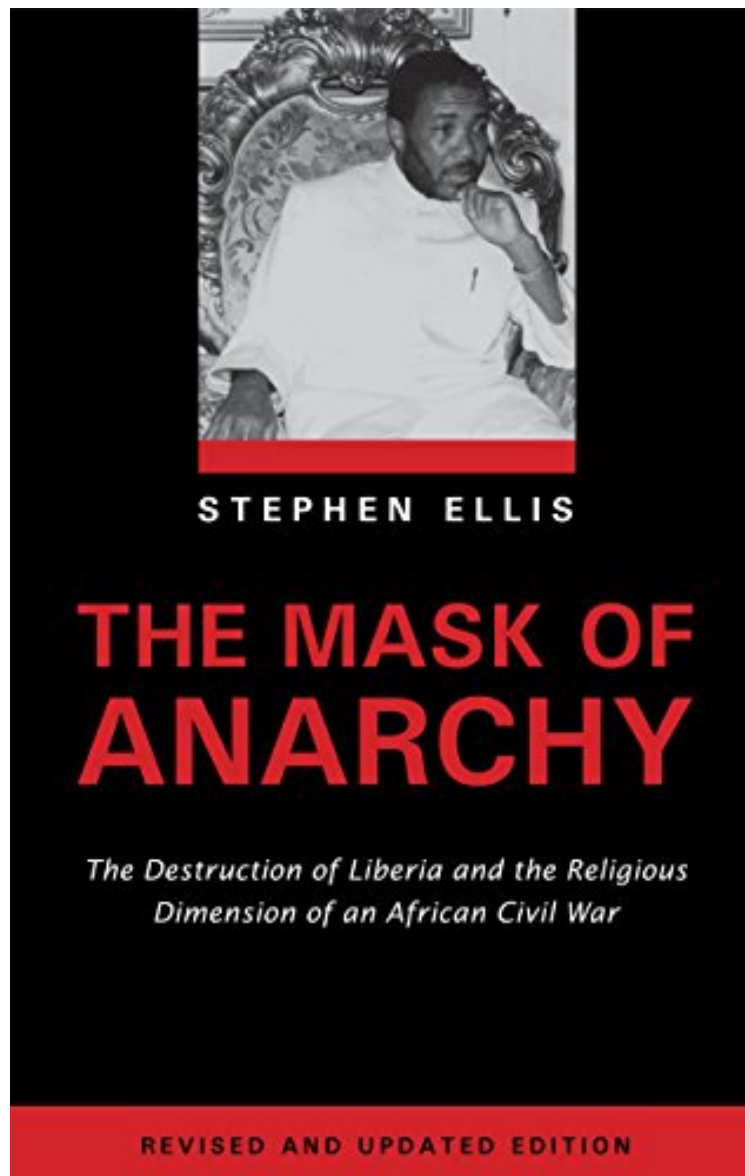


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# The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War

*Stephen Ellis*

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**Stephen Ellis : The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Gives great insight into the cultural and political factors that preceded and sustained the Liberian Civil War. By Dale Klemm I bought this book after going on a mission trip to Liberia. It is not an easy read (I read it in bits and pieces over several months) but the author does an absolutely fantastic job of describing the political and cultural events leading up to the civil war, then walks the reader through the significant events of the war. I'm not sure if I would have appreciated or understood the book having not been to Liberia first (I was recommended to me by another missionary that I met on my trip). Beyond describing the civil war, this book provides a foundation that gives insight into the cultural and political issues that still influence Liberia and the surrounding countries today.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Stephen Ellis presents a fascinating account of the forgotten dimension ... By W F Stephen Ellis presents a fascinating account of the forgotten dimension of most contemporary conflict analysis and resolution: religion. Developed countries are, by and large, so secularized that they forget that many other places have retained close ties to a sense of the numinous. Agree with it or not, we cannot afford to ignore this aspect of international social and political conflict. Ellis is to be commended for this groundbreaking study of the influence of religion - or, rather, the instrumentalization of religious symbols - in the recent West African conflict.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Liberia's Civil War By John Gibbs Stephen Ellis's book is a fascinating exploration of the little known (to Westerners) history of the Liberian civil war. From 1989 to 1997 war raged across Liberia in West Africa, fuelled by child soldiers wearing women's clothing and wigs for "spiritual protection", while high on marijuana and cane juice. The war was characterised by mindless brutality, relentless looting, and constant quests for greater power provided by spiritual forces, such as through tearing out and eating the hearts of conquered warriors. The book provides important insights into the causes of violence and war, and it provides a well-researched source of information. However, the content is at times repetitive and some of the author's opinions are puzzling. For example, he seems to consider it politically incorrect to talk about cannibalism, but it is fine to talk about human sacrifice. Both practices have been engaged in extensively by those seeking to obtain power from the spiritual world. The civil war essentially ended when the most powerful of the warlords, Charles Taylor, defeated the others, thereby obtaining a monopoly on violence and looting. In 1997 he was elected apparently legitimately (the people didn't want him to keep fighting for power), but the war started up again in 2000. Taylor is now on trial for war crimes, and the country is trying to recover from the devastation of the past 25 years.

For the last decade Liberia has been one of Africa's most violent trouble spots. In 1990, when thousands of teenage fighters, including young men wearing women's clothing and bizarre objects of decoration, laid siege to the capital, the world took notice. Since then Liberia has been through devastating civil upheaval and the most feared warlord, Charles Taylor, is now president. What began as a civil conflict, has spread to other West African nations. Western correspondents saw in the Liberian war a primeval, savage Africa - a "heart of darkness." They focused on sensational "primitive" aspects of the conflict, such as the prevalence of traditional healers and soothsayers, and shocked the international community with tales of cannibalism, especially the eating of the body parts of defeated opponents, which was widespread. Eschewing popular stereotypes and simple explanations, Stephen Ellis traces the history of the civil war that has blighted Liberia in recent years and looks at its political, ethnic and cultural roots. He focuses on the role religion and ritual have played in shaping and intensifying this brutal war.

"Ellis has written a very honest and brave book about a ghastly human experience which has, one learns, much less to do with the primordial past than about the future." - Ecclesiastical History "Important and profoundly disturbing." - Choice "Careful field inquiry was pursued in risky environments." - World Politics "Outstanding. . . . A fascinating and profound exploration of what Ellis sees as Liberians' deep spiritual anarchy, manifested during the war in extreme brutality, incidents of cannibalism, and the fighters' bizarre sartorial affectations. . . . Ellis's persuasive analysis of Liberian religious ideology and culture does more than make sense of these strange phenomena. It offers rare insight into the way political, physical, and spiritual power can be linked and legitimized in the popular imagination. . . . A model of lucid writing, thorough research, and penetrating interpretation, this is one of the best books on Africa in recent years." - Foreign Affairs "A model of lucid writing, thorough research, and penetrating interpretation, this is one of the best books on Africa in recent years." - Foreign Affairs About the Author Stephen Ellis is a senior researcher at the Afrika-Studiecentrum, Leiden University and co-editor of African Affairs.