The Evolution of the Liberian State

A Study in Neo-patrimonial

State Formation and Political Change

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Anschrift und Bezugsadresse

About the Author

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Abstract

Against the background of the hypothesis of historically rooted state failure in Liberia, this paper argues that Liberia's political history represented a fast-paced process of state formation. It traces the development of formal and informal institutions of sovereign, central authority and investigates the drivers of the geographical extension and the institutional growth of this central authority. Against dominant position in the debate on African state-building, the author argues that the formation of the Liberian state was strongly driven by conventional old world mechanisms. While different initial conditions, different configurations of social forces and a different world economy indeed entail divergence in local forms of the state, secular political trends have similar effects in different places. This analysis suggest that the political history of Liberia can, to a significant extent, be understood with reference to dynamics of concentration of power and social struggles that universally characterize societies in the era of modernity. Historically, personal relations have strongly patterned the empirical Liberian state, but the expansion of personal authority was accompanied by the development of features of ideal-typical statehood. Further, the paper de-emphasizes the importance of neo-patrimonial continuity, arguing that important differences with respect to state authority and political integration of dominated strata can be observed within Liberia's *longue durée* structure of strong personal and weak bureaucratic authority. While conflicts about the distribution of burdens and benefits of the political order intermittently weakened central authority, the ideal-typical state remains a model informing the organization of power in Liberia.

Contents

1. Introduction

Just as the Iron Curtain was about to fall and large parts of the Western world were enthusiastic about the beginning of a new era promising world peace and freedom, the small West African Country of Liberia became the scene of the region's most deadly civil war. In December 1989, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) rebel group attacked the military government. What initially was a civil war between a weak army and a strong rebel group quickly metamorphosed into an imbroglio that pitted the NPFL, a regional intervention force and several armed factions, most of which emanated from the ruins of the regime, against each other for some seven years. In a second civil war from 2000 to 2003, power once again became contested violently between groups involved in the first war.

The civil wars that were fought in Liberia between 1989 and 2003 were widely interpreted as the breakdown of the state, although there was little consensus on how to conceptualize that breakdown. Kaplan (1994) framed it as "the coming anarchy", a situation characterized by violent competition, particularly among bands of youths, spurred by overpopulation and correspondingly shrinking livelihood resources. Reno (1998) emphasized the disintegration of clientelistic pyramids underlying stability in post-colonial African states and the emergence of alternative, "warlord politics" patterns of domination. Pham (2004) considered Liberia a historically "failed state", characterized by repression, extreme exploitation, poor legitimacy, and lack of provision of public goods.

However, since democratically elected President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf assumed office in January 2006, the country has moved considerably towards the conventional state model. Relations of authority have become re-centralized, legitimacy has markedly increased, central control of means of military violence improved, and state investment in public goods—e.g. road infrastructures, electricity, water, education, health services—has risen significantly. This strengthening of statehood along several dimensions is surprising if we consider the wars the outcome of long-running, deeply rooted patterns working against statehood. For instance, Pham advanced the hypothesis that "history shows that the collapse began much earlier [than 1989] and, in fact, the very foundation of the Liberian state contained within it the seeds of its own destruction" (Pham 2004: 192). But is this really so?

This paper investigates the historical background of Liberia's civil wars, focusing on the formation of the Liberian state. It asks how and to what extent central authority over a demarcated territory was established, formal and informal institutions of authority evolved, and what were the drivers of these processes. In the course of analysis, I will further put the developments into comparative perspective, identifying

to what extent they mirrored classic Western processes of state formation, to what expected they differed, and what this historical background implies for the civil wars and prospects for the empirical Liberian state.

Answering these questions, this paper argues that the historical Liberian experience represented a high-speed state-building process starting from very low foundations. Many of the dynamics of state-building, in particular concerning the elements of violent conquest and external political pressures, show similarities to those engendering state-formation in Western Europe. Neither was the process of Liberian state formation altogether different from previous processes, nor should we expect the result to be. Yet a number of differences, in particular concerning initial conditions, specific social forces and integration into the world economy, impacted on and modified the character of the Liberian state. This implies that the civil wars may be considered part of the violent process of state formation rather than state failure. While the Liberian state certainly has specific characteristics, it should not be considered an antithesis to statehood.

The theoretical chapter of this paper outlines core elements of Weber's political sociology and state-building theory as elaborated on by Charles Tilly and Norbert Elias. It emphasizes the violent character of state-building and the association between taxation and state-building on the one hand and the integration into the world economy as exporter of natural resources and personal authority on the other.

The empirical analysis of the formation of pre-war Liberia distinguishes five phases on the basis of reach of authority. This reach of authority has two mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory dimensions: the power of internationally sovereign, central authority over the territory (*Verstaatlichung der Gesellschaft*) and the integration of those dominated into the power-administering structure (*Vergesellschaftung des Staates*) (cf. Siegelberg 2000). Political integration here is broadly defined as generation of input and output legitimacy. Input legitimacy is generated by allowing those dominated to participate in decision-making and thus have a say in determining the distribution of costs and benefits of domination. Output legitimacy, by contrast, arises from benefits channelled from the centres of power to those dominated in the form of money, goods, services and jobs. In strongly patrimonial societies, values are transferred through private channels, and take on the form of private patronage. Qualitative differences in the combination of the two dimensions of state-building characterize the phases. Yet on one dimension or the other, state-building progressed over the phases. Structural change implied changing patterns of conflicts. The latter nevertheless continued to evolve around the extension of central domination and the attempts of peripheral or subaltern groups to improve their positions in the configuration of power. Investigating both formal and informal patterns of authority,

the analysis provides a comprehensive picture of the institutional development of Liberia.

In Gerdes (forthcoming 2013), I analyse in detail the evolution of the state during Liberia's civil wars and in the post-war period, and explain recent developments with emphasis on the character of Liberia's recently established "neo-patrimonial democracy". This study of the historical background to these developments applies the same theoretical approach.[1] It thus helps to put recent developments into historical perspective and gaining a deeper understanding of both *longue durée* continuities and structural change.

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[1] The theoretical chapter contains extracts of Gerdes (forthcoming 2013).

2. State-building in Europe and Beyond

An interpretation of the history of Liberia as state formation is, of course, dependent on the notion of the state and an understanding of drivers and processes of state formation. This section firstly argues that the notion of the state can be applied to political entities only partially characterized by ideal-typical statehood, and subsequently elaborates theoretically on elements of state formation processes that the empirical part of this study investigates with respect to Liberia's political history.

2.1. On Variation in Patterns of Authority

This paper argues that Liberia's political history before the civil wars since 1989 represented an example of fast-paced state formation. Important for this understanding is the distinction between the state as an ideal-typical category and an empirical polity. In order to qualify as states, empirical polities have to exhibit characteristics of the ideal-type but they, in general, deviate in significant respects. However, we can theoretically reflect on these deviations as much as on the notion of statehood, the latter understood as the combination of ideal-typical characteristics of the state.

Central among these ideal-typical characteristics are legal-rational, procedurally based legitimacy; internationally sovereign central authority; legitimate monopolistic control of this entity over means of violence; internal sovereignty understood as effective supreme authority over a territory marked by boundaries; bureaucratic administration, and the designation of those governed as the state's population or people (cf. Weber 1975a: 215-223; cf. Reinhard 1999, VIII). The form of legitimacy is of particular importance as it is the basis on which Weber distinguished his ideal-types of domination. Yet important to remember is that for Weber, legitimacy was first of all a feature of relations between a ruler and his staff, who would coerce subjects into obedience.

Statehood is an inherently modern ideal-type of domination and can be contrasted with traditional ones. Thus, among the frequently found elements of traditional rule contrasting with state rule are: authority over people rather than territory; authority fading out in frontiers rather than being delimited by borders; overlapping authorities; fragmented control over means of violence; and administration of power based on personal relations of obedience, loyalty and reciprocity. Weber contrasted the legal-rational ideal-type of domination with traditional domination legitimized with reference to traditional precedents. Patrimonialism, a sub-typed of traditional domination and administration, is

characterised by the absence of a distinction between public and private, as well as the all-dominant importance of personal relations between ruler and staff (Weber 1978a: 231-241). A key defining feature is the treatment of a realm as a private patrimony (ibid: 244). Power is private and positions of political power are opportunities for private accumulation. The distinction between private wealth of a ruler and the public treasury is a historically late, modern development.

Weber's third ideal-type of domination is charismatic domination legitimised through the belief of subjects in the extraordinary qualities of a leader (ibid: 241). The lack of administrative continuity, cohesion and regularity is a defining feature of charismatic administration. In order to characterise the relationship between charismatic ruler and staff, Weber employed the metaphor of a congregation, an "emotional form of communal relationship" (Weber 1978a: 243). The relationship between ruler and staff can be likened to that between prophet and disciples. Administrative staff are chosen according to inspirations of the ruler identifying charismatic talent of "disciples".[2] While traditional and legal-rational domination are ordinary, everyday modes, charismatic domination is "specifically revolutionary" (ibid). Domination is not oriented towards traditional beliefs guaranteeing continuity. On the contrary, charismatic leaders seek to introduce innovations, and thus are typical agents of social and political change. In short, charismatic authority is revolutionary, associated with anachronism of previous socio-political orders and times of crisis.

As analytical abstractions, ideal-types do not appear in their pure form in reality. In empirical states, ideal-typical characteristics are compromised. Thus, in empirical studies the state is not so much the legal-rational institution (*Anstalt*) (cf. Weber 1980, 821) monopolistically controlling the means of violence but an organization "controlling the principal means of coercion within a given territory, [and] which is differentiated from other organizations operating in the same territory, autonomous, centralized and formally coordinated" (Tilly 1975a, 638). The legal-rational character of the ideal-typical state, which is intrinsically associated with bureaucratic administration, characterizes empirical states only in part. In the debate on authority in young states, the "neo-patrimonial state" as a term to designate a specific real-type of domination has featured prominently. While the term is generally considered to designate the mixture of legal-rational and patrimonial patterns of authority (cf. Engel/Erdmann 2007), different scholars emphasize divergent aspects of rule.[3] Semantically, it stresses the patrimonial element at the expense of the legal-rational

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[2] The English edition omits the word "Eingebung" (inspiration), which Weber inserted in order to stress the arbitrary means of selecting staff.

[3] Important contributions to the debate are Clapham (1985); Eisenstadt/Lemarchand (1981); Médard (1982); Roth (1968); Theobald (1982); Bratton/Walle (1994), Gazibo/Bach (2012).

one, and I consider it most useful to understand it as political authority formally organized along legal-rational principles that may have some substance but are undermined by a dominant patrimonial logic. An important function of legal-rational institutions is that they structure personal relations of authority and opportunities for private accumulation. However, not every mixture of legal-rational and dominant personal forms of power is essentially neo-patrimonial. Charismatic authority is as much based on personal relations as patrimonial authority but its dynamics may overshadow those of the latter.

Important for the empirical analysis in this paper is that political organizations combining features of different ideal-types may qualify as states. What matters is that elements of statehood form an integral part of the apparatus of domination. The relative weight of different ideal-types of authority is one of the aspects that inform the distinction of phases of domination in Liberia argued in chapter 3.

2.2. Dynamics of State Formation:
Violent Competition, Revenue Generation and External Pressures

Thus having clarified the notion of the state, this section elaborates on the notion and dynamics of state formation. At its core, state formation is a two-pronged process of extension of powers of an empirical state over the peoples of a territory (*Durchstaatlichung der Gesellschaft*) and the complementary (but delayed) integration of society into the state (*Vergesellschaftung des Staates*) (Siegelberg 2000: 12).

Historically, state-building has been a highly violent process—"War made the state, and the state made war" (Tilly 1975b: 42). Charles Tilly (1985) analyses European state-building as the unintended outcome of violent actions by self-seeking political entrepreneurs. At the core of his reflections is the widely recognized intrinsic association between the emergence of monopolistic control of the means of violence, and the emergence of a centrally-controlled, coherent system of taxation. In his perspective, "war making", "extraction" of values, "protection" of sources of income and "state-making" are interwoven processes entailing a consolidation of central, sovereign power in the long run (ibid: 183). Ideal-typically, four stages of political economy development can be distinguished: A "period of anarchy and plunder" tending to destroy necessary sources of revenue is followed by a "stage in which tribute takers attracted customers and established their monopolies by struggling to create exclusive, substantial states" as extraction becomes more regularised and sustainable (ibid: 176). Likening state-makers to organised crime, Tilly describes those of this stage as a "protection racket" of which the "customer" is a victim (ibid.).

Relative security due to these monopolies and consequent economic development is translated into a "stage in which merchants and landlords began to gain more from protection rents than governors did from tribute". Eventually, "technological changes surpassed protection rents as sources of profits for entrepreneurs" (ibid: 177). As expression of the "contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous" (Siegelberg 1994), processes of these stages may occur simultaneously in young states, were the state model was introduced later than in Europe.

Describing similar processes of accumulation of central power, Elias (1999; 2006a) introduced the terms *configuration*, *survival unit*, and *free competition* into his analysis of state-building processes. A configuration is characterised by interdependencies between the people within it. These interdependencies may be abstract and indirect, e.g. two villages that have no links except the one constituted by dependence on the same source of water form a configuration (cf. Elias 2006a: 97-98). Specific configurations universally group human beings and Elias proposes to employ these as *tertium comparationis* for comparative analysis of societies. Of major importance is the *survival unit* (*Überlebenseinheit*), a term closely related to polity, political society or political community. It is characterised by the control of the use of violence in relations between its members, as well as relations between the unit and the outside world. Other pertinent units are those of material and symbolic reproduction. In human life, both assuring subsistence and generating symbolic systems that allow communication and cooperation are social issues transcending the individual (Elias 2006b). Linkages between survival units and units of material reproduction constitute the political economy, the key category employed in this analysis.[4] The configuration analysed in this study is Liberia, a unit characterised by a political centre linking its various elements through competition for sovereign state power as well as an unequal distribution of the costs and benefits of that central power.

Configurations are inherently characterised by internal imbalances, inter alia in terms of power and wealth. These imbalances render internal patterns of configurations dynamic, given that people try to improve their position and thereby force their rivals to re-organise in order to defend their status. Internal competition is a key feature of configurations, however mitigated it may be (Elias 2006a: 170-176). Although directional, political development is a contingent process dependent on the imposition and marginalization of social and political forces. Elias proposes to develop dynamic terms with which to analyse fluctuations of power that both characterise and

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[4] My analysis would profit greatly from integrating symbolic reproduction, as thoughts, ideas and attitudes impact heavily on political and economic strategies. I do mention some important elements of Liberian political thought, but providing a history of (changes in) symbolic reproduction is beyond the scope of this study. Yoder (2003) and Ellis (2007) in particular provide interesting insights in this respect.

determine political development, and has criticised the ideal-typical method as representing static thinking (cf. ibid). However, ideal-types do not describe a static reality. Rather, they are heuristic instruments, allowing us to identify principles between which real political life fluctuates. In this study, ideal-types and changes in degree of manifestation are used as markers indicating shifts in the organisation of power. The empirical part of this study essentially is an analysis of shifts of power within the Liberian configuration.

Elias conceives early state-building as an elimination contest between competing survival units. This distinguishable early phase is termed *free competition* (Elias 1999: 163). Violent political conflict during this phase aims at destroying a rival unit, absorbing its resources and expanding one's own unit. Physical insecurity and economic scarcity forces survival units to accumulate resources, entailing violent conflict between them. In terms of political economy, victory enables one of the actors to appropriate economic resources that were formerly controlled by its rival. Military victory thus translates into accumulation of values, which in turn translates into increased military capacities. As a consequence, a self-feeding cycle of monopolisation of the means of violence and monopolisation of value extraction unfolds. The sequence of war, victory, appropriation of enemy resources and renewed war is termed a political *monopoly mechanism*. While Elias stresses elimination of rivals as the core process of state-building, Tilly provides a more nuanced view, attributing equal importance to "conquest, alliance, chicanery, argument, (…) administrative encroachment" and co-optation. Yet these strategies, if successful, are backed up by military power (Tilly 1975c: 636; cf. Tilly 1985).

Over time, authority becomes more institutionalized, as the central authority develops more sophisticated means to extract revenues. The quest to increase taxation is a key driver in the evolution of statehood, and the emergence of a comprehensive system of taxation is at the heart of bureaucratization. As maximization of tax collection requires monopolization, i.e. the suppression of other revenue collecting authorities (or, in Tilly's terminology, protection rackets), and this monopolization allows strengthening the coercive apparatus, tax monopoly and monopoly on the use of force reinforce each other. As these monopoly mechanisms work repeatedly, they shapes societies over extended periods of time, giving direction to political change (Elias 1999: 151-168). Yet this directional process is not linear. The history of political formations generally features processes of expansion and breakdown or retrenchment of central authority but in long-term historical perspective, there is a trend toward institutionalization of domination and integration into more comprehensive structures of authority.

As authority is becoming more institutionalised, competition is no longer free but framed by prior processes of accumulation of power. Political conflict increasingly is about having influence in or controlling rather than destroying established structures of power (Elias 1999: 213-230). Greater institutional continuity leads to increasing and more complex interdependencies. As a consequence, the ruler becomes more dependent upon those ruled. State-building, hitherto primarily (though not exclusively) a process of extension and imposition of centralised power on society (*Durchstaatlichung der Gesellschaft*), is complemented by a process of society imposing itself on the state (*Vergesellschaftung des Staates*) (Siegelberg 2000: 12; Elias 1999: 156-157). This may likely temporarily weaken effective state authority but this weakening may be the impetus for political changes strengthening the state in the long run.

Historically, growth of central authority has for extended periods proceeded as extension and consolidation of patrimonial relations of authority while the concomitant integration of those dominated proceeded through building of clientelistic relationships. Clientelism can be conceptualized as an early form of state formation combining extension of authority and integration of those dominated. The specific modern expressions of *Vergesellschaftung des Staates* are nationalism and liberal democracy.[5] The more power is constrained through complex interdependencies and (as a consequence) the more the accumulation of values takes place in society rather than at the centre of political power, the less political conflict will be about personal control of political power and the more it will concern societal distribution of costs and benefits of the monopoly of violence. This implies a depersonalisation of the administration of power. Table I summarises the main features of ideal-typical phases of institutionalisation of authority.

As I will show in chapter 3, Liberian state-building was, in one vital aspect, more similar to the European experience than it was to state-building in most other African states. Liberia was not colonised by another state, and extension of sovereign authority proceeded largely without recourse to resources of a developed capitalist economy. While European state formation was characterised by a closely interwoven process of domestic revenue extraction and consolidation of authority, African state formation was, to a large extent, a consequence of European colonialism. Relatively developed economies provided superior resources to European states, which were thus able to conquer African territories. In times of crisis, the centre's resources in terms of military technology, economic resources and administrative knowledge could be drawn on. Colonial rule did not need to be consolidated to the same extent as state-makers had

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[5] Historically, no straightforward evolution from patrimonialism to liberal democracy took place. On the contrary, absolutism meant a reduction in clientelistic relationships.

been forced to do in Europe. However, decolonisation, completing a vital step in the emergence of a worldwide state system, can be seen as analogous to a conventional pattern of overstretching and retrenchment of central rule. While "economies of scale in the production of effective force" allow progressive extension of central authority, "diseconomies of scale in control and command" (Tilly 1985: 177) put limits to that extension. State power reaches its limits where "the costs of communication and control exceed the returns from the periphery" (Tilly 1975c: 636).[6]

Table 2.I: Ideal-typical Phases of Authority

Category	Free Competition	Conflict over Power	Conflict over Policies
Aim of conflict	Destroy rival apparatus, replace it with own one; appropriate rival's power resources	Remove rival from position in apparatus of power; occupy position in apparatus; monopolise access to spoils of power	Make/abrogate/amend laws (that determine the distribution of costs and benefits of the monopoly of violence)
Politically important forces	Warriors Religious Elites	Landed Elites Warriors Religious Elites	Professionals Bourgeoisie Labour

In the post-colonial states thus created, competition was no longer free but framed by the colonial legacy. Nonetheless, the dynamics of extension and retrenchment of central authority remain very acute in the 21st century. The equilibrium, or, in Elias' terms the unstable balance, between economies and diseconomies of scale that determine the boundaries of state territories is contingent upon a number of factors. Most important among these are administrative patterns, the state of technology (Tilly 1975c: 636), location and character of natural resources,[7] world market integration,

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[6] These costs need not be purely economic, and can also be political.

[7] Auty (2001) introduced the distinction between diffuse and point resources. Diffuse resources are spread over large areas, and their extraction does not necessitate control over a particular area. Diffuse resources tend to finance rebel groups who can occupy places at the margins of government control. Billon (2001) extends this typology by adding the dimensions of, from the government's point of view, distant and proximate resources. A resource close to the capital city is less likely to be captured by rebels than is a resource close to a border (ibid: 570). As will become clear in the empirical chapters, investment costs play an important role too. Capital intensive activities, such as iron ore and crude oil extraction, tend not to be undertaken in times of war, as potential losses due to destruction are extremely high. When undertaken in situations of instability, these activities tend to take place under government control and

interdependencies, and degrees of cultural difference and homogeneity of the peoples of a conquered territory (cf. Tilly 1975c; 1992; cf. Elias 1999). When borders are first of all guaranteed by juridical sovereignty rather than internal accumulation of powers, effective authority over the territory varies strongly in dependence of these factors. Central rulers than face the challenge of creating conditions allowing to exploit the territory they supposedly rule. A key strategy to increase their ability to do so is *extraversion* (Bayart (2000).

> "The leading actors in sub-Saharan societies have tended to compensate for their difficulties in the autonomization of their power and in intensifying the exploitation of their dependants by deliberate recourse to the strategies of extraversion, mobilizing resources derived from their (possibly unequal) relationship with the external environment. The external environment thus turned into a major resource in the process of political centralization and economic accumulation" (Bayart 2000: 218-219).

Access to externally generated power resources, which, in post-colonial times, has taken on the form of politically motivated transfers from former colonial powers, military and financial Cold War patronage, development assistance, and natural resource rents (cf. Bayart 2000), is widely considered the key political economy variable that engenders weak statehood, particularly as concerns the dimensions of legitimacy and bureaucratic administration. Political and economic rents allow rulers to refrain from building legitimacy among lower status strata. There is little need to minimise tax evasion, build costly bureaucratic administrations in order to monitor transactions that could be taxed, and provide public goods. Rents allow the establishing of patrimonial clientelistic networks disproportionately favouring elites and the financing of a strong repressive apparatus to keep financially irrelevant subjects in check.[8]

Contemporary weakness of statehood in Africa further has a specific historic basis. In large parts of Africa, pre-colonial central rule was weak if it existed at all. Links between rulers and the core population of its territory were often close due to marked interdependence. Central authority was often based on conquest and exploitation of outsider populations, giving rise to particular mixtures of benevolent rule to the benefit of insider populations and despotism towards outsiders (Hauck 2001). Further, many political communities were small-scale in scope, and the continent featured particular political heterogeneity expressed in diverse forms of non-

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help to finance the sovereign state, because legality offers superior opportunities for ensuring or hedging investment costs. Further, large firms able to mobilise significant capital are vulnerable to lawsuits brought against them by sovereign governments for supporting rebel groups.

[8] Cf. Tilly (1975c: 638); Reno (1998); Ross (1999); Auty (2001); Schlichte (2005: 182-215).

state forms of social order and authority. Against this historical background and the adverse effects of Africa's integration into the international political economy, the idea and substance of statehood in Africa has shown remarkable growth through the colonial and post-colonial eras.

2.3. A Note on Sequences of Domination

Political trajectories in young states cannot be assumed to mirror those experienced in the Occident. As a consequence of the global spread of modernity, *inter alia* through colonialism, and its confrontation with societies organized on the basis of traditional modes of political and economic reproduction, the simultaneous existence of modern and traditional patterns characterizes peripheral societies. This, however, should not lead us to consider these societies as either intrinsically traditional-patrimonial (cf. Chabal/Daloz 1999; 2006) or uniformly neo-patrimonial. There are important differences in the combination of bureaucratic and personal forms of rule in general and in the mixture of legal-rational and patrimonial patterns in particular.

As a heuristic tool for analysing processes of social change, Braudel (1984) proposes to distinguish three layers of historicity. These are the *longue durée* stretching over centuries, *conjonctures* rising and falling within decades, and *histoire événementielle*, i.e. singular events and their immediate consequences. Much as did Elias (2006b), he deplored a focus by contemporary social analysis on short-term phenomena and a lack of reflection on how these are embedded in long-term trends.

Braudel only roughly outlines criteria to defining the layers but suggests that *long durée* periods are characterized by a set of intricately linked, enduring political and economic patterns. He specifically proposes to consider the era of trade-based capitalism a distinct *longue durée* period (Braudel 1984, 196). A major feature of that period was accumulation based on trade rather than a cycle of knowledge creation, investment, and superior production (cf. Marx 1987, Chapters 1–3). Natural resource economies realize profits in trade rather than production. In a Marxian sense, natural resources are not produced but extracted. They are generated as a consequence of ecological processes that can be influenced by investment in a limited way only. Natural resources thus are scarce, which creates rents that are prone to appropriation by way of control over the means of force (cf. Auty 2001). Similarly, agricultural goods are dependent on ecological variables and seasonal cycles that investment has no impact on. Rulers are thus not dependent on promoting conditions that support knowledge creation and investment. Relevant for war economies, capital concerned

with natural resource extraction cannot relocate when conditions deteriorate (cf. Billon 2001, 569).

In this sense, Liberia's political economy has been characterized by trade-based capitalism throughout. Political power has been based on appropriation of rents that stabilized patrimonial relations. In this sense, Liberia's *longue durée* pattern has been that of strong personal and weak bureaucratic structures of rule. Neo-patrimonial rule characterized Liberia for the better parts of its history, with the exceptions of the colonial and warlord phases of authority analysed below. However, there are important differences in political organization below the *longue durée* abstraction. The empirical part of this study argues that we can identify five phases of state formation in Liberia that qualify as distinct *conjonctures,* as they are marked by the rise, peak and decline of political-economic patterns that emerged in response to historically specific opportunities and challenges but became anachronistic within decades.

3. Domination in Liberia in Historical Perspective

Liberia was established in the 1820s by the *American Colonization Society* (ACS) and smaller affiliate colonization societies, which represented diverse interests aiming at creating a "homeland" for "free men of color" from the US. Soon after the colony was founded, it also became a landing place for so-called Congos, would-be slaves transported (by then illegally) on vessels intercepted by the US coastguard and the Liberian government.[9] Smaller groups of immigrants came from the West Indies. The state thus had its origins in a settler society of strangers implanting themselves on African lands. In contrast to surrounding European colonies, where colonialists were essentially administrators posted to a distant territory by a state that assured their subsistence,[10] the existence of the Liberian polity depended on the settler's ability to exploit the colonial territory. Liberian state-building was, in one vital aspect, more similar to the European experience than it was to state-building in most other African states. Liberia was not colonised by another state, and extension of sovereign authority proceeded largely without recourse to the resources of a developed capitalist economy. As in neighbouring colonies, however, colonisation pitted colonisers and indigenous groups against each other.

When analysing political domination in Liberia, several dimensions should be borne in mind. An important one is that of the political organization of settler society. Here, a distinction between central politics and organisation of domination on the ground in peripheral settlements is relevant.[11] Another dimension is that of relations of authority between the settler state and indigenous communities. A third one is that of diverse forms of traditional rule of native communities on Liberian territory. Inasmuch as these dimensions are interlinked, all of them will be dealt with; yet the central issue of this study is relations between the Liberian state and indigenous communities on its territory.

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[9] The "Congo" re-captives were numerous but quickly assimilated into "Americo-Liberian" culture and integrated into this population segment. In this paper, the category of "Americo-Liberians" includes the assimilated Congo segment.

[10] In this respect, European colonialism in West Africa differed markedly from European settler colonialism in East and Southern Africa.

[11] Literature on the latter is scarce, although scholars universally emphasize that outlying settlements had considerable autonomy, largely for practical reasons. An interesting study on the Sinoe settlement is that by Sullivan (1980).

3.1. Early State-Building: The Colonial Phase

As a starting point, it is useful to recall the indigenous political situation which formed the background to the colonization project. It has to be emphasized that a key feature of the region then was instability. The area that was to become Liberia was heavily forested, sparsely populated, and at the time American settlers established their settlements, indigenous groups were still migrating into the area and settling there too. In the process, they allied with some groups already present and got into conflict with others.[12] Reminiscent of pre-state era Europe, peace and war were not clearly differentiated and among the groups already present, violent conflict was frequent. Control over trade routes and acquisition of slaves were major motive for warfare. When the first settlers arrived, indigenous warfare had already brought about a centralisation of authority, but state-building was still in its early stages and political, demographic and environmental factors prevented a consolidation of this central authority.[13] Political authority was, to a large extent, economically based on intermediary positions in trade between the interior and European merchants, the most important trade item being slaves. Indigenous political communities tended to be small-scale and dispersed. A situation of intense competition between indigenous groups, accompanied by the incessant conclusion and dissolution of alliances, formed the background to "Americo-Liberian"[14] efforts at rule until the turn of the century. When the settlers arrived, local political communities were thus experienced in

[12] The last major destabilising influx of strangers took place when the French conquered Samory Touré in the 1890s and bands of his former forces marauded through the region, selling their mercenary services to local rulers.

[13] For instance, in the 1820s there were two indigenous confederations in north-western pre-Liberia that featured a degree of centralisation of power that the Liberian state was to achieve only towards the end of the 19th century. However, both confederations quickly collapsed after their rulers died, as patterns of rule were vulnerable to fragmentation. A quote from a local Gola ruler sums up political dynamics of the time: "In the old days if someone put himself in power over you and deprived you of your rightful place, you looked about for a more powerful person to join you in destroying him. There was always some king greater than the man who wanted to rule you. You could run to him and say, O master I bring you my people and all that I own in this world. They belong to you, but you must bring peace and order to my country which an upstart has stolen. When a great king hears such a thing, he must make things right and he will make war on your enemy. That is the way it was in the great days" (quoted in: Azevedo 1969b: 58). Similar processes have been described by Elias (1999), stressing that centralisation of domination is nevertheless probable in the long run.

[14] "Americo-Liberian" is a contested political label and is therefore put in quotes. Its use has been discouraged by Liberian officialdom since the early 20th century, as it increasingly became associated with exclusive rule, and the connotation is very much present in contemporary political discourse. It further obscures family and cultural linkages between settlers and indigenous society that were established over time. Yet the outright rejection of the expression (often advocated by descendants of settlers) masks patterns of exclusion based on ancestry and Liberia's history cannot be understood without reference to these.

fighting, establishing purpose-driven alliances, and adapting to shifts in the distribution of political power (cf. Sawyer 1992: 76-85; cf. Levitt 2005: 17-29).

An important aspect in which colonial rule over Liberia differed from other cases was that it had not been effected by a sovereign country, which would have been in accordance with international legal norms of the time. Legally, the ACS was a private civil society organisation. "Liberia" had neither a developed military apparatus at its back, nor a relatively developed economy generating financial means for funding early conquest and occupation, not to speak of the lack of an (by the standards of the time) advanced academic system researching indigenous social organisation or efficient patterns of administration. Equally important for Liberia's trajectory, it was not subject to pressures by an expanding manufacturing industry demanding *mise en valeur* of African economic activity.

Against this background, the ACS hardly developed a deliberate policy towards the interior, as its central concern was the organization of settler society. Its major activities were securing land, organising emigration, sending agents to rule the colony, and financing the supply of consumer goods supporting the early settlers. Designs were for an "exclusive settler state in coastal enclaves" (Sawyer 1992: 71), while minimal consideration was given to relations with people inhabiting the region. The first, and generally a major, form of strategic contact with indigenous peoples was purchase of land.

In December 1821, an agent of the ACS purchased initial settlement areas, speeding up the negotiations by putting a gun to the head of one of the indigenous rulers present. In following years, further territories were acquired through practices combining purchase, deception and coercion. By the time of independence in 1847, Liberia comprised three clusters of settlements stretching over more than 150 miles of West African coastline, previously known as the *Grain* and *Pepper Coasts*. Montserrado, the place of the first permanent settlement constituted the political centre, while the more eastern settlements of Bassa and Sinoe were peripheral and effectively enjoyed considerable autonomy. Further to the east, the *Maryland Colonization Society* established a separate colony that was to join Liberia only in 1857 (cf. Sawyer 1992: 134).

About a year and a half after the creation of the colony, the settlers were attacked for the first time.[15] They suffered heavy casualties but eventually prevailed. One of the important patterns established during this war was the conclusion of military alliances

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[15] Levitt (2005) lists additional, minor clashes that took place even earlier. However, in Liberian memory, this fight is widely remembered as the first violent challenge to the settler project. The fighting was triggered by settler intervention in the looting of a wrecked ship on the coast, but involved larger questions of control over the area.

with indigenous groups. These alliances followed a well-established logic of preservation of local autonomy. Groups allied with the settlers when under pressure from other groups from the interior, but teamed up with indigenous forces when threatened by the immigrants (cf. Sawyer 1992: 129-130). The pattern remained alive well into the 20th century (cf. Barclay 1904: 118), but eventually allowed the settlers to control both allies and those conquered. As the settlers' strength grew, the power of those indigenous elite groups that had more consistently allied with the victorious settlers increased. Alliances between the settlers and indigenous groups played an outstanding role in the formation of domination in Liberia, and, although state-building evolved around the settler-indigenous divide, this "master cleavage" did not generally structure violent conflicts (cf. Levitt 2005).

A major outcome of the first fight for the settler project was "the conviction (…) that Liberia needed both a strong military force and its constant display or use to keep the indigenous Liberians submissive to Liberian Government authority and deter them from aggression against the Americo-Liberians" (Akpan 1986: 123). Innumerable other battles followed, with issues of control of lands and trade underlying the fighting (cf. Levitt 2005; cf. Akpan 1986). Security for the settlers was provided by a poorly trained and little disciplined militia force that became increasingly aggressive as it succeeded in demonstrating its military superiority. In disputes with local groups, use of force became a means of first rather than last resort.

An important reason for settler attacks was the suppression of the slave trade, partly because slaving contradicted the core legitimation of the colonisation project, and partly also because suppression would force indigenous peoples to engage in legitimate trade to the benefit of the settlers. Further, the settlers intervened in conflicts between groups of the interior, in particular because the fighting disturbed trade. Whenever treaties were concluded between settlers and indigenous communities in the wake of fighting, these generally obliged the latter not to disrupt passage of goods and terminate involvement in the slave trade. Most important, they usually contained an important element of indirect rule, which was to characterize the Liberian state later. "Most of the treaties negotiated by the Liberian authorities with warring indigenous political communities were designed to establish a role for the Liberian government as arbitrator and guarantor of peace and stability in the subregion" (Sawyer 1992: 83). While, by and large, dominant political opinion envisaged only selective contacts with indigenous groups (ibid: 107), the settlers staked the claim to be the final authority in relations between these communities. Alliances and agreements, however, tended to be short-lived, and violations of agreements regularly entailed further violent battles. Despite few efforts and even fewer capacities to assume control over the peoples of the

interior, the ACS and the settlers conceived of the Liberian experiment as a civilizing mission, implying much greater interference in indigenous politics.

However, rather than entailing control of the colony over the hinterland, early wars were instrumental in state-building by uniting settler Liberia. Private interests in several US states had established Colonization Societies that maintained relations with the ACS but established autonomous settlements. In 1835, an attempt to establish a colony without using force against indigenous peoples had failed. The *Pennsylvania Young Men's Colonization Society*, made up largely of Quakers, had foresworn wars and made non-resistance a principle of their settlement policy. "[J]ust as soon as their pledges and abstinences were made known to their native neighbours (…) the whole colony, consisting of some twenty or more men, women and children, was massacred" (Johnson 1987: 70-71). In the years to come, all settlements, except those of Maryland, united, essentially for purposes of security cooperation. During its early days, Liberia's existence was acutely threatened. Almost half of the roughly 4,500 immigrants shipped to Liberia by 1843 had died by then, most of malaria, and life was extremely difficult for many more (cf. Pham 2004: 12-13).[16] The resilience of the settler state thus was anything but a foregone conclusion.

The ACS was supported financially by the US government sporadically, but its means were modest. As a consequence, the colony had to become self-financing quickly. For the last three years of its colonial existence, Liberia did not receive any material support from the ACS. Owing to the structure of economic opportunities at the time, Liberia developed into a trade-based economy, the political apparatus of which was financed by levying customs on intercontinental trade. Control of overseas trade, however, proved difficult, as both European merchants and indigenous rulers were interested in evading customs. In 1838, the colonial authorities enacted a Ports of Entry Law restricting overseas trade to locations that they directly controlled.

Liberian independence eventually came about as France and Great Britain, having received a clarification by the US Government that Liberia was not a colony of the country, militarily challenged the ACS's claim to charge customs, as the organization was a private body. In order to establish a legal claim to indispensable tax and customs collection, Liberia needed to be sovereign or the colony of a sovereign country. "It was not the attraction of freedom but fear of annexation or annihilation that drove the process of independence" (Sawyer 1992: 95). In addition, Liberia was composed of several, largely autonomous settlements whose inhabitants had been

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[16] There is very little information available on the demographic development of Liberia. By 1867, some 15,170 persons had been shipped to Liberia. Significant numbers immigrated later on, and thus in 1899 the figure stood at 22,190 (Liberty 2002: 246). However, there is no information available on how many survived.

brought to the country from diverse localities in the US, the Caribbean and Africa, and hardly considered themselves an indivisible, politically and culturally united community.[17] "The new government of Liberia was not the result of popular feeling. (…) It was forced upon the [settler] people as a protective measure in consequence of the impositions practised upon their revenue by foreign adventurers, who had no respect for a community which neither was a nation nor a colony of a nation" (Edward Blyden, quoted in Ellis 2007: 41-42). This absence of a nationalist ideology in the Western sense contradicts Levitt's (2005) hypothesis of nationalism having been the main cause for violent conflicts between settlers and indigenous groups, and my analysis thus emphasizes (often irreconcilable) contradictions driving competition between the European colonial, "Americo-Liberian" and indigenous polities of the region.

In 1847, with the consent of the ACS, Liberia declared its independence. Being thereby forced to define the sovereign territory, the government claimed some 150 miles of coastline and declared a "constitutional zone" reaching 45 miles into the interior. The zone included the upriver settlements established by the ACS on rivers flowing down towards the coastal core of the settlement clusters, but large parts thereof were not effectively controlled. As European occupation of Africa proceeded, the Liberian government extended its claim to territory. Legal sovereignty was to become the major advantage of the settler state, enabling it to impose its claims against indigenous groups.

3.2. Settlers, Indigenous Communities and Open Competition: From Independence to the 20th Century

Although the Liberian state slowly extended its reach, until the turn of the 19th century its powers extended little beyond the settlements. The core pattern of political rule was that of simultaneous existence of several autonomous political communities which were interlinked in shifting alliances. Liberia's merchant elite maintained spheres of influence in the hinterland, organized on a private basis employing webs of dependants, intermediaries and small-scale traders linking up with indigenous authorities, traders and producers. There were few interests in "the state" extending domination into the hinterland. Early Liberian state-building was strongly motivated by international pressures.

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[17] Tellingly, Bassa boycotted the referendum due to intra-elite divisions, and, as has been said, Maryland only joined Liberia in 1857 in the wake of serious fighting with indigenous groups.

Having declared independence, Liberia needed to have her claim to sovereignty recognized by other states, in particular France and the UK. The UK was the first country to recognize Liberia, in 1848, and France as well as the Hanseatic German Confederation followed in 1852 and 1855 respectively.[18] The US recognized Liberia only in 1864. However, British and French recognition was far from comprehensive. In particular, after the Berlin Conference of 1885 had outlined boundaries of colonial territories of the empires and established the principle of *effective occupation* as the basis for claiming sovereignty over African territories, Liberia faced regular, and sometimes successful, attempts at annexation of her territory, as well as plans to put Liberia under foreign trusteeship. The government was therefore under intense pressure to "effectively occupy" areas that dominant Liberian political opinion had considered to be spheres of influence where opportunities for trade were to be pursued, rather than areas to be controlled.

The predominance of competition with European colonial powers as a driving force of the early state-building process points to a mechanism familiar from the European experience: once a strong neighbour chooses the principle of central administration over a demarcated territory as a mode of domination, it exerts pressure on its neighbours to adopt the same principle (cf. Siegelberg 2000). Competition for power with local political communities reinforced early state-building, but was not its primary determinant.

Competition between the settlers and local communities centred on control of coastal trade by "Americo-Liberian" merchants, the imposition of customs on overseas trade by their state, and the prohibition of the slave trade (cf. Levitt 2005: 89-137). For the precarious settler state, generating revenue was an imperative, while opposition to the slave trade was at the centre of its symbolic-ideological basis and, at the same time, important to justifying Liberia's existence internationally. Yet the social order of indigenous groups in the area was inherently tied to an intermediate position in overseas trade, and heavily based on trade in human beings (cf. d'Azevedo 1969a; 1969b). There was thus an irreconcilable clash of interests. Although indigenous groups were more experienced in warfare and often pursued superior strategies, battles were almost invariably won by the settlers.

Sovereignty can be considered the decisive competitive advantage of the "Americo-Liberians", for four major reasons: firstly, the right to collect customs and taxes over an extended, commercially used coastline allowed mobilizing resources that

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[18] Sawyer attributes British recognition of sovereignty to Liberia's policy against slavery, given that slavery had become repugnant to British moral consciousness and inimical to its interests in the region (Sawyer 1992: 136). British recognition of Liberia strongly contributed to France's decision. The German Hanse was a major trading partner of Liberia and had an economic interest in official relations.

could be used for weapons purchases, resulting in a slight military technology advantage. Second, it offered (limited) protection against European colonial designs.[19] Third, support from the US, sporadically provided following urgent requests by the settlers, can be considered a function of sovereignty, as it involved the recognition of the settler state as the legitimate authority in the area. Direct US military support was symbolic, as it essentially consisted of engaging in a show of force by posting naval vessels to scenes of conflict. However, the belief on the part of indigenous forces that the US military intended to intervene was decisive for averting settler defeat at least once (see below), and it probably did more than just prevent heavy settler casualties in several instances (cf. Levitt 2005). Fourth, sovereignty meant the "Americo-Liberian" settlers had superior access to foreign credit, although the net effect of foreign credit was ambiguous.[20]

Conflicts between indigenous groups, similarly, were mostly fought for control of trade routes and, as the settlers consolidated their sphere of influence, for a favourable position in intermediate trade between them and the interior. Slave raiding was another major motive, but one which decreased in importance during the 19th century. Inasmuch as these conflicts demonstrated the lack of effective control of the state, the settlers were forced to intervene, in particular when fighting spilled over into French and British colonies.

A slight, but enduring military advantage meant superior punitive and enforcement powers for the settlers. As a consequence, 19th century state-building proceeded as a series of treaties between the settlers and indigenous authorities following the principles that had already characterised the colonial era, the most important point of which was the acceptance of the Liberian state as the final arbiter in conflicts between indigenous groups. However, that acceptance was more rhetorical than real. Corresponding to weak "Americo-Liberian" control over the hinterland, indigenous integration into the Liberian state was minimal.

Upon independence, Liberia had adopted a democratic regime modelled on the US Constitution featuring an elected presidency and a bicameral legislature. Presidential tenure was two years, and no president was able to entrench himself in power. Given poor finances, the need of consent on the part of the inhabitants of the

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[19] By contrast, the indigenous communities never stood a chance to evolve into states. Had they conquered the "Americo-Liberian" settlers, France and the UK would have invaded and shared the territory.

[20] At times, the ability to take credit made available badly needed finances. For instance, Liberia purchased weapons on credit given by the US government while being seriously confronted by indigenous troops and running out of military equipment (Akpan 1986: 133-134). Yet generally, Liberia's debt constituted a drain on its resources that impeded the consolidation of domination. Until the mid-20th century, Liberia's debt essentially was a legacy of the first major foreign loan taken out in 1871. While the loan had extortionary conditions attached, the way it was managed made things worse.

dispersed settlements to send at least a portion of the tax revenues due to Monrovia, and few capacities for coercion, meant that the effective power of the president was acutely limited. However, democratic institutions—including elections and the legislature—on their own did not ensure accountability.[21]

> "There is no indication in the Liberian experience that the electoral machinery was ever meant to be an instrument for conducting free and fair elections. From earliest times, electoral commissioners and registrars were selected either exclusively from the ruling party or the incumbent president, who was either running for reelection or supportive of a particular candidate" (Sawyer 1992: 271).

Voters did not need to register in person, and registrars received a payment for every name on the lists they eventually sent to the election commissioner. Voter lists were not verified and thus systematically inflated, allowing massive ballot stuffing later (cf. Johnson 1987: 148-149). Nevertheless, elections and the associated campaigns served political purposes. They were effective in stimulating debate and framing political issues, served to identify people with leadership potential and encouraged these people to build a constituency, and were important for the political socialisation of future elites (Sawyer 1992: 270-271).

The essence of politics was conducted outside formal political channels by "*an oligarchy*" made up of rich individuals and "*demand[ing] accountability*" (Sawyer 1992: 267; italics added).

> "The group of leading citizens whose role circumscribed presidential prerogatives and whose leader, if not president, was more powerful than the president, also functioned as the 'Legislative' authority. This group usually included the president and his cabinet, leading and influential members of the legislature, former presidents, and others who were notable merchants and planters. *Although this group had no standing in law, it was the final authority* especially in times of national crises" (Sawyer 1992: 267, italics added).

Yet the group of "leading citizens" was not homogeneous, as frequent changes in the presidency illustrate. A core feature of Liberian politics since the creation of the state was personalised factionalism. Generally, the governing party was made up of several competing factions.[22] If these could agree on a common presidential candidate, he

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[21] Suffrage was restricted to "Americo-Liberian" males aged at least twenty-one and owning real estate.

[22] During the first decades after independence, the Republican Party controlled the government. It is considered to have represented those then designated "mulattoes" (a term that, in this paper, is used in the sense of that time) in Liberia, who had had a relatively high status in the US and succeeded in

would stand unopposed. Where intra-party cleavages were too deep, an opposition party would be founded and stand in the elections. "Opposition parties [were] highly personalized affairs organized to compete in specific elections and rally under the banner of a dissident" former government party elite (Liebenow 1969: 119).

Factions were invariably organized around rich elites, with merchants rather than planters dominating on the central level. Sullivan offers two variables to explain the boundaries of political factions in 19th century Liberia: family and arrival group (Sullivan 1980: 6).[23] Until the early 20th century, marriages between settlers and indigenous individuals were socially unacceptable. Given the small number of settlers and the need to avoid inbreeding, family links became extensive, which enlarged factions.[24] The importance of arrival groups stems from the time passed together on a ship and the common experience of the difficulties of initial implantation (ibid.). Furthermore, arrival groups frequently settled close by, or established new settlements together. All in all, it was the small number of settlers, entailing significant personal links between members of the community, and the vulnerability of the community which limited exploitation and repression of lower strata, rather than democratic institutions. Democratic institutions, however, constituted one of the important channels through which the leading oligarchy organised its collective control of politics.

These democratic institutions were also the channels through which indigenous elites were tentatively integrated. In 1870, a "referee system" was instituted, meaning that every indigenous community paying 100 US dollars had the right to send a member to the central House of Representatives. The "referees" were allowed to speak only on issues relating to their communities and could not vote. In 1880, their status was changed to that of "delegates", which went along with the right to vote on issues pertinent to their communities and being paid a stipend of 100 US dollars annually (Sawyer 1992: 207-208). Indigenous delegates, however, were few in number, and they

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dominating early Liberia as a consequence. It was challenged by a few ephemeral parties, and eventually the *True Whig Party* (TWP), which initially represented settlers of darker complexion. In 1883, the TWP came to power. It governed Liberia for almost 100 years and developed into a de-facto single party as the presidency became more powerful, but collapsed quickly and completely after the military coup of 1980.

[23] Studies on 19th century Liberia generally highlight two other distinctions transcending the political factions at the core of Liberian politics: that between light-skinned (including "mulattoes") and dark-skinned settlers, and that between "Americo-Liberians" and recaptured Africans. All presidents before Edward J. Roye (1870-1871) emanated from the light-skinned segment, which had succeeded in carrying over the relative privileges it had enjoyed in the US into Liberia. After Roye, the distinction lost importance. Generally, the major cleavages of early settler society did not leave a lasting mark on Liberian politics, which demonstrated remarkably integrative capacities despite intense and lasting factionalism.

[24] There is little information available on social mobility between the higher and lower strata of Liberian settler society (cf. Sawyer 1992: 103-116), but divides do not appear to have been impenetrable and family links were likely to constitute an avenue for social advancement.

had hardly any impact on legislative debate. Liberian state rule over the hinterland remained precarious and largely illegitimate until the early 20th century.

Important drivers of Liberia's process of state formation then lay in the economic basis of the state. For the first two decades after independence, trade boomed and Liberia's economy grew. International prices for goods produced in Liberia, notably coffee, palm oil and rubber, were high. Liberian merchants invested in vessels, giving rise to a small shipping industry. "By 1870, about fifty small vessels, of thirty to eighty tons, had been built in the Monrovia shipyards" (Brown 1941: 141). Yet generally, Liberia relied on trade in items produced by indigenous labour, and the wealthiest among the elites were merchants engaged in overseas trade. Manual labour and farm labour in particular were frowned upon in elite circles and beyond. Nevertheless, in the upriver settlements in particular, which were socially distant from the Monrovia establishment, an infant planting economy developed. Liberian coffee, much in demand at the time, required little investment, and plantations were developing. Further, rice, sugar and cinnamon were produced in significant quantities (Brown 1941: 133).

Since the 1860s, competition in overseas transport increased markedly with the introduction of steamships (cf. Sawyer 1992: 168-170). Liberian merchants, short of capital by European standards, could not compete and, by the 1880s, almost the whole Liberian fleet had gone out of service. In an early response to the crisis, *leading citizens* decided to improve transport infrastructure into the interior in order to stimulate trade. In 1871, Liberia took its first major international loan to finance infrastructure investment. The loan eventually obtained had stringent conditions attached. A nominal amount of 500,000 US dollars was provided at seven per cent interest, but the sum was discounted by 30 per cent and three years' interest payments were deducted in advance. Liberia thus only received some US$245,000, which were questionably handled. The loan and its consequences remained a heavy burden for Liberia well into the 20th century until the rubber plantation economy developed.[25]

The loan affair discredited President Roye politically, and Liberia's *leading citizens* endorsed a successor for the next elections. Yet Roye, probably encouraged by a boost in his personal finances, tried to cling to the presidency. He first unilaterally declared his term of office extended for two years and armed his supporters to confront his challengers but was overpowered by militia units loyal to the *leading citizens* and arrested. He little later drowned during an escape attempt, the circumstances of which have never been convincingly clarified. The events constituted by far the most violent

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[25] Liberia defaulted periodically on repayments and would renegotiate the loan. Although the state was able to significantly reduce its obligations, defaulting increased substantially the costs of future loans, and the long-term consequences of the whole loan affair constituted a significant burden.

experience in central state politics until 1980. While politics towards indigenous peoples was highly violent, violence as a means of political competition in intra-settler politics was widely abhorred and socially unacceptable (cf. Liebenow 1969: 118-119). Liberian attitude towards violence in politics was ambivalent.

Liberia's trade-based economy then ran into a crisis. Just as the plantation economy appeared a viable alternative, international prices for Liberia's most important export goods fell due to increased global production, tougher competition and discovery of substitutes (Brown 1941: 141-143; Sawyer 1992: 168-170). Within a few years, the most productive and innovative elements in Liberian society were ruined. Subsequently, the economic basis of the Liberian elite and its state came to be of a virtually entirely parasitic nature, one that was to determine political-economic patterns for a considerable time.

The Liberian state has historically been unable to tax the "Americo-Liberian" population, and only an insignificant fraction of state income was derived from the wealthiest part of Liberian society (cf. Brown 1941: 185). As European shipping lines took over commerce, the bulk of state revenue was derived from taxing foreign merchants trading in goods produced by indigenous peoples. Liberia's elite, increasingly favouring jurisprudence as a professional background, came to depend economically on public office and foreign trading houses employing well-connected individuals to be protected against government harassment (Sawyer 1992: 269-270). Increasingly, the indigenous population itself became a source of tax revenue. Frequently, private taxes and fines far exceeding the official tax burden were arbitrarily levied on indigenous peoples by local state officials without regard for levels of native production (cf. Brown 1941: 146; cf. Johnson 1987: 3-9). In the latter part of the 19th century, state-building, inasmuch as it was synonymous with the extension of the powers of local government officials effectively free from central control, proceeded as a predatory endeavour. By means of patronage networks, the state indirectly supported a significant part of the "Americo-Liberian" population (cf. Sawyer 1992: 160-178). As the state extended its reach, predation reached new levels.

3.3. Indirect Rule: The First Half of the 20th Century

So far, notions of territoriality had remained vague in Liberian society (Sawyer 1992: 273), and extension of central control had almost completely been due to immediate pressures. The advent of Arthur Barclay to the presidency of Liberia in 1904 is generally considered a turning-point in Liberian politics, because it marked the beginning of a concerted, official policy to establish a hinterland administration

informed by the British example and based on principles of indirect rule. Barclay officially established the principle of recognizing the pre-existing indigenous power structures (or rather, what "Americo-Liberians" took for indigenous power structures) and ruling through the powerful families of native political communities. He imposed a uniform system of administration through a two-layered system of "Paramount Chiefs" and "Town Chiefs" on the hinterland.

Rulers were supposed to be chosen according to traditional practice, but were approved and commissioned by the president. In return for acceptance of the settler state's supreme authority, the state would guarantee the indigenous rulers' control over their subjects, resulting in increased local despotism. In eastern Liberia, where segmentary groups without institutions of chieftaincy dominated, intervention in internal order through imposition of Chiefs was even greater. Most important for both the Liberian state and transformations of indigenous social orders, Chiefs were charged with collecting government taxes, of which they could keep ten per cent. Over time, the responsibilities of the Chiefs were increased, notably to include recruiting involuntary labour for rubber plantations. Central state backing of Chiefs entailed that the chieftaincy office became increasingly associated with ostentatious display of power and that despotism became the normal way of exercising power. If

> "a chief wanted to raise himself in the world, he was forced to fight his own relatives and use the government to make them obey him. If you were good to your people, you were poor and no one listened to you" (Gola Paramount Chief, quoted in: Azevedo 1970-71: 7).

The state had continued to impose and demonstrate its superiority in violent ways, and its forces had remained agents of a despotic logic that eventually was came to be considered impeding rather than promoting the growth of central authority. President Arthur Barclay famously voiced his concern that the militia was becoming "a greater danger to the loyal citizen, and his property, which it ought to protect, than to the public enemy" (Barclay 1904: 119). Under Arthur Barclay, the notion of "citizen" included indigenous people for the first time.

After Arthur Barclay's tenure ended, subsequent administrations incrementally introduced changes that slowly lead to a strengthening of central control. As the number of indigenous subjects effectively dominated grew, a new level of chieftaincy was created in 1914. The former Paramount Chiefs were re-designated Clan Chiefs, and called upon to propose individuals for the office of Paramount Chief, who would represent them vis-à-vis the state. The reform included a decision to have Chiefs elected in future. This, however, effectively meant increased interference in the

selection of Chiefs by the state, which determined who was eligible. While state control thereby increased, the legitimacy of the Chieftaincy suffered (Sawyer 1992: 198-200). President Edwin Barclay (1930-44) was to become particularly well known for his strict control over Chieftaincy nominations (cf. Azevedo 1970-71).

The efforts of Arthur Barclay and his successors were reinforced and partly conditioned by the urgent need of the Liberian state to strengthen interior taxation. In return for badly needed foreign loans, Liberia had temporarily ceded important elements of sovereignty. From 1906 onward, parts of Liberia's state revenue, in particular customs collection, were under various forms of foreign control, and the bulk of revenue was assigned to servicing debts.[26] In the 1910s, state salaries were effectively cut in half, but the state still accumulated huge arrears (Pham 2004: 36). In response to chronic fiscal needs, the Liberian state opted for increasing income from taxes not under foreign control, which meant increasing taxation of the interior peoples (Levitt 2005: 170). The hut tax, imposed on every inhabitable indigenous dwelling, eventually became the "backbone of the annual state income" (Brown 1941: 184).

The Barclay Plan also included establishing a civil administration formally linking the central state and state-appointed chiefs. The interior was divided into districts supposedly conforming to traditional boundaries, and District Commissioners were posted to hinterland areas to form an administrative hierarchy above the Chiefs. District Commissioners reported through the central Secretary of the Interior, rendering the office functional for the first time.[27] As a means to control the hinterland administration, Barclay introduced presidential tours into the hinterland, during which *Executive Councils* would be held allowing indigenous subjects to complain about local officials. However, *Executive Councils* were few, punishment of government officials was lenient at best, and local officials routinely employed abusive practices to further their private interests. Generally, while the state extended its reach greatly, political integration of indigenous peoples was superficial. The most important official move towards integration under Barclay was the extension of citizenship to indigenous peoples, a move more rhetorical than real.

As state control was extended, internal administrative boundaries were redrawn and personnel increased under governments after Barclay. Notably, Assistant District Commissioners were recruited to support the District Commissioner. Meanwhile, increased contact between the indigenous groups and the state, as well as the

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[26] The situation was to change substantially only in the 1950s, when the rubber industry had put Liberia in a position to retire the last loan, which had been granted by a subsidiary of the *Firestone Rubber and Tyre Company*.

[27] The Interior Secretary's post had been created in 1869-70, yet it took until 1892 for a secretary to be appointed for the first time. The Secretary of the Interior was the precursor to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and its creation was thus a key event in Liberian state-building.

increasing presence of Christian missionaries establishing schools, had created a new stratum of society, the "educated" or "civilized countrymen". These,

> "embued with a righteous sense of identification with coastal Liberian society […] most often filled the myriad petty posts of local township and government interior administration. They were also utilized as messengers and mediators between government and tribal authority and, in some cases, were able to accumulate such wealth and power that they became virtually lords of feudal estates in the interior" (Azevedo 1970: 111).[28]

As despotic as these local orders were, the staffing of locally powerful offices with indigenous Liberians rendered boundaries between settlers and indigenous elites less strict, thus representing a tendency of integration of dominated social forces into the growing state. For indigenous Liberians, "interior service was a career pattern leading eventually to their acceptance in settler society" (Sawyer 1992: 201).

A key feature of the Barclay Plan realized from 1909 onwards was the creation of a standing army, the *Liberian Frontier Force* (LFF). So far, security had been provided by a settler militia. This meant that indigenous peoples were increasingly recruited into a core state institution, albeit in subaltern roles only, as the higher ranks were occupied by "Americo-Liberians". The force quickly grew, from about 600 servicemen to some 1,500 in 1920. It became an integral part of hinterland administration, being stationed in Liberia's various districts and reporting to the District Commissioner (Sawyer 1992: 201). As the state extended its reach, numerous conflicts with indigenous groups were fought. A war in 1910 against south-eastern Grebo groups turned into a major challenge, as most LFF and militia units were beaten or refused to fight a superior enemy.[29] Eventually, the US sent two navy vessels to take up position off the Liberian coast in order to deter the indigenous forces. The Grebo indeed surrendered when made to believe that the vessels were there to protect the settlers.[30] By the 1920s, the

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[28] There are no statistics available on the background of interior administration officials. Sawyer emphasises that a significant proportion of officials did not have Liberian indigenous backgrounds (Sawyer 1992: 201).

[29] One of the units refusing to fight was that commanded by later Vice-President Allen Yancy. Yancy was subsequently court-martialled and sentenced, but "saved through the intervention of friends" (Johnson 1987: 164). His career is is interesting concerning the relevance of services rendered to the state versus social capital as criteria for recruitment for highest state office. The events surrounding the case are indicative of the establishment of links between indigenous societies and Liberian state officials: Yancy's wife was Grebo, and his Grebo relations are considered one of the reasons for his refusal to fight. Given his personal power as a Big Man in Grebo territory and relations to indigenous society, he was well-placed to maintain an important position even in the case of Grebo victory. Against the background of Yancy's continued high-profile position in the settler state, his personae is indicative of the formation of personal-political relations transcending the "Americo-Liberian" community.

[30] Levitt concluded that "had the [attacking] Grebo known the truth [i.e. that the US did not intend to intervene], Liberia would likely have been destroyed in 1910" (Levitt 2005: 155). Not too long ago,

Liberian state's control over the "principal means of coercion within a given territory" was largely imposed, although a few strong challenges to the state's existence still occurred in the 1930s (cf. Levitt 2005: 137-152).

Administration of the hinterland was essentially military, and the LFF effectively constituted a tool at the disposal of independently acting District Commissioners to appropriate indigenous resources.[31] In many instances, state-building in the periphery was motivated by opportunities for plunder, and proceeded as a series of looting sprees. By threat of destruction of villages, regularly carried out when communities were unable to pay, District Commissioners routinely demanded payment of arbitrarily imposed taxes and fines. In addition, indigenous peoples were subject to excessive demands to undertake road construction to improve access to the hinterland, and pressed into working on private holdings of government officials. The LFF, not being regularly paid, was notorious for living of the land "as much as traffic will bear" (Liebenow 1969: 54),[32] commandeering at will rice, livestock, women and various services from indigenous communities.[33] Allied indigenous auxiliary troops, which were still systematically called upon in confrontations with hostile groups, were routinely given permission to pay themselves (Akpan 1986: 136). Overexploitation of indigenous peoples, i.e. exploitation undermining the economic viability of the communities (and decreasing the state's tax base), reached its zenith when high-ranking state officials turned to export of labour as a source of private income.

Recruitment of Liberian labour for work in foreign territories started in the late 19th century. In 1900, the Spanish cocoa plantations of Fernando Po (in today's Equatorial Guinea) recruited Liberians for the first time (Brown 1941: 147). Treatment of labourers amounting to slavery caused a minor international scandal in the early 1910s already. Following an agreement subsequently concluded in 1914 between the Liberian and Spanish governments on labour recruitment, recruitment increased and conditions deteriorated rather than improved (cf. Guannu 1972: 122-123). For about three decades, indigenous Liberians were recruited *en masse*. Amongst other practices, communities were persuaded to provide "boys" by threatening to destroy their villages or arresting and torturing their chiefs. Often, communities were forced to

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European warships had bombarded coastal towns in areas were merchant ships had been attacked or looted when shipwrecked, explaining the reaction of the Grebo.

[31] At the same time, district commissioners were paid quite well, US$100 a month (Johnson 1987: 202).

[32] Around 1920, most soldiers had not received their pay for some three years (Levitt 2005: 164).

[33] Cf. Clower et al. (1966: 16); cf. Johnson (1987: 199-221); cf. Akpan (1986: 135-142). In many ways, the actions of warring factions in Liberia's civil war mirrored the behaviour of the historic army.

provide porterage services and the carriers were forced into slavery upon on arrival in the port cities and exported (cf. Johnson 1987: 175-221; cf. Guannu 1972).[34]

Practices of de-facto slavery became a matter of international debate in the context of a particularly bitter dispute about a presidential election in 1927, which is briefly described here because of the insights its offers on Liberian democracy. After the election, tally returns showed some 9,000 votes for the opposition candidate Thomas Faulkner and some 235,000 for President Charles D. King. All in all, there were roughly 40 times more ballots than voters, earning Liberia an entry in the *Guinness Book of Records* for the most fraudulent election ever. The results were disputed in court, but the judge and an assisting sheriff were immediately fined by the president for questioning the election procedure. The matter was not further pursued and the president assumed office once more (cf. Johnson 1987: 149-150).

Loosing candidate Thomas Faulkner subsequently embarked on a campaign making public the details of labour recruitment in the US public.[35] His advocacy eventually triggered a *League of Nations* investigation into the issue of forced labour. Amongst others, the investigation revealed that Vice-President Allen Yancy, shielded by President Charles D.B. King, played a major role in organizing slave exports (cf. Johnson 1987; cf. Guannu 1972). There is no reason to assume that the trade had been organized on lower levels during the preceding decades. In his *opus magnum* on Liberia, the African-American member of the *League of Nations* investigating commission, Charles Johnson, describes depopulated villages and looming food insecurity in the hinterland as a consequence of governmental actions hardly distinguishable from classic slave raids (Johnson 1987: 199-221).

The Fernando Po labour scandal in many ways exemplifies the parasitic and predatory nature of the Liberian state, as well as the weakness of interests in *mise en valeur* of domestic natural resources. Planters complained about loss of labour, and succeeded in having recruitment for export banned in certain areas. However, labourers were still "illegally" exported from these areas with the involvement of

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[34] Forced labourers had to sign contracts stating that they were voluntarily offering their labour for a determined period of one or two years and according to which they should be adequately remunerated. The contracts later served to absolve foreign entrepreneurs involved of charges of slavery. However, recruitment was forced, workers were often kept longer on the plantations than "agreed", the death rate on Fernando Po was extremely high and many did not return at all, and salaries were systematically embezzled without any opportunity to complain (cf. Johnson 1987).

[35] At the time, Faulkner was one of Liberia's most important businessmen and probably its most innovative one. His criticism of "Americo-Liberian" elite behaviour earned him few friends among the "leading citizens", and, as he became a threat to the political establishment, his enterprises were destroyed by means of political interference (cf. Johnson 1987: 131). The events surrounding the election once more demonstrated the pre-eminence of Liberia's parasitic strata over its productive ones.

highly placed Liberian officials (Brown 1941: 150), demonstrating the weak influence of the productive strata on government policy.[36]

At the time, the *League of Nations* inquiry represented an immediate threat to the existence of the state, as its report supported foreign efforts to turn Liberia into a protectorate.[37] International condemnation consequently caused a major uproar in Liberian society, forcing the president and vice-president out of office.[38] In a long-term perspective, it furthered state-building and the development of Liberia's rubber plantation economy. First, the export of labour was halted, reducing scarcity of labour in Liberia. Second, it led to the effective prohibition of the widespread practice of pawning,[39] freeing up additional labour. In 1926, an agreement between the Liberian state and the US-American *Firestone Tyre and Rubber Company* established what would become the world's largest rubber plantation.[40] It would, however, take another 20 years before rubber boosted Liberia's finances. In the meantime shortage of labour remained one of many impediments to growth. Further, by outlawing pawning, the Liberian government demonstrated a capacity to intervene in indigenous social order to a degree previously unheard of.

> "President King's proclamation against tribal slavery and pawning in September of 1930 destroyed the last major outposts of resistance against government authority [in western and central Liberia] and firmly established the prestige of those chiefs and their families who had given consistent loyalty to the government" (Azevedo 1969b: 58).

Related to these events, the apparent weakness of the government as Liberia appeared to be put under foreign trusteeship, coupled with the punitive actions against

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[36] For instance, Parliament had repeatedly discussed the issue. Just before recruitment came under the international spotlight, the Senate deliberated on the issue again in 1929. When a bill outlawing labour export was presented, there was a tied vote, but the Senate president pro tempore voted against it, thus killing the bill (cf. Johnson 1987: 166). The events demonstrate that, among Liberia's "leading citizens", there was considerable opposition to labour export, but those profiting from it finally prevailed.

[37] From the outset, the inquiry had partly been motivated by foreign interests that wanted to justify a takeover of Liberia. The eventual *League of Nations* report was carefully worded to avoid accusing the colonial powers, in particular Spain, or Western economic interests of being complicit in forced labour use. The blame was squarely laid on the Liberian government. On the international political background to the inquiry, see Stanfield (1987).

[38] International and internal uproar did not deter Liberian officials from taking revenge against villages and individuals suspected of having provided negative testimony to the investigators. Numerous individuals were murdered and villages destroyed in the aftermath of the investigation (cf. Stanfield 1987; cf. Johnson 1987).

[39] Pawning vastly increased as the Liberian state expanded, as government officials' demands for taxes and fines had led to widespread indebtedness of natives.

[40] Liberia's elite was historically cautious of foreign activities in Liberia, fearing valuable resources could increase foreign interest in a takeover of the country, and hence rejected concession activities. Urgent financial needs eventually caused a contentious political shift.

suspected informants of the foreign investigators, sparked the last indigenous uprisings among south-eastern Liberian Kru peoples, which the government succeeded to put down without major difficulties, definitely establishing its monopoly over means of military violence.

3.4. The Rise and Decline of Authoritarian Neo-patrimonialism

As the financial situation of the central state slowly improved due to the growth in hut tax revenue and, much more importantly, of the rubber sector, both the powers of the president and authoritarian tendencies increased. The duration of presidential tenure increased markedly. Until 1920, no president had served longer than eight years, and most only held on to office for one to four years. King was president for ten years until forced to resign. His successor Edwin Barclay, a nephew of former President Arthur Barclay, served for 14 years. Under Edwin Barclay, a law was passed penalising criticism of the president or his policy towards the interior (Johnson 1987: 151). Despite these tendencies towards increasing personal control of the president over the "Americo-Liberian" as well as the indigenous population segments, it is President William V.S. Tubman (1944-1971) who is credited with creating Africa's first neo-patrimonial one-party state (cf. Richards et al. 2005: 40).

State revenue grew further under Tubman. In 1948, the Maritime Code providing for the registration of foreign-owned vessels in Liberia was enacted. The registry would grow to become the world's second-largest fleet. In the 1950s, the first iron ore mining concessions were granted, eventually providing the bulk of state revenue under Tubman. Mining activities were a direct consequence of an *Open Door Policy* shift of Tubman aimed at attracting foreign capital.

Tubman's *Unification* Policy towards the interior was the second central cornerstone of his political project. His efforts can, to a limited extent, be traced to the fact that Tubman, born and raised in Maryland County, was a relative outsider to the Monrovia establishment and turned in part to less powerful groups in order to build a constituency (Pham 2004: 43-44). More importantly, the "Americo-Liberian" elite became increasingly apprehensive about nascent nationalism in Africa, and perceived the Liberian state to be less well equipped than colonial powers to control the masses. "Thus, if the Americo-Liberians could not prevent change, they could at least attempt to control it" (Liebenow 1969: 77). It was consequently necessary to increase state control over, as well as legitimacy in, the hinterland. In structural perspective, patterns of domination signalled the definite establishment of the presidency as the locus of

power, and political violence increasingly assumed the character of more subtle repressive violence bolstering the president's power.

Politics largely was designed to preserve the hegemony of a culturally defined "civilized" "Americo-Liberian" establishment. Tubman "has not been able at any particular moment to stray too far from the interest of the "Americo-Liberian" group that constitute[d] his main base of political power" (Liebenow 1969: 219). While the social divide between the "civilized element" and the "tribal element" remained stark, moves were made for increased political integration of interior peoples. Already in 1944, membership of the House of Representatives was increased to allow regular hinterland representation. The three hinterland provinces from now on elected six of the 39 members of the House (Clower et al. 1966: 9). However, it took until 1964 for the basic administrative difference between settler "counties" and indigenous "provinces" to be abolished. At this point, four new interior counties were created, and, in the same year, suffrage was extended to indigenous people, with each of the new counties now sending two Senators to the Upper House (ibid: 74). In 1946 Tubman granted indigenous Liberians paying the hut tax the right to vote in presidential elections. Yet,

> "with regard to taxation, land tenure, control over residence and movement, marriage and divorce, legal jurisdiction, access to education and medical services, obligatory (no pay) labor service to local authorities, labor recruitment (forced labor with pay), and extra-legal exactions of money, rice, and services, tribal Liberians in the hinterland [remained] subject to a socio-legal system different from that of Americo-Liberians" (Clower et al. 1966: 5).[41]

Under Tubman, both personal authority over hinterland peoples and state administrative presence in rural Liberia greatly increased. Major pressures arose from an increasing need for state regulation, as more foreign rubber and mining companies established themselves in the country. Economic growth was accompanied by a need to oversee and tax foreign corporations, organise labour supply, and dominate a migrant worker population that had moved beyond the reach of control by Chiefs (cf. Liebenow 1969). Furthermore, the economic activities of foreign companies were associated with an increase in infrastructures, notably roads, that needed to be policed and maintained. Yet as revenue from natural resource exploitation by foreign corporations increased, state salaries increased, administration became more expensive, and taxes from the interior lost relatively in importance. Generally, administrative positions were very well paid (Clower et al. 1966: 68). While there was

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[41] Indeed, in 2013 people under the authority of chiefs were still subject to the "Revised Rules and Regulations Governing the Hinterland of Liberia", a socio-legal order last amended in 2000 and different from that applicable to urban and rural "civilised" Liberians.

"unlikely to be a substantial difference between taxes actually paid and enforceable tax obligations" (Clower et al. 1966: 54) by the 1960s, "[t]axes collected from the poorer classes of Liberian society, whether direct (like hut taxes) or indirect (like customs and excises), [were] likely to yield little more than the cost of collection" (ibid: 65). Yet hinterland administrative posts and the associated opportunities for appropriation were important for integrating a growing state clientele.

The extension of bureaucratic offices and opportunities for education were accompanied by a strengthening of a bureaucratic ethos of formalism. Increasingly, "emphasis upon proper form and procedure (…) pervade[d] almost all aspects of social intercourse in Liberia." Epitomizing bureaucratic rationality, "[t]he act of making a record ha[d] a logic and mystique of its own almost unrelated to improving government procedures" (Liebenow 1969: 81-82). Formalism was closely tied to a discourse of America-Liberia legitimacy stressing their modern education. Knowledge of bureaucratic administrative procedures was used to legitimize rule and block claims to rule by those defined as "uncivilized". However, cultural capital, such as administrative expertise, alone was insufficient to rise socially. Rather, "modern" cultural capital allowed access to higher strata and accumulation of social capital imperative for upward social mobility. "There was a persistence of the elite notion that those who advanced on the basis of merit alone or in spite of their tribal or alien background constituted potential threats to the regime" (Liebenow 1987: 113). Any bureaucratic logic was counteracted by the logic of personal connections.

Thus, personal connections and loyalties were much more important as the basis of Tubman's rule than were bureaucratic institutions. With respect to the hinterland, this first of all meant maintaining convivial relations with chiefs. However, several of the chiefs installed under Tubman were "his household attendants, dependents, and confidants" (Sawyer 1992: 280). Furthermore, more than any president before him, Tubman toured the hinterland, held "Executive Council" sessions in which grievances and complaints of indigenous people were heard, and subjected local state officials to comparatively strict discipline.

> "Without being burdened by legal restrictions or bound by precedents, the President has meted out a form of substantive justice which has had a tremendous impact upon the tribal people, most of whom have long felt isolated from Liberian politics and have never had the opportunity of seeing a Liberian President. The summary dismissal of errant district commissioners (including a very close relative of the President), the immediate granting of justice, and the promises to extend the benefits of the new economic development to the hinterland have been significant factors in almost

eliminating the incidence of violent opposition to Americo-Liberian rule" (Liebenow 1969: 75).

In addition, two indigenous personalities were allocated the highest offices held so far by individuals with non-"Americo-Liberian" background, although these moves were rather symbolic.

Part and parcel of Tubman's patrimonial strategy was to use the extended state administration to reward clients. Tubman personally made appointments to all official positions in the country. Many if not most government jobs were "sinecures requiring only occasional attendance" (Clower et al. 1966: 10). Similarly, Tubman had to personally approve any public payment exceeding US$250 (Liebenow 1969: 149). Control over offices included control over the legislature, which historically had provided a check on presidential powers due to its character of formal institution of the "leading citizens". Confidantes of the president, in some cases illiterate personal servants, were allocated legislative seats. A most important element of his apparatus of personal control was the *Public Relations Officers* (PRO) system. PROs were more accurately described as government spies or informants, who were ubiquitous even in outlying hinterland areas and reported directly to the president. Repression of dissent or criticism was a key feature of Tubman's rule.

Despite drastically increased state revenue and comparatively strict control, office-holders were allowed and expected to use their offices for private gain, as is characteristic of patrimonial regimes with limited central control.

> "To each level of government employment there is attached a special set of fringe benefits. The highest echelons and their kin obtain the most lucrative material prerogatives: purchases of shares of stock in iron ore concessions at bargain rates; purchases of tribal land along reloads; sales of phantom services (public relations, advertising) to foreign concessions; sales of real economic services to concessions (e.g., trucking), but at higher cost than the buyers would incur in providing similar services; acquiring compulsory labor for their rubber farms; the right to impose private levies in rice on tribal groups; the use of government vehicles and other equipment for private gain; extraordinarily large expense accounts; free housing and trips abroad; and government scholarships for training and education abroad regardless of merit. Lower echelon civil servants have a narrower but still impressive array of prerogatives" (Clower et al. 1966: 10).

Correspondingly, soldiers continued to take what they needed or wanted from the communities where they were stationed (Liebenow 1969: 54). However, the difference

from earlier government practice was that, under Tubman, privileges of office-holders were informally well-defined and not allowed to conflict with central interests in domination (cf. Massaquoi 2000: 369-372), as the dismissal of a close relative of the president mentioned above indicates. While still delegating significant authority, Tubman's control over exercise of local governance was real and effective.

Tubman was in control of Liberia to such an extent that his rule only ended with his death in 1971. His vice-president, William Tolbert, followed him in office. Tolbert immediately faced strong challenges. Already in the 1960s, state revenue and private incomes related to mining had declined. Major works necessary for preparing mining sites were completed, leading to a decline of associated industries. Rising prices for Liberia's major import, fuel, and falling world market prices for iron ore in the late 1970s escalated financial problems (cf. Kappel 1980: 43). Tubman's strategy of extending the state apparatus to integrate a growing number of clients was consequently no longer viable.

Tolbert's rule was characterized by contradictory tendencies,[42] as he was under pressure from an entrenched oligarchy seeking to perpetuate its hold on the levers of power and wealth, as well as from a "progressive" intelligentsia consisting of lower-status "Americo-Liberians" and educated individuals from indigenous backgrounds. The president's response partly consisted of "efforts to establish bureaucratic rationality" (Sawyer 1992: 288). This responded, on the one hand, to intelligentsia demands for improved state service provision and, on the other, to private appropriation of office powers that threatened to reduce presidential authority. His political actions largely followed the logic of strengthening the state by rationalising the lower level echelons of the administration and broadening the regime's constituency while using the state apparatus to secure elite privileges. Given decreasing opportunities for patrimonial co-optation, his approach to neutralising the intelligentsia consisted of allowing more criticism of government, for instance by abolishing the PRO system and allowing opposition groups to be formed. Communications with oppositional groups in pursuit of an official government policy of "knowing the mind of the people" (Dunn et al. 2001: 321) created a semblance of democratic participation. The half-way nature of Tolbert's reforms, however, did little to appease the intelligentsia. His overtures towards opposition groups essentially were designed to neutralise criticism and conserve the privileges of the establishment,

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[42] Perspectives on Tolbert's rule vary widely. Reno (1998) considered it a period of further personalisation and informalisation of politics. Pham (2004: 74-75), by contrast, emphasised efforts towards rationalisation of the bureaucracy. Sawyer (1992: 286-293) presents a complex picture of contradictory tendencies of both personalisation and bureaucratisation. It is the latter line of argument that I follow here.

including his own. Nevertheless, the president was heavily criticised by the more conservative elements of his constituency for this relative political liberalisation.

Liberia's opposition intelligentsia itself was the product of the growth of the Liberian state and the economy. Economic growth had led to relative economic diversification. Coupled with the extension of opportunities for modern education, largely stimulated by an increased need of the state and the private sector for qualified personnel, this had increased social mobility. Furthermore, wider African developments, leading to the promotion of political ideologies stressing people power, had left their mark on Liberia. "Progressive" organisations formed in the 1970s, among which the *Movement for Justice in Africa* (MOJA) and its rival *Progressive Alliance of Liberia* (PAL) were the most important ones.[43] In the "progressive" movement, diverse constituencies including well-educated "Americo-Liberians", indigenous intellectuals, and lower status social groups united. They based their criticism of the government on its exploitation of lower strata, in particular indigenous peoples. In consequence, the distinction between elite and marginalized was framed in ethno-cultural terms, and the distinction between settler "Congo" and indigenous "Country" society became increasingly politicized. The emergence of "Country" as a subjective political identity itself is indicative of a process of state formation, in which formerly disunited and often rivalling groups were reconfigured into a nation-wide political category that could form the basis of a social movement.

A key innovation of Tolbert in the face of declining state capacities for patronage was establishing a diversified base of economic power outside the state apparatus. In the late 19th century, the state had become the major source of elite wealth. Since the 1930s, rubber increasingly complemented or even substituted for direct state patronage, but productive Americo-Liberia economic activity remained essentially confined to managing rubber plantations, while elite culture harboured an explicit "disdain of commerce and industry" (Liebenow 1969: 213). Partly as a consequence of a deliberate strategy to prevent the emergence of a politically influential domestic bourgeoisie (cf. Ellis 2007: 45),[44] most entrepreneurs were foreigners or people politically defined as foreigners: e.g. the Lebanese Diaspora, or the Mandingo

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[43] Both organisations produced a sizeable share of Liberia's future elites. In particular, MOJA's Amos Sawyer, H. Boima Fahnbulleh and Togba Na Tipoteh would rise to prominence and influence developments during Liberia's Wars, and likewise the PAL's Blamoh Nelson, Gabriel Bacchus Matthews, Chea Cheapoo and Oscar J. Quiah.

[44] Liebenow thus quoted an official as stating that, as "a rule, the government does not do business with Liberian businessmen" (Liebenow 1969: 92).

(considered Guinean immigrants).[45] Nonetheless, by 1980, the number of smallholder rubber plantations was estimated at 3,000 (Reno 1998: 83).

The *Mesurado Group of Companies* had been started as a fishing venture by the then Vice-President William Tolbert, and his brother, Stephen Tolbert, and was already flourishing before the 1970s. Under William Tolbert's government, which included Stephen Tolbert as Minister of Finance, it was heavily supported through use of political power officially referred to as "Liberianization" and grew to become by far the largest enterprise ever held by Liberians (Dunn et al. 2001: 228). The conglomerate was active in virtually all profitable consumer product and agricultural sectors. To a large extent, "Liberianization" was effectively synonymous with "Tolbertization", achieved by "gobbling up already well-established businesses, foreign as well as Liberian owned, curtailing the activities of legitimate Liberian business by cut throat, unbelievable outright dishonest business tactics, and strangling others before they are born" (Porte 1974: 5).

Eventually, Tolbert's double strategy was inadequate for dealing with Liberia's deepening crisis, and extensive mixing of public and private interests finally provided the impetus for his fall. Ostensibly as a measure to support domestic rice cultivation, the government increased the price of Liberia's staple food rice from 22 to 30 US dollars per 50kg bag.[46] Resistance to the price increase was reinforced by the widely held belief that the move was designed to benefit the *Mesurado Group of Companies*, the largest rice producer and seller. The PAL under Gabriel Bacchus Matthews organized a protest rally that ended in a brutal crackdown. Several dozen people were killed as police opened fire on the protesters, causing further riots and looting. In times of crisis, the accumulated deficit in legitimacy made itself felt drastically, as the military refused to join the police in quelling the disturbances. Eventually, a support unit sent by neighbouring Guinea's President Sékou Touré restored calm, but further alienated the military from the government (cf. Pham 2004: 76-77).

The military had so far not been considered a relevant political force in Liberia. Yet the "division between officers and enlisted ranks very neatly reflected the settler and tribal cleavages within the greater society" (Liebenow, quoted in: Schröder/Korte 1986: 24). Enlisted men faced habitual humiliation by officers, were badly paid and lived in squalid conditions in the barracks, and had increasingly become aware and critical of the political situation at large. The loss of legitimacy of the government, evidenced in the "rice riots" and the difficulties of putting these down, provided the

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[45] Liberia's Constitution accorded nationality only to "persons who are Negroes or of Negro descent", thus excluding, inter alia, the sizeable Lebanese Diaspora.

[46] Since 1936, maximum prices of rice in Liberia were fixed by the government (Brown 1941: 184).

background to the military coup of 1980, carried out by 17 privates and non-commissioned officers.

3.5. The Dawn of Warlord Politics

The coup of April 1980 brought to the forefront of politics a group of low-ranking soldiers claiming to carry out a revolution to the benefit of indigenous peoples. The constitutional government was abolished and a military "*People's Redemption Council*" (PRC) was proclaimed the highest authority. President Tolbert was killed during the coup, thirteen key government officials were executed on Monrovia's beach ten days later, and others followed subsequently.[47] Probably the killing that had the widest regional repercussions was that of Adolphus Tolbert, son of the former Liberian president and married to a family member of the Ivorian president, Félix Houphouët Boigny. However, the new government initially was broad-based. It integrated prominent members of Liberia's "progressive" movements, and quickly turned also to members of the "Americo-Liberian" establishment possessing administrative knowledge and connections. Many members of Liberia's "progressive" opposition were left-leaning, and a significant part of the PRC sympathised with these tendencies. Yet, within a very short space of time, the government became markedly exclusive.

The coup marked a turning-point in Liberia's history of political marginalisation of indigenous peoples. In a long-term perspective, it signalled the end of the era of "Americo-Liberian" dominance and meant increased integration of the hinterland population. If a few months earlier the possibility of permanently excluding indigenous groups from political participation had been considered a viable option by a large section of the "Americo-Liberian" establishment, this position immediately became wholly anachronistic. Yet loss of power by the old oligarchy sparked new struggles for positions at the centre of power.

Master-Sergeant (very soon General) Samuel Kanyon Doe, 28 years of age and little educated, took over as president and quickly metamorphosed into "the first of the warlords" (Ellis 2007: 31). "Unschooled in the traditions and methods of patrimonial rule in Liberia" (Sawyer 2005: 18), "[n]either individual members of the junta, nor the PRC collectively, had control of a real patronage machine" (ibid: 54). Although individual PRC members established clientelistic relationships, typically with individuals from their home regions, patrimonial exchange was not a primary

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[47] The executions caused an international outcry, in particular among Liberia's neighbours. However, to "put this in perspective, only the televising of the event [...was] novel to the Liberian scene", as countless public beatings and executions had been carried out under previous leaders (Liebenow 1987: 190).

characteristic of relations of domination. Still the PRC government was widely popular initially, in particular among indigenous peoples, pointing to the charismatic nature of legitimacy. This was evidenced in the belief on the part of Liberia's marginalized and exploited population that the leader would transform in a revolutionary way a societal order widely perceived as illegitimate. Military charisma had a strong appeal on indigenous peoples.[48]

Doe, as well as other military government officials, strove to establish patronage networks. Yet these networks did not evolve into a stable informal institution that could serve as a basis for rule, nor did the president succeed in centrally controlling allocation of patronage. Important reasons include a lack of social capital on the part of the new leaders, i.e. the absence of stable, personal connections to influential personalities. Limited financial means played a role, too. Immediately after assuming office, Doe drastically raised soldier pay to US$250 a month and the salaries of all state officials to US$200 at least, which the government was unable to pay. Additionally, public service employment rose by 300 percent over the next three years,[49] this in the context of a still ailing economy (Sawyer 1992: 295; Chaudhuri 1986: 49). The regime soon lost its popularity and violent repression became the hallmark of Doe's rule.[50]

Societal conflicts re-entered the military leadership, partly because it was composed of soldiers with different regional backgrounds, all of whom were under pressure from kin people and family to provide patronage that the regime could not finance (cf. Ellis 2007: 56). Political rivalries in the military thus became rife. Within the first five years of the regime's rule, most of the 17 soldiers who had carried out the coup were either killed or suspended from government. Similarly, Liberia's "progressive" opposition politicians were pushed out of government one after the other. The president increasingly relied on an extremely small clientele, namely members of his home district clan and the socially marginal Mandingo elites (cf. Schröder/Korte 1986). The military was thoroughly ethnicised and increasingly dominated by members of Doe's small ethnic Krahn group, originating from Grand

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[48] Scholars tend to stress that soldiers were widely disregarded in society, as they were employed to suppress the indigenous population and essentially made a living by extorting from indigenous civilians (cf. Schröder/Korte 1986). Yet Sawyer affirms that soldiers tended to occupy high-level positions in the rural social hierarchy once their service ended (Sawyer 2005: 24). The military coup initially was immensely popular. A slogan widely sung by indigenous people was "Congo Women Born Rogue; Country Women Born Soldier", which has been translated into Standard English as "Americo-Liberian Women Give Birth to Criminals; Indigenous Women Give Birth to Heroes" (cf. PBS 2002: 10). The local meaning of "hero" is morally more ambiguous than the Western concept (Ellis 2007; Utas 2003) yet soldiers appear to have been much more highly regarded than many Western observers realized.

[49] This may have been a turning-point, with a long-lasting impact on the social background of state employees.

[50] The most comprehensive study on the character of repression under Doe is that by Gifford (1993). See in particular pp. 9-46. See also Chauduri (1986) and Sawyer (1987).

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Gedeh County and constituting some 3.8% of the population (Pham 2004: 14). Thus the major structural patterns of Samuel Doe's rule were charismatic legitimacy and the associated capricious administration, the exclusion of major societal interest groups from political participation, and repression to make up for deficits in legitimacy.

The military being unable to develop a consistent political and economic policy project, political rule became more predatory. The economic crisis escalated further, with harassment of domestic and foreign entrepreneurs reaching new heights.[51] For instance, a reputed international company exploring for oil preferred to end its engagement prematurely and pay the fines stipulated in the contract (Gifford 1993: 45). For a time, massively increased US assistance made up for shrinking concession revenues. Samuel Doe "gained ascendancy within the PRC largely through the alacrity with which he realized that he could get American support in factional politics of the junta by arguing a pro-Western line in foreign affairs" (Ellis 2007: 55). For the better part of Doe's reign, the US provided more assistance to Liberia *per capita* than to any other African country. Yet US assistance went to the military and re-inforced repressive capacities rather than the construction of legitimizing clientelistic networks.

A major conflict in the military pitted the president against Sergeant-turned-Brigadier-General Thomas Quiwonkpa. Quiwonkpa was widely considered the key organiser of the coup and was popular among soldiers as well as a cross-section of the Liberian public. An ethnic Gio, he originated from Nimba County and contributed to ethnicising the army by increasing recruitment of members from his home region. Quiwonkpa was initially made army chief and maintained close contacts with his troops. Alone among the more prominent PRC members, he continued to live in the barracks, and, much in contrast to other junta members, demonstratively lead a comparatively modest life (Ellis 2007: 55; Reno 1998: 85). Perceiving him as a rival, Doe attempted to relieve Quiwonkpa of his army chief post.

One of those closely linked to Quiwonkpa was Charles Taylor, who was married to a close relative of the army chief and had been helped by him to obtain the post of Director of the central government procurement body, the *General* Services *Agency* (GSA). Taylor controlled a considerable part of government finances and made enemies when refusing requests for equipment by high ranking officials, notably the

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[51] Legitimised by the perception of being treated unfairly by powerful foreign interests, the Liberian government had regularly in the past either directly refused to honour agreements it signed, as was the case when Liberia declared a moratorium on debt service on the loan of 1871, or had taken action against concessionaries that was difficult to reconcile with the contracts it concluded. For instance, directly after signing the agreement with Firestone, the Liberian government introduced a series of laws cancelling a number of key provisions on financial matters in the contract (Brown 1941: 201). The strategy paid off, at least in part: for instance, Liberia negotiated a significant reduction of debt service on the 1871 loan, and eventually, in 1962, succeeded in obtaining much better terms with Firestone than provided for in the original agreement.

influential Deputy Minister of Commerce. In the context of Quiwonkpa's conflict with Doe, Taylor was demoted and the former Deputy Minister of Commerce took his post. The new Director immediately launched an investigation into financial administration of the GSA and, amid looming charges of corruption, Taylor fled to the US. He was then accused of embezzling some US$900,000 by Doe, who demanded that he be extradited. Taylor was arrested but managed to escape from prison, to resurface in West Africa (Huband 1999: 19-26; cf. Ellis 2007: 57-58).[52]

Thomas Quiwonkpa's rivalry with Doe entailed his flight into exile in 1983. A considerable number of his military clients followed him. Later in 1983, exiled soldiers loyal to Quiwonkpa undertook a raid from Côte d'Ivoire, targeting the most important iron ore concession holder, the *Liberian American Swedish Minerals Company Inc.* (LAMCO) in Yekepa, Nimba County. During the raid, the family of LAMCO's security chief Charles Julu, a Krahn General loyal to Doe, was murdered. The raid contributed to a political climate in the capital that induced more of Quiwonkpa's clients to leave for exile. In the hinterland, on direct orders from the president, Charles Julu took violent revenge against Nimba civilians, killing scores and increasing their alienation from the government (cf. Pham 2004: 84; cf. Ellis 2007: 58).

For the first five years of Doe's rule, Liberia's democratic institutions were suspended, for the first time in Liberia's sovereign history. As his legitimacy eroded, the president had a new constitution worked out that maintained the key democratic institutions unaltered but was meant to represent a break and herald a Second Republic, a republic that would expressly recognise the indigenous population as "the people". Further, Doe intended to acquire democratic legitimacy and be recognized as a regular president of Liberia. The election that took place in 1985 and which formally made Samuel Doe the legitimate president proceeded according to patterns established earlier, i.e. blatant rigging to the benefit of the incumbent (cf. Adebajo 2002: 29; cf. Sawyer 1987: 29-31). Jackson F. Doe, an assimilated native from Nimba County who

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[52] One of the most serious investigations into the matter has been undertaken by US journalist Mark Huband. According to his analysis, the government's actions were targeted at Taylor, and whether and to what extent the money was embezzled is in doubt. Taylor's successor had all major transactions looked into, which inquiry was reported to have found only one that was suspicious. The company that received the US$900,000 payment authorised by Taylor declared that it had not sent the goods as agreed because the Liberian government still owed it money from a previous contract. The Liberian government never took any steps against the US-based company (held by one of Liberia's diaspora businessmen) and never made a serious effort to clarify the roles played by different persons involved (Huband 1999: 19-26). Yet Taylor government insider Hyman's (2003) portrayal of events suggests that a substantial amount of the payment in question ended up in Taylor's pockets. Whatever the case, observers were unanimous that Taylor would have been "more likely to have met an untimely end than stand a fair trial" (Richards 1995: 165) if he had been extradited, which the US was formally obliged to do. Taylor's escape from prison thus solved a dilemma for the US authorities, which may explain the event.

had been Minister of Education under President Tolbert, was widely considered to have won the election (Ellis 2007: 59).

A group of former soldiers under the command of Thomas Quiwonkpa then sneaked into Liberia from Sierra Leone and attacked Monrovia. The coup, however, failed and resulted in Quiwonkpa's death. Purges of the army and violent reprisals by Doe's troops against civilians in Nimba, where 600 to 3,000 people were killed (Schlichte 1992: 105; Adebajo 2002: 43), further compelled civilians and soldiers to flee. The regime's popular base became extremely narrow.

> "Doe was the first Liberian head of state since the conquest of the hinterland who excluded certain social groups entirely from political society, most notably the Gio and Mano of Nimba County. […] It is because of his excessive use of violence and his hostility to whole social groups that Samuel Doe could reasonably be described as the first of the modern Liberian warlords" (Ellis 2007: 65).

Amongst those who benefited from Doe's regime were the Mandingo, partly because they were widely considered foreign immigrants from Guinea and thus constituted little political threat, and partly because there was a substantial minority of them in Nimba County (Ellis 2007: 60-61). Mandingo had been living in Liberia even before the settlers arrived, but maintained a considerable social distance from other indigenous groups. Notably, their Muslim faith both served as an economically rational marker, shielding Mandingo trading networks from outsiders, and also prevented social integration in the hinterland, which would take place through local religious institutions (cf. Konneh 1996). Historically, the "Americo-Liberians" regarded Mandingo as a relatively "civilized" group with distant origins rather than Liberian natives, and, as the number of immigrants from Guinea grew from the 1950s, Mandingo as a whole were equated with immigrants. Though there is a substantial Mandingo peasant population, many were small-scale traders occupying shops at lucrative market locations. They lived in a situation of latent, though hardly expressed, tension with the other local groups, a state partly fed by economic competition (Richards 1995: 154-155). When his rivalry with Quiwonkpa developed, Doe appointed Mandingo officials to local authority positions in Nimba, encouraged them to purchase land, and gave them economic privileges (Ellis 2007: 61). Gio and Mano felt that, even in their home area, they were marginalised to the benefit of "foreigners". At the national level, the Mandingo Alhadji G.V. Kromah was first made head of the Liberian Broadcasting Corporation and then Minister of Information. After the attempted coup

of Quiwonkpa, Doe officially recognised the Mandingo as the 16th ethnic group of Liberia, a decision which met with widespread hostility.

Although Doe's regime had initially come to power on the promise of political integration of the "country people", very few profited genuinely from the government. As legitimacy decreased, repression increased. The deteriorating human rights situation, coupled with the easing of Cold War tensions, eventually led to a quick and drastic reduction of US support for the government in 1987/88. It did not take long for the regime to collapse. Government power quickly broke down when Charles Taylor's rebel group, which initially was largely based on Nimbaians, attacked in late 1989.

In Weberian perspective, Samuel Doe's rule was first of all characterized by charismatic patterns, associated with the "revolutionary" socio-political changes that indeed left their mark on Liberia. Patterns of ideal-typical statehood were significantly weakened while patrimonial patterns underwent significant changes. Yet while authority was primarily patterned by typical features of charismatic rule, the neo-patrimonial principles historically informing the exercise of power showed through.

4. Conclusion: Liberian State-Building

This paper asked whether the history of domination in Liberia can be considered state formation, or if "state failure" was the logical outcome of long-term developments. In investigating this question, this paper argued that Liberia represents a case of accelerated state building that can be traced along the lines of extension of sovereign, central authority and integration of those dominated into the apparatus of central power. More specifically, Liberia's history is the story of the drastic growth of the project initiated by a small and vulnerable settler community, a project that increasingly integrated with the societies within its territory, which themselves underwent significant changes during this process. A major reason for Liberia's weak statehood is its relative youth. When the settlers started their project, indigenous power structures were little centralized and in as much as power had become centralized through conquest, it was little consolidated. The indigenous basis for state-building was thus was weak. Yet a superficial comparison with the European history of state-building (cf. for instance Tilly 1985) suggests Liberian state-building proceeded at great speed.

State-building was largely driven by classic old world dynamics until the first decades of the 20th century; competition with internal rivals for power and economic resources engendered the control of the Liberian state over "the principal means of coercion" within its territory, external threats (posed by colonial powers) forced the state to consolidate territorial control, the need for taxation spurred the extension of administration, and the dependence of the presidency on those transmitting taxes to the centre prevented perpetuation in power. As in the old world, these developments took place against the background of a "mercantilist" trade-based economy. Throughout Liberia's history and probably re-inforced by the recent emphasis on "state-building" in the development industry discourse, the external expectation of statehood contributed to the sovereign state remaining the superior model of organising power.

As foreign capital ventured into Liberia and integrated the country into the world economy as a source of raw materials, different dynamics slowly took precedence. Enclaves came to dominate the national economy and a few easily accessible companies provided the bulk of revenue. The major effect was the strengthening of the presidency. This entailed authoritarian rule and had ambivalent effects on the growth of the state. The state continued to grow, as changes in the economy entailed new challenges and increased revenue provided means for strengthening personalised central authority within the territory. The state administration grew first of all due to its role as a tool of patrimonial integration.

Economic incentives to rationalize hinterland administration were few and formalisation remained superficial. In as much as it existed, legal-rational administration was the outcome of the symbolism of elite distinction, which emphasized the mastering of codes of the modern world to legitimise exclusive rule.

While the concomitant existence of weak formal and pronounced personal patterns of rule represent the *longuée durée* structure of the Liberian state, the state nevertheless grew. This evolution of formal and informal institutions took place in five distinct phases before the civil war.

During the colonial phase, the state-building project began. Core features were limited but crucial initial external support and settler initiatives to establish a domestic economic base for political rule. Politically of major importance were the establishment of control over settlement areas, notably by victory in violent conflict, and the unification of settler society in response to conflicts with indigenous groups.

Independence than established, first of all, international *de jure* sovereignty and marked the beginning of the phase of *open competition* establishing basic internal sovereignty. During that period, violent conflict with internal groups still was very much about the existence of the Liberian settler state and independence of indigenous polities. The period saw strengthened control over international trade, yet as Liberia lost access to these revenues to creditors and the plantation economy was negatively effective by world market developments, it was marked by efforts towards increased interior taxation.

The following phase of indirect rule was characterized by increasing effective control of the centre over the hinterland and the state established itself as the controller of the "principal means of coercion" (Tilly). As the state formalized chieftaincy structures and created a rudimentary hinterland administration, rule over the territory was institutionalized, although these institutions were essentially patrimonial in character. Correspondingly, the state and its officials increasingly could appropriate hinterland resources, and interests in these economic opportunities strongly drove the process of state extension. Predatory state officials provoked counterreactions, and putting these down effectively established the state as supreme military authority.

The period of authoritarian neo-patrimonialism then saw a massive strengthening of personalised central power and growth of the state apparatus in terms of both civil service employment and creation of administrative institutions. While integration of the hinterland population through patron-client relationships and supposedly democratic state institutions increased and "almost eliminated the incidence of violent opposition" (Liebenow 1969: 75) to the government, the distribution of costs and benefits of state power remained heavily skewed to the benefit of the central state and a "civilized" elite still largely defined with reference to settler

ancestry. The presidential surveillance apparatus epitomizes the growth in central control and correspondingly, political violence took on the form of repression against individuals considered dissidents rather than social groups. Against the background of economic crisis, the distinction between an elite defined as "Americo-Liberian" and a majority population emphasizing an indigenous background was increasingly politicized and became the major discursively expressed political cleavage.

The military coup of 1980 than marked the beginning of a phase of warlord politics that saw a significant weakening of central power. It is, however, indicative of the growth of the state that by then only a state institution, the military, was in a position to violently challenge government authority. The coup was as well indicative of institutional evolution toward a stage were political conflict was essentially about controlling the state (and the spoils of power control over the state territory offered). However, neither the coup nor the civil wars of Liberia's era of warlord politics can be properly understood without reference to political discourses and struggles associated with a more consolidated state; discourses and struggles about the distribution of costs and benefits of the state order. The coup drew its popularity from and was legitimized with the promise of a more equitable distribution of power and its spoils, in particular to the benefit of the "indigenous" population. The question who exactly would benefit, however, ushered in the formation of new conflicts along new lines. Associated violent conflict would ravage Liberia for roughly the span of a generation. The civil wars represented the most comprehensive political mobilization in Liberia's history. In this perspective, they were part of a process that reconfigured political relations and the structure of its elite. As Liberia's contemporary political elite is much more diverse than has historically been the case and a clientele in the hinterland has become much more important as a political power resource, patterns of power and political integration now are significantly more comprehensive and national in character (Gerdes 2011).

All in all, classic internal and international dynamics of state formation continue to be relevant in the contemporary world, and these dynamics explain that an empirical state like the Liberian one develops features of ideal-typical statehood. This suggests a resurgence of state patterns is a strong probability. Yet the state is the product of competition and conflict between social forces, which are strongly conditioned by different initial conditions and different historical political and economic patterns. An empirical state like Liberia will thus exhibit particular patterns shaped by the specific global historic circumstances of the time of its formation, regional influences, and local particularities.

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