**Democratization of Liberia: Internal and External Factors**

Presently ruled by a female president, Ellen Johnson, Liberia is a nation that has been historically encroached by a series of civil wars. Haven struggled under the predating wings of a series of authoritarian leaders, the country’s plea for freedom began since the domination of its jurisdictional terrain by African Americans in the 18th centuries. Therefore, this paper examines the internal and external factors that favored a transition democratic transition in a war shredded country like Liberia. However, before delving into details, it is necessary to analyze such factors by concentrating of the sequence of events that led to such a transition.

As mentioned above, Liberia in the 18th centuries was under the leadership of African-Americans. However, the Americano-Liberian phase of political domination in Liberia was brought to an end in April 1980 when Samuel K. Doe and his soldiers overthrew the president, William Tolbert (Dennis, 2006). After the coup, the People’s Democratic Council (PRC) headed by Doe, took over power and suspended the constitution. Nevertheless, Doe’s government proved to be no better for the Liberian people. During Samuel Doe’s military dictatorship, he promoted members of his own ethnic group, the Krahn, over the others. Although he permitted elections in 1985, external reports showed that such elections were barely transparent (Dennis, 2006). Immediately after the elections, Doe’s former second in command, Thomas Quiwonkpa, attempted another coup but this attempt only ended up with Quiwonkpa’s defeated body disgracefully dragged across the streets of Monrovia and a resulting Krahan-dominated retaliation that led to the killing of Quiwonkpa’s Nimba County (Dennis, 2006).

Haven suffered the wrath of Samuel Doe, the Nimba County easily supported Charles Taylor and his group of Libyan trained rebels called the NPFL (National Patriotic Front of Liberia). They initially encountered launched counterattacks from the Armed Force of Libya (AFL) (Dennis, 2006). Due to the incessant blood spills that resulted, the ECOWAS peace keeping forces (ECOMOG) entered the battle with the premise of a cease-fire and peace although they did not intend to include the NPFL in such a deal (Dennis, 2006). However, peace was far from being attained. Later, the Independent National Patriotic Front (INPFL) of Prince Johnson also joined the rage. Consequently, Samuel was tortured and murdered by INPFL’s forces after a visit to the ECOMOG headquarters in Monrovia.

Due to amassing conflicts, the ECOWAS negotiated the establishment of an Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU). In denial of such a negotiation, Charles Taylor did not lay down his armors and battles intensified. Thus by 1995, Liberia’s political terrain witnessed up to seven major political factions (Dennis, 2006). After a series of intense and perhaps the bloodiest battles in Liberia, Taylor won the July 1997 elections, a victory which many speculated that Liberians believed his victory was the only way to end the war.

Taylor’s victory however did not ensure peace. His rule was again challenged by another rebel group, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). By 2001, Liberia was again involved in a three-year civil war between Taylor’s government, the LURD, and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2006).

In 2002, a women-led group known formed a peacekeeping network to bring an end to the civil war in Liberia (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2006). It led to the formation of a cross-religious organization that was determined to bring piece. They held sit-ins in the capital and with the rapid spread of their ideas in rural areas and refugee camps in Liberia, public pressure grew rapidly. A peace summit was then called in Ghana and Taylor, LURD, MODEL, and representatives of the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, attended the summit. Although peace talks were unsuccessful, the women’s actions are still credited with the galvanizing talks brought about the peace agreements in 2003. As part of the agreement, Charles Taylor agreed to step down and was later sentenced to 50 years in jail at the International Court of Justice fir war crimes (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2006).

Consequently, Liberia’s political struggle took a different turn in the year 2005; Ellen Johnson Sirleaf won the elections and became Africa’s first president in what was considered to be a free and fair election (The World Bank, 2016) (BBC, 2012)(Dennis, 2006). Under her regime, Liberia has continued to enjoy stable and a democratic government following two presidential and legislative elections including the Senatorial Election in 2014 (World Bank, 2016).

As seen above, both internal and external contributed to the democratic transition in Liberia. Firstly, domestic groups were determined to bring down authoritarian regimes. Although some of these groups were rebels who instead resulted to militant techniques, much praise can still be attributed to these organizations because without the efforts, previous authoritarian regimes would have stayed unopposed. In addition, the impacts of the Liberian people who vied for peace resulted to a democratic Liberia. Although some of the attempts were born of desperation, such as the election of Taylor as president, some of them actually paid off. The women rallies against war summoned substantial pressure that later contributed to a peace conference through which dictatorship in Liberia was unseated.

Furthermore, external entities influenced such a transition. For instance, in August 2003, Taylor accepted an ECOWAS-brokered peace deal that offered him an asylum in Nigeria. In addition, UN-imposed sanctions on the Liberian government such as the barns on arms importation, foreign travel by high-ranking officials and their families, and on “blood diamonds” weakened the authoritarian leadership of Taylor to a certain extent.

In addition to the above factors, the impact of the media in Liberia can never be underestimated. The media, through the influence of radio, television, newspaper, and social media, has the power to shift public opinion. Whether negatively or positively, it provides an infrastructure for informed decision making. It also contributes in creating an enabling environment for sound participation and decision-making by educating individuals. According to BBC (2012), China has helped renovate Liberia’s transmission infrastructure. More importantly, Liberia enacted West Africa’s first freedom of information law and the BBC World Service now broadcasts in Monrovia on 103 FM (BBC, 2012).

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