd-liberia-update-2014-11-27>

¹⁵ For more examples, see the author's study on foreign direct investment in Liberia in the 1944-1977 period, *The Open Door Policy of Liberia: An Economic History of Modern Liberia* (Bremen, 1983).

¹⁶ Source: *Global Witness*, 'Curse or Cure: How oil can boost or break Liberia's post-war recovery' (Monrovia, September 2011): http://www.globalwitness.org/sites/default/files/library/curse%20or%20cure%20to%20print%20v1r_0.pdf

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- SIMBA ENERGY, 'Simba Energy in Liberia': <http://www.simbaenergy.ca/projects/liberia.aspx>
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<http://instapaperstories.tumblr.com/post/1179530822/the-gangster-prince-of-liberiadetails>

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ETHIOPIA: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopia>

IVORY COAST: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivory_Coast

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MADAGASCAR: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madagascar>

NIGERIA: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigeria>

SIERRA LEONE: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sierra_Leone

TOGO: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Togo>

Blog

LIBERIAN PERSPECTIVES: <http://blog.liberiapastandpresent.org>

Films – YouTube

The following videos and the documentary contain gruesome images and therefore have a minimum age restriction. They are only accessible after registration.

<http://www.youtube.com> Liberian Execution 1980

1980 (April 22): This 10-minute video shows street scenes of Monrovia after the coup, the 'trial' of the Minister of Planning & Economic Affairs, David Franklin Neal, and the execution of the leading members of the True Whig Party and a number of ministers on a beach in Monrovia.

<http://www.youtube.com> The Execution of former Liberian President Samuel K. Doe 1990

1990 (9 september): This 15-minute video was recorded in the place where warlord Prince Johnson, surrounded by members of his militia and looking relaxed and drinking beer, humiliates and tortures captured president Samuel Doe. The murder of Doe is not shown.

<http://www.youtube.com> The VICE guide to Liberia: The cannibal warlords of Liberia.

1989–2003, civil wars, ritual killings and cannibalism: the full version of this documentary lasts 54 minutes.

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<http://trcofliberia.org>

- Liberia and international organisations

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

<http://www.imf.org/external/country/lbr/index.htm>

United Nations (UN)

<http://unliberia.org>

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

<http://www.lr.undp.org>

United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

<http://unmil.unmissions.org>

<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmil>

World Bank

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/liberia>

- Special Court for Sierra Leone

<http://www.sc-sl.org>

- Other

The Trial of Charles Taylor (*Open Society Justice Initiative* – project)

<http://www.charlestaylortrial.org>

Liberia: Past and Present of Africa's Oldest Republic

<http://www.liberiapastandpresent.org>

Recommended reading

This section includes only books and no articles, reports or journals. There are two exceptions, which are referred to in general: the 19th century documents of the various American Colonization Societies and the most authoritative Liberian journal, the *Liberian Studies Journal*, which was first published in 1968. After appearing intermittently for a short period during the civil wars, it is once again published regularly. Most publications are in English, as this is the official language of Liberia. Although most of the recommended reading also refers to publications in English, there are also many interesting publications about Liberia in Dutch, French and German. Furthermore, a number of official websites of the Liberian government and international organizations have been included.

Much has been published about Liberia in the course of two centuries. The list below is a selection of publications that I consider particularly remarkable or important. It is unavoidably a subjective selection of highlights which does insufficient justice to the large number and wide variety of books on Liberia. In the Library of Congress in Washington alone, there are more than 2,600 books exclusively dealing with Liberia. In the Netherlands, the African Studies Centre (ASC) in Leiden houses a substantial collection of books, journals and other material ('grey literature') on Liberia, which is part of an impressive 'Africana' library.¹ The nearly 500 books and more than 700 articles on Liberia in the ASC's library include the most authoritative publications on the country.

I would like to conclude this introduction with a remark on the nature of the selected literature. The works dating from the first half of the twentieth century are largely ethnographic and historical, while the main publications from the second half focus more on Liberia's political economy. After 2000, books on the two civil wars predominate, many of them written by Liberian authors.

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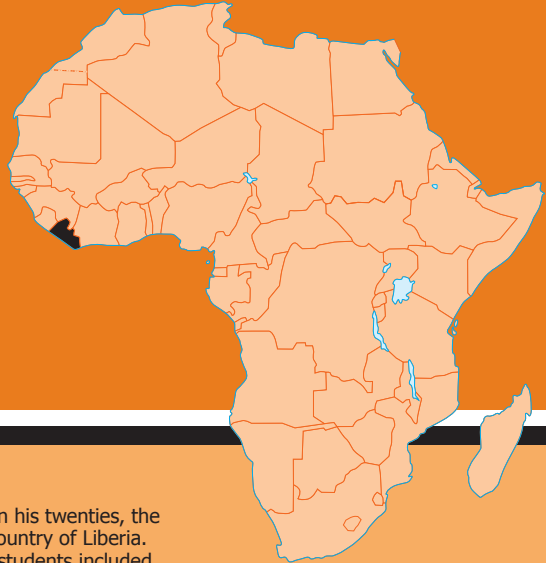
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In the 1970s, as an enthusiastic young graduate in his twenties, the author left the Netherlands for the West-African country of Liberia. He lectured at the University of Liberia where his students included future ministers. One later emerged as a feared warlord, while one of his colleagues even became the country's president. During his many years in Liberia, the author travelled to every corner of the country, visited rubber plantations and iron ore mines, and spoke to managers and workers. In the capital, Monrovia, he met political activists, journalists, ministers, civil servants and academics, from whom he learned much about the country: Africa's first independent republic, founded in 1847 by freed slaves from the United States of America.

Forty years later, in this personal account, the author looks back on the country he has grown to love. In 2012, he returned to Liberia and found a country in the process of recovering from two gruesome civil wars that cost the lives of an estimated 250,000 people and left an unknown large number of people wounded and traumatized. How could a country that was considered to be one of the most stable in Africa descend into such chaos and anarchy? What went wrong? And how is it to move forward? The author tries to answer these questions, based on his own observations. He focuses particular attention on Liberia's current president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first democratically elected female president and joint winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011, and her role in the country's new start after the forced resignation of warlord-president Charles Taylor. This new start aims at both national unification – made more difficult by the scars of the civil wars and the lack of attention for national reconciliation – and the country's economic development. To achieve the latter, president Sirleaf has revived Liberia's traditional 'Open Door Policy' – attracting foreign capital and knowhow in exchange for favourable business conditions – but these efforts were severely compromised in 2014 by the Ebola epidemic, which devastated Liberia's already weak public health system.

Fred van der Kraaij is an economist and worked and lived in West Africa for 16 years.



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