

## On Racialized Citizenship: The History of Black colonialism in Liberia

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Today, Liberia is criticized for having citizenship based racial criteria; that is, only black people may become citizens, and, by extension, own property. This is the starting point for an enquiry into the history of the state of Liberia, and how this mandate appears in light of Liberia's past. Looking back will allow us to consider Liberia's journey from a colony, to an independent republic (Dennis, 2006), and the effects that European Colonialism had on Liberia, despite being one of two African countries which were never formally colonised by white settlers.

This essay argues that the view that Liberia could become a “racial ideal” was misguided (Putnam, 2006, p.240). The area where Liberia was later founded had Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch traders travelling through it for the begetting of goods and spices from the 15th century onwards (Van Der Kraaij, 2014), so Americo-Liberians were by no means the first to arrive on those shores for purposes akin to colonisation, but none had a bigger effect than black colonialism. Despite never being colonised by white westerners, Liberia still suffered negative effects of colonialism, but none of the positives (infrastructure built by colonisers, for example) (Dennis and Dennis, 2008). Americans naively expected that Liberia would fulfil the dreams of all involved; that repatriates would create a black unified version of republican America, reinforcing the racial order and proving that colonialism could work – that it would become a civilised reflection of America in Africa. However, the Americo-Liberians had internalised white European racism, and began to engage in “white self-racialization” (p.185), which resulted in segregation and inequality.

This essay also posits that European colonialism and racism was the catalyst for struggles in Liberia between a nominally ‘white’ group and a nominally ‘non-white group’, regardless of skin colour, ethnicity, or perceptions of biological claim to those terms. It acts as a way of organising society, politically and morally, resulting in inequality and exploitation (Mills, 1997).

Four different aspects of processes of Racialization in Liberia will be discussed. The first is black colonisation, looking at the circumstances under which people were repatriated to Liberia, whose interests it served, and the racialized colonial logic that the repatriates bought with them. Secondly, this essay will consider the structure of Americo-Liberian rule – the colourism employed during the early stages of the state, and the links between white American affectation and status. The third process of racialization to be explored will be ethnocentrism; how and why did the turn to ethnocentrism and ethnocentric violence arise after the dissolution of colonial rule? This section will also consider how the site of political struggle, at first seemingly racial, became about ethnicity as the population mixed. Finally, racial citizenship and Liberia's current constitution will be discussed. How will Liberia meet the challenges involved in balancing a racialized constitution with the pressures of global migration and a diversifying population?

The State of Liberia, meaning “Land of the Free” (Morgan, 2011, p. 2131), was founded in 1822, as a new land for repatriated slaves (Dennis, 2006; Burrowes, 2004). Prior to this founding of the state, Pygmy tribes (or “Jinna”) (Van Der Kraaij, 2014, no pagination) and emigrants from Sudan and the Ivory Coast lived in the area (Van Der Kraaij, 2014).

Mandingo tribes also resided there from the 17<sup>th</sup> century until the formation of Mali (Van Der Kraaij, 2014). The black colonisers imagined a land where they would be free to found a fair society and govern themselves, but they were surprised to find pre-existing groups already living there (Morgan 2011; Diedrich et. al, 1999). The dream of a black nation faltered as the country dissolved into “colourism...and ethnic conflict” after the creation of an indigenous

minority group (Morgan, 2011, p. 2131), and this group's resistance towards being disregarded as the people who inhabited Liberia first (Morgan, 2011).

Two groups arrived on the shores of Providence Island near Monrovia in 1822 (Bøås, 2001); the first was what would become the Americo-Liberians, made up of mulattos (Dennis, 2006) (who tended to be illegitimate children of slave owners), and black freed slaves – the “returning Africans” (McCall, 1956, p.92). Not all of them left voluntarily; for some, leaving the USA was a condition of their freedom (Laidlaw, 2012). The second group were the Congoes; tribes rescued from US bound slave ships coming from Jamaica (Dennis, 2006). Indigenous Liberians, or ‘natives’, were at the bottom of the social order (McCall, 1956). The mulatto Americo-Liberians were the first non-white officials and high class elites, but soon extended their status to darker freed slaves and ex labourers who had also travelled from America (Dennis, 2006). The Americo-Liberians comprised less than 3% of the population of Liberia (only about 12,000 arrived in Liberia between 1822 and 1861) (Bøås, 2001), and yet they had total control of the country (Dennis, 2006). They were the designated whites in that they were the “innately socio-political beings” to the indigenous people’s savagery (Mills, 1997, p.13). Congoes sat somewhere in the middle of the social spectrum (McCall, 1956).

The colony was a project steered by the ACS (American Colonization Society), with support from the US government. Broadly speaking, this colonization process could be seen as the USA’s first foreign policy regarding Africa; however, they had no wish to collaborate or take over territory; rather, they were getting rid of their black population (Horne, 1996), as many African American’s saw it (InMotion, 2005). The initial aim and purpose of this repatriation was twofold; one goal was to appease slavery apologists, who saw non-slaves as a nuisance and a threat to slavery and the social order (Horne, 1996), fearing that they would become successful and marry white women (Dennis and Dennis, 2008); another was to meet the demands of abolitionists, who hoped that freeborn and emancipated slaves could flourish in a land of their own, free from prejudice (Laidlaw, 2012). Either way, the project was a paternalistic one (Mills, 2014), interested in cleansing the nation of blacks and separating them from whites, for the good of both groups, based on a primordial and biological belief in national and ethnic belonging (Irobi, 2005); that Africa was the home of blacks, while America and Europe were the native lands of whites (Mills, 2014). All questions of future issues with national identity were ignored by the parties involved, and the benefits of “civilization and commerce” were focussed on instead (Diedrich et. al, 1999). For the African Americans who were repatriated, many of who were from the South and escaping horrendous conditions (Dennis and Dennis, 2008), Liberia was seen as the future; what would become “the land of the free” (Morgan, 2011, p.2131), a “black Zion” (Sundiata, 2003, p.2). However, a lot of free slaves from the North were incredulous of the project and did not wish to be sent to the “dark continent” (Dennis and Dennis, 2008, p.10).

The US only believed that these blacks would do well because they had absorbed “Caucasian energy” and “civilization”, not because of their own intrinsic abilities (Mills, 2014). More widely speaking, the project was designed, on the part of the white-led ACS, to bring Christianity to Africa (Laidlaw, 2012; Diedrich et. al, 1999). It was also hoped that Liberia would serve as a model for ‘good’ colonisation or “benevolent colonization” (Mills, 2014, no pagination), where the settlers and indigenous people could coexist peacefully and trade fairly (Laidlaw, 2012). The idea was spread amongst the white population of the US that Liberia would not threaten the racial order; it would not mean true freedom or emancipation of self-governing blacks, but would represent a triumph of white US republicanism, in a community which would emulate US symbolism, politics, values and language (Diedrich et. al, 1999). Liberia would be an unequal partner; a US in Africa (Mills, 2014). Overall, the USA’s interests in building the state of Liberia were questionable, and reproducing US nationalism abroad may have contributed to the reproduction of US racial hierarchy (Mills, 2014).

Reversing the middle passage was not destined to be the success that freed blacks and the ACS hoped it would be. The 16,000 African Americans shipped to Liberia during the 19<sup>th</sup>

century (InMotion, 2005) were not truly returning home (Diedrich et. al, 1999), and would not become “nation builders” (Diedrich et. al, 1999, p.193) or assimilate with the 16 indigenous groups, each with their own laws, dialects and religions (Bøås, 2001), in the expected manner. Unfortunately, the American culture which they had left behind, when applied as a template during the creation of a new state, could never bring peace and freedom (Dolo, 2007), as it had always left one group (blacks) enslaved and oppressed, and it seemed that Americo Liberians were now transferring that oppressed status onto the indigenous people. The African Americans could not speak the same language as the indigenous people and had no tribal belonging, and even the Congoes, who had once belonged to tribes before being recaptured on their way from Jamaica to the US, no longer had anything but a fragmented sense of belonging in Africa. Perhaps for this reason, natives were viewed with suspicion. Americo-Liberians refused to learn anything about or from them; they saw them as evil cannibals, and expendable “country people” – in this way, their status mirrored that of Negros in the USA until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Dennis and Dennis, 2008, p.32). The new settlement was therefore set up using western values and ideas (McCall, 1956), with no input from indigenous people. Between 1821 and the 1850’s (when they had US financial and political support), they used guns and violence to strengthen their precarious control over the state (Mills, 2014), and maintain their supremacy (Laidlaw, 2012). As writer and ex-president of Nigeria Nnamdi Azikiwe puts it, “the fathers of the country...in their Christian idealism and American miseducation preferred to travel the route to statehood alone, and without the aborigines” (McCall, 1956, p.92) – that is to say that they did not include or associate themselves with the prior inhabitants of the land when setting up the state of Liberia. Their goal seemed to be to reform and reinvent Africa, not to be part of it, as black and white commentators in the US had hoped (Dennis and Dennis, 2008).

African Americans who were repatriated to Liberia had limited powers at first. Initially, the governors and administrators of Liberia were white Americans (Mills, 2014), with the first non-white governor eventually being elected in 1841 – Joseph John Roberts, of Virginia (Laidlaw, 2012). US support of Liberia dwindled soon after, as the government felt that the costs of supporting the young state were becoming unjustifiable (Laidlaw, 2012). The republic gained independence in 1847, drafting a constitution similar to that of the USA in order to protect their political and financial dominance over the indigenous population (Bøås, 2001), and their independence from the USA (Mills, 2014), which only granted citizenship to those of “Negroid descent” (Kromah, 2010, no pagination). Liberia formed its own council, and Joseph John Roberts became the first leader of this ruling body, and president of Liberia (Laidlaw, 2012). Liberians felt that they finally had a chance to be autonomous and to prove to white Americans that blacks could organise themselves, successfully rule over the indigenous population, and were equal in status and intelligence (Laidlaw, 2012). The Americo-Liberians set about protecting the west coast from European invasion (Mills, 2014), while at the same time, oppressing the indigenous people (Bøås, 2001), who they considered below themselves in status. However, their rule was rarely stable during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, constantly marred as it was by infighting between black and mulatto/octaroon Americo-Liberians, as well as struggles for personal power (Wiltz, 2010; Tonkin, 2002) which would continue well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The black settlers in Liberia mimicked white rule from their arrival in 1822 in several ways, and became “proxy whites” through the prism of culture (Feagin, 2009, no pagination). Claims to whiteness were tied to diaspora status and cultural affect, as well as ones place on the scale of colourism or shadism. Not all repatriates had an equal “Western cultural endowment” (McCall, 1956, p.92), but Americo-Liberians took pride in their American-ness, and saw themselves as above the Indigenous Africans (Laidlaw, 2012), due to the language, religion and methods of industry that they had collectively brought with them (McCall, 1956), reproducing white supremacist hierarchies (Mills, 2014). One could argue that antebellum racial politics were transferred to Liberia through the colonised minds of the freed slaves, with the racism they had experienced being reproduced through their oppressed minds (Feagin, 2009), as well as the colourism that had developed among slaves in the US which

had stopped them working together to escape (Morgan, 2011). Certainly, the relationship between the indigenous, and the elite or ruling group mirrored black/white racial relations and racism in the US in a number of ways (Morgan, 2011; Dennis and Dennis, 2008). Tonkin (2002) writes that their actions were “characteristic of what is assumed to be (white) metropolitan-origin colonisation” (p. 131). If we use social learning theory, the explanation for this would be that Americo-Liberians’ experiences and memory of 400 years of enslavement, segregation and abuse affected their collective psychology and actions (Morgan, 2011). Morgan goes as far as to suggest that slavery produced in these black colonisers the desire and the will to discriminate against others the way they had been, in order to maintain their position as the elite group (2011), or (if we analyse the social arrangement using C. W Mills), the nominally ‘white’ group (1997). They became oppressors as they had come from an environment of “master-slave” racial relations (Morgan, 2011, p. 2131); one in which everything from their speech to their physicality was viewed as inferior to that of whites (Morgan, 2011). This reflects the suggestion that, during colonial conditions, whiteness produces a “psychological deficit” in the non-white underclass, causing them to want to “mimic or inhabit” this whiteness (Garner, 2007, p.51). There is no doubt that their conditioning during slavery may have contributed to what occurred and may have aided in allowing them to see native people as inhuman, justifying the seizure of land and resources (Morgan, 2011), and the use of guns and violence (Laidlaw, 2012) when they arrived in Liberia. They took on a “flawed white social model” (Morgan, 2011, p. 2135), and so the native population, as the ‘non-white’ or othered group to the black settlers symbolically ‘white’ elites (with this whiteness being expressed through cultural affect), were denied the right to vote or own land as a citizen (Laidlaw, 2012) when the constitution was drawn up in 1847 (Bøås, 2001). The black settlers’ initial intent (to civilize and absorb natives) (Mills, 2014) was circumvented, and instead a system of cultural superiority informed by settlers’ experiences of living in a country where white racial unity led to black enslavement and the control of slaves’ lives and how they were perceived, was born (Dennis and Dennis, 2008).

A one party state was established in 1870, and this would continue for 110 years (Bøås, 2001). The True Whig Party was made up of an elite group of light/mulatto and dark skinned Americo-Liberians, with colourism beginning to become less of an issue than it had been previously (Kollehlon, 2008); as time went by, the idea that lighter skin was favourable (Wiltz, 2010) as it signified that you were likely to be descended from more educated house slaves (McCall, 1956), had a less of a grip as the state became relatively more homogenous (Jinadu, 1994). They ruled despite having little to no prior knowledge of governance, or even an education (Dennis and Dennis, 2008). When they came into power they imposed a plantation model onto the state, dividing it between civilised masters, and savage workers (Bøås, 2001). Americo-Liberians could not transcend race, so to gain status in an all-black nation, they exploited indigenous people through the modality of culture and colourism (Dennis and Dennis, 2008) in ways which amounted to a racialized hierarchy organised along a spectrum of how close one was to American-ness, Western-ness, or Whiteness. Productive labour was stigmatised (Bøås, 2001), and the culturally-white political elites assumed a position of authority and superiority based on their ability to speak English, their religion, their education, and their weapons (Dennis and Dennis, 2008). Those who moved in these circles of power used fraudulent methods to stay on top and broke rules. Leaders took bribes and taxes from multinational companies went straight to them, rather than the country itself (Bøås, 2001). Liberia’s government was taunted by the US, who called it ‘anti-intellectual’, and criticised the state’s lack of healthcare, and continued dependence on “foreign loans” and “Christian sympathy” (Dennis and Dennis, 2008, p.11), even though this was the way that the state had originally been set up by the US- Liberia had been a paternalistic project whereby vulnerable, poorly educated ex-slaves had been extricated from the US and repatriated to a country where they could not speak the language, and had to be reliant for many years of US funding and intervention to set up the state.

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the indigenous people were strongly contesting the values of Christianity, commerce and Western civilization which had been forced upon them.

Furthermore, outsiders in the US were accusing the small, elite community of Americo-Liberians of slavery due to the labour practices they sanctioned to ease debt to the West whereby from 1914 to 1927 indigenous people were shipped to the island of Fernando Po to work on Spanish cocoa plantations (Putnam, 2006). The nation was beginning to look like a failure on the world stage (Sundiata, 2003). African Americans had hoped that Liberia could be a promised land where Pan-Africanism and Garveyism could flourish. However, black nationalists and missionaries spreading these messages to Liberia at this time failed, as Americo-Liberians aligned not with colour, but with their American diasporic status. They did not agree with a core africanness linking all black people. Instead, Sundiata (2003) writes, repatriated Americo-Liberians had long sought prestige from symbols of white Americanness (Dennis and Dennis, 2008), and, in fact, a letter to the British consul of Liberia in 1921 made it known that President King of Liberia didn't approve of Marcus Garvey's "activities" and "fantastical schemes" (p.40).

Ethnicity became more of a "point of contention" (Burrowes, 2004, p.5), particularly among Westernised natives and the descendants of repatriates. Rumbles of discontent occurred many times, but were always suppressed (Bøås, 2001). However, the logics of Americo-Liberian rule were unfair and corrupt (Bøås, 2001), and would not continue for much longer. Elites living in Monrovia enjoyed grand homes, and sported the conspicuous fashion of 19<sup>th</sup> century southern-style dress (Bøås, 2001) – top hats and tails despite the heat (Wiltz, 2010), and colonial dress (Dennis and Dennis, 2008). They held prestigious "square dances" to "hillbilly" music (p.33) and ate American foods like sweet potato pie and cornbread. They consumed expensive imported goods. Whiteness, embedded in American culture, seemed to hold a lot of value for them, and any white westerners who came to visit were given special treatment, as when groups arrived in Monrovia, brought there by a wartime need for rubber, and were given private rooms in hospitals, while ordinary people had to make do with public beds and inferior facilities and treatments (Dennis and Dennis, 2008). And yet the whites they so identified with did not identify with them, and Liberia had little status in the West (Dennis and Dennis, 2008).

What is striking about the period of Americo-Liberian rule is that those at a higher level of society (or aspiring to be at a higher level) equated whiteness with respectability and entitlement – it functioned as a "public and Psychological wage", if we reference Du Bois (Garner, 2007, p.51). Whiteness expressed dominance through its operation in society as a norm, imbued with cultural capital (Garner, 2007) and social value. And of course, as evidence by the treatment of Indigenous people, whiteness requires blackness – it is defined by its opposition to a perceived barbarity (Garner, 2007).

Americo-Liberians were seen as "whites in disguise" and "foreigners to Africa" by the African Liberians (Dennis and Dennis, 2008, p.15), who lived in poverty with no running water alongside Congoes (poor Americo-Liberians living upriver who acknowledged their Congo descent), and worked on Americo-Liberian farms for very little money. They also found work building infrastructure, but had to provide their own tools and food (Dennis and Dennis, 2008). African Liberians were also separated from everyone else in public, and couldn't even sleep in the same room as an Americo-Liberian (Dennis and Dennis, 2008). This echoes the racial segregation experienced by black people in America (Massey and Denton, 2003).

By 1944, President Tubman had outlined a strategy for trying to unify Americo-Liberians and African Liberians, inviting indigenous people into government and allowing women and all male citizens the vote once they reached 21 in 1947 (McCall, 1956), but his unification strategy was undermined by the continuation of corrupt, cultish rule where the president as an individual was an omnipotent figurehead of state power, and enemies were publicly victimised and tortured to deter dissent (Bøås, 2001). The ruthless politics he and previous presidents had employed suggested an uneasiness and insecurity (Dennis and Dennis, 2008) among Americo-Liberian elites; that secretly, they knew their power over African Liberians was precarious and unearned, and so they fought to keep the social order the way it was, and constantly kept up a façade of superiority, looking over their shoulders constantly

at ‘white countries’. Even their superior education was a façade, as the schooling system was poor, and grades could be acquired without study if you knew the right people (Dennis and Dennis, 2008). No one could speak against the presidents, who had always defended their reputations with violence. No one could publish anything negative about Liberian politics, lest it be seen by foreigners and used to judge them (Dennis and Dennis, 2008).

During Tubman’s regime, McCall (1956) wrote that “the four orders...have disappeared; Congoes can no longer be distinguished; complexion is no longer an index of education or status... [everyone] married individuals of tribal origin” (p.95). So, the unification policy altered things in that the general population mixed together and skin colour or tribal status were no longer definitive markers of inferiority. Culture was more important as a measure of inferiority than race (as in the US), due to the fact that they were all seen as the same ‘race’ (Feagin, 2009). As links to America weakened, natives began to seem less inferior and poorer Americo-Liberians and Congoes began to eat African Liberian food, accept indigenous medicines, and learn how to make animal traps from African Liberians. Rich Americo-Liberian men began to take on African Liberians as mistresses. This integration was pronounced in Monrovia (Dennis and Dennis, 2008). Now the boundaries were set not between natives and recaptives, but the civilised and uncivilised; between hinterland and county, between rich and poor. The distance between these perceived positions broadened, and, although the policy was based on “racial equity” (McCall, 1956, p.96), racial snobbery was still permitted, and family connection and heritage was still important. Rich elite remained who intermarried so as to maintain a small circle of power, and constantly compared themselves to the West (Dennis and Dennis, 2008). McCall argues that the policy was tantamount to “cultural imperialism” – as long as you possessed a correct, Western, ‘civilised’ kind of culture, you could be integrated and accepted (1956, p.96). However, Christianity and education didn’t completely dissolve tribal ties, and natives were never fully accepted (Dennis and Dennis, 2008).

Vice President William Tolbert took over from him after his death in 1971. He continued to glorify America, decorating the walls of his office with pictures of American presidents (Dennis and Dennis, 2008). Americo-Liberian elites in Monrovia began to suffer greatly from alcoholism at this time as their excess caught up with them. They also continued to consume American TV, radio, movies and foods (Dennis and Dennis, 2008). Tolbert claimed to be committed to preventing political corruption; however, he and his family were the worst offenders and riots took place against him in 1979. He was arrested, but 2 days before his trial, his regime was overthrown and he was killed (Bøås, 2001). This spelled the end of Americo-Liberian monopoly.

A turn to Ethnocentrism resulted from years of master-slave elitism, which became the neopatrimonial rule of a one-party state (from 1870 to 1980) (Bøås, 2001), and the prevention of any political organisation or wielding of power among indigenous people (Schlichte, 1994). “An organised minority” had long triumphed over “the disorganised majority” (Malešević, 2004, p.113). Inter-ethnic violence occurred between the 16 indigenous groups and the Americo-Liberian repatriates (Burrowes, 2004) over the right to power. From 1989 to 1996, and then 1997 – 2003, civil war took place in Liberia (Dennis, 2006). The breakdown of Liberia as a racialized state, and the growth of ethnic conflict, was inevitable if we take on Irobi’s presumption that these kinds of conflicts are caused by weak or corrupt states (2005). Bøås (2001) similarly posits that the years of civil war were caused by “political collapse and state recession” (p. 697), as well as struggle between warring factions over scarce resources. Ethnic tensions and divisions which had built up over many years resulted in “deep-rooted...conflicts over...religion, language and identity” (Irobi, 2005, no pagination), exacerbated by fear and competition (Irobi, 2005).

“Ethnic nationalism” often causes violence and separatism, as it has in Ethiopia, the Philippines, and Yugoslavia (Schlichte, 1994, p.59). Civil war also broke out in Sierra Leone, another state which experienced black colonialism (Bøås, 2001). The ethnocentric violence in Liberia began with a coup in 1980, ending around 130 years of Americo-Liberian rule

(Dennis and Dennis, 2008). Samuel Doe, an ethnic Krahn, became the first African Liberian to come into power (Bøås, 2001). However, his rule also dissolved into fraud and suppression of dissent, with Doe's soldiers (known as the Armed Forces of Liberia) preemptively attacking opponents, especially those from the Gio, Dan, and Mano ethnic groups (Bøås, 2001); in fact, shootings regularly took place in the streets over ethnicity, despite there being few cultural differences between the groups except dialect (Schlichte, 1994). Ethnicity became equivalent or bound to state power (Jinadu, 1994).

1989 began a year of fighting between a group of rebels led by Charles Taylor and Doe, with Nigeria leading ECOWAS (Economic Community Of West African States) in trying to keep the peace so as not to encourage uprisings against corruption elsewhere in Africa. One of Taylor's group, Prince Johnson, turned against him and captured Samuel Doe, and the two men and their ethnic groups fought to gain control of Monrovia, with ECOWAS eventually joining forces with warlords and up becoming embroiled in the struggle by attacking Taylor. The United Liberian Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO) was unsuccessfully attempted to stem the fighting, and was split internally between Christian Krahns and Muslim Mandingos. Eventually, the differing factions lost sight of what the warring had been about and it became a fight for resources, with warlords using forced labour to extract or steal diamonds, gold, rubber, palm oil and marijuana (Bøås, 2001), and middlemen making money from this informal economy of looted goods. After an unsuccessful attempt in 1995 by UCOMOG at disarming the warlord factions and getting a peace treaty signed (the warlords claimed that UCOMOG was not neutral but had become a faction in itself, so could not be trusted), a Nigerian dictator named Sani Abacha stepped in to end the fighting, mostly, it was claimed, to make himself look good and to detract attention from his own political wrongdoings (Bøås, 2001). This worked. Elections took place in 1997 and Charles Taylor became president. Relative peace lasted until 2000, when the UK and US accused Liberia of being a rogue state and issued it with sanctions. Rebels used this as an excuse to arm themselves against Taylor.

The rise of "indigenous military dictatorships" after the fall of Americo-Liberian rule and the obsession with personal power and wealth, writes Dolo (2007, p.7), could be linked back to Liberia's exclusionary history, which had resulted in an attachment to ethnicity, and a desire for power. Indigenous groups had experienced decades of "ethnic bigotry", with Americo-Liberian "bureaucratic centralism" and nepotism breaking up the nation and leaving native people on the margins (Dolo, 2007, p.xviii). African Liberians were denied education, citizenship, healthcare, and infrastructure such as roads, which in turn made it near impossible for them to sell goods or get jobs, and even after an ethnic Krahn (Samuel Doe) came to power, he continued to use a divide and rule strategy to maintain power, and committed many human rights abuses (Dolo, 2007), as did Charles Taylor, who both ruled using ethnic polarization to spread fear and gain support, and so still the different ethnic groups in Liberia were not equal.

Today, Liberia is one of many African states with a citizenship law which discriminates against certain races or ethnicities (Manby, 2010). Their constitution was last revised in 1986 (Kollehlon, 2008), and it only grants citizenship by birth or naturalization (and the right to own land or property) to "Negroes or people of Negro descent" (Kollehlon, 2008, no pagination). This goes beyond mere preference, as many other countries have (Manby, 2010). The initial creation of the constitution, drawn up when Liberia became independent in 1847, was to reverse racially exclusionary citizenship in the US, in favour of blacks, making race a core value of nationhood and citizenship, as in the USA, but in an inverted sense (Mills, 2014). This seemed to be a kind of insurance against domination by white supremacy and colonial tactics after years of white dominance and influence exerted through governance and white missionaries travelling to the region (Dennis and Dennis, 2008). The Constitution has long been a source of pride for Liberia, with Americo-Liberians noting that they had never been colonized, and never would be due to their laws (Dennis and Dennis, 2008). Americo-Liberians wanted the citizenship they had never been granted in the US, and wanted to

make sure that they would not be enslaved by whites again in their new state (Kollehlon, 2008). It is also suggested that the constitution reflects the US rule of hypo descent, a legacy of the country's African American founders (2008). It essentially bars whites from owning land (Mills, 2014), except for "missionary, educational, benevolent...or foreign diplomatic" purposes (Kollehlon, 2008, no pagination). The reasoning behind the policy is that it will preserve Liberian culture, character and customs (Kollehlon, 2008). However, arguments exist that proclaim the constitution to be racist and illogical.

Liberia is still trying to rebuild itself after years of civil war. There is still much political corruption, the unemployment rate is 85%, the electrical grid has been blown up and, outside of the capital Monrovia, ruined roads and scant infrastructure, as well as recovering child soldiers are casualties of the fighting (Wiltz, 2010). Echoes of the past are still visible. It is impossible to forget the damage and complications caused by black colonialism and the involvement of the USA in the Liberian repatriation scheme when even the flag resembles that of America (Wiltz, 2010). Some argue that the constitution acted as, and will continue to act, as protection against further "colonial intrusion" (Kromah, 2010, p.89) from the West. Offering justification for the continued adherence to citizenship laws, Kromah says "where psycho-social factors have featured strongly in the evolution of a nation state, growing, for example, out of experiences of servitude or colonialism, the challenge [is to draw up] ...constitutional safeguards against racial domination from the outside" while balancing "different ethnic and class collectivities". Does the current constitution meet this challenge?

There are many debates about racialized nature of its constitution. Kollehlon (2008) suggests that Liberia should open up its racialized citizenship to others, suggesting that culture is not a feature of "function" (no pagination) of race, so there is no need to exclude non blacks to preserve it; they could just exclude non-Liberian ethnic groups. He questions why citizenship is extended to all blacks from any country when the stated aim of the constitution is to preserve Liberian culture (2008). The author also argues that it is difficult to decide who counts as 'negro'. Which physical traits should be used as qualifiers? In some countries, what would be black in one place is mixed or claro in another (Kollehlon, 2008). He further argue that there is no need to exclude non-blacks because Liberians have 'learned' white culture – they speak English, the national sport is soccer, the national dance is the French/British quadrille, and the flag and constitution is based on the USA. If Liberians can take on the culture of whites, he asks, why can't non-blacks take part in Liberian culture and become citizens? If Liberians can work and become citizens in other countries, with many having sought safety all over the world during the civil war, why shouldn't they return the favour? And he says that opening up citizenship would bring much needed doctors and professionals into the country.

In terms of the ethnic tensions in Liberia, which was one of the factors which ignited and prolonged the civil war and "indigenous military dictatorship" (Dolo, 2007, p.7), many solutions are offered. Ethnic or tribal belonging is still an important tenet of Liberian existence, as it is in many African states – people are socialised and politicised along ethnic lines, and even sports teams are organised according to ethnic-linguistic groups in Liberia (Dolo, 2007).

The problems, some argue, lies in the fact of Liberia's history, where ethnic pride and difference, suppressed for so long by a group of people perceived to be non-African, resulted in war. Dolo (2007) suggests the need to create a national identity which would unite the different ethnic groups – a "trans-ethnic vision" (p.xxiii). He also argues that politicisation of ethnic identity should be banned, as it only leads to perceived feelings of superiority over others. The constitution suggests a certain unity between those of Negro decent, those who are Liberian citizens; but this does not stop xenophobia towards those returning Liberians who left during the civil war, with calls for these out of touch and arrogant people to be excluded from a potential nationalised identity set out in the constitution (Dolo, 2007). Dolo suggests that unless ethnic inequality is ironed out, democracy will never take hold (2007). Of course, this will not be easy, as years of suppression and hardship under

Americo-Liberian rule mean that the nation's ability to organise itself in this way has been impeded, and that it will take time for the effects of years of anti-indigeneity, segregation and underdevelopment caused by black colonialism which was achieved through US intervention to be undone

Liberia started life as a state governed by the rules of colourism and shadism among the repatriates, as well as anti-indigeneity, with the indigenous people being separated from repatriates by a divide very much structurally similar to the black/white dichotomy in the US, although measured along lines of culture, symbolism and diaspora status. Americo Liberians continued to wear a culture which paradoxically came out of slavery and oppression as a badge of honour until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Dolo, 2007). As the population mixed and skin colour and 'racial' proximity to whiteness became less of a marker, the emphasis switched to the boundary between rich and poor, town and country, and those who could associate with, enact and purchase symbols of whiteness versus those who did not. Tribal and indigenous status till continued to be a marker of inferiority, however. Finally, as the divide between indigenous and repatriate weakened, certainly at a common population level, people began to politically organise themselves around ethnicity. However, the constitution still emphasises the importance of racial difference, with citizenship only being granted to black people.

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