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Who is a Liberian Anyway?

The claim for formalised identity by diaspora Liberians

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines Liberia's complex history as a unique settler colony and the ramifications of this history for current attempts at constructing a collective identity. More specifically, it analyses diaspora Liberians' claim for formalised identity and how Liberians in-country perceive these claims. I use the country's dual citizenship debate as a lens through which to interpret the intricate narratives around how identity and belonging are being constructed in the post-war era. The project draws on document analysis and in-depth interviews with respondents from civil society, academia, government, media, and other professionals living in Liberia and the diaspora.

The thesis contributes to knowledge by re-theorising Liberia's formation as a settler colonial project and argues for the recognition of Americo-Liberians as colonisers. Liberia is often seen as yet another conflict-ridden African country that was never colonised. In fact, Liberia was colonised by Black settlers from America who established the nation-state in 1847. I draw on settler colonial theory to show that when the Americo-Liberians dispossessed and marginalised the Africans they met upon arrival, they established the antagonisms and enduring unequal structures that ultimately led to Liberia's civil wars. I argue that the systemic inequality established by the settler regime continues to inform and shape contemporary debates over who can legitimately claim Liberian identity.

The second part of the thesis seeks to understand a long, contentious debate about dual citizenship. Many Liberians recognise the economic benefits of allowing dual citizenship. They welcome the potential investments and skilled labour that dual citizens might contribute to Liberia's post-conflict reconstruction and development agenda. And yet, there is widespread resistance to dual citizenship. This apparently illogical opposition is understandable in light of Liberia's history as a settler society that entrenched inequalities to privilege the settler class.

At the heart of the debate are conceptions of Liberianess. Diaspora Liberians are marginalised in both their home and host countries. They consider dual citizenship a practical strategy that formalises their Liberianess and provides them and their children a route back to their *real home*. In-country Liberians fear being colonised by a small, privileged group and purposefully conceptualise Liberianess as an exclusionary tool. I argue that structural inequality due to historical injustices and current poverty levels have eroded conditions of trust in Liberia's political systems. Thus, the shifting and contested meanings of Liberianess that play out in

the debate result from this lack of trust, generating conflictual and unstable expectations about the future behaviour of elites and the implications of this for the ordinary Liberian. Ultimately, when we consider the invisibility and enduring nature of settler colonialism, even in a supposedly post-colonial Liberia, we can understand the anxieties of in-country Liberians and why they *may* see dual citizenship as a recolonising tool and diaspora Liberians as the new settler-colonisers.

Declaration

This thesis comprises only my original work towards the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used. It was approved as a minimal risk project by the Faculty of Arts Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG), the University of Melbourne, on 8 April 2019. Ethics ID: 1852996.1

The thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, bibliography, and appendices.

Francisca (Franka) Korantemaa Vaughan

November 2022

Figures, Tables & Illustrations

Figure 1: Dimensions and indicators of the MPI.

List of Acronyms

ACS - American Colonisation Society

AFL - Armed Forces of Liberia

ALCOD - All Liberian Conference on Dual Citizenship

AU – African Union

BBC – The British Broadcasting Corporation

BLM – Black Lives Matter

CANZUS states – Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States of America

CEDAW– Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

CPA – Comprehensive Peace Agreement

CRC – Central Revolutionary Council

DDRR - Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration and Rehabilitation

ECOWAS - Economic Community of West African States

ECOMOG - Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group

EFLA – The European Federation of Liberian Associations

GoL – Government of Liberia

FOLICA - Federation of Liberian Communities in Australia

HDI - Human Development Index

ICCPR - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

IDP - Internally Displaced Persons

IECOM – Independent Electoral Commission

IGNU – Interim Government of National Unity

INPFL – Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia

IOM - The International Organization for Migration

LNTG - Liberian National Transition Government

LECBS – Liberia Emergency Capacity Building Service

LDF - Lofa Defense Force

LPC - Liberia Peace Council

LURD - Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy

MILEAD - Moremi Initiative for Women’s Leadership in Africa

MODEL - Movement for Democracy in Liberia

MOJA - Movement for Justice in Africa

MPIGO - Mouvement Patriotique Ivoirien du Grand Ouest

MPI - Multidimensional Poverty Index

MSc. – Master of Science

NDPL – National Democratic Party of Liberia

NPFL – National Patriotic Front of Liberia

NPP - New Patriotic Party

OAU - Organisation of African Unity

OPHI – Oxford Poverty and Human development Initiative

PAL – Progressive Alliance of Liberia

PAPD – Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development

PPP – Progressive People’s Party

PRC - Peoples’ Redemption Council

PRS – Poverty Reduction Strategy

RUF – Revolutionary United Front

SES - Senior Executive Service

TOKTEN - Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals

TRC – Truth and Reconciliation Commission

TWP - True Whig Party

ULAA – The Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas

ULAG – United Liberian Association Ghana

ULIMO – The United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy

UN – United Nations

UN Women – The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

UNHRC - United Nations Human Rights

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

US – United States of America

USD – United States of America Dollars

VoIP - Voice over Internet Protocol

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my formative teachers. Growing up, I was lucky to have had outstanding educators with my beloved mum, “Auntie Maggie” [Margaret Abena Amofoa], leading the charge. Together they nurtured my love for learning and schooled me on the importance of higher education. Your labour of love set this PhD into motion. From the bottom of my heart, thank you to all educators who believe in the transformative power of education and do their best to ensure that many more kids like me get the chance to escape the cyclical trap of poverty.

Ayekoo!

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In times like this, I am reminded of the Akan proverb: “Yewo wo to esie so a, wonnkye tenten ye.” This proverb speaks about privilege and the inherent enrichment we derive from such opportunities. It has indeed been a privilege to work on this thesis and to have the profound commitment, support and encouragement of so many people throughout the journey.

I am deeply indebted to all my research participants in Liberia and the diaspora who shared their experiences, insights and expertise with me through countless phone calls, some of them at a time when the world was grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic. I am grateful for your time, trust and openness in sharing your stories with me.

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Introduction: Diaspora Liberians' Claim for Formalised Identity

On Monday, 16 January 2006, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was inaugurated as Liberia's president. The day was euphoric. She was Africa's first elected woman president. Beyond the symbolism of what the day meant for feminism on the continent, it was a day of hope and possibility for Liberians, Africans, and the world. Sirleaf's inauguration signified the end of one of the most brutal civil wars the African continent had ever experienced. She represented a new chapter, the prospect of "change and restitution and a brighter tomorrow"¹ for the troubled country.

I remember the pomp and ceremony of the day quite clearly because I was preparing for my West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) – a standardised university entrance exam. As many young West Africans can attest, your WASSCE results largely determine your life chances because they chart your access to university education and its associated opportunities. Watching TV during this exam period was generally frowned upon – it was a 'pastime' final year students could not afford. But I remember taking time from my studies to follow the countless news stories about Sirleaf's inauguration on TV and BBC radio.

I don't remember exactly what she said in her inaugural speech. I just remember how the world's celebration of her made me feel that day. I remember feeling profound happiness, hope, and freedom. I witnessed a woman ascend to the highest political power in a neighbouring African country. That experience inspired me so that I was optimistic about my future despite the enormity of the WASSCE gloom. I did not want to be president like 'Africa's Iron Lady' as Sirleaf is often known, but a year later, I walked onto the University of Ghana's Legon campus with the confidence that I could chart a future of my own while doing more than just studying. At Legon, I pursued student leadership, tried different sports, and several other 'pastimes' I had initially categorised as distractions. I felt free to just live and even dream.

Some ten years later, I finally read Sirleaf's inaugural speech while preparing the proposal that developed into this thesis. Since then, I have read this inaugural address and related media reporting several times. Each time, her statement on the eve of her inauguration: "I am excited by the potential of what I represent – the aspirations and expectations of women in Liberia, African women and women all over the world" (ReliefWeb 2006a), brings back those feelings I had on that day in January 2006 and the impact it had on my life then. Interestingly, Sirleaf has since compared feminism to extremism, claiming that while the concept's definition

¹ In her memoir *This Child Will Be Great* (2010), Sirleaf describes the atmosphere of her inauguration day as that of hope and joy; "the possibility of change and restitution and a brighter tomorrow" (p.269)

describes her life, she does not identify with it (Hirsch, 2017). Her story as the first elected female president in any African country, while undeniably courageous, was fraught with accusations of corruption and nepotism, thus leaving behind a complicated legacy. Her efforts toward gender equality have been especially criticised (see Pailey 2017; Munu 2017).

In this thesis, however, I have had to think beyond the feeling of freedom that Sirleaf's inauguration gave me and consider critically what her government and the Liberian state have meant to Liberians – people who had experienced the worst form of war for over a decade. As Sirleaf framed it on the day:

We applaud the resilience of our people who, weighed down and dehumanized by poverty and rendered immobile by the shackles of fourteen years of civil war, courageously went to the polls, not once but twice...

We pledge anew our commitment to transparency, open government, and participatory democracy for all of our citizens. Yet, we are humbled and awed by the enormity of the challenges that lie ahead – to heal our nation's wounds, redefine and strengthen its purpose, make democracy a living and effective experiment, promote economic growth, create jobs, revitalize our health and educational facilities and services, and quicken the pace of social progress and individual prosperity in this country (Sirleaf 2010, p.318).

This thesis analyses some of the challenges Sirleaf highlighted in her inaugural speech. I have often wondered how Liberians are forging new relationships with their country and each other in the post-war era. I wanted to understand how the Liberian state, specifically Sirleaf's government (2006 - 2017) and now George Weah's (2018-), fosters connectedness between the state and *all* Liberians.

As articulated by Sirleaf, social cohesion² had become increasingly important in post-conflict Liberia. Consequently, beyond rebuilding the state machinery, the governments of Sirleaf and Weah have engaged in work to reconstruct societal relations. Significant to this thesis are the attempts by the state to construct a collective Liberian identity that embraces all Liberians and unites the different cleavages of identity categories that existed before and those that emerged out of the war. In Liberia's National Development Plan (2018-2023) – the Pro-Poor Agenda

² I use social cohesion to imply the bond among groups in society. Social cohesion "aims to consolidate plurality of citizenship by reducing inequality and socioeconomic disparities and fractures in the society" (Manca 2014, p.6069)

for Prosperity and Development (PAPD) – for example, the state rejects the long-standing “tendency to bifurcate the Liberian identity into an Americo-Liberian vs Indigenes cleavage” (GoL 2018a, p.xxii). The state maintains that such categorisations suggest two “discreet communities” requiring reconciliation to advance political and socio-economic development in Liberia (GoL 2018a, p.xxii). Beyond these divisions, however, the PAPD document also recognises that:

new cleavages emerged out of the civil war – between the Diaspora and those Liberians who remained at home and between those who were victimised and those who were the perpetrators of violence. All these cleavages must be addressed for Liberia to go forward successfully as a united people and a progressive nation.

The recognition of these divisions underlies attempts by the two post-war governments – those of former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and now President George Weah – to develop an all-embracing Liberian identity. The state has pursued attempts to construct a collective Liberian identity through legislation intended to create the possibility of dual citizenship. Legislation on dual citizenship seeks to develop a sense of belonging, unite the different cleavages, and encourage investment in Liberia. On the surface, introducing dual citizenship in Liberia makes a lot of sense in a contemporary world that is continually on the move. Instead, however, such attempts have generated a complex and contentious debate, fostering a new divide in Liberia between those who support the allowance of dual citizenship and/or non-Black citizenship and those who are opposed.

In this thesis, I use the debate generated by demands for dual citizenship by diaspora Liberians as a lens to interpret the complex narratives around the state’s attempt to construct a collective Liberian identity. I also consider citizenship claims by non-‘Negro’³ migrants, particularly the Lebanese community in Liberia, and how their demands amplify the racial issues in Liberia’s history and this history’s impacts on contemporary debates. I argue that the dual citizenship debate reflects the politics of belonging and identity contestations that framed the formation of Liberia as a settler colony. I must emphasise that due to the thesis’ focus on theorising Liberia’s settler colonial past and how the legacies of structural inequality continue to frame contemporary Liberian society, I do not engage thoroughly with the scholarship on citizenship

³ I use terms such as ‘Negro’, and ‘Mulatto’ in parts of this thesis. I acknowledge the offensive nature of these terms and so I put them in single quotation marks to indicate their use in the source materials.

in Africa. My focus in this thesis is understanding Liberia as a settler colony so as to unpack the anxieties that underline questions of identity and belonging in post-conflict Liberia. As I explain in Chapter 2, I engage concepts like identity, citizenship, belonging, collective identity, and ethnicity throughout the thesis but as *tools* that provide frameworks for articulating and understanding different forms of contestations. For example, I mobilise belonging as a synonym for both collective identity and citizenship to explain claims for dual citizenship in Liberia. This is because the thesis is concerned with the utilisation of citizenship claims by diaspora Liberians to construct a sense of belonging to Liberia and vice versa. My focus here, is on the ‘everyday’ meanings these concepts offer to people⁴.

The dual citizenship debate is about claims over who truly belongs or otherwise, who has the right to call Liberia home, and, most importantly, who can claim ownership of the country and its resources. The debate raises questions about identity, belonging, ethnicity, diaspora status, inequality, race, and other socio-political issues fundamental to Liberia’s ability to rebuild in the post-war era. But underlying these tensions is the systematic inequality that characterised the founding of Liberia as a settler colony by Black⁵ settlers from America. Consequently, instead of categorising the contestations around citizenship in Liberia as just another contest over resources, I argue that we must consider Liberia’s history as a settler colonial regime to really appreciate and understand these disagreements.

Liberia’s formative years as an experimental nation-state project engineered by the American Colonisation Society (ACS) continue to influence contemporary identity struggles in post-conflict Liberia. The modern Liberian state originated from the coming together of the official sixteen ethnic groups of the territory and the descendants of formerly enslaved and free African Americans, who were settled on the country’s coastal areas by the ACS in 1822. Before the settlers’ arrival, the Indigenous groups had built diverse societies and intricate socio-economic structures (David 1984). The Indigenous groups and their political and economic systems were already connected to the global economy through the transatlantic slave trade and trade in general merchandise with European merchants and explorers (David 1984; see also Leopold

⁴ A detailed review of the literature on citizenship and collective identity is beyond this thesis. More so, focusing on citizenship would duplicate the work of the Liberian scholar Robtel Pailey, who has written extensively on citizenship concerning Liberia as a migrant-sending country (Pailey 2021, 2018, 2016).

⁵ I capitalise *Black* (and not *white*) when using Black as a collective noun because when used in reference to racial/ethnic/cultural, Black represents a shared sense of identity and community. The understanding is, while *white people* may be used as a collective noun, it carries a different set of meanings as one will typically deploy *Black people* (Laws 2020).

2006; d'Azevedo 1969). Typical of pre-colonial African societies, the Indigenous communities formed out of ethnic warfare and political conquests and coexisted autonomously (Gershoni 1985; d'Azevedo 1969).

The African American settlers who began arriving in the 1820s were an 'excess' free Black population who had supposedly failed to integrate into American society. Their repatriation emanated from the presumption that racial prejudice in Western countries would continuously limit Black peoples' citizenship and freedom even when they were free from slavery. Thus, the ACS resettled these Black Americans in Liberia in an attempt to create a model Black society that was to be emulated by other Africans (Tyler-McGraw 2007; Fitzgerald 1997; Liebenow 1987).

The settlers (who later became known as Americo-Liberians⁶) and their descendants, comprised about five per cent of the population but dominated Liberia's intellectual and ruling class for nearly one hundred years, only granting citizenship to Indigenous Liberians in 1946. Political and socio-economic imbalance generated divisions between the two main identity groups and, in the process, limited Indigenous attachments to the nation-state. For example, the settler state ignored Indigenous people during the republic process to the extent that there is no mention of them in the constitution that established the nation-state in 1847. During this period, the Americo-Liberian population enforced a strict colonial logic of separateness from the Indigenous people. As I discuss in Chapter 1, the eliminatory logic of settler colonialism (Wolfe 1999, 2006) was evident in Liberia's establishment as a modern state. The separatist logic persisted until the nineteenth president, William Tubman – the most influential president in Liberia's history. As Liberia's longest-serving president (1944-1971), Tubman introduced some progressive policies. Through his Unification Plan and Open Door policy, Tubman arguably sought to incorporate the Indigenous majority into the mainstream of what essentially was a settler society and advocated for foreign engagement in Liberia's economic development. Nevertheless, settler colonialism remained the dominant structuring force in the

⁶ I use settlers and Americo-Liberians interchangeably throughout this thesis. Some scholars shy away from labelling Americo-Liberians as settlers and instead classify them as immigrants/repatriates. I unpack theorising Liberia's formation as a settler colony and, by extension, the Americo-Liberians as settlers in Chapter 1 and detail in Chapter 3, the Americo-Liberians colonial relationship with the Indigenous people.

Further, the term 'Americo-Liberian', and related terms such as 'Congo', 'native' 'indigene', 'aboriginal' are problematic in some cases because they extend from categorisations that date to the period of (racialised) state formation but remain in use today. I know the risks of homogenising some of these identity categories and acknowledge that different classifications translate into differential power relations within and between these categories.

relationship between the state and the Indigenous majority until the 1980 coup that brought an abrupt end to the Americo-Liberian hegemony (see Chapters 3 & 4; see Appendix 1 on p.249-50).

The entrenched societal divisions prior to 1980 prompted public uprisings, leading to the coup d'état orchestrated by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe, an Indigenous man. Samuel Doe's dictatorial rule and favouring of his ethnic group, the Krahn, were then implicated in the ensuing civil wars (Ellis 1999). The wars began with Charles Taylor's invasion of Nimba County, the north-eastern part of Liberia, on Christmas eve 1989, with about 100 Libyan-trained troops – the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) – seeking to oust Doe's repressive regime. Taylor's NPFL quickly gained the support of groups that had suffered under Doe's regime (Raddatz 2016; Liebenow 1987).

But while Doe's regime may have ignited the first civil war, more significant to the devastating nature of the conflicts was the economic and political system that the settler state had engineered to protect the interests of the minority settler class. The settler society had established a lopsided socio-political and economic development pattern in Liberia, resulting in deep-rooted inequalities between rural (inhabited mainly by Indigenous communities) and urban areas and between settlers and Indigenous people. Vast inequalities – in economic opportunities, political power, and distributional outcomes – intensified ethnic and class rivalries and ultimately led to Doe's coup and the ignition of at least the first civil conflict. Student activism was a critical factor, with protests by students and political groups contributing to the regime change before the war (Utas 2003). Liberia's 16 officially recognised ethnic groups, with homelands in different counties (Liebenow 1987), aligned with various factions during the conflicts (Bøås & Utas 2014).

Liberia's two civil wars claimed the lives of an estimated 250,000 people out of a pre-war population of about 3 million. Additionally, the majority of the Liberian population (1.5 million) were either displaced internally or became refugees in neighbouring African countries and other parts of the world, such as the Americas, Europe, and Australasia (The Advocates for Human Rights et al., 2009). The coup d'état and ensuing civil wars caused the Liberian state and economy to collapse, derailing whatever development the coup supporters had anticipated and compounding the country's already crippling poverty and inequality levels (World Bank Group 2018). The civil conflicts officially ended in August 2003 amidst intervention by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the eventual signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement by the key stakeholders in the conflict, and

Charles Taylor's cajoling to leave Liberia by ECOWAS leaders. Displaced Liberians who emigrated to other countries form a large portion of the country's current diaspora population.

As Liberia continues to recover and rebuild, the transition from Sirleaf's government to Weah's in January 2018 marked a pivotal moment in the country's trajectory towards democratic governance. Yet Liberians remain divided over citizenship laws and questions about who can claim Liberian identity. In the dual citizenship debate, arguments against dual nationality or for a stricter dual citizenship policy tend to caution against the repetition of the historical injustices orchestrated by the Americo-Liberian hegemony. In these negotiations, anxieties about systemic inequality have generated a deep rift between groups of Liberians in-country, diaspora Liberians, and non-'Negro' migrant groups such as the Lebanese community, who are also demanding dual citizenship status in Liberia (I revisit the demands of the Lebanese community in Chapter 7). As I show in Chapter 6, many believe dual citizenship could set in motion further lopsided socio-political and economic development for years if negotiations do not consider the country's history of elites manipulating the political system to benefit a privileged few. Only this time, the argument goes, the rulers would be the minority diaspora population or the 'white people'⁷ demanding dual citizenship status.

The dual citizenship debate is about power, privilege, and access to wealth. Hence, concerns about inequality and how it manifests in questions of fairness, justice, and race are essential to the issues at stake in the debate. These concerns underpin the argument in this thesis, which contends that the formation of Liberia is a unique case of settler colonialism.

In what follows here, I argue that underpinning the contemporary dual citizenship debate is the history of Liberia's formation as a settler regime that entrenched inequalities to privilege the settler class.

Research Question(s)

This thesis examines the ramifications of Liberia's history as a settler colony for current attempts at constructing a collective Liberian identity. Contemporary demands for dual

⁷ 'White people' as used presently in the dual citizenship debate typically refer to non-'Negro' migrants (minority groups such as Lebanese, Pakistanis, Indians, Syrians, etc.) who are long-time residents of Liberia. I should note that the Lebanese community is often highlighted in such debates because they are a 'visible minority' through their business dealings and direct engagement in the debate.

However, it becomes apparent in Chapters 6 and 7 that 'white people' is a category often deployed by Liberians in-country to describe all others they believe do not belong (lack Liberianess) and, therefore, should not have access to Liberian identity (citizenship).

citizenship by diaspora Liberians, in particular, emanate from calls by both President Weah and former President Sirleaf for diaspora Liberians to return home and help rebuild their homeland into a New Liberia. Amid these calls has been the question of the citizenship of diaspora Liberians, particularly returnees who are directly engaged in the country's reconstruction process. Amidst state invitations to engage more 'meaningfully' in-country, diaspora Liberians have demanded the formalisation of their Liberian identity. Led by the All Liberian Conference on Dual Citizenship (ALCOD), diaspora groups have pressed for legislation that upends the country's stringent⁸ nationality laws. In response to these demands, successive governments have pursued dual citizenship policies as part of their post-conflict rebuilding projects. In such attempts, the state envisions dual citizenship as an opportunity to bring together all Liberians, both in-country and abroad.

The thesis looks particularly at diaspora Liberians' claim for formalised identity and how Liberians at home perceive this claim. It uses the discourse on dual citizenship to interpret the complex narratives around how identity and belonging are being constructed in the post-war era. Guiding the research process is the overarching research question: ***How does Liberia's complex history and present-day reconstruction shape questions of identity and belonging?*** The sub-research questions that framed the design of data collection instruments for field-level exploration, as well as data analysis, are:

1. ***How has the Liberian state engaged with its population abroad?***
2. ***How do Liberians think about and engage with debates on what it means to be Liberian?***
3. ***What does Liberia's history tell us about the civil wars and contemporary contestations over identity and belonging?***

These questions have developed as my research has led to a deeper understanding of Liberia's history, which revealed a unique case of settler colonialism. Exploring that insight clarified the context of contemporary anxieties among in-country Liberians, particularly about systemic inequality and possible recolonisation by another group of domineering elites if Liberia allows dual citizenship. Articulating Liberia's formation as a settler colonial project helps us

⁸ Liberia's 1973 Aliens and Nationality Law prohibits dual citizenship. Together with the 1986 Constitution, only people of 'Negro' descent can obtain Liberian citizenship by birth, ancestry or naturalisation (see Chapter 6).

appreciate the interconnections between the historical injustices orchestrated by the settler regime and current contestations around identity and belonging.

For this reason, the thesis is presented in two parts: the first re-theorises Liberia's history as a settler colony and the second analyses how identity and belonging are being constructed in the post-war era in light of Liberia's past as a settler society that entrenched inequalities to privilege the settler class.

It is significant to note that the Weah government has, since 22 July 2022, enacted an Amendment Law. The Law repeals the 1973 Aliens and Nationality Law ban on dual citizenship, thus allowing Liberians in the diaspora who have naturalised elsewhere to maintain their Liberian citizenship and women the right to pass on their citizenship to their children (GoL 2022). The July 2022 Amendment Law came into effect after I had finalised the data collection, analysis, and writing of this thesis. Nevertheless, the thesis's core interest is the debate surrounding claims for and counterclaims against dual citizenship. Such discussions provide a lens to understand how Liberia's settler colonial past (and present) continue to shape narratives of identity and belonging in post-war Liberia. Moreover, even after the passing of the Amendment law, the debate continues due to dual citizenship links to power, land ownership, wealth and other privileges previously reserved for only citizens (FrontPageAfrica 2022). I revisit how the debate has unfolded and the insights it contributes towards understanding the construction of a collective identity in post-war Liberia in the second part of the thesis (Chapters 5, 6 & 7).

The Nexus of Settler Colonialism/Inequality/Race in Liberia

Systemic inequality is an enduring feature of settler colonialism. Indeed, colonial domination may take different forms, but as Enrich Steinman has argued, the "processes of settlement institutionalise settler privileges materially and discursively" (2016, p.221). Settler societies achieve 'dominant status' by structuring economic and socio-political systems to benefit the settler class and often use racial violence to weaken or erase Indigenous sovereignty. Racial violence against Indigenous groups manifests in entrenched inequalities of outcomes (land ownership, income wealth and educational attainment) and opportunities (unequal access to economic gains and political power). These injustices persist through settlers' (and elites') disavowal of the past in contemporary political and socio-economic inequalities (Bruyneel 2021), fostering what Moon-Kie Jung has categorised as "depraved racial indifference" (2015, p.141ff). Like other settler societies, inequalities in Liberia emanate from socio-historical

processes and structures that have produced uneven political and economic development outcomes that persist to this day.

Liberia was established from the outset as a settler colonial project, and the country's deep-rooted inequalities stem from a particular type of settler colonial formation. In this case, as I explain further below, the Americo-Liberians, though Black settlers, effectively reproduced the system of white supremacy that underpins settler colonialism. The structures of white power are systemic in settler societies, which produce enduring racial domination. According to Bonds and Inwoods (2016, p.716), white supremacy emphasises “the brutality and dehumanisation of racial *exploitation* and *domination* that emerges from settler colonial societies.” As with settler societies globally, colonists justify their elimination of the native and the appropriation of their lands and resources by racialising Indigenes/Indigenous people as ‘primitive’ and ‘savages’ who need civilisation.

In contrast, the settlers are cast as superior and the managers of the civilising mission (Bray 2021; Glenn 2015; Dunbar-Ortiz. 2015; Veracini 2010; Wolfe 2006). As noted by Bonds and Inwoods (2016, p.716), white supremacy underlines “the material production and violence of racial structures and the hegemony of whiteness in settler societies.” Hence, the encounter between the Americo-Liberians and the Indigenous population represents a defining moment in the racialisation of the Indigenous peoples as primitive.

Analysing Liberia's formation as a settler colonial society raises questions of whiteness. Unlike the well-known British settler colonial societies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States (also known as the CANZUS states or the white dominions of the British Empire), where the settlers were/are cosmetically white, the settlers in Liberia's case were Black people, many of whom were formerly enslaved people. The complexion of the Americo-Liberians troubles the dominant normative category of the settler as white and the deployment of white supremacy as an underlying feature of settler colonial projects⁹. As I argue in Chapter 1, however, and demonstrate in Chapter 3, the *settleness* of the Americo-Liberians emanates from the racialised relations *they* developed towards the Indigenous population they encountered upon arrival. In essence, the Americo-Liberians, while possessing Black bodies, enacted what looks like white supremacy in Liberia.

⁹ Theorisations of Asian settler colonialism in Hawaii offer a good correlation (see Fujikane & Okamura 2008; Sarannillio 2013; Isaki 2016)

In my analysis, I deploy whiteness as a knowledge system to refer to the embodiment of whiteness and the enactment of white supremacy by the Americo-Liberians despite their dark skin. The Americo-Liberians established a socio-political hegemony underpinned by violent racial structures that was reproduced through their racialised engagements with the Indigenous people. In this instance, whiteness operates as a “social identity and location” (Bonds & Inwood 2016, p.717) that bestows power and structural advantages in settler societies. The Americo-Liberians established a settler-colonial relationship with the Indigenous Africans – a particular form of domination where power is structured in a way that continually “facilitates the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority” (Coulthard 2014, pp. 6ff). Whiteness also acts as the normative category against which all other “racialised groups are ordered and valued” (Bonds & Inwood 2016, p.717; see also Frankenburg, 1993; McIntosh, 2004 [1988]; Roediger, 1992; Lipitz, 1995; Rothenberg, 2008). The contemporary theorisation of race as socially constructed suggest that the meaning of race can shift to benefit the dominant group. Omi and Winant (2014) have argued that race is an ongoing process, enacted through racial/political projects – “the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed” (p.109). Consequently, the Americo-Liberians embodied and enacted whiteness despite their dark skin and, in the process of reproducing white supremacy, *othered* the Indigenous populations by racialising them as inferior and in need of civilisation.

Anti-Black discrimination is generally considered the hallmark of racism because scholars (and practitioners) tend to organise racial hierarchy around a black/white binary. Indeed, the transatlantic slave trade and its lasting impact on racial hierarchies often make people refrain from categorising Black people as colonisers. Consequently, white people or Euro-Americans are perpetually cast in the role of colonial antagonists. Liberia troubles this narrative. Yet, the country’s formation is often overlooked as a settler colonial project because the settlers were mainly formerly enslaved, Black people. The argument I aim to emphasise is that the Americo-Liberians, like other colonists in the settler colonial world, *othered* and *racialised* the Africans they met upon arrival as ‘savages’. The Blackness of the Americo-Liberians, who were themselves racialised as inferior in America by the slaveholding regime, did not prevent them from dominating the Indigenous groups. Thus, while African enslavement in the Americas is still crucial to our appreciation of global power and economic systems, Liberia’s case highlights the need to destabilise the conceptualisation of anti-Blackness as the most vital hallmark of racism.

According to Bray (2021), theorising race from a settler colonial perspective helps highlight the racialisation of Indigenous groups in settler societies – racism against Indigenous people in America, for example (Dunbar-Ortiz 2015). Bray (2021) identifies settler colonialism as a “racial project” (Omi & Winant, 2014) predicated on land and resource acquisition. Omi and Winant (2014) defined ‘racial projects’ as “the building blocks” of racial formation because they structure differential access to resources to benefit the dominant group. The understanding is that, by design, the strategies of settler colonialism create deep injustices and inequalities against Indigenous people. By linking racial formation and inequalities, settler colonialism provides a valuable lens through which to understand the impacts of structural economic and political disparities in settler contexts, even in those societies like Liberia, South Africa, and others that have supposedly transitioned to a postcolonial situation.

Analysing Liberia’s formation as a settler colonial project is important and marks a significant contribution to knowledge in this thesis. Such analysis enables the recognition of the structural political and economic injustices perpetrated by the Americo-Liberians against the Indigenous groups. It is accurate to categorise the Americo-Liberians as settlers because their settlerness emanated from the racialised relationship they developed towards the people and the lands they appropriated, rather than from their complexion or their small population. Further, acknowledging the settlerness of the Americo-Liberians does not refute the transatlantic slave trade’s legacy, nor does it impugn the apparent ‘victim role’ that Black nations and people have been cast into by the slaveholding regime. Indeed, the Americo-Liberians were themselves racialised as inferior because of their Blackness, first in the Americas and later by German and French imperial agents when they established Liberia as an independent nation-state. However, the historical racialisation of Blackness as inferior does not negate the Americo-Liberians’ colonisation of other Africans. Both things can be true, and we must make space for such analysis.

This thesis, therefore, offers a novel theoretical reconsideration of Liberia as a settler colonial project, including the categorisation of Americo-Liberians as settlers. It also enjoins us to take a fresh look at settler colonial theory, particularly criticisms that settler colonial theory is overly structural in nature (King 2021; Barker 2011, 2017). The general view is that settler colonialism represents an ongoing structure that combines white settlers’ territorial acquisition with a racialised system of domination, thus making *the elimination of the native the central organising logic* (Veracini 2010; Wolfe 2006). However, as currently conceptualised (concerning the CANZUS states especially), settler colonial studies relies on a structural

rigidity that maps whiteness onto settlers and Blackness onto natives/Indigenous groups. Such rigidity has the unintended consequence of erasing Black people as colonists, as seen in the case of Liberia. Thus, the thesis makes an original contribution to settler colonial studies in its deployment of whiteness as a knowledge system reproduced by the Americo-Liberians that facilitated their racialisation and domination of the Indigenous groups for close to one hundred years. These arguments are further developed in the second part of Chapter 1.

Inequalities, Poverty, and Liberia's Dual Citizenship Debate

Inequalities have damaging effects on societies. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), inequalities matter for policies because imbalances in political and economic power eventually translate into political dominance, which, in turn, can lead to greater inequality (2019). Systemic inequality weakens social cohesion and reduces peoples' trust in governments, institutions, and each other. Aside from making it difficult for people to reach their potential at work and in life, inequalities make it harder for political decisions and policies to reflect the aspirations of the whole society (UNDP 2019).

Liberia is one of the poorest and most unequal countries in the world. For example, its Human Development Index (HDI) value in 2019 was 0.480, which positioned the country at 175 out of 189 countries and territories. Liberia's HDI value increased by about 10.3 percent between 2000 and 2019. Still, its HDI score rendered it below the average of 0.547 for countries in sub-Saharan Africa and below the average of 0.513 for countries in the low human development category. We learn from the index that "as the inequality in a country increases, the loss in human development also increases" (UNDP 2020, p.4). So, when Liberia's HDI value is adjusted for inequality¹⁰, it falls from 0.480 to 0.325, registering a loss of 32.3 percent. This loss is due to inequality in the distribution of the HDI indices of a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living (UNDP 2020). Critiques of indexes such as the HDI tend to focus on data unreliability and arbitrariness of the measure. Yet, the HDI, in particular, is widely used because it provides a good approximation of the situation on the ground.

Liberia's dual citizenship debate demonstrates the nexus between settler colonialism and structural inequality. The debate evokes fear and anxiety rooted in the divisive period of the

¹⁰ HDI measures the average basic human development achievements in a country. The average measure masks inequality in the distribution of human development across the population at the country level, hence the introduction of inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI) to account for inequality in all the three dimensions of HDI: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living (UNDP 2020).

Americo-Liberian hegemony. These fears stem from the experience of being colonised by Black settlers who established these inequalities. Consequently, past injustices orchestrated by the Americo-Liberian hegemony continue to frame debates about citizenship and belonging to Liberia. Although it has become more difficult to distinguish between settlers and natives in recent years, due to years of intermarriage and business dealings, there is still fear amongst many Liberians that the country might return to a period of gross structural inequality if dual citizenship is permitted.

Poverty is a “pronounced deprivation in wellbeing” (Haughton & Khandker 2009, p.1). According to Rohwerder (2016), our understanding of wellbeing determines whether we define poverty narrowly or broadly. In the narrower sense, wellbeing (and poverty) focuses on commodities, that is, whether individuals or households have sufficient resources to meet their needs. In this sense, poverty is viewed mainly in monetary terms. Here, the poor do not have enough income or consumption to put themselves above some adequate minimum threshold (Haughton & Khandker 2009). To demonstrate, about 40.9 percent of the Liberian population were living below the income poverty line (US\$1.90 per day) according to 2013 estimates (UNDP 2019). However, income poverty only tells part of the story.

Broader definitions of wellbeing include competence and self-worth, social connections, agency and participation, physical and mental health, economic resources, close relationships, and values and meaning. These measures are either enabled or constrained by factors such as the policy regime, political system, economy, physical environment, infrastructure, services, social institutions, and peace or conflict (White 2013). A broader understanding of poverty as capability deprivation was articulated by Amartya Sen (1987), who argues that people’s wellbeing relates to their capability to function in society. Thus, when people are poor, they “lack key capabilities, and so have inadequate income or education, or poor health, or insecurity, or low self-confidence, or a sense of powerlessness, or the absence of rights such as freedom of speech” (Haughton & Khandker 2009, pp.2-3). From this understanding, poverty is multidimensional, making it less responsive to simple solutions (Haughton & Khandker 2009). The multifaceted nature of poverty helps explain why some people are chronically poor or are trapped in poverty, while others can be transiently poor – moving in and out of poverty (Rohwerder 2016; Shepherd 2011).

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) sheds some light on the broader definition of wellbeing. The MPI complements traditional income poverty measures by capturing multiple overlapping acute deprivations suffered simultaneously by the individual or household. It uses

a set of ten indicators in three dimensions of poor health, insufficient education, and a low standard of living (see figure 1 below) and summarises the individual's or household's poverty profile with a weighted deprivation score. The MPI deprivation score ranges from 0 to 1, and higher values indicate higher multidimensional poverty. A deprivation score of $\frac{1}{3}$ (one-third of the weighted indicators) distinguishes the multidimensionally poor and nonpoor¹¹.

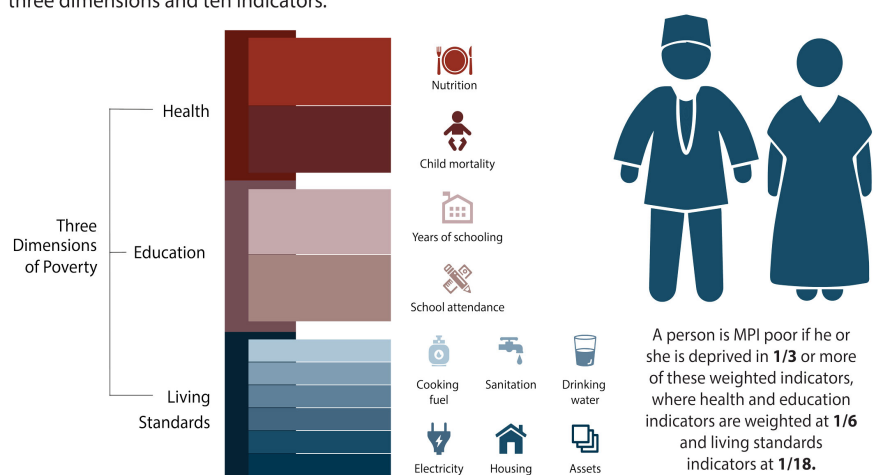
Using 2019/2020 survey data, the MPI index estimates Liberia's value at 0.259. This means 52.3 percent of the population is multidimensionally poor, while an additional 23.3 percent are vulnerable to multidimensional poverty. Also, 24.9 percent live in severe multidimensional poverty. Significantly, there is a difference of 7.9 percentage points if you compare Liberia's income poverty value of 44.4 percent (the percentage of Liberians living below PPP US\$ 1.90 a day) to its multidimensional poverty value of 52.3 percent. The difference suggests that even individual Liberians "living above the income poverty line may still suffer deprivations in health, education and/or standard of living" (UNDP 2021, p.2). The point here is that a majority of the population may not just be poor in education, health, and income wealth. Instead, they may also be equally poor in the other dimensions of wellbeing such as competence and self-worth, social connections, agency and participation, physical and mental health, among others.

Figure 1: Dimensions and indicators of the MPI. Source: (OPHI 2018)

¹¹ The index classifies a household and everyone in it as multidimensionally poor if its score is $\frac{1}{3}$ or greater; as vulnerable to multidimensional poverty if its score is greater or equal to $\frac{1}{5}$ but less than $\frac{1}{3}$; and if the score is greater than or equal to $\frac{1}{2}$, it means the individual or household live in severe multidimensional poverty (UNDP 2021, p.1).

2018 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)

The global MPI directly measures the deprivations people face at the same time in different aspects of their lives. The MPI has three dimensions and ten indicators.



The global MPI helps to end poverty in all its forms and dimensions.

#MultidimensionalPovertyIndex #MPI4SDGs
For more information please visit ophi.org.uk

On the other hand, inequality is “fundamentally about relational disparities, denial of fair and equivalent enjoyment of rights, and the persistence of arbitrary discrepancies in the worth, status, dignity and freedoms of different people” (UNICEF & UN Women 2013, p.33). There are two broad perspectives on inequality: inequality of outcomes, which relates to income wealth, land ownership, and educational achievement; and inequality of opportunities, which results from an individual’s ‘circumstance’ regarding differences in socio-economic background and indicated by unequal access to education, employment, for example (Paes de Barros et al. 2009; UNDP, 2013; UNICEF & UN Women, 2013). Inequality of outcomes and opportunities are two sides of the same coin. Those born into relatively disadvantaged households are most likely to have unequal outcomes (income wealth, educational attainment etc.), translating into fewer opportunities to live a fulfilling life (UNDP 2013; UNICEF & UN Women 2013). Like poverty, inequality can be cyclical, and people can be trapped in it either transiently or permanently.

The cyclical nature of poverty and inequality is prominent in Liberia’s dual citizenship negotiation. Whatever policy solution emanates from the debate has the potential to make a difference in Liberians’ opportunities and distributional outcomes, whether in-country or in the diaspora. In-country Liberians, in particular, believe that the introduction of a dual citizenship policy will give diaspora Liberians and their children an unfair advantage. The possible generational impact is of utmost concern for opponents who believe that dual citizenship will

reinforce inequality in Liberia. This concern is legitimate. For example, Ricardo Paes de Barros and his colleagues arguing from the context of Latin America and the Caribbean, have concluded that inequality of opportunity among children is much more important than inequality of outcomes among adults, hence the need to change the debate to focus on equity (equal chances for all) instead of equality. Their emphasis on equity is significant to the discussion here because they highlight the importance of human opportunity. The assumption is that “one’s destiny is predetermined by circumstances over which one has no control or responsibility, such as skin colour, gender, birthplace, or family wealth” (Paes de Barros et al. 2009, p.xvii). Yet, those circumstances determine the playing field, and in most cases, the government is unable to do much about it (Paes de Barros et al. 2009).

Accordingly, the push and pull that have characterised the demand for dual citizenship either by diaspora Liberians or non-‘Negro’ migrant groups relate to the generational effects of poverty and inequality. This factor has contributed to mutual distrust among stakeholders in the negotiation for dual citizenship. Liberians in-country believe that opposing dual citizenship protects the future, thus insisting that the state prioritise the economy instead of dual citizenship. It becomes evident (Chapters 6 & 7) that systemic inequality and current poverty levels in Liberia have eroded conditions of trust in the political system, generating conflicting and unstable expectations about the future behaviour of elites. These anxieties make it difficult for Liberians to coalesce around a shared understanding of a ‘fair’ (and a justified) dual citizenship policy.

There is a significant difference between the current groupings of Liberians in-country and in the diaspora compared to previous groupings of settlers and Indigenous Liberians. Initially, the elites were predominantly educated, wealthy, and well-connected Americo-Liberians with international links mainly to the United States (Herbert 2014). However, the elite category expanded during the latter part of Tubman’s rule, during William Tolbert and Samuel Doe’s regime, in the civil war period, and in the years after to include a ‘new’ crop of other ethnic and regional individuals and groups (including the Lebanese and other migrant communities), who took advantage of events to acquire privileged social standing. Diaspora Liberians are categorised among the ‘new’ Liberian elites in the dual citizenship debate.

The settler/Indigenous dichotomy that framed Liberia’s settler society until its supposed toppling in the 1980 coup d’état has now morphed into an in-country/diaspora dichotomy. Fears around land dispossession and possible absorption into a foreign culture are now informing the dual citizenship debate. Thus, the portrayal of the Americo-Liberian hegemony

as an exploitative group provides a lens for considering in-country reactions to dual citizenship demands by diaspora Liberians and other migrant communities. In particular, demands by diaspora Liberians are often read as a code for a small, powerful and privileged group's desire to establish their political and economic dominance. Accordingly, diaspora Liberians' engagement in-country is constantly viewed with suspicion. Indeed, the characterisation of the citizenship debate as an 'invasion of foreigners' could be a deflecting tactic by an enduring settler structure that is working to bury its continuous presence and dominance in-country. Hence the significance of settler colonial theory to understanding Liberia's past and how that history is informing contemporary contestations.

Key Terms/Groups/Categories

In this section¹², I unpack the key terms I use throughout the thesis to categorise different stakeholder groups: Indigenous, settler (Americo-Liberians), diaspora and in-country Liberians, and non-'Negro' migrant groups. As I discuss in detail in Chapter 2, these identity categories are not rigid. Instead, they are constructed in relational terms and are considered as categories based on their political projects, practical categorises and the cultural idioms that constitute such a group (Brubaker 2002).

For the purposes of this thesis, I categorise as Indigenous, the collective population of the descendants of the various African ethnic groups that inhabited present-day Liberia before the first group of African American settlers (Americo-Liberians) arrived in 1822 under the sponsorship of the American Colonisation Society (ACS). In the first part of Chapter 3, I discuss the Indigenous groups of the Grain Coast (pre-Liberia) in detail, showing how modern state formation impacted Indigenous political power and institutional arrangements and setting the stage for an unending conflict between the two main groups.

Also, I categorise as settlers, the collective population of formerly enslaved African Americans who were repatriated from America to the Grain Coast, beginning in the 1820s as part of the nation-state project engineered by the American Colonisation Society (ACS). To this effect, I engage in the ongoing debate on whether migrants are settlers to ascertain that the repatriated African Americans and their descendants may have begun their journey as immigrants. Using a settler colonial lens, I argue that they, however, became settlers not only through their establishment of sovereign political and socio-economic systems via native conquest but

¹² This section was included following the recommendation of Reviewer 2. While it largely repeats subsequent sections of the thesis, it purposes as a guide for the reader to navigate the different identity categories.

through their colonial relationship with the people they met upon arrival and the lands they appropriated (see page 58ff). Hence, I use settlers and Americo-Liberians interchangeably throughout this thesis. I unpack theorising Liberia's formation as a settler colony and, by extension, the Americo-Liberians as settlers in Chapter 1 and demonstrate in Chapter 3 the history of settler colonialism in Liberia.

I must emphasise that in the post-war era, the binary of Indigenous versus settler, and more so, the cultural, political and socioeconomic dominance of the Americo-Liberians, is no longer explicit in Liberia's societal mainstream. This is due to years of intermarriages between the settlers and Indigenous Liberians, the overthrow of the settler regime and the ensuing protracted civil conflict. Therefore, it is nearly impossible to discern who is a settler and Indigenous in present-day Liberia. Effectively, everyone is Liberian. There are no direct policies I can find that reference or makes these categories explicit.

Nevertheless, this thesis argues that the structural inequality established by the settler regime continues to define Liberian society today. Indeed, there have been several events (political speeches, demonstrations etc.) in the post-war era where stakeholder sentiments have included issues of Indigeneity and the legitimacy it gives sections of the population to rule Liberia and have access to land and other resources (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7). On the contrary, political leaders (e.g., President George Weah) and government documents (e.g., the National Development Plan (2018-2023)) tend to emphasise the importance of Liberians letting go of past bifurcations of Indigene/ settler categories and instead advocate for a genuine reconciliation to advance political and socio-economic development in Liberia. As stated in the previous section, the Sirleaf and Weah governments have pursued dual citizenship as a post-war strategy to create a sense of belonging, unite the country and encourage investments in Liberia's economy and socio-political development.

The category diaspora Liberians define all people living abroad who identify as diaspora Liberians. The category typically defines Liberians living abroad, many of whom were forced to flee Liberia during the years of political patronage and different stages of the civil war. Many of these Liberians have taken on the citizenship of their host countries, causing them until recently to automatically forfeit their Liberian citizenship per the stipulations of the 1973 Aliens and Nationality Law. On the other hand, in-country Liberians loosely define people who identify as possessing only Liberian citizenship. While this group were largely residing in-country when interviewed as part of this thesis, some were living abroad as students,

professionals etc. and yet defined themselves as in-country because they had not taken the citizenship of their host countries.

Effectively, the binary of diaspora versus in-country Liberians is not a rigid identity category as they come up mostly for contestations over political power, land rights etc., in the dual citizenship debate. These two categories are important in this case because the thesis uses the dual citizenship debate as a lens to understand how those contestations frame the intricate narratives around how identity and belonging are being constructed in the post-war era. Indeed, Liberians move in and out of these categories depending on the issue, who is assigning the groupings and the circumstance of the contestation. As the thesis argues, contemporary contestations over dual citizenship and its manifestations between diaspora and in-country Liberians are underpinned by anxieties over structural inequalities and devastating poverty levels that trace to the settler regime established by the Americo-Liberians. Consequently, the thesis observation that the 'old' settler/Indigenous dichotomy has morphed into a 'new' diaspora/in-country dichotomy is not to suggest that diaspora Liberians are the same people or the descendants of the settlers that 'founded' Liberia. The comparison here is about vast inequalities in economic opportunities, political power and distributional outcomes. Diaspora Liberians in the debate are generally seen as an already privileged group due to their Western education and economic standing and how those privileges translate into political power, access to land and other generational opportunities. Consequently, the argument goes that the allowance of dual citizenship could further entrench structural inequality and position diaspora Liberians to unfairly benefit materially and politically, further marginalising in-country Liberians (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7).

Like diaspora Liberians, non-'Negro' migrant groups are key stakeholders in Liberia's dual citizenship debate. The group include Lebanese, Pakistanis, Indians, Syrians, non-Black Americans, and other migrants with non-'Negro' descent who have been present in Liberia for many years and have been vital supporters of the modern Liberian economy but are banned from claiming citizenship because of the 'Negro' clause in Liberia's citizenship laws (see Chapter 7).

Thesis Structure

Beyond this introduction, I have structured the thesis into two main parts:

Part 1: Re-Theorising Liberia's History as a Settler Colony

In this section, I outline the theoretical (Chapter 1) and methodological framework (Chapter 2) utilised in the thesis. I analyse the origins of the Liberian state using the lens of settler colonial theory (Chapter 3) and conclude the section with an analysis of the brutal end to Liberia's settler regime (Chapter 4).

Chapter 1 provides a theoretical grounding for my argument that Liberia was established as a settler colonial project. It begins with an overview of the major perspectives in settler colonial studies, paying particular attention to the exposition of settler colonialism as a distinct form of colonial domination that is an ongoing structure rather than a discrete event. In this instance, I employ (and in some cases criticise) the analytical frames provided by Wolfe, Veracini, Mamdani, and other scholars in the field. Veracini's (2010, 2013) theorisation of settler colonialism as "neither entirely separate, nor part of the same conceptual field" as classical colonialism; Mamdani's (1998, 2020) differentiation between immigrants and settlers; and Moreton-Robinson's (2015) delineation of race as purposefully fundamental to indigeneity and sovereignty as opposed to Wolfe's (1999, 2006) consideration of race as a function of territoriality in settler colonial projects are all crucial.

The second part of Chapter 1 presents Liberia's formation as a unique form of a settler colonial project. This section probes the roots of structural inequality in the country, which I argue are foundational to current struggles over identity and belonging. Here, I deploy 'whiteness' as a knowledge system and make a case for categorising the Americo-Liberians as settlers. I argue that the Americo-Liberians assumed a non-Black identity in Liberia to facilitate their racialisation of the Indigenous groups as inferior. I contend that the Americo-Liberians reproduced the system of white supremacy that typically structures settler colonial societies. This section further develops the theoretical contributions of this thesis.

Chapter 2 presents the conceptual framework and the study's research design. The first section outlines the fundamental concepts of the research – identity, ethnicity and belonging. In the second section, I argue for the appropriateness of a qualitative research design, and the use of online interviews and interpretive content analysis as supplementary data collection methods.

Chapter 3 summarises the historical *movements* of the two main groups from which Liberia originated. Here, I show that the so-called Indigenous groups were mostly “Native Settlers” (Mamdani 1998) because most migrated to present-day Liberia, with their migrations dating as far back as the 12th century or possibly earlier (Kraaij 2015). However, these Native Settlers became Natives/Indigenous through the praxis and tools of settler colonialism deployed by the Americo-Liberian regime. Additionally, while the Americo-Liberians may have begun their journeys as immigrants, they became settlers following their formation of a settler colonial regime and their racialisation of the Indigenous groups as primitive and inferior. I examine the nature of Indigenous political and social structures before the settlers’ arrival to show how the formation of the modern state impacted Indigenous political power and institutional arrangements. The chapter reveals the settler colonial strategies that the Americo-Liberian regime utilised to legitimise its territorial sovereignty and highlights the creation of economic and socio-political structures that continue to underpin systemic inequality in Liberia today.

Chapter 4 investigates the makings of a New Liberia aimed at including Indigenous Liberians in the societal mainstream. I briefly review the presidencies of Tubman and Tolbert, focusing on their attempts and failures at national integration. I argue that such initiatives are strategies of settler regimes to engage Indigenous demands within the confines of the settler structure. The chapter illustrates the significance of deep-seated inequality in Liberian society, the emergence of a new social class, and how this new social class’s fight to decolonise eventually culminated in Liberia’s brutal fourteen-year civil war. I argue that categorising these tensions as just ethnic or resource wars simplifies what is instead a very complex social conflict that has its origins in Liberia’s history as a settler regime. This chapter gives meaning to Liberians’ mass migration into the diaspora and sets the scene for the prominence of the dual citizenship debate in the post-conflict phase.

Part 2: Contestations Over What it Means to be a Liberian.

This part of the thesis analyses how identity and belonging are being constructed in the post-war era based on the understanding of Liberia’s past as a settler colony. It considers how the three stakeholder groups – the Liberian government, Liberian diaspora groups, and Liberians in-country – are shaping the debate on dual citizenship and, more generally, the construction of a collective Liberian identity (Chapters 5, 6 & 7).

Chapter 5 provides insights into the motivation of the Liberian state in its engagement with its population abroad. First, the state deems remittances insignificant to its goal of inclusive

and sustainable development. Instead, diaspora Liberians must demonstrate their patriotism by making macro contributions such as returning home to boost the workforce, investments, jobs creation and other initiatives in line with the national development agenda. Second, the state promotes its diaspora engagement as a corrective approach to past mistakes of exclusionary politics and nation-building. I argue, however, that underlying the messaging of restorative inclusiveness is a calculated tactic by the state to locate settler colonialism in the past, making diaspora Liberians feel included, so they do not revert to alleged past practices of sponsoring resistance against incumbent governments.

Returning the focus to the other two stakeholder groups, Chapters 6 and 7 reveal the meanings Liberians abroad and in-country attach to their identity or *Liberianness*.

Chapter 6 reveals the intimacies of the dual citizenship debate and presents the arguments of proponents and opponents. It presents the legal origins of the debate to show that Liberia has continually used citizenship and related identity categories to demarcate boundaries of belonging to the Liberian society. Rooted in concerns about structural inequality and the impact of an open policy on an equitable society, the chapter shows that the debate is shaped by fears around land dispossession and the possible normalisation of a foreign culture as experienced by Indigenous Liberians during the era of the Americo-Liberian hegemony.

Chapter 7 presents the framing of *Liberianness*. The chapter contends that Liberians who continue to reject dual nationality and insist on maintaining Liberia's infamous racial clause do so because of the lingering fear of being recolonised by another group of domineering elites. These Liberians consider dual citizenship as a recolonising tool. Beyond the dominant economic argument that frames the debate, the chapter reveals that diaspora Liberians' claims for dual citizenship are informed by experiences of dual marginalisation, first in their homeland because of their diaspora status and in their host countries because of their Liberian origins and culture. Hence, they consider access to dual nationality a practical strategy that formalises their *Liberianness* and provides them and their children a route back to their *real home*.

The chapter uses the Lebanese community in Liberia as a lens to understand the role of the racial clause in the citizenship negotiations. It shows that the racialised economic positioning of those claiming dual citizenship is fundamental to how the general populace perceives the negotiations, impacting their restrictive construction of the Liberian identity. I argue that in-country Liberians purposefully construct *Liberianness* as rooted in origin and culture and as much more than citizenship to exclude claimants of dual citizenship in Liberia.

The conclusion, **Chapter 8**, summarises the thesis' main arguments and discusses the implications of the key findings. I propose future avenues for settler colonial studies beyond the CANZUS states.

In its argument that contestations around identity and belonging in post-conflict Liberia reflect the country's background as a settler colonial project, this thesis is significant as Liberia provides an important site for theorising settler colonialism. I develop this argument in the following chapter.

Part 1: Re-Theorising Liberia's History as a Settler Colony

This part of the thesis re-theorises Liberia's history as a settler colony. I show Liberia's colonial background, particularly the injustices and enduring inequalities perpetrated by the Americo-Liberian settlers and their descendants against the Indigenous African groups, which ultimately climaxed into the 1980 coup d'état and the ensuing civil wars.

Part 1 of the thesis introduces my argument that contemporary debates over identity, belonging and who can legitimately call Liberia home are influenced by Liberia's history as a settler colony that entrenched inequalities to privilege the settler class.

Understanding Liberia through a settler colonial lens helps us recognise and articulate the structural political and socio-economic inequalities that continue to frame the lives of many Liberians today.

Chapter 1: Theorising Settler Colonialism in a Non-White Settler Nation

Introduction

Liberia was a settler colonial regime. So, there is much to gain from settler colonial theory in studying identity construction in post-conflict Liberia. Settler colonialism is a distinct form of colonial domination that operates through a temporal and socio-spatial eliminatory logic (Gniadek 2017; Kauanui 2017; Wolfe 2006). It is ongoing colonialism premised on the destruction of Indigenous communities to establish a new society and stabilise the power of white settler nations and their control over property and land (Wolfe 1999, 2006; Veracini 2010, 2013; Coulthard 2014). The main difference between settler colonialism and classical (European) colonisation of Africa for example, is the former's continuing nature and the inability of the settler society to decolonise structurally because the settler has come to stay (Veracini 2013; Watts 2020).

On the one hand, Liberia's formation is not an exception from other settler colonies. The Americo-Liberians, like settlers in the CANZUS states, pursued the political, cultural, and demographic elimination of Indigenous sovereignties to facilitate access to territory and sustain settler dominance. On the other hand, Liberia is an exception because of its unique history as a country that we normatively think of as having never been colonised, even though it was, in fact, colonised by formerly enslaved African Americans. An analysis of Liberian history and present reveals a settler structure whose construction in the early 18th century combined varying rationales and complexities that are at times contradictory, making it a case that does not fit comfortably within any existing explanation of colonialism.

The contemporary theorisation of settler colonialism has primarily focused on the CANZUS states and, more recently, Israel/Palestine because of Patrick Wolfe's theoretical emphasis on the settlers' abiding presence and ongoing colonisation through a logic of elimination towards Indigenous societies to facilitate access to territory. Liberia and several other states in Africa and elsewhere would typically not make the list of settler colonies because of their decolonial/post-colonial status. However, in this thesis, I argue that there is much more in the analytical framework of settler colonial theory that we can use to understand the historical foundations of contexts like Liberia. One of the significant features of settler colonialism is its enduring structures. I contend that it is within these systemic structures that we encounter the

true nature of settler colonialism in contexts like Liberia. Indeed, Wolfe has argued that by recognising settler colonialism as a structure rather than an event, we can keep in view “the continuities, discontinuities, adjustments, and departures” of “the historical development and complexification of settler society” (2006, p.402). Focusing on the lasting structural features allows us to perceive the underlying elements of Liberia’s formation and how these come to shape socio-political relations today.

This chapter articulates Liberia’s formation as a settler colonial project, making a case for recognising the Americo-Liberians as settlers and their colonisation of the Indigenous Africans they met upon arrival. It explains the thesis argument that contemporary contestations around identity and belonging are influenced by Liberia’s complex history as a settler colony. The chapter foregrounds my re-theorisation of Liberia’s history, from its construction as a settler colonial project to its supposed end in August 2003 at the official conclusion of the civil war (Chapters 3 & 4).

To understand the nuances of Liberia’s case, I am combining settler colonial theory with some tenets of critical race theory. These frameworks do not always speak to each other very well, but they offer something important to the exposition of Liberia’s formation as a settler state. From settler colonial theory, I employ the language of settlerness and the utilisation of racial violence in the founding of the settler state and the persistent structural features of settler colonialism. From critical race theory, I deploy ‘whiteness’ as a knowledge system that different actors can reproduce in different environments regardless of their racial positioning in the global system. This allows us to see that the Americo-Liberians, while Black, nevertheless enacted white supremacy in their colonisation of Liberia. I contend that the Americo-Liberians embodied whiteness and deployed it as political power and socioeconomic and cultural capital in their racialisation of the Indigenous populations as savages.

This chapter’s integrative framework contributes to the further development of settler colonial studies. The theoretical reconsideration I articulate here assumes that Liberia should be understood as a product of Euro-American imperialism and the transatlantic slave trade. Accordingly, the Americo-Liberians and the Liberian settler state emerged from the racial violence inherent in colonial domination and Euro-American imperial designs. But as outlined in the introductory chapter, Liberia’s case presents an opportunity to learn from a unique settler society where the colonial antagonists were Black people.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first discusses settler colonial studies and outlines the difference between classical and settler colonialism, focusing on the latter's persistent structural features. Veracini (2013, 2010) has continually emphasised that while colonialism and settler colonialism often overlap in practice, they should be conceptualised as distinct concepts. In focusing on the structural strategies of settler states, I present "the settler situation as it is actually experienced on the ground" (Tout 2018, p.48).

The second section operationalises settler colonial theory in a non-white settler nation – Liberia. This section grapples with the significance of *movement*, *conquest* and *race* in making the settler (and the native). I first argue that considering Liberia's migratory history, movement and conquest are not sufficient to distinguish the native from the settler. Instead, I consider Evri and Kotef's (2020) argument that the type of movement that produces settlerisation is a function of the moving person's relationship to place and people. Thus, the settlerisation of the Americo-Liberians derives from the racialised relations *they* developed towards the Indigenous peoples whose lands they appropriated. Following the tenets of critical race theory, I employ whiteness as a knowledge system that can be reproduced not just by white people. Liberia shows that non-white people can also take on the racial hierarchy of whiteness and demonstrates how that hierarchy maps onto colonial projects. I argue that the Americo-Liberians, though Black in complexion, reproduced the system of white supremacy that typically underpins settler colonialism. Consequently, in their racialisation of the natives as inferior, the Americo-Liberians saw themselves as a racial category above African Blackness.

Understanding Settler Colonial Theory

The field of settler colonial studies examines the historical and present impacts of settler states on Indigenous peoples and seeks to fill the perceived gaps in postcolonial theory. In the late 1990s it became evident to a range of scholars that it is not useful to assess settler colonialism's invasive and persistent structures using the same tools developed for postcolonial studies. Kauanui (2021) maintains that this particular origin story establishes the field's "discontinuities to postcolonial studies" (p.290). According to Carey and Silverstein (2020, p.1), "where the 'post' in postcolonialism refers to the ongoing effects of colonial rule in states that have been formally decolonised, settler colonial studies consider those political and geographic contexts in which the colonisers never left."

Liberia represents an interesting puzzle regarding the distinction between settler and postcolonialism. Colloquially, the country is sometimes lumped into the bracket of postcolonial

African countries that underwent decolonisation in the 20th century. In some narratives, it is heralded as one of two African countries that were never colonised¹³. By contrast, I reject both narratives through a re-theorisation of Liberia's history as a settler society established by formerly enslaved African Americans, whom I argue were colonisers despite their cosmetic appearance. Also, the Americo-Liberian settlers never left Liberia.

The Australian anthropologist Patrick Wolfe is credited with articulating settler colonial theory despite the fact that the theoretical framework has its foundations in the works of Indigenous activists and scholars in Australia and beyond, whose efforts exposed the violent political, economic, and socio-cultural arrangements and territorial dispossessions that continue to shape Indigenous lives and communities (Veracini 2013, 2010). Indigenous peoples' assertions of their abiding sovereignties and right to self-determination invigorated the development of the theory (Veracini 2013). Nevertheless, it was Wolfe (1999) who responded to the shift in colonial studies concerning the abiding presence of the settler with his theorisation of settler colonialism as premised on white settler states pursuing the elimination of Indigenous populations and societies to access territory/land.

Consequently, a vital task of settler colonial studies has been to articulate the differentiation between settler colonies (settler colonialism) and administered colonies (classical colonialism). Watts (2020, p.846) provides a practical distinction: in classical colonialism,

a minority exogenous population exploits local resources using the labour of a majority Indigenous population. In settler colonies, an exogenous majority population occupies the colonial space with an eye toward permanent inhabitation, unilateral sovereignty, and [a desire for] the full cultural and demographic removal of the [I]ndigenous populations

Classical colonialism operated on the logic of exploitation. As such, colonisers invested in the governance of the Indigenous population and recruited Indigenous elites and collaborators into their economic ventures. Settler colonialism, by contrast, operates on the logic of elimination

¹³ Some scholars have used terms such as 'pseudo-colonial'; 'quasi-colonial'; 'caste-like'; neo-colonial and similar terminologies to describe the relationship between the Black settlers and the Indigenous Africans (see Liebenow 1987; Gershoni 1985; Akpan 1973; Kieh 2008). Even then, these terminologies are used descriptively but not as a lens to analyse the impact of Liberia's formation as a settler-colonial regime on the lives of Indigenous Africans. Samuel Toe (2020) provides an insightful discussion on the conceptual inconsistencies of the term 'colonial' and its unsystematic use within Liberia's history.

(Wolfe 2006). Its interest lies in land seizures, the destruction of Indigenous societies and the displacement of Indigenous peoples beyond the ever-expanding frontier settlement.

According to Wolfe (1999, 2006), the primary objective of settler colonialism is the acquisition of the land itself. Unlike other forms of colonialism, where the focus is on the extraction of surplus value through the *exploitation* of colonised territories and Indigenous labour, the economic imperative of settler colonialism is to *acquire* the land for permanent settlement (Wolfe 2006). The logic of settler colonialism is the political, cultural and demographic elimination of pre-existing sovereign Indigenous entities by settlers seeking to gain access to the territory. Wolfe (1999, 2006) argued that white settler nations like Australia employed the fiction of *terra nullius* to justify their use of state violence to erase or at least replace Indigenous presence (see also van der Walle 2018).

The contemporary understanding of settler colonialism as an enduring structure rather than a historical event derives from Wolfe's theorisation. There is no end to settler occupation, thus making Indigenous dispossession a continuous and ongoing process. Indeed, the ongoing nature of settler colonisation, in the CANZUS states at least, suggests that "native dispossession is not one historical moment in a teleology of capitalist development". Instead, settler colonialism adapts "over time in ways that operate in conjunction with other forms of expropriation and subjection and the differential devaluation of racialized peoples" (Goldstein 2017, p.45; see also Cacho 2012, p.17).

Wolfe (2006, p.388), has argued that settler colonialism "destroys to replace" to emphasise its uniqueness. He juxtaposes the racialised roles of enslaved Black people and Indigenous people in the formation of the United States to lend meaning to his argument that settler colonialism, unlike classical colonialism, operates through a "logic of elimination". He notes that the wealth of an enslaver is augmented by an increasing population of enslaved people due to the inclusive taxonomy of slavery, which automatically enslaves the offspring of an enslaved person. Colonial structures were racialised using the 'one-drop rule', thus, mapping Blackness onto any individual with an African ancestry irrespective of their phenotypical appearance even after the end of slavery. Wolfe's point here is that enslaved Africans and their descendants were indispensable to America due to the multiplying labour they provided.

In contrast, Indigenous reproduction was counterproductive because any increase in those populations gets in the way of the acquisition of Indigenous territory, the commodity most coveted by the settler nation. Wolfe writes:

Whatever settlers may say ... the primary motive for elimination [of the native] is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element (2006, p. 388).

Consequently, America sought to eliminate Indigenous people using restrictive racial classifications and legal and political arrangements (for example, blood quantum regulations). In a 2010 interview with the Kānaka Maoli scholar J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Wolfe explains that:

Indigenous people's historical role in settler colonialism is to disappear so far as the Europeans go, to get out of the way, to be eliminated, in order that the Europeans can bring in their subordinated, coerced labor, mix that labor with the soil, which is to say set it to work on the expropriated land and produce a surplus profit for the colonizer (Kauanui and Wolfe 2018, pp.346-7).

In his comparison of the roles played by Indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans in the formation of America, Wolfe reveals how settler societies racialise subjugated peoples in different but complementary ways in order to sustain settler dominance. Wolfe's argument about the colonial logic of elimination as the organising principle of settler societies is powerful and persuasive, especially in contexts like Australia, the United States, Canada and elsewhere. In this regard, the settler state seems to always engage Indigenous resistance to colonisation and demands for self-determination within the structural confines of the settler order (Coulthard 2014; Simpson 2018).

Veracini's (2016) argument that settler colonialism is related to classical colonialism is also enlightening. He clarifies that both settler and classical colonialism are "defined by unequal relationships: settler vs native/indigenous in the former and coloniser vs colonised in the latter". Yet, the two forms of domination are inherently different. Veracini proposes that while an exogenous collective is present in both forms of colonial domination, unlike classical colonialism, settler colonies aim to permanently replace Indigenous lives and communities. Like Wolfe, Veracini argues that a thriving settler colony is a violent act against geography, in that it turns someone else's place/home into space and then into a place again – the latter place tends to look like the home the settlers left behind, if not, they compensate (Veracini 2016, pp.4-5). Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis (1995) have previously located settlers' 'geographical violence' in areas they call 'white dominions' – Canada, New Zealand and Australia. These settler societies maintained dependent relations with their European sponsor even after

considerable political and economic development. Consequently, “the dominant culture and institutions are fashioned directly on those from the ‘mother’ country” (Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis 1995, pp.3-4). The settlers’ motive to transform the appropriated lands to resemble the ‘home’ they left behind is very significant as I discuss Liberia’s case.

Strategies of Settler Colonial States

The irreducible territorial imperative of settler colonialism has grave consequences for the pre-existing (Indigenous) populations because “settlers are made by conquest, not just by immigration” (Mamdani 1998, p.1). Settlers’ determination to make appropriated territory their permanent home shapes all social, economic, and political relations with the Indigenous population (Weitzer 1990, p.26). Thus, in settler states, judicial, police, military and financial institutions are all designed to dispossess, displace and even massacre Indigenous people to create a new capitalist society (Hirano 2007, p.55). Accordingly, Veracini (2010) concludes that the aspirational permanence of the settler is one of the most significant features of settler colonialism and what distinguishes it from classical colonialism. In his view, the settler aspiration to remain permanently on appropriated lands makes discussion about decolonisation or a postcolonial situation improbable because the settler has come to stay.

Weitzer (1990, pp.26-29) argues that the achievement of autonomy from the metropole, particularly in the exercise of political authority and coercive power is imperative for the stability of settler societies as it provides them with room to mould their economic, political, and socio-cultural structures. Nevertheless, in some settler societies, the settlers either mould these structures to resemble the culture and institutions of the metropole (Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis 1995) or sometimes emulate aspects of indigene identity to set them apart from the metropole (Hixson 2013). The stability of the settler state is also paramount. Settler regimes consolidate control by adopting strategies geared towards preventing or containing Indigenous threats and political mobilisation while simultaneously discouraging the interference of the metropole (see also Elkins & Pedersen 2005, p.2).

According to Good (1976), settler societies’ political rigidity separates them from other forms of colonisation. In his analysis, Weitzer (1990) explains that using force to maintain social cohesion was rarely sufficient or desirable in *some* settler societies. Instead, they implemented wide-ranging systems of control that restricted physical mobility and ensured the continuous economic dependence of the subordinate population to the extent that overt physical violence

was rarely necessary¹⁴. He notes that settler societies vary in how they manage Indigenous people. For example, while conciliation measures were more evident in Taiwan and during the latter stages of settler rule in Liberia, it was the opposite in places like South Africa, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and Ulster (Northern Ireland). Nonetheless, in all of these cases, a suppressed native population was crucial for the stability of settler supremacy and their hold on political power. Hence, even in cases where the settler state accommodated the Indigenous population using ‘soft’ measures, colonial strategies guarded against the advancement of the subordinate population.

The unity of the settler collective or what Weitzer calls ‘caste solidarity’ is critical to settler supremacy. Usually, a single or dominant political system works to lessen friction among settlers by rewarding loyal supporters and punishing dissenters. Cracks in the settler monolith due to class divisions and conflicts along political cleavages, ethnicity, or culture can undermine the state’s capacity and create opportunities for Indigenous mobilisation. Weitzer (1990) writes:

[Settler] regimes often dramatize communal differences by marshalling the folk wisdom of native ‘paganism,’ ‘barbarism,’ ‘animalism,’ ‘untrustworthiness,’ and ‘subversiveness’. As material incentives, they commonly dispense privileges to the lower echelons of the settler caste – where they exist in significant numbers – to avert the growth of class alliances with natives (pp.24–26).

For settlers to turn Indigenous places into a space and then a home that resembles the metropole, as concluded by Veracini (2016), settlers – and the settler state – are compelled to eliminate the existing Indigenous population to enable “their own direct connection with the land” (Tout 2018, p.51). In the face of Indigenous resistance and refusal to be eliminated, settler societies adopt and reproduce varying colonial strategies designed to destroy (or at least displace) and replace the sovereign indigene. The disappearance or defeat of Indigenous populations facilitates settler societies’ development into an economy integrated into the global market (Denoon 1983). Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis (1995) have also shown that settler societies typically have extensive systems of exclusion and exploitation of Indigenous people and ‘alien’ others using a variety of coercive, ideological, legal, administrative and cooperative

¹⁴ In contrast to Weitzer (1990), theorisations about settler colonialism in the CANZUS states especially have demonstrated the use of overt physical violence in the establishment of settler societies (see Wolfe 1999, 2006; Veracini 2010)

mechanisms. Indeed, it was commonplace for settler societies to model or adopt the systems of control and exploitative practices that have been successful elsewhere. A case in point is the modelling of apartheid on the United States' treatment of Indigenous populations (Mamdani 2020).

In his often-cited refrain, Wolfe has argued that "invasion is a structure, not an event" (1999, p.2); that the colonial logic of elimination persists in Australia and elsewhere since the continuous presence of Indigenous populations in settler states poses an enduring threat to the legitimacy of the settler order. Nevertheless, he distinguishes between direct acts of elimination through the violence of the frontier phase of settler colonialism and the more ongoing embedding of a logic of elimination evident in a desire for the symbolic elimination or 'transfer' of Indigenous peoples. According to Wolfe (1994), symbolic elimination manifests through various state policies of protection, assimilation, integration, self-determination, practical reconciliation, and so on.

In his theoretical overview of settler colonialism, Veracini (2010, pp.33-52) outlines 26 settler strategies that facilitate the 'transfer' of Indigenous populations either literally or symbolically to enable the settler colony to achieve territorial permanence. Following Wolfe's logic of elimination, Veracini argues that "all settler projects are foundationally premised on fantasies of ultimately 'cleansing' the settler body politic of its (indigenous and exogenous) alterities" (p.33). The diversity of settler strategies of transfer is informative. It suggests that settler regimes deploy multiple modalities that continually adapt to changing local and international circumstances. Veracini's exhaustive list and analysis by Wolfe, Weitzer and others clarify that settler colonial projects do not follow a uniform pattern or deploy similar colonial strategies.

The critical aspect of settler colonial phenomena with which this thesis is concerned relates to the first part of Veracini's definition of settler colonialism as "circumstances where colonisers 'come to stay' and to establish new political orders for themselves, rather than to exploit native labour" (2013, p. 313). The exploitation of native labour may not be the settler states' primary motivation. Yet, in reality, native labour is, in some cases, crucial for settler societies' socio-economic development. Liberia is one such case. This thesis adds to debates on the application of settler colonial theory to contexts where the settlers did not emerge as the majority and, more importantly, spaces where Wolfe's understanding of the colonial logic of elimination does not necessarily apply even though some aspects of settler colonialism are in evidence.

Reservations about Settler Colonial Studies

It is complex to ascertain the locations of settler colonialism. As Adam Barker asks: “How does one identify exactly where and when settler colonisation happens given the pervasiveness of its structures and institutions, and normalisation of its associated and myriad lifestyles?” (2012, np). The complexity of locating settler colonialism relates partly to the focus of historical accounts of settler colonies. Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and academics of different disciplines and research fields have presented important critiques that demonstrate the imperfections of settler colonial studies and the areas that need further work. The critiques include the field’s possible erasure of Indigenous studies¹⁵; the loss of rich Indigenous writings that do not fit neatly into the boundaries of academic scholarship; the politics of knowledge production as it relates to the race and/or indigeneity of the scholars; the capacity of the field to account for Indigenous agency; its overly structural theorisations; the possible erasure of Black people because there appears to be no room in the settler colonial paradigm to imagine settler decolonisation and many others (see King 2021; Sommerville 2021; Barker 2011, 2017; Maddison & Shepherd 2014; Rowse 2013, 2014; Cavanagh 2012, pp.29-30; Strakosch & Macoun 2012).

Of particular relevance to this thesis is the concern that analyses of settler societies have, for a long time, concentrated on a narrow range of societies, either those that emerged due to British imperialism or settler colonies that took hold in the 19th and late 20th centuries (Stasiulis & Yuval-Davis, 1995). This narrow focus in contemporary times is partly due to Wolfe’s theorisation of settler colonialism as premised on the abiding presence of the settler collective, their pursuance of land/territory (elimination of the native) and the inability of the settler state to decolonise structurally. But as I have indicated earlier, while Wolfe’s argument holds for the CANZUS states, there is more to his analytical definition that allows us to consider other states as sites of settler colonialism, although these states may not have all the defining characteristics. Deviating from Wolfe’s framework facilitates the consideration of other settler states that are different (in purely theoretical terms) and may have had varying motivating

¹⁵ The debate over whether settler colonial studies erase Indigenous studies is complex because they are two separate disciplines (Veracini 2021). J. Kēhaulani Kauanui’s (2021) response on the usefulness of settler colonial studies is instructive here, as she argues that the field does not erase but speak alongside Indigenous studies. Still, Alice Te Punga Somerville (2021) contention that colonialism continues to reproduce the same old power structures about hiring, funding, promotions, pathways into administration and several other biases, suggesting that Indigenous scholars may experience the academy “more as finite land than infinite knowledge” (p.280) points to the complexity of the debate.

rationales for colonising Indigenous populations. Weitzer (1990, pp.25-26), for example has considered cases such as Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and others¹⁶.

Notwithstanding the varying histories of settler states across the globe, the application of settler colonial theory beyond the Anglophone settler regimes is very recent. In its contemporary iteration, settler colonial theory relates primarily to the experiences of First Nations people in Australia, Māori in Aotearoa/New Zealand, First Nations in the United States of America and in Canada, Palestinians in Israel/Palestine and many peoples in Southern Africa¹⁷. But as a transnational framework, settler colonial theory is still an emerging field, thus allowing scholars to apply its insights to various sites, including some postcolonial countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, the Middle East and elsewhere.

Postcolonial African countries such as Algeria, South Africa, Kenya, Namibia, Mozambique, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and others provided some of the context for the formative work of settler colonial studies¹⁸. Protracted anti-colonial struggles on the African continent in the 1960s and 1970s involving settler minorities provided a context where the conquest and domination of these African countries were considered structurally different from other colonised states. Veracini (2013) notes that ‘settler colonialism’ as an analytical inquiry emerged during this period as it was used to describe these specific colonial forms. Theoretical developments by Arghiri Emmanuel (1972), Ronald Horvath (1972), and later Kenneth Good (1974, 1976) during this period emphasised the “structural importance of the settler presence”, which led to the consideration of colonialism and settler colonialism “as related and yet separate categories” (Veracini 2013, p.323).

Yet, these African nations are now considered to be outside the ‘new’ settler colonial studies because of the relatively small size of the settler populations. The structural decolonisation of

¹⁶ As previously mentioned, settler colonialism is increasing being theorised beyond Anglophone settler regimes such as Latin America (Castellanos 2017), and so on.

¹⁷ Edward Cavanagh (2012) has proposed a grouping of ‘Anglo’ CANZUSSA (instead of CANZUS) states to enable the inclusion of Southern Africa as a site of settler colonialism. He maintains that settler colonisers’ continued dominance over Indigenous populations is happening beyond Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States (CANZUS states). He notes, for example, the settler colonial project in Palestine, the settler bloc in Hawaii dominating the Indigenous Polynesian community, Soviet settlers in Siberia and the settler government in Northern Ireland. According to Cavanagh (2012, pp.24-5), the list of settler colonies could be expanded further if we considered the “complicated genealogies of conflict across the contested terrains of Africa and Asia”.

¹⁸ Kauanui (2021) provides a genealogy of settler colonial studies that counters assertions that the field originated in Australia (Veracini 2021). She provides multiple and often unrecognised origins of settler colonial theory and link early iterations of the field to the US, Hawaii and the Palestinian context.

these states renders incomplete the logic of elimination envisioned by Wolfe, hence their exclusion from the contemporary iteration of settler colonial theory. Through decolonisation, the settler collective, in some of these cases, returned to the metropole (Algeria) or was expelled by nationalist forces (Libya). South Africa's post-apartheid democratic society is quite peculiar. In fact, scholars such as Edward Cavanagh (2012) have argued that South Africa should be considered one of the white dominions. Cavanagh's proposal stems from scholars unjustifiably omitting South Africa as a site of settler colonialism. Cavanagh (2013) again utilises settler colonial theory in his exploration of apartheid and dispossession in South Africa. South Africa shows that (political) decolonisation achieved very little change for Black South Africans with regard to the systemic inequalities established first by colonisation and later by the apartheid system. The transition from apartheid to democratic governance was designed to appease the settlers and prevent white capital flight, so while Black South Africans today are the majority in an inclusive democratic system, the country is still colonised economically. I contend that South Africa and countries like Liberia epitomise the argument that settler colonialism is an enduring structure. Instead of overlooking them, the differences of these settler colonies (in purely theoretical terms) provide a great opportunity to not only interrogate the defining features of settler colonialism, but also to further develop the analytical power of settler colonial theory.

Beyond decolonisation, native populations in Africa are not considered "Fourth World"¹⁹ peoples" because they were not a minority group, unlike those in the CANZUS states. Distinguishing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people on a continent where most people identify as native has remained problematic for policymakers and Indigenous activists alike. Indeed, others have indicated that by observing how the United Nations' employs the term, African nations do not have '[I]ndigenous peoples' (LeFevre 2015). Nevertheless, Balaton-Chrimes' (2011, 2013, 2016) work on Kenyan Nubians is instructive on the contested nature of indigeneity²⁰ in African studies and perhaps the need to link theory with the practical dilemmas of such groups in Africa and beyond (see also Hodgson 2011).

¹⁹ "First Nations leader George Manuel (Neskonlith Indian Band of the Shuswap Nation) coined the term Fourth World to name the Indigenous peoples who today are deprived of the right to their own territories and its resources" (Kauanui 2021, pp. 294-5; see Manuel *et al.*, 2019).

²⁰ A review of the complexities of indigeneity in Africa is beyond the mandate of this thesis (see Pelican 2009; Hodgson 2011; Balaton-Chrimes 2016).

Patrick Wolfe, for example, excludes African countries from his analysis because colonisation and indigeneity on the continent does not fit his definition of settler colonialism which emphasises settlers' continual presence and their aspiration for the elimination of Indigenous societies. Wolfe (2006) only includes Africa to support his arguments on the settler colonial "logic of elimination" by differentiating between the racialised roles performed by enslaved Africans and First Nations in the formation of the United States as a settler society.

In his critique of Wolfe's 2016 book *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*, Kelley argues that Wolfe misrecognised Africans as Black Americans and unwittingly contributed to what was a process of elimination. Kelley draws on Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism* (2000 [1983]) to show that slavery was a form of colonial elimination because it prepared the African body for labour through the elimination of its culture, identity, and consciousness. As Robinson argues (2000, pp.121-122):

The cargoes of the slave ships were real human beings, notwithstanding their manner of transport, the bills of *ladino*, the captains' logs, and trade account books that designated them otherwise.

... the cargoes of laborers also contained African cultures, critical mixes and admixtures of language and thought, of cosmology and metaphysics, of habits, beliefs, and morality. These were the actual terms of their humanity. These cargoes, then, did not consist of intellectual isolates or deculturated Blacks—men, women, and children separated from their previous universe. African labor brought the past with it, a past that had produced it and settled on it the first elements of consciousness and comprehension.

Consequently, for all intents and purposes, the process of ripping Africans from their lands and Indigenous communities and cauterising any semblance of dignity through enslavement could be categorised under Wolfe's colonial logic of elimination. I agree with Kelley's critique to some extent, recognising that the forced migration of Africans through the transatlantic slave trade should count as a form of elimination from their Indigenous communities in Africa. Indeed, there is no doubt about the impacts of slavery and colonialism's inherent eliminatory powers on colonised societies and Indigenous peoples' belief systems. The Kenyan scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986, p.3) characterises the enduring impact of European and American imperialism on Africa and its people as an explosion of a 'cultural bomb' that works to:

annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their language, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, despondency, and a collective death-wish. Amidst this wasteland which it has created, imperialism presents itself as the cure and demands that the dependent sing hymns of praise with the constant refrain: 'Theft is holy'.

Nevertheless, Kelley's critique misses the mark due to his focus on enslaved Africans in the United States. Like many, Kelley fails to recognise the complex relationship between European settlers, (forced) migrants, racialised people, and First Nations. I have acknowledged that there is always a need in these debates to recognise global structures of power that organise such migration flows. At the same time, it is imperative to admit that migrants of different backgrounds are participants in the continual dispossession of Indigenous people, whether deliberately or unwittingly (Lawrence & Dua 2005; see also Villegas et al. 2020; Kauanui & Wolfe 2018).

Wolfe clarifies in his writings that the transatlantic slave trade had two primary purposes: to create European wealth and to help establish new settler colonies such as the United States by working the stolen Indigenous lands. However, his main argument is that the CANZUS states, Israel/Palestine, and others are settler colonies because of the logic of elimination directed at First Nations. This argument is accurate. Still, it is curious that Wolfe, even in his last work (*Traces of History*), did not include the African context – South Africa especially – in his analysis.

But as Kelley argues, Wolfe's exclusion of Africa as settler colonies has more to do with decolonisation than whether white settlers came to stay in places like South Africa, Zimbabwe or Congo. Kelley (2017, p.268) contends that Wolfe's conceptual framework fails to account for labour regimes where the natives were simultaneously 'eliminated' and exploited on the African continent (see also Mitchell 2014, c2008; Keegan 1996). Destruction or replacement

of the native population was not the primary objective in places like South Africa or the Congo. Still, the settler collective wanted “land *and* labour but not the *people*”, which suggest “they sought to eliminate stable communities and their cultures of resistance” (Kelley 2017, p.268).

Kelley draws a plausible comparison between Robinson’s articulation of slavery’s eliminatory impact on African communities and people in *Black Marxism*, (a process identified as “the destruction of the African and the invention of the ‘Negro’”) and Wolfe’s reasoning on the uniqueness of settler colonialism: “In destroying to replace, this logic [of elimination] encompasses more than the summary liquidation of Indigenous people”. Accordingly, Kelley maintains that Wolfe’s advancement of the colonial logic of elimination as the “organising principle of settler colonial society” should hold true for settler societies in Africa. Instead, Wolfe’s limitation of settler colonial theory to a narrow range of settler societies in his analysis works to obscure the concept’s transnational and transcultural character. In the context of Africa especially, I agree with Kelley’s claims that Wolfe’s strict interpretation of settler colonialism “*eliminates the settler* from African history” and “forecloses a discussion of what it means to decolonise settler societies” (p.268).

I want to emphasise that despite the absence of an African context in Wolfe’s analysis, much of his general articulation of the structure of settler colonialism is valuable to my argument that Liberia’s background as a settler colony is significant to current contestations about identity and citizenship. Wolfe’s work provides an important theoretical framework for thinking about power and structures of inequality in settler regimes. Liberia presents an opportunity to reintroduce the settler into African history. It also offers the opportunity to rethink the status of decolonisation, and the size and complexion of a settler collective in the scheme of identifying settler states, historically or otherwise.

Settler Colonial Theory and the Case of Liberia

Liberia’s formation as a settler colonial society both conforms to certain aspects of how settler societies are understood by the current, dominant iteration of settler colonial studies while still troubling some of the normative and distinguishing features of Anglophone settler regimes. Liberia reveals a highly complex settler structure, hence my categorisation of its formation as a unique case of settler colonialism. As Chapter 3 shows, the settler project in Liberia, like others in the settler colonial world, sought to establish a new society from its inception. Yet the motivations that underpinned the formation of Liberia and the political imagination that accompanied the repatriation of freed and formerly enslaved people in the first instance are

different from other settler projects in many respects. Significantly, the settlers in Liberia's case were the minority and were Black people, most of whom were free slaves. The phenotypical appearance of the settlers in Liberia's case is noteworthy since, in almost all accounts of settler colonies, the settler is a white European. Further, unlike Anglophone settler colonies where discussions about the postcolonial condition are inherently complex (Veracini 2010), Samuel Doe's 1980 coup d'état and the ensuing civil wars (1989-2003) supposedly removed the last remnants of settler colonisation, thus suggesting a postcolonial Liberia²¹.

These points of difference are significant in themselves and can influence how we view Liberia as a settler colonial project. Indeed, some of these differences underline the hesitancy around categorising Liberia's formation as a settler regime. I argue, however that these differences may not be as relevant. As argued by Wolfe, settler colonialism is structural and eliminatory in how it is set up to privilege the settler group. Therefore, it does not matter if the settlers were enslaved, coerced, or co-opted in relation to the native; they are a part of the settler colonial process of dispossession and elimination (Kauanui and Wolfe, 2018). Consequently, I argue that the emphasis in Liberia's case should be the prevalence of settler colonial tools, including permanent settlement, unilateral sovereignty, and the physical, cultural and spiritual elimination of the Indigenous populations (Coulthard 2014; Wolfe 2006).

Thus, in the case of Liberia, the settler not only transcends the normative phenotypical appearance but, to some extent, has also ceased to be a settler. As argued by Evri and Kotef (2020, p.1), "the settler can cease to be a settler" through decolonisation. Liberia presents a case where the native/settler dichotomy has become less meaningful in current political contestations. But as later chapters in this thesis show, the most visible remnant of the settler state is structural inequality. So, while Liberia is currently a fusion of natives and settlers, systemic inequality, which was foundational to the settler state, is still shaping citizenship, identity, and belonging negotiations in the post-war era. Thus, questioning again whether we can meaningfully talk about a postcolonial Liberia if the structures of settler colonialism, albeit 'defeated', remain operative over time.

Within the construct of the post-conflict state, Liberia and its diaspora now provide a site where the native seems to have become a settler, in that, the Americo-Liberians are not easily

²¹ But then again, one of the critical features of settler colonialism is its lasting structures and its ability to bury its continuous presence, thus causing me to question whether we can logically call Liberia postcolonial. As already indicated, I contest Liberia's categorisation as postcolonial in this thesis through my use of settler colonial theory to understand the history of Liberia's formation and how that history is informing current debates about identity and belonging.

identifiable in the post-war era due to years of intermarriages with Indigenous Liberians. Hence, the historical wrongs of the Americo-Liberians have been passed on to diaspora Liberians, even though most identify as Indigenous people. In essence, the indigene/settler dichotomy that framed Liberian society for over a hundred years has transformed into an in-country/diaspora division (see also Chapters 6 & 7). Consequently, contemporary debates about identity and belonging are informed by anxieties around continuous land dispossession and an imposition of a foreign culture if dual citizenship is allowed.

My argument here is, the articulation of Liberia as a unique case of settler colonialism offers opportunities for further developing settler colonial studies and its application beyond the white dominions.

Beyond the differences outlined above, the fundamental features of settler colonialism as articulated in Anglophone settler regimes – that settlers come to stay, transform appropriated lands, establish territorial sovereignty and nurture a dominating relationship with the Indigenous population – are present in Liberia’s case. These are all persistent structural features of settler colonialism, as presented in the writings of Wolfe (1999, 2006, 2016), Veracini (2010, 2013), Mamdani (1998, 2020) and others. Evidently, settler colonial projects do not follow a uniform pattern or necessarily deploy similar colonial strategies. Instead, the transnational nature of the theoretical approach facilitates its application in varying contexts, even in non-white settler nations like Liberia.

On Settlers & Natives: Settlerhood through Movement, Conquest & Racialisation

The indigene/settler dichotomy is as fundamental to settler colonialism as the colonised/coloniser binary is to classical colonialism. The possibility of immigrants encountering empty lands rarely or ever happens. Hence, the relationship between the settler and the native is central to the structure of settler colonialism. Settler status emerges out of movement but more so because settlers *invade* the lands of the Indigenous peoples. In settler colonial theory, the assumption that the settler is made *only* through movement is debatable. Such categorisations assume no migration occurred prior to settler colonisation and suggest a geographical binary between those already on the land and those who invaded it. Wolfe (2016, p.16) noted that “the simplest definition of Indigenous people, obviously enough, is that they are the only ones who have not come from somewhere else”. The question becomes, how do we define ‘somewhere else’? Ascribing indigene status to groups “who have *not* come from somewhere else” as outlined by Wolfe and settlers as “geographical outsiders” (Evri and Kotef

2020) is too simplistic, at least in the case of Liberia. Chapter 3 shows that Liberia's history consists of the movement to, conquest, and settlement of the lands of different ethnic groups, some from Africa and others beyond. To this, Mamdani's 1998 lecture: '*When does a settler become a native*' provides an excellent foundational analysis. Mamdani argues that:

Settlers are made by conquest, not just by immigration. Settlers are kept settlers by a form of the state that makes a distinction -- particularly juridical -- between conquerors and conquered, settlers and natives, and makes it the basis of other distinctions that tend to buttress the conquerors and isolate the conquered, politically.

Mamdani's argument speaks to Wolfe's contention that settler colonialism "destroys to replace"; that "settler colonisers come to stay." According to Mamdani, settlers are without ethnic homes. He identifies 'the whites' of the colonial state as the proto-type settlers and also defines groups such as Asians, Arabs who came from both within and from outside Africa, and the Tutsis²², who came wholly from within Africa as settlers. Mamdani argues that "every native outside of his or her own home area was a settler of sorts, someone considered non-indigenous – precisely because that person had an ethnic home elsewhere, even if within the same country" (p.3). Hence his proposal for 'Native Settlers' as another category of settlers. According to Mamdani, the distinction between the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous was not racialised but ethnicised since ethnic groups are distinguished between those who belong (ethnic citizens) and those who do not (ethnic strangers). He notes:

The case of the Asian and the Arab, but particularly that of the Tutsi, shows that you didn't have to be white to be a settler. The word for the white settler in Kiswahili is *mzungu*. *Mzungu*, however, does not literally mean a white person. It simply means a restless person, a person who will not stay in one place (1998, p.2).

Mamdani's exclusion of whiteness (race) in the making of the settler is reminiscent of Wolfe's earlier work (1999, 2006). Wolfe considers race to be mostly incidental in the settler colonial aspirations for native elimination. He maintains that settler colonial strategies might be expressed in racial terms but insists that the eliminatory logic is ultimately about land

²² Regarding the Tutsis, although their migration predated colonialism by centuries, their categorisation as the Hamitic race by the colonial state turned them into settlers, so that the Tutsis are always considered as people who came from elsewhere.

acquisition. Wolfe presents race in settler colonial settings as merely entangled in settlers' pursuit of territorial control and profit extraction. In effect, the settler/native binary is more geographical than racial in Wolfe's view. In later work, he does seem to depart from this thinking, notably in *Traces of History* (2016) where he works through the historicities and construction of race in settler colonial contexts. Here Wolfe establishes race as a critical organising structure in settler societies and contends that racial binaries are tools used by settlers to legitimise, perpetuate and protect white privilege.

For his part, Mamdani (1998, 2020) differentiates between the mode of settlement by settlers and immigrants. He argues that immigrants join existing political systems whether they seek equality or advantage, while settlers displace existing polities in order to establish their exclusive sovereignty. Similarly, Veracini (2010) argues that settlers and migrants "move in inherently different ways" and "towards very different places." The understanding is that while "settlers are founders of political orders and carry their sovereignty with them", migrants are appellants who "move to another country and lead diasporic lives" (Veracini 2010, pp.3-4). Thus, unlike the privileged existence of settlers, migrant lives are often devoid of inherent rights and sovereign entitlements even when they are co-opted into settler colonial political regimes.

The analytical distinction between settlers and migrants, as outlined by Mamdani (1998, 2020) and Veracini (2010), is significant in an analysis of Liberia as a settler colonial project. This is because most of the ethnic groups that inhabited the area before the arrival of the Americo-Liberians also immigrated from other parts of Africa. Hence, in the case of Liberia, the establishment of sovereign political systems through native conquest is not sufficient to differentiate between settlers and natives. As Evri and Kotef (2020) have argued in relation to the Zionist project in Palestine, movement alone is not adequate to distinguish between the settler and native. They contend that "the movement that results in the 'settlerization' of the moving person is ... a function of their relationship to place and people" (p.11).

As I detail in Chapter 3, the Americo-Liberians' colonial relationship with the lands they appropriated and the people they met upon arrival is what makes the formation of Liberia a settler colonial project. Upon achieving autonomy from the ACS, or the metropole if you like, the Americo-Liberians established a sovereign nation-state, ironically named Liberia – the land of the free – to not only appropriate Indigenous lands but to replace their sovereign political and socio-cultural systems. The settler state used 'tried and tested' settler colonial strategies to create a 'caste solidarity' (Weitzer 1990) among the settler class to maintain their supremacy

and hold onto economic and socio-political power. The Americo-Liberians engineered their dominance through its one-party political system – the True Whig Party (TWP), which rewarded supporters and punished dissenters. They racialised the differences between the settler class and the native populations by classifying Indigenous systems and cultures as inferior and backward. When Indigenous people were recruited into the societal mainstream, they assimilated into the Americo-Liberian lifestyle (Liebenow 1969, 1987). The Indigenous Africans understood these differences to the extent that some sent their children to live with settler families to learn ‘whiteness’, thereby unlearning ‘nativeness’. Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard (2014, p.6) captures the settler-colonial relationship articulated here between the Americo-Liberians and the Indigenous Africans in his seminal book *Red Skin White Masks*, albeit in the context of Canada:

A settler-colonial relationship is one characterized by a particular form of domination; that is, it is a relationship where power—in this case, interrelated discursive and non discursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power—has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority.

The Fernando Po scandal in 1927, for example, in which the Liberian government illegally shipped thousands of boys and young men of Indigenous background to work on the plantations of the Spanish island of Fernando Po and French Gabon, is one of many examples of actions that implicate the Americo-Liberians in the racialisation and dehumanisation of the Indigenous peoples (Ciment 2016, p.226; Bøås 2001; Dunn, Beyan & Burrowes 2000; Sundiata 1974). Liberia’s reliance on racialised labour, exemplified in this scandal, can be understood as a settler colonial strategy for capital accumulation. As noted by Goldstein (2017, pp.43-44), “racialised and gendered relations of appropriation and reproduction... [relate] directly to the specific question of property and possession at work in [settler] colonialism and empire.” Writing from a feminist perspective, Silvia Federici (2012, p.140) has similarly argued that capital relies on devalued labour from groups that are non-subsumed or partially-subsumed. In this sense, capital is “structurally dependent on the free appropriation of immense quantities of labour and resources that must appear as externalities to the market”. These non-subsumed or partially-subsumed groups tends to naturalise “onto the bodies of those gendered as women and non-white people, in order not only to expand profit margins, but also to pacify, discipline, and divide” (Goldstein 2017, p.43). The Fernando Po scandal is significant for the ways it

illustrates Liberia's production of race (whiteness) as a method for devaluing the entire Indigenous collective.

Significant to the articulation of Liberia's formation as a settler project is the question of race in the making of the settler. Liberia presents an important point of departure from Anglophone settler colonies. In Liberia's case, the settlers are often categorised as immigrants rather than settlers primarily because settlers are usually white Europeans in a normative colonial sense. As previously mentioned, the settlers that established Liberia were Black people repatriated from the United States. Many of these settlers were formerly enslaved people whose freedoms were tied to their forced immigration to the Grain Coast.

Consequently, the racial dynamic is much more complex in Liberia's case than in other settler colonial societies. Liberia highlights the problematic assumption in settler colonial literature that maps whiteness onto settlers and Blackness onto Indigenous people. This racial assumption understandably emerged from the development of settler colonial theory in the CANZUS states.

Nevertheless, I argue that in the case of Liberia's formation, the settlers, while Black people, still reproduced the system of white supremacy that underpins settler colonialism. The Americo-Liberian settlers embodied 'whiteness' as a form of power to advance the racialisation of the Indigenous populations as inferior and in need of civilisation. At the core, whiteness operates as the social norm that confers power to dominant groups. It sustains the privilege of one group and mitigates the life chances of marginalised others in society. Whiteness studies share some perspectives with critical race theory (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado and Stefancic, [2001] 2017) and racial formation (Omi and Winant, 2014). It explores the political and socio-economic implications (and the often taken-for-granted privilege) of whiteness and its connections to racism in America and beyond (Guess 2006, pp.650–1; see also Bhabha 1998; Bonnett 1998, 1996; Delgado 1995; Feagin 1991, 2000, 2001; Feagin and Vera 1995; Frankenberg 1993; Ignatiev 1996; Kincheloe 1999; Perea 1997; Roediger 2007).

In this thesis, I use whiteness as a knowledge system where different people can embody and reproduce irrespective of their racial positioning in the global system of power. In this case, whiteness is much more than one's cosmetic appearance. Instead, it is a status that signifies power as well as socio-economic, cultural and political hierarchical positioning from where people value themselves, others and the larger society.

The sociologist and social critic, W.E.B Du Bois provides an interesting insight into the articulation of whiteness as a knowledge system in his characterisation of white racial identity as the “new religion of whiteness” (Du Bois 1999 [1910]). Du Bois’ insistence that whiteness was more akin to a religious belief than a biological trait helps explain its worldwide appeal due to its economic viability; its adaptability to local conditions so that the meaning of whiteness can vary in different settings; but more so, its flexibility to accommodate groups that in previous years had been categorised as quintessential outsiders²³ (see also Roediger 2007). Significantly, the religion of whiteness found success in its ability to persuade its devotees that they were the real victims and not the people they oppressed²⁴ (Baird 2021). So, it was with the Antebellum South’s fondness for calling itself a land of immigrants and their victimisation by the big bad British empire. Settler-colonist in America, like most settlers across the globe, hate to acknowledge their role in the near elimination of First Nations to facilitate the state’s access to territory and them, the so-called American dream (see Bruyneel 2021; Dahl 2018; Jafri 2017).

Similarly, the Americo-Liberians dominated the Indigenous people for about a century and yet cast themselves as a persecuted group whose love for liberty led to their establishment of a nation-state open to all subjugated Blacks. The irony of Liberia’s case is profound. The productive myths engineered to protect the settler status in Liberia is reflective of the role of disavowal in settler societies²⁵. As elaborated by Jafri (2017, p.2), “a quintessential feature of white settler mythologies is, therefore, the disavowal of conquest, genocide, slavery, and the exploitation of the labour of peoples of colour.”

Despite their cosmetic appearance, the Americo-Liberians were thus settlers because of their racialised relationship with Indigenous people and place. They racialised the Indigenous populations as inferior and that relationship continue to structure Liberia’s social and political systems. Racialisation is the imposition of “classificatory grids on a variety of colonised [and enslaved] populations” (Wolfe 2016, p.10). According to Schaefer (2008, p.1111), the process

²³ Groups such as the Italians, Irish and Jews were all considered non-white in particular places, at specific moments of history. These groups were eventually considered white following the racialisation of slavery in 1600s because at this point whiteness and Blackness represented racial categories (Guess 2006). Significantly, the transition of some of these groups into whiteness was a much longer process.

²⁴ Ta-Nehisi Coates’ article *‘The First White President’* (2017) provides an interesting insight into the dicta of whiteness, and its ability to transform the sins of white people into a virtue.

²⁵ Kevin Bruyneel (2021) on Settler Memory is particularly insightful.

of racialisation begins with attributing racial meaning to peoples' identity in relation to social structures and institutional systems. The visible effects of racialisation are the racial inequalities embedded within those social structures and political systems.

Whiteness and Blackness are not just abstract forms of power because, in reality, they attach to bodies in varying ways. In other words, whiteness and Blackness are inescapable in relation to privilege or the mark of inferiority those categories may confer on racial groupings. Indeed, Americo-Liberians portray, in many ways, the profoundly traumatic effects of global racialisation processes and their impact on people considered non-white. Significantly, we cannot understand Liberia as a settler state in and of itself. Instead, it has to be viewed as a product of the transatlantic slave trade and the United States' colonial power and enduring imperialism on the African continent.

Nevertheless, this thesis focuses on the racialised relationship between Americo-Liberians and the Indigenous peoples of the region that came to be called Liberia, which brings to the fore the underlying influence of race in the making of the settler. Race is understood here as a social construct; hence, people create a racial identity using symbols to establish meaning in a culture or society. It is "not an inherent biological grouping, so racial categories ... [race] often gain legitimacy in society through political action" (Schaefer 2008, p.1091). As argued by Omi and Winant (2014)²⁶, "[r]ace is strategic; race does ideological and political work" (p.111). The formation of racial categories is often "accomplished by a dominant racial grouping exerting authority over minority or subordinate racial groupings" (Schaefer 2008, p.1091). In the Liberian case, the racial categories were created and enforced by the settler minority because they controlled the state and dominated social structures and political systems.

The Americo-Liberians adopted the "*race and civilisation myth*" (Schaefer 2008, p.1092) which underpinned Western colonisation of Africa, Latin America and elsewhere. Using this lens, the settlers considered the Africans they met upon arrival in the Grain Coast to be inferior due to their "backward," "primitive," or "underdeveloped" culture. Of course, the Americo-Liberians were primarily Black, but not African Blacks because their Blackness originated from America. Hence, they were American Blacks, a racialised category considered to be above African Blackness. Many people claim whiteness as a form of power. People can move in and out of the racialised category of whiteness. Similarly, in the formation of Liberia, the

²⁶ They propose 'racial formation' to demonstrate how race is socially constructed. They define racial formation as "the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed" (p.109).

Americo-Liberians reproduced the system of white supremacy through settler colonial strategies.

In the next section, I further analyse the classification of Americo-Liberians as settlers, drawing on Tyron Woods's (2019) argument against categorising emancipated Black people as settlers and Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson's (2015) innovative articulation of the *white possessive* framework.

Beyond the White/Black Binary: The Making of the Americo-Liberian Settler

For the longest time, 'white' racial identity was the default, producing hierarchies that rendered all other non-whites inferior. In effect, being categorised as belonging to the default racial group locates individuals in a particular racial position that gives or denies them certain privileges. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues, "[r]ace matters in the lives of all peoples; for some people, it confers unearned privileges, and for others, it is the mark of inferiority" (2015, p.xiii). Similarly, Nikhil Singh has argued that the transatlantic slave trade was "the cornerstone of capitalism's articulation of exploitation, appropriation, and dispossession but it also bequeathed something that lasted—an enduring cheapness of [B]lack life" (2016, p.43).

Consequently, studies on race have concentrated mainly on relations between interracial groups and inequality between and among groups marked as white and Black (Glenn 2015). This focus is necessary considering the long history of Black subjugation in colonial processes and the unique structural positioning of Blacks as property under the regime of chattel slavery (Glenn 2015). There have been changes in conceptualising categories such as race, identity, gender, ethnicity, and many others in recent years. Varying studies influenced by constructivism have emphasised the fluidity and hybridity of identity categories, even racial identities (see Bhabha 1994; Gilroy 1995; Hall 2003; Sandoval 2000; Anzaldua 2012; Lugones 2010). Racial categorisation of individuals is not constant across boundaries, explaining why a person could be classified as Black in the United States but considered white in Brazil and coloured in South Africa. Individual self-racial identification can also shift with time and experience (Onwuachi-Willig 2016; see Saperstein & Penner 2010, 2012).

However, white/black binaries have persisted and continue to influence hierarchical relations within and between societies (Glenn 2015, pp.55-56). According to Onwuachi-Willig (2016, para. 4), while race and racial identities are fluid, "the social, political and economic meanings of race, or rather belonging to particular racial groups, have not been fluid". As a result, the

racial meanings assigned to non-European groups in slaveholding culture have remained stagnant for Black people in particular.

Stagnation of the white/black binary contributes to the belief that race is not meaningful in postcolonial Africa. This belief is a myth, yet it is ingrained in both society and academia as there is a lack of racial analysis in contemporary studies of Africa. In situations where racial categories should suffice, we tend to invoke ethnicity, class, and culture. Indeed, Jemima Pierre (2013) notes that scholars of continental Africa, outside of Southern Africa, tend not to engage with the complex ways that race and racial structures continue to shape the postcolonial moment. As she frames it thus: “How do we analyse the persistence of white (and racialised Arabs) privilege in postcolonial spaces” if the continent is studied as if “the structures of colonial rule – economic, political, and cultural – disappeared with the Europeans at the end of colonialism” (p.549)? Pierre insists that “*anthropologizing* around a ‘*cultural*’ and ‘*ethnic*’ Africa belies the continent’s relation with global racialised hierarchies against and through which such cultural and ethnic relations develop” (2013, p.548). Liberia presents an even trickier case where the racialised relation is not between Africans and Europeans, hence the total denial of racial consciousness in that context.

Ochonu (2019a, 2019b) makes a similar observation about the construction of contemporary Africa as a place devoid of racial consciousness. Racial discussions about Africa are often framed in the past tense, only in the context of colonial and early postcolonial “encounters between weak, noble Africans and racist, domineering Europeans” (Ochonu 2019b, para. 6). Accordingly, articulating “the social consequences of racialisation ... is to risk being accused of mistaking other forms of social difference—class, ethnicity, culture—as racial manifestations” (Ochonu 2019b, para. 5). I may be similarly accused of mistaking class and cultural difference as racial manifestations in the case of the Americo-Liberian settler and natives. But as Ochonu chides, even if we accept the problematic premise of racial homogeneity in specific contexts, it will still be wrong to posit the absence of racial consciousness in these areas. Insights from critical race theory suggest that “racism does not require the physical presence of racists or even physical interactions between [B]lack people and white people” (Ochonu 2019b, para. 7).

Racism is steeped in beliefs that “a person’s behaviour is determined by stable inherited characteristics... each of these distinctive attributes is then evaluated in relation to ideas of superiority and inferiority” (Schaefer 2008, p.1092). Critical race theory (CRT) helps us understand that racism is inherent in the law and legal institutions and they function to create

and maintain social, economic, and political inequalities between racial groupings (Brown 2021). Thus, racial groups that are assigned superiority benefit from political and socio-economic systems, leaving all others powerless. Ochonu's observation that white and Black people do not have to interact physically for racism to occur supports my articulation of Liberia as a settler colonial project. Simply put, the absence of white people in Liberia's case does not negate the settler status of the Americo-Liberians, nor the consideration of Liberia as a settler project. Settler colonialism is about structures and how those structures shape the lives and societies of Indigenous populations. Yet, because the Americo-Liberians are dark in complexion, as are the Africans they colonised, they are somehow considered immigrants instead of settlers. However, when we consider the settler colonial structure of taking land, settling permanently and racialising the natives, Americo-Liberians can clearly be understood as settler colonisers.

While settler colonisers were/are mostly 'white' in appearance²⁷, their embodied superiority due to their racial identity motivated their colonisation and domination of all those *they* categorise as (Indigenous and therefore) inferior. Americo-Liberian settlers were socialised as Black people in America. They shed this Black racial category as soon as they were repatriated to a place in Africa, a space abounding with 'uncivilised' Blacks. This space allowed them to rise above their formerly racialised lives and restrictive citizenship in America. In this place, they founded a nation-state and created socio-political structures that mimicked a home they did not intend to return to (America). The Americo-Liberians transformed themselves into a superior racial identity by categorising the Africans they met upon arrival as inferior, first through non-engagement and later through full-blown settler colonisation.

Tyron Woods' (2019) thesis on the ways in which racial slavery structures human relations proves immensely useful in unpacking some of these ideas. Woods (2019) maintains that the violence of the Atlantic slave trade turned the Black body into a fungible object and positioned Black people outside of human relations. He argues that Black peoples' status as 'nonhuman' renders null the claims that formerly enslaved people can be "settlers" or "colonists" in Liberia. To him, both the settler and the presumed native in the case of Liberia were all products of the same violence. The only point of contention is that these groups do not recognise each other in

²⁷ The assumption that settlers are typically white Europeans is changing in settler colonial studies as settler colonialism is being theorised beyond the CANZUS states. And as I have mentioned, generations of non-white immigrants, forced or otherwise in settler colonies are all part of the continuous dispossession of Indigenous people of their lands.

that way, “[i]nstead, they perceive each other through the antiblack world’s antagonistic relationship to Black people, as problems to attack, rather than as people produced through a shared problem” (p.51). Woods argues that Liberia represented “the newly redrawn antiblack frontier” where Black settlers performed institutional authority borrowed from the slaveholding class against “the very people from whom, and by whom, they were once and forever stolen” (p.52).

The presumption in a slaveholding culture that violence is the response to a transgression or to shifts in power relations is how “white people, and then later, all non-[B]lack people, no matter how immiserated, came to realise their humanity” (Woods 2019, p.40). The humanity of all non-Black people is linked to “their shared capacity to engage in anti-[B]lack violence with impunity” because Blackness is the defining marker of the nonhuman in a slaveholding culture (2019, p.40). Jared Sexton has made a similar observation: “[n]ot all free persons are white, but slaves are paradigmatically [B]lack. And because [B]lackness serves as the basis of enslavement in the logic of a transnational political and legal culture, it permanently destabilizes the position of any nominally free Black population” (2010, p.46).

Woods’ argument on slaveholding culture categorising both the Black settler and the native as nonhuman is persuasive. It emphasises the previous assertion that Liberia is a product of the slaveholding culture and American imperialism. However, Woods’ analysis is framed around the white/Black binary. It ignores the racialisation of the natives through the established structures of Americo-Liberians to enable their access to territorial sovereignty and legitimacy.

Woods’ contention that the violence of racial slavery caused *all* non-Black people to realise “their shared capacity to engage in anti-[B]lack violence with impunity” is very instructive in considering the positionality and racial identity of the Black settler in Liberia. Woods’ proposal provides a lens through which to decipher how the repatriation process impacted the settlers’ self-identification as a category above Blackness and their negotiation of place and belonging to Liberia and their relations with the natives.

For example, some scholars have argued that the Americo-Liberians thought of Africans as people without knowledge or proper beliefs and thought of themselves as superior to the Indigenous populations (Tyler-McGraw 2007, p.7; see also Martin 1969). Raddatz (2016) has also explained that the Americo-Liberians did not consider themselves African but American and their views of Africans were similar to the ideas shared in the antebellum American South at the time. For this reason, they clung firmly to the subtle differences that set them apart from

their neighbouring ‘tribal savages’. They attempted to reproduce the culture of the American South through the institutions, values, dress, and speech they introduced on the land they had appropriated (see also Wegmann 2010; Liebenow 1987). Effectively, the Americo-Liberians bought into the ACS’s idea of Christianising and ‘civilising’ the Indigenous populations and therefore committed to stripping Indigenous Liberians of their ‘tribalness’ and, in essence, their African ethnic identity.

Slaveholding culture mediated the status of the Americo-Liberians in America. Even as emancipated Blacks, they were constructed as ‘nonhuman’ and were prevented from wholly realising the rights and privileges that should have accompanied their citizenship as *free* Americans. These opportunities were not available because of their positionality as Black people. The Americo-Liberian experience of racism, coupled with their ascribed identity as the chosen few, purposely selected to deliver civility and the Christian faith to the ‘dark continent’, caused them to self-identify as separate from the Africans. In this case, the Americo-Liberian settlers assumed a ‘non-Black identity’. Like Africans, Americo-Liberians are perceived as Blacks by all others. They are racially identified through a lens of Blackness that is fundamental to the slaveholding culture. Still, they saw themselves as a category above African Blackness. Following Woods’ proposal, the Americo-Liberians’ self-racial identification as non-Black granted them humanity. Accompanying the human status is the cultural purchase to identify as different from the natives and the capacity to engage in anti-Black violence with impunity.

Essentially, the Americo-Liberian settlers were Black in appearance, but they personified the default racial category of ‘whiteness’ following their independence from the ACS. They did not integrate into the existing political structures as immigrants often have to. Instead, they shed their Blackness, if not in phenotypical terms, but in all the other forms that matter. The Americo-Liberians embodied a racial category that they considered to be above Blackness. Hence, they transformed the lands they invaded into a society in the image of the one they aspired to in America, a home deserving of their new racial identity. They were the minority, yet they became the dominant culture and the law of the land.

Settler colonialism is inherently about belonging (Moreton-Robinson 2015). As argued by Veracini, the formation of the settler collective is hinged upon “an ability to will a collective identity and its institutions into existence” (2010, p.61). The construction of the colony [home] is achieved through the destruction of Indigenous lives and societies. The notion of home in relation to Liberia’s formation is particularly interesting as the Americo-Liberians embody the doubleness of home for settlers quite perfectly. Veracini states that the settler collective “is

coming from elsewhere and sees itself as permanently situated” and so considers themselves as “Indigenous and exogenous at the same time” (p.20). Americo-Liberians are comfortable referencing their African heritage so far as it gives them a sense of belonging and rootedness on the African continent but are quick to insist on their exogenous background and with that, their superiority over the Indigenous people (Raddatz 2016; Tyler-McGraw 2007; Liebenow 1987). This is exemplified in their desire to construct Liberia in the image of the Antebellum South.

In the construction of Liberia, the Americo-Liberians embodied what Moreton-Robinson²⁸ (2015) calls ‘possessive logics’: “a mode of rationalisation ... underpinned by an excessive desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the nation-state’s ownership, control and domination of indigenous lands and lives” (p.xii). Possessive logics are underpinned by racism, by how racialisation produces indigeneity through whiteness in settler colonial contexts. She explains: “white identity has cultural and social purchase, and as a possession, it enhances one’s life chances as configured through the logic of capital” (p.xix). Whiteness works as a form of property, a possession that enables holders to accumulate capital and social appreciation. Whiteness produces a means to differentiate settlers from the natives, and categorises those without white identity as racialised subjects. Consequently, it is settlers’ racialisation of all those they consider *other* that produces the indigeneity of these others.

While Moreton-Robinson references contexts such as Australia, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Hawaii in her analysis, the possessive logic applies to all contexts of settler colonial condition, including Liberia. Her argument that “the dehumanising impulses of colonisation are successful because racism is predicated on the logic of possession” (p.xiii) can be seen as instrumental in the advancement of Liberia as a settler state. Through the mechanisation of the ACS, Americo-Liberian settlers dispossessed the native Africans of their land, regarded their cultures as inferior, and categorised them as savages who needed saving and civilising.

The Americo-Liberians embodied whiteness as a form of power. This power and its privilege structures revolved around a settler identity, of which lighter skin pigmentation was the initial marker and, later, Americo-Liberian ancestry (see Chapter 3). Settler status thus consisted of a cultural and social purchase considered to be above that of the natives. As Moreton-Robinson

²⁸ Moreton-Robinson’s *The White Possessive* contributes to work that conceptualises whiteness as property. From this perspective, the value of this identity and social location is available to only those deemed white by the dominant socio-cultural and political institutions (see also Harris 1993; Lipsitz 1995, 2018, 2019).

has argued, “the possessive logic ... operates to discriminate in favour of itself, ensuring it protects and maintains its interest by the continuing denial and exclusion of Indigenous sovereignty” (2004). Whiteness works as the norm in configurations of belonging, home and place in settler societies. Settlers’ sense of belonging “derives from ownership as understood within the logic of capital”. Against this settlers’ sense of belonging, “stands the Indigenous sense of belonging, home, and place in its incommensurable difference” (2015, pp.3ff). According to Moreton-Robinson, the states’ legal, political and socio-cultural impositions to define settlers’ sense of belonging renders Indigenous people, “the original owners, as not belonging, but as homeless and out of place” in their own land. Consequently, although “belonging is experienced as a profound [personal] attachment” (p.7), “who belongs, and the degree of that belonging, is inextricably tied to white possession (p.18).

In Liberia’s case, the possessive logic of whiteness operated first through a racial sense of separateness and later through unification to provide the settler society with Indigenous legitimacy (Chapters 3 & 4). Nevertheless, Americo-Liberia imposed a racial hierarchy within which the native African could be whitened in either regime. This was understood by the Indigenous people, explaining why some high-ranking natives sent their children to live with settler families to learn whiteness and find belonging in the settler society.

Conclusion

Americo-Liberians were Black people, and in the scheme of international politics, they were treated like all other Blacks. But this fact does not negate their embodiment of racialised prejudice and colonisation of the ‘Native Settlers’ (Mamdani 1998) they met upon arrival on the Grain Coast. Through their settlerisation, as they constructed Liberia in the image of the Antebellum South, they transformed the Indigenous people into natives by categorising them as inferior. The settler status of the Americo-Liberians has less to do with their phenotypic appearance (black complexion) and the tangible effects of that racial category in the scheme of the global structure of power underpinned by enslavement and Western imperial designs. Instead, they are settlers because of their racialised categorisation of the natives as inferior, enabling the natives’ marginalisation and land appropriation to facilitate the establishment of the nation-state.

This chapter has argued that Liberia was founded as a settler colony and although theoretically, it may have structurally decolonised through the coup d’état and subsequent civil wars; the country’s legacy of settler colonialism is still informing and infecting contemporary dynamics.

I contend that the application of settler colonial theory in Liberia's case and similar contexts helps us understand the structures of power and structural inequality that were established during the foundation of Liberia as a settler society and continue to shape the lives of Liberians today. Moreton-Robinson's argument that the construction of belonging in the settler state is tied to possessive logics is insightful in this case as it foregrounds the thesis argument that Liberia's settler colonial background influences contemporary contestations around identity and belonging in the post-war era.

Consequently, in Chapters 3 and 4, I show the settler regime's historical use of citizenship, Americo-Liberian ancestry/identity or what I have articulated in this chapter as embodied whiteness to restrict Indigenous peoples' belonging and access to the state and its resources. These historical injustices and the legacies of the systemic inequality established through the Americo-Liberian hegemony put into context how, in contemporary negotiations, Liberians in-country purposefully conceptualise identity and belonging to Liberia as an exclusionary tool to stave off the possibility of being recolonised by a small group of people perceived to have all the power who can buy up all the land (Chapters 5, 6 & 7). In these chapters, we are confronted with the post-conflict state's pursuance of a collective identity that, in fact, seeks to bury its colonial past through a typical project of the politics of belonging.

Chapter 2: Methodology and Conceptual Framework

Introduction

The empirical research undertaken in this project employs a qualitative research design to understand identity construction in post-conflict Liberia. Firstly, the research documents the motivation of the Liberian state in connecting with its diaspora through an interpretive content analysis of policies, speeches, documents, and other materials produced by the Liberian state that addresses dual citizenship and diaspora engagement in-country (Chapters 5 & 6). Secondly, the project examines the experiences and perspectives of Liberians in-country and abroad through online semi-structured interviews (Chapters 6 & 7). The study is set in a historical context, developed in Chapters 3 and 4 through an analysis of the settler colonial origins of the Liberian state and the impact of this history on current contestations over who belongs or otherwise to the Liberian polity.

This chapter discusses both the concepts and methods used in this research. The following section clarifies my conceptual language by mapping out the parameters of identity, citizenship, ethnicity, and belonging as they are deployed in this thesis.

Conceptual Parameters of Identity and Belonging

Much research has focused on outlining the differences between identity, citizenship, belonging, ethnicity, and other related terms and their deployment as research concepts (Brubaker & Cooper 2000; Anthias 2002, 2006; Antonsich 2010; Pfaff-Czarnecka 2013; Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011). Concerning identity, for example, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) have critiqued the use of the term due to its ‘theoretical baggage’. They claim that identity is an overburdened concept that tries to do too much but says too little. Despite these critiques, identity has remained an ‘everyday’ concept that has practical meanings for people. Significantly, the concept of identity has infiltrated our common understandings of the social world and our place in it. Anthias (2013) argues that the rise of possessive individualism in the Western world, in particular, makes the deployment of identity a powerful tool in political claims and contestations. Political actors articulate these concepts in multiple ways depending on the issue at stake.

Therefore, I engage concepts like identity, belonging, ethnicity, and citizenship as tools in this thesis and consider how they are embedded in local and international political discourses and

the meanings they offer my interviewees. All these concepts are interrelated as they all raise questions about inclusion and exclusion, issues essential to the focus of this thesis.

According to Anthias (2013, p.3), “belonging and identity simultaneously raise the question about boundaries of ‘difference’, ..., the boundaries of collectivities and social bonds, and how they are struggled over.” Additionally, Youkhana (2015) has argued that belonging is commonly used interchangeably with identity and in association with citizenship, defined in this thesis as “an entitlement describing a contractual relationship between a person and the state” (see also Antonsich 2010; Yuval-Davis 2011, p.47; Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011). Like identity and citizenship, belonging provides frames to understand varying forms of political contestations. Following this argument, I will use some of these concepts interchangeably. For instance, I mobilise belonging as a conceptual tool to explain claims for dual citizenship in Liberia. While citizenship – citizens’ contractual relation to the state – is much more official than an emotive concept like belonging, this thesis is concerned with the utilisation of citizenship claims by diaspora Liberians and migrant communities to construct a sense of belonging to Liberia and vice versa.

The thesis seeks to analyse the notion of belonging as an emotional feeling of being at home in a place (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011). Pfaff-Czarnecka (2011) suggests that ‘belonging’ is the new term for ‘collective identity’ in social research, thus making it crucial to distinguish between identity and belonging analytically. She argues that the differences between identity and belonging help us envisage “the possibilities of living together in the transnationalised contemporary world” (p.2). Pfaff-Czarnecka’s suggestion is foundational to my exploration of identity and belonging in this Chapter and the interchangeable use of belonging and collective identity in this thesis. As she puts it, belonging “does more justice to the complexities, dynamics, and subtleties of human interrelating, to its situative and processual character than that of ‘collective identity’” (p.2).

Therefore, I use the term ‘collective identity’ in the thesis to refer to the Liberian state’s attempt to construct a sense of belonging to the nation-state among *all* Liberians in the post-war era. The state pursues this collective identity through negotiations for a dual citizenship policy. As I argue in Chapter 5, the state envisions dual citizenship as an instrument that will create a sense of belonging among diaspora Liberians to their home country, thereby uniting the post-conflict state, paving the way for recovery and investment in the country’s future. I consider the state’s actions a typical project of the politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2011). Liberia’s pursuit of dual citizenship confirms arguments that consider the nation-state the most

influential political project of belonging. In this context, the nation-state promotes nationalism as its ideological grounding, but it uses citizenship to link people to its national boundaries or exclude them (Youkhana 2015, p.13; see also Yuval-Davis 201; Isin & Turner 2007). Accordingly, it is within the nation-state – the political project of nationalism – that the allocation of citizenship and its related rights and privileges meets imaginations of national belonging and a “feeling of loyalty” within national boundaries (Youkhana 2015; Yuval-Davis 2011).

The rest of the section is divided into three. The first conceptualise identity as a product of society and thus responsive to social processes and interactions (Brubaker & Cooper 2000; Tajfel 1981, 1982; Tajfel & Turner 2001; Calhoun 1994; Hogg, Terry & White 1995; Castells 1997). The second briefly explains the use of ethnicity in the thesis, and the last subsection focuses on the concept of belonging and the related politics of belonging. This section clarifies my conceptual language in this thesis and situates it within the different bodies of literature to which this thesis contributes.

Identity is a Product of Societal Relations

Identity is an interpretation of existence and belongingness (İnaç & Ünal 2013, p.233); the source and meaning of our experiences (Castells 1997). Identity is how we view ourselves as individuals and how others view us. It is bound to social categories in that it identifies us with other people or groups in some cases and at the same time, differentiates us from others. This understanding of identity emanates from the constructivist perspective, which is the stance that this thesis adopts.

Before the constructivist perspective became the prevailing view on identity, *primordial* understandings of group origins and differences dominated the debate. From this view, individuals have primordial attachments originating from the “assumed givens” of their social existence – religion, culture, community, kin, language, and social practices (Geertz 1963; discussed in Bačová 1998, pp.31–33). Primordialists believe that identity is a static, natural category, thus rendering identity groups fixed. Members of identity groups are biologically determined and are defined by territorial boundaries and objective cultural traits. Thus, instead of developing from social interactions, the ties within an identity group are a natural feeling. Accordingly, the innate differences between identity groups make conflict inevitable, and resolving such disputes is unlikely.

In recent years, however, the view that group identities are ‘natural’ has lessened in influence due to the emergence of more compelling theoretical approaches to understanding identity construction and identity negotiation by individuals and groups. The recent debate is between instrumentalist and constructivist approaches.

Instrumentalism rejects the primordialist emphasis on the enduring characteristics of individuals. Instead, it invokes rational-choice theory, indicating that the individual considers the group as an instrument for achieving their goals. Thus, individual attachment to identity groups is temporary, by choice, and devoid of emotions. Paul Brass, the first to articulate the instrumentalist view, maintains that primordial identities are not politically salient without elite leadership. To Brass, ethnic groups “are created and transformed by particular elites ... [and this] process invariably involves competition and conflict for political power, economic benefits, and social status between competing elite, class and leadership groups” (1991, p.25).

However, the dominant approach to understanding identity is *constructivism* which became popular in the 1970s and 1980s. The Norwegian social anthropologist Fredrik Barth was one of the first to challenge the anthropological notions of identity as primordial bonds. Barth (1969) provided a theoretical framework for studying ethnicity, which focuses on the ongoing negotiations of ethnic boundaries, the interconnectedness of ethnic identities, and the continuous transformation of ethnic groups. Barth’s work provided the groundwork for what is now considered the *constructivist* approach to identity (Hummell 2014; Cornelissen & Horstmeier 2002). The constructivist view suggests that societies collectively produce or construct identities, thus making identity dynamic and responsive to social processes and interactions (Brubaker & Cooper 2000; Tajfel 1981, 1982; Tajfel & Turner 2001; Calhoun 1994; Hogg, Terry & White 1995; Castells 1997).

The social construction of identity challenges the view that identity is fixed or natural, that collective identity is informed by some core features that all members share, or that an individual has a single immutable identity that evolves purely from the acts of the individual (Calhoun 1994, p.13). Martin (1995), for example, contends that identity is not formed in isolation because it gets its meaning “from what it is not, from the Other” (p.6). He uses an identity card to demonstrate the ambiguity of identity. A passport, for example, is a document that indicates an individual as one and no other (uniqueness) while also specifying that the individual belongs to one or several groups (sameness). Identity refers to both the individual and the collective, thus implying ‘uniqueness and sameness’. The attributes that distinguish us from others constitute our identity. In contrast, our social identity refers to those attributes and

categories that we share with others and therefore define us as being similar in some way or another.

This thesis is more concerned with the social aspect of identity because it is “collective and external, and ascribed, for instance, on the basis of people’s appearance or roles” (Taylor 2015, p.1) rather than personal identities. As Martin (1995, p.8) observes, “an individual is always attached to groups, a narrative always tells the story of one or several groups, and group identity can be analysed as a narrative”. The need for this distinction is due to this study’s focus on identity and citizenship claims by diaspora Liberians and the choice of narrative enquiry as one of the methods for data collection. I consider diaspora Liberians to be a population that has evolved into a group due to perceived similarities (or differences) among their goals, attitudes, values, demands. Accordingly, they have taken on the collective diaspora identity, and its representation in Liberia and beyond. In this study, I engaged with two main groups: Liberians in-country and diaspora Liberians. Although I mainly interviewed individual Liberians without necessarily emphasising their affiliation to either group, their narratives about the issues suggested that they sometimes align with the arguments of one group or another. The behaviour of the interviewees, in this case, speaks to the tenets of social identity theory.

In his explanation of social identity theory, Hogg (2016, p.6) suggests that social groups, irrespective of their size and focus, “provide their members with a shared identity that prescribes and evaluates who they are, what they should believe, and how they should behave” (see also Tajfel 1981, p.251). Boundary creation is central to the social construction of identity. As groups define who ‘we’ are, that identification process automatically creates who ‘they’ are. In aligning with groups, we create boundaries founded on the exclusion of others. We use markers (such as experiences, goals, language, and other cultural norms) to place ourselves in a social group with whom we share such similarities, thus distinguishing us from other groups we consider different. Membership in specific social groups provides us with a sense of self-esteem, creating a cohesive bond between us and our group (the in-group). It can also create divisions between us and those we believe do not belong to our group (out-groups) (McKeown, Haji & Ferguson 2016, p xv).

Social identity theory helps us understand conflict and cooperation between groups as being “generated by basic human motivations and cognitive processes impacted by people’s beliefs about themselves, and about the society, social context, and immediate situations people find themselves and their groups in” (Hogg 2016, p.4). This understanding is critical to Chapters 5, 6 and 7, where I present Liberia’s identity construction as a political project of identity and

belonging and its relationship to citizenship (as well as entitlement and status) (Yuval-Davis 2006, p.205).

That identity is a construct of society does not mean that it does not carry real meaning for people. Indeed, Appiah (2018) contends that identity matters to people “because having an identity can give you a sense of how you fit into the social world. ... [it gives] you reasons for doing things” (p.8). The fact that identity carries real meaning helps us appreciate Benedict Anderson’s conception of nations as “imagined communities”. Identity groups are imagined communities because their existence depends on people’s belief that they exist. As Anderson explains, “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1991, p.6).

Further, people consider themselves members of a particular group because of certain traits. Anderson’s idea of “imagined communities” demonstrates that individuals sometimes use primordial markers such as culture, ethnicity, language, religion, history, and others as the basis both for differentiation and categories of identification. However, these primordial markers are not natural or enduring but rather the products of social construction. Constructivism presumes that societies collectively ‘construct’ identities through the process of individual experiences or as people continually engage in questions of who ‘we’ are. Constructivism helps us move away from the reification of identity. More importantly, it opens up an understanding of complex social dynamics and changes that inform identity as a construct of society (Taylor 2015; Cornelissen & Horstmeier 2002).

Interactions between primordialist, instrumentalist and constructivist understandings of identity are significant in Liberia’s case since elements of all three were present during and after state formation and continue to play an essential role in post-war reconstruction processes.

Ethnicity and Ethnic Groupings

Like identity, the theorisation of ethnicity has been ongoing for decades. The debate focuses on understanding the markers of an ethnic group and whether these markers are static, i.e., primordial or subject to human agency, i.e., constructed (Malešević 2011, Zagefka 2009).

For a long time, ethnic solidarity was seen as automatic, normal, and natural. This view emanated from primordial understandings of group origins that “cultural difference is not only given but is also an ultimate cause of a particular behaviour” (Malešević 2011, p.68). However, recent scholarship espousing the constructivist stance (Brubaker 2004, 2002; Malešević 2011,

2006, 2004; Jenkins 2008, Le Vine 1997; Cohen 1994) has argued that the development of ethnic identities in every society is usually in response to groups' functional requirements. There is now some consensus among scholars that the concept of ethnicity, like identity, nation, race, is constructed rather than primordial (see Brubaker 2002, 2004; Le Vine 1997; Laitin 1998). According to these scholars, what is significant is what informs the crystallisation of categories into groups. We sometimes confuse categories with groups, although categories are mere collections of entities (which at best could be the basis for potential group formation). According to Brubaker (2004, p.12), a group is "a mutually interacting, mutually recognising, mutually oriented, effectively communicating, bounded collectivity with a sense of solidarity, corporate identity, and capacity for concentrated action".

The point here is that ethnic categories are social constructions, making ethnicity more of a political process (Cohen 1994) or a "politicised social action" (Malešević' 2011, p.71) than a natural phenomenon. In this sense, Cohen (1994) defines ethnicity as involving 'corporate groups' where in some instances, group leaders invoke primordial symbols, such as cultural and historical backgrounds, as part of a political strategy to obtain support from potential group members. Similarly, Malešević' (2011) contends that it is not the cultural difference of ethnic groups that translates into social action but the situational context of potential group members. He states: "it is the interactive social situation that shapes their feelings, their thoughts and their conduct [...] and generates action and determines the patterns of conflict and solidarity" (Malešević' 2011, p.79).

This study approaches ethnicity and ethnic groupings from the constructivist perspective. Liberia's Indigenous groups are characterised as ethnic groups colloquially and in academic circles – it is sometimes not clear the perspectives influencing their labelling as ethnic groups. This study does not consider ethnic groups to be natural social groups, "but rather in relational, processual, dynamic, eventful and disaggregated terms" (Brubaker 2002, p.167). Understanding ethnic groups as relational means considering ethnicity in terms of political projects, practical categories, contingent events, organisational routines, and the cultural idioms that constitute such a group (Brubaker 2002).

Identifying ethnic groupings as political projects shows the significance of Liberia's settler colonial past for the construction of ethnic groupings. For example, the colonial strategies deployed by the settler regime explain the heightened inter-ethnic tensions that erupted into the civil wars. As argued in Chapter 1, settler societies rely on a system of segregation and othering to sustain settler supremacy and limit Indigenous political mobilisation. The Americo-

Liberians grafted some ethnic groups into the lower echelons of the settler structure and provided them certain privileges, including executing the regime's 'dirty business'. An example is the Frontier Force which was compromised of Indigenous people but was used by the settler regime to commit unimaginable atrocities against other Indigenous groups. My point here is that residual anger about historical injustices and deep-seated divisions from the colonising tactics of the settler regime is crucial to understanding both contemporary group behaviour and motives for the brutalities Liberians meted out against those they consider to be outside their in-group during the coup and the civil wars (Chapters 3 and 4).

Thus, in our consideration of Liberia's case, it is critical to view ethnicity via the situational context – the political, social, cultural, and psychological processes within ethnic groups. This requires taking the 'groupness' (the elements or micro-politics that bounds them as a group) as the analytical category, and not the 'group' as an entity, because those bounding elements often fluctuate contextually (Brubaker 2002, pp.167-8).

Approaching ethnicity as a process – thus, understanding it through the different micro-politics that constitute ethnic groups – instead of a static entity, helps us appreciate how ethnic groups construct collective solidarity. So, without assuming that collective ethnic solidarity is natural and constant, as seen with primordial perspectives, we can understand how ethnic categories crystallise into groups and establish boundaries to protect the common interest while also remaining contingent on other situations. I now move into a discussion of Liberia's Indigenous groups in the context of ethnicity as a process and ethnic groupings as relational.

Belonging and the Politics of Belonging

Belonging is about feeling *at home* (Yuval-Davis 2006) or *a feeling of being at home in a place* (Antonsich 2010). The notion of belonging relates to emotion or a desire for attachment to a place, group, culture. Youkhana (2015, p.11) notes that our understanding of belonging

ranges from a personal feeling, the sense of belonging to a certain group, place, or social location, to the understanding of belonging as a resource that can be used to draw social demarcations and establish border regimes.

Like identity (and ethnicity), belonging is generally treated as a self-explanatory term²⁹ (Antonsich 2010). This is the case in this thesis—my interviewees primarily use the concept

²⁹ Antonsich (2010, p. 644f) and Youkhana (2015) have provided a comprehensive review of the use of the term in varying disciplines in social science.

of belonging to explain claims for dual citizenship in Liberia. The description provided by Youkhana (2015) above proves helpful in organising the various ways my interviewees utilise the concept of belonging. They use belonging to self-identify; to articulate the dual citizenship debate and what they believe to be at stake in such contestations; to express their feeling of patriotism to Liberia; and to establish boundaries of inclusion and exclusion concerning access to ‘Liberianness’ and the associated rights and privileges (Chapters 6 and 7).

In migration studies, the concept relates more to migrants’ (diasporas) claims for belonging in their host countries (see Anthias 2006, 2008; Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011; Wessendorf, 2017). In these works, belonging is commonly tied to territories, culture, memories, and identity, and it is increasingly contested between and among host and guest communities (Youkhana 2015). Belonging plays a similar role in this thesis, although my interest is in diaspora Liberians’ claims for formalised identity (belonging) in their home country and not necessarily their host communities. However, in some cases, diaspora Liberians’ perceived lack of belonging in host countries underpins claims for formalised identity in Liberia (Chapter 7). This thesis use of belonging follows the writings of Nira Yuval-Davis in particular, as well as Floya Anthias, Marco Antonsich and Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka. These scholars have made tremendous contributions to our understanding of belonging and the politics of belonging, although their analyses are primarily situated in Europe.

Yuval-Davis (2006, p.203) has differentiated between three interrelated levels of belonging as “social locations”; “individuals’ identifications and emotional attachments to various collectivities and groupings”; and “ethical and political value systems with which people judge their own and others’ belonging/s” (p.199f). She defines belonging through an intersectional lens, arguing that belonging is not a “reified fixity” but a dynamic process that “is constructed [and negotiated] along multiple axes of difference, such as gender, class, race and ethnicity, stage in the life cycle, sexuality, ability” (p.200). In justifying the use of an intersectional approach (Crenshaw 1989, 1991), Yuval-Davis maintains that it is incorrect to construct the social locations of belonging along a single axis of difference. The use of an intersectional approach relates to “its consideration of multiple narratives of belonging, influenced by different historical trajectories, and of social realities that are able to form senses of belonging far beyond those tied to ancestry, authenticity, and places of origin” (Youkhana 2015, p.12). For her part, Anthias (2006, 2008, 2013) situates belonging at the interface between the local and the global. Her introduction of the term “translocational positionalities” helps us understand that belonging is not static to a specific location or place. Instead, “people might

occupy different and contradictory positions and have different belongings globally” (2013, p.15). Like Yuval-Davis, Anthias (2013) suggests the need for an intersectional lens in our understanding of the construction of belonging.

This thesis draws on this framing of belonging by focusing on two analytical dimensions of belonging: personal and social. First, the notion of belonging can serve as an act of self-identification. Second, others can deploy belonging to establish the boundaries and borders of social and political locations. Antonsich (2010) categorises the first dimension as ‘place-belongingness’, arguing that it is a “personal, intimate, feeling of being at home in a place”. The second is the ‘politics of belonging’, which considers belonging “as a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion” (p.644; see also Fenster 2005).

Antonsich’s (2010) emphasis on place in the first dimension speaks to Yuval-Davis’ definition of belonging as a feeling of being ‘at home’ and Anthias’ spatial reference. Consequently, “place is felt as ‘home’ and to belong is to find a place where one can feel ‘at home’” (Antonsich 2010, p.646). Home, in this instance, does not necessarily represent a physical, domesticated space since such places do not always afford different people the same level of comfort and security³⁰. Instead, Antonsich deploys the definition provided by bell hooks in her seminal book: *Belonging: a culture of place* (2009), in which hooks defines home as “a symbolic space of familiarity, comfort, security and emotional attachment” (p.213).

The equation of belonging to home and the categorisation of home as a place to which one is emotionally attached due to the comfort and security it provides is essential to the focus of this thesis. On the one hand, the link between belonging and home is significant to how the dual citizenship debate supports or threatens the sense of belonging of both in-country and diaspora Liberians. Negotiations for dual citizenship and demands for belonging operate along multiple axes, including race, ethnicity, gender, class, age, diasporaness, and several other social and economic locations that underpin the social realities of all the stakeholders involved in the debate. On the other hand, it helps explain Liberia’s foundation as a settler colony. Settler colonialism is inherently about belonging, and the Americo-Liberians found both personal – “place-belongingness” (Antonsich 2010) – and social belonging by constructing the settler state. Their subjugation of the Indigenous population demonstrates the politics of belonging.

³⁰ See feminist scholars such as Blunt and Dowling (2006) and Varley (2008) who have criticised homes for reproducing gendered and patriarchal relations of oppression, violence and fear.

As noted by Youkhana (2015, p.12), when we use our “sense of belonging to mobilise collective identities, to create social, cultural, and territorial boundaries, or to allocate citizenship rights”, our “feelings of place-belongingness translate into ‘regimes of belonging’”.

Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (2011) coined the term “regimes of belonging” to describe the shift from a ‘sense of belonging’ (the personal, intimate feeling of being at home in a place) to the politics of belonging, which is public and formal, and mainly concerns membership (to a group) and ownership (of a place). Regimes of belonging manifest in institutionalised patterns that are bounded and can be restrictive (pp.6-7). Similarly, Yuval-Davis maintains that the politics of belonging is the “arena of the contestations around ethnical and ideological issues” (2006, pp.203-5). We move from the realm of belonging to the politics of belonging when people and groups begin to utilise social locations and narratives of identities to erect boundaries. And the boundaries that are critical to the politics of belonging “are the boundaries of the political community of belonging, the boundaries that separate the world population into ‘us’ and ‘them’” (p.204).

Significant to my analysis is the realisation that “the politics of belonging also include struggles over the determination of what is involved in belonging, in being a member of such a community” (Yuval-Davis 2011, pp. 20-21) and, by extension, claiming ownership of a place in said community. Indeed, Liberia’s dual citizenship debate has generated contestations over determining what belonging to Liberia entails (Chapter 7). Therefore, belonging encompasses contestations concerning the participatory aspect of citizenship and the status and entitlements that such membership entails. Also, it is continually negotiated between individuals and collectivities. This means “one’s personal, intimate feeling of belonging to a place should always come to terms with discourses and practices of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion at play in that very place and which inexorably conditions one’s sense of place-belongingness” (Antonsich 2010 p. 649). It is with this understanding of belonging that this thesis analyses Liberia’s dual citizenship debate.

Research Design

This section outlines the research methods that informed and structured the data collection process. Reflexivity is a moral and methodological obligation (Chiumento et al., 2018), and so the study draws on anthropological ideas on positionality. I present my positionality as a Ghanaian interested in a Liberian identity question and examine how this has influenced the

dialogical process of the research design. Positionality is “how differences in social position and power shape identities and access in society” (CTLT Indigenous Initiatives).

Secondly, I argue for the appropriateness of qualitative research design and explain the use of interpretive content analysis and narrative interviewing for the data collection. In this section I discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the data collection process and argue for the suitability of online interviews for the study.

But why Liberia, Though? Negotiating my ‘Ghanaianness’ in the Study

Why is a Ghanaian studying Liberia? I was asked this follow-up question a lot whenever someone asked about my thesis. The question’s emphasis is primarily on ‘why Liberia and not Ghana’: why is a Ghanaian studying an ‘intimate issue like identity about Liberia’? I got various versions of this question, mostly from other African scholars and students. Initially, I linked my positionality in this thesis to my MSc. programme in International Development (Governance & Statebuilding) at the University of Birmingham, where I gained a theoretical and practical grounding in post-conflict reconstruction processes. I saw this PhD research as a logical continuation of my master’s thesis, which looked at the direct engagement of Liberian returnees and their impact on the legitimacy of the Sirleaf government. This explanation was never quite adequate as the conversation always returned to: ‘but why Liberia though’?

Some of these interrogations made me feel it was inappropriate for a Ghanaian to study any country other than my own. They also made me rethink the status of my Development Studies professors at Birmingham, who were primarily white Europeans and yet were experts on most things Africa. I learnt early in my PhD journey that the ‘why Liberia?’ questions relate to complex queries about my positionality as an outsider and its significance to the research process. I agree with Janet Salmons’ contention that:

to understand a piece of research and assess its credibility and potential contribution to knowledge in the field, we need to understand the researcher’s motivations, purpose, and designs. We want to grasp the nature of the interaction between researcher and participant that allowed data to be collected or generated (2012, pp.1–2).

Consequently, I had to (re)define who I am in the research and interrogate the consequences of the different identities or social locations I assumed in interactions with the study participants.

Beyond my Ghanaian nationality, I had to contemplate the other dimensions of who I am – a woman, a feminist, someone who lives abroad (with citizenship in Ghana and residency in Australia), a PhD student in a Western university (suggesting a degree of educational attainment and a particular class), a parent in a biracial marriage, Christian. I had to consider the degrees of privilege and access these social identities afford me and the different roles each dimension have played in my study of Liberia. Qualitative researchers bring ‘a gendered historical self’ to the process. Denzin and Giardina (2019, p.6) maintain that the “self, as a set of shifting identities, has its own history with the situated practices that define and shape the public issues and private troubles being studied”. Therefore, I highlight instances in the subsequent sections and the empirical chapters where my ‘shifting identities’ helped me gain access and connect me more closely (or otherwise) with different sections of my study participants.

Foremost, however, I believe that sharing the journey of how I became interested in Liberia may add another perspective to the focus of this project. My positionality has perhaps shaped some, if not all, of the decisions I have made during each cycle of the research process. This reflexivity acknowledges that researchers are always positioned. Nevertheless, disclosure of that positionality and, most importantly, how it impacts or informs the research has not always found its way into the final research output. My reflexivity brings into focus Soedirgo and Glas’ (2020, p.527) observation that “there is a growing consensus within political science that positionality matters”, but “less has been written about the practice of reflexivity within research processes”.

In assessing my positionality, I can think of several factors that motivated my interest in Liberia. The most significant, was in February 2010 when I had the opportunity to meet former Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. I attended a seminar she delivered at the University of Ghana on Liberia’s post-conflict reconstruction process. She discussed her dreams and aspirations for her country and her desire to bring together the different collectives of Liberians that have emerged following the civil war. In a rallying cry, she called on the Liberian diaspora to return home and contribute their quota to their country, which is in dire need of their funds and expertise. Sirleaf made a strong impression on me that evening. As the budding feminist I was then, her status as the first elected African female President meant so much to me. She occupied the epicentre of power in an African country – thus representing all I could be and more.

Until my encounter with President Sirleaf, my knowledge of Liberia and its people had been shaped by media reportage, mostly around Liberia's civil wars and the refugees the conflict had produced. I grew up in a relatively peaceful country in the early 2000s, but surrounding Ghana were countries riddled with civil conflicts. You couldn't turn on the BBC without hearing something about these wars during those years. News about Liberia's drug-fuelled, protracted civil war was always on the radio. There were constant commentaries on the BBC about rebel groups taking towns and villages hostage and more broadly recounting the horrors of the war.

Additionally, Ghana was one of the countries that hosted Liberian refugees and was heavily engaged in Liberia's peace talks. In fact, civil and political actors signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which officially ended the war, in Accra on 18th August 2003. So, listening to President Sirleaf that late February afternoon, I was intrigued by this powerful woman who seemed determined to change the warring narrative that defined her beloved country. Beyond the impact of her presence, I was intrigued by how her government would unite the different collectives of Liberians that emerged following the war – diasporas, stayees, returnees, survivors, perpetrators – to buy into the plan for reconstruction in Liberia. This interest in Liberia, growing from my encounter with former President Sirleaf and my master's thesis, developed into the focus of this thesis.

Reflexivity is increasingly seen as necessary in qualitative research “to ensure the ‘accuracy’ and ‘trustworthiness’ of research” (Soedirgo and Glas 2020, p.528; see also Berger 2015, p.221; Schaffer 2016; Yanow 2014). Being reflexive about my positionality helped me understand my identity as a researcher and how it influences the entire research process, becoming aware of what allows me to see and what inhibits my seeing (Watt 2007, p.82). The purpose of this section is to allow “the reader more transparency about what is more the result of the authors’ [me] and what is more the product of the lived experiences studied”, (Urrieta and Hatt 2019, p.3) Liberians abroad and in-country. Consequently, instead of readers being passive recipients of my interpretations of identity construction in Liberia, my aim with revealing my positionality is to invite the reader *into* my interpretations and critiques (Urrieta and Hatt 2019, p.3).

Qualitative-Interpretivist Research Method

Qualitative methods are compatible with the reflexive approach discussed above and are more appropriate to this study than quantitative methods. I am not interested in ‘how many?’

diaspora and in-country Liberians favour dual citizenship but rather *why* diaspora Liberians are claiming formalised identity and *how* Liberians in-country *perceive* this claim. A qualitative design facilitates answering these questions because the approach allows for gathering data through text, images, information about individual participants' situations or stories (through interviews), among others. Patricia Leavy (2020, p.2) provides a comprehensive definition, particularly, the use of the approach in the social sciences as, qualitative:

approaches to research are often used to explore, describe, or explain social phenomena; unpack the meanings people ascribe to activities, situations, events, or artifacts; build a depth of understanding about some aspect of social life; build "thick descriptions" (see Clifford Geertz, 1973) of people in naturalistic settings; explore new or underresearched areas; or make micro-macro links (illuminate connections between individuals/groups and institutional and/or cultural contexts).

As Leavy (2020) defines above, qualitative enquiry allows for an in-depth understanding of the matter. It enables researchers "to interpret or make sense of the meaning people attach to their experiences or underlying a particular phenomenon" (Mayan 2009, p.11). Concerning studies on identity, Urrietta and Hatt (2019, p.2) add that qualitative methods allow researchers "to explore more intimate conceptualisations of and experiential knowledge of identity with participants and communities."

Further, I adopted an interpretivist perspective as the study's epistemological standpoint. Leavy (2020, p. 2) notes, "qualitative research is a way of learning about social reality". Since social reality is embedded in social contexts, I can *interpret* the reality of my study participants through a process of sense-making about their meanings. Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991, p.15) have maintained that interpretive methods are based on the understanding "that people create and associate their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them". In this project, I have been interested in accessing the subjective meanings and interpretations my respondents assign to the question of a Liberian identity, thus making the qualitative/interpretivist approach an excellent methodological stance for this project.

Data collection for this study was conducted in two phases. The first deals with the sub-research question: *How has the Liberian state engaged with its population abroad?*, while the second focuses on *How do Liberians think about and engage with debates on what it means to be Liberian?*

Phase One: Interpretive Content Analysis

I gathered a significant volume of qualitative data on the discourse of the two post-conflict governments (Sirleaf and Weah) in the dual citizenship debate and their written and spoken communications about the engagement of diaspora Liberians in-country. This analysis was crucial to understanding the state's motivation for connecting with its populations abroad.

In this phase of the research, I deployed interpretive content analysis as an analytical tool to get a better contextual understanding of the state's positioning in the dual citizenship debate. Interpretive content analysis describes "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff 2013, p.24). With this technique, *meaning* is not merely "contained" in the text because it is neither simply descriptive nor literal. Instead, the approach requires researchers to go "beyond descriptive questions of 'what' and 'how' to inferences about 'why', 'for whom' and 'to what effect'" (Krippendorff, 2013, pp.25–27; Drisko & Maschi, 2015, p.59). Interpretive content analysis facilitates more significant contextual inferences and thus helps researchers gain a richer understanding of the meaning of the text analysed. It has a constructivist epistemological foundation (Krippendorff 2013, 2004), meaning texts are "rendered meaningful by the perspective and understanding of the reader for specific purposes" (Drisko & Maschi 2015, p.67).

I sampled official documents³¹ such as policy directives, reports, advertisements, and speeches produced by the state that addressed issues relating to diaspora Liberians both directly and indirectly. The records span the two terms of former President Sirleaf (January 2006 – December 2017) and the first year of the current president, George Weah (January 2018 – December 2019). In reviewing these documents, I drew on the four-step guide to content analysis provided by Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017): familiarising oneself with the data; creating meaning units; coding and condensation; and categories and themes. According to Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017, p.97), themes answer 'questions such as *why*, *how*, *in what way*, or *by what means*?'. It is at this stage that researchers engage with the data at a deeper level and make an interpretation.

³¹ I define these documents as 'official' mainly because I sourced them from the Liberian government's main website, the Executive Mansion (<https://www.emansion.gov.lr/>) that host most of press briefings, speeches, policy documents.

Following these steps, I identified the themes from the official documents focusing on questions about diaspora participation in Liberia's reconstruction and development process. I paid attention to the nature of engagement encouraged by the state, how specific government representatives defined or framed the Liberian diaspora, and the state messaging on dual citizenship and to whom it was directed. In total, I analysed over 50 official documents produced by the two governments. However, the analysis draws heavily on the documents produced by the Sirleaf government, since Weah and his government had only just started the second year of their first term during the period of data collection and analysis. The decision to include documents produced by Weah's government in the sample was due to President Weah's crucial remarks about dual citizenship in his inaugural address. His comments prompted calls from the diaspora community for collaboration with the government on the issue. Further, sections of Weah's development plan were dedicated to diaspora engagement in-country, specifying their potential for Liberia's reconstruction process.

The findings of this analysis are presented in Chapter 5. It also guided the design of some of the interview questions utilised in the next phase of the data collection process. Despite the potential for interpretive content analysis to offer great insight into a phenomenon, Krippendorff (2013) and others have noted that the method must be firmly grounded in empirical data. In the following section, I introduce narrative inquiry as my interviewing method and outline my sampling strategies.

Phase Two: Narrative Inquiry

I deployed narrative inquiry as an interview technique to understand the experiences and perspectives of Liberians – both diaspora and in-country. According to Clandinin (2007, p.xv), narrative inquiry is a “profoundly relational form of inquiry.” It focuses “not only on individuals' experiences but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, pp.42–43). Narrative inquiry is about “how stories and storytelling make meaning in our lives” (Mayan (2009, p.49).

Narrative inquiry can be deployed as a technique to understand and analyse stories lived and told and as a way of viewing a particular issue (Clandinin 2016; Pinnegar & Daynes 2007). In this thesis, I conceive of identities as narratives – the stories people tell themselves and others regarding who they believe they are and who they are not, and who and how they would like to be (Martin, 1995). Clandinin and Kosiek (2007) have argued that the regulative ideal of

narrative inquiry is not to generate a faithful representation of a reality independent of the knower, but to develop a new relationship between a human being and their environment – their life, community, the world (discussed in Clandinin 2016 pp.11-19). This implies that although narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience, it is also “situated in relationships and in community, and it attends to notions of expertise and knowing in relational and participatory ways” (Clandinin 2016 p. 13). Thus, the inquiry is into the individual experiences in the world or society they find themselves in.

Martin (1995, p.8) has argued that “as much as an individual is always attached to groups, a narrative always tells the story of one or several groups, and group identity can be analysed as a narrative, just as individual identity”. Further, in response to Wetherell’s (2006) argument that people are provided with a sense of ‘personal order’ through identity narratives, Yuval-Davis maintains that identities are never just personal, that collective identity narratives provide a collective sense of order and meaning. The use of ‘order’ by Yuval-Davis is not about coherence but points instead to “a sense of agency and continuity that encompasses changes, contestations, and ruptures within the identity boundaries of the individual and/or collective subject” (2010, p.267).

For this study, narratives provided me with the means to “understand the complexities of personal and social relations” of my respondents because the approach takes “into account the broader social construction of that story within interpersonal and cultural relations (Esin, Fathi & Squire 2013, p.305). The understanding that there is no need to separate the personal from the collective advances the project’s choice of focusing on both individuals and group representatives as study participants.

The Changing Realities of my Fieldwork

During the initial phase of project planning, I anticipated undertaking multisite fieldwork. The plan followed my argument that three stakeholder groups (the Liberian government, Liberian diaspora groups, and Liberians in-country) were shaping the discussions on identity construction, hence the need to recruit key informants from these groups.

The interview process was to begin with leaders of identified diaspora organisations in the United States and Europe. I also planned to interview Liberians in these locations who do not necessarily associate with these diaspora organisations but are nonetheless invested in the subject matter. At this stage, I would interview respondents using telephone and other internet-

based methods of communication such as Skype, Facebook Video/Audio Call, WhatsApp Call. The decision to conduct online interviews at this stage was to help manage project size and reduce cost and travel time due to the geographical dispersion of target respondents.

The next stage would have been fieldwork in West Africa. I had anticipated spending a couple of weeks travelling through Liberia and interviewing personnel from the political class, civil society, youth groups, media, academia, and representatives of groups engaged in the debate to gain a holistic perspective on the subject matter. I would then visit my home country Ghana, where I could access Bujumbura, a Liberian township in Accra, the capital city. Like other data collection sites, I would interview individual Liberians in Ghana, the leaders of the United Liberian Association Ghana (ULAG) and spend some time with the Liberian community in Bujumbura.

I had examined these options for data collection in consideration of my previous fieldwork in Monrovia and the networks I have built over the years of studying and working in the international development space. The plan seemed feasible and exciting. However, I fell pregnant just at the cusp of completing my first year, suspending all travel plans due to health-related issues. After the birth of my child in April 2019, I believed even then that, with careful planning and support, I could still undertake fieldwork in West Africa. Unfortunately, once I had a seemingly feasible plan to travel to Ghana and then Liberia with my mother and one-year-old in tow, travelling outside Melbourne, much less Australia, became impossible due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related international travel ban. The reality of the pandemic and varying degrees of lockdowns across the globe caused me to fully embrace the potential of an internet-mediated strategy for the study's entire data collection.

Online interviewing became crucial as I had to modify the format of engaging with potential respondents entirely. Shifts in interviewing format, in particular, caused some 'methodological messiness' for the study. In such instances, data generation by the researcher happens alongside their learning of the research process (Chiumento et al., 2018). Consequently, I conducted a brief literature review to help me adapt to engaging respondents online. The benefits of online interviews in comparison to face-to-face interviews include limited ecological impact (Hanna, 2012); and effective time use due to absence of travel (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Increasing technological advancement and its spread enables researchers to target participants from all over the world (Lo Iacono, Symonds and Brown, 2016); and makes online interviews convenient and cost-effective (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). However, most of the outlined benefits rely on the researcher and respondent having access to high-speed Internet and

knowing how to use the online platforms (Janghorban, Roudsari, & Taghipour, 2014; Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Relatedly, there could be potential technical problems such as poor sound quality and a time-lag in the audio or video (Chiumento et al. 2018).

The Internet as the ‘Space’ for Engaging Study Participants

Within qualitative research, interviewing is one of the most common strategies scholars use to gather data about a particular topic or research question (Leonard 2003; Creswell 2007). Defined as a “conversation with a purpose” (Burgess 1984, p.102; cited in Maddison 2008), interviews are purposefully arranged by qualitative researchers to “elicit specific kinds of information” (Blee & Taylor 2002, p.92). Leonard (2003) indicates that interviews typically follow rules and procedures, including participants’ consent to be interviewed and answer questions posed by the interviewer, to be recorded (or otherwise). The researcher has a responsibility to treat the respondent and the data provided with respect and per the ethical standards demanded by the nature of the data collected.

Interviews are traditionally conducted face-to-face in qualitative research. Among the benefits of in-person interviews are the opportunities for researchers to observe respondents’ nonverbal and social cues. Such observations might offer more insight into the meanings respondents attach to specific experiences. Face-to-face interviews “have a reputation for being the highest standard of interviewer-participant encounter” (Krouwel, Jolly & Greenfield, 2019).

However, the growth of the internet due to technological changes over the last few years has seen online interviews “overcome time and financial constraints, geographical dispersion [of potential study participants], and physical mobility boundaries”, which have previously adversely impacted in-person interviews (Janghorban, Roudsari and Taghipour, 2014). Consequently, internet-based methods of communication are increasingly becoming essential and influencing researchers’ options (Lo Iacono, Symonds and Brown, 2016).

I adopted online interviews for the bulk of the interviews due to the geographic dispersion of my study participants. The travel restrictions that followed the COVID-19 pandemic also impacted my choice of internet-based channels of interaction as the ideal option for interviews due to their synchronous (real-time) connection. My decision to adopt online synchronous communication technologies for the interviews followed consideration that most potential participants might have prior experience using them for professional and/or personal purposes.

I conducted my ‘online fieldwork’ between September 2019 and August 2020 and collected the primary empirical data for this study. Before commencing the online interview process, I

adopted purposive sampling and snowballing techniques to identify potential study participants. Mayan's (2009) deliberative questions about sampling context and likely subjects were particularly useful at this stage. Referencing Morse (1991a), Mayan proposes that researchers reflect on the following questions before commencing data collection: "What kind of characteristics of individuals am I looking for? Who can give me the most and the best information about my topic?[and]In which contexts will I be able to gather the most and best information about my topic?" as crucial to underpinning the process of selecting individuals and contexts (2009, pp.61–63).

I approached potential respondents mainly through email and other social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn. I suggested that potential respondents choose either Skype, WhatsApp Call, Facebook Messenger Video/Audio Call, Facetime, or phone call for the interviews. Significantly, all of these platforms, other than the phone call, have video functions, thus allowing me the opportunity to observe respondents' nonverbal and social cues. As Deakin and Wakefield (2014) rightly acknowledge, the nature of the interviews could be impacted by respondents' familiarity with online communication tools and, in some cases, access to high-speed internet. The challenge of unpredictable power cuts and bandwidth limitations, and the cost of internet data was a genuine worry since these concerns were of paramount significance in some of the locations where I was targeting potential participants. For example, Liberia's relatively recent history of civil conflict meant that internet and electricity infrastructures were inadequate, especially outside Monrovia, the capital city. And being Ghanaian, I understood from personal experience the difficulty of trying to make WhatsApp or Facebook video calls with family back home. As a result, I added phone calls to the list of options to interview respondents. Telephone calls were supposed to be a failsafe for technological failure. Nevertheless, most participants, even those based in Liberia, opted for WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger calls due to familiarity from prior use for personal and professional purposes.

Despite respondents choosing either Skype, Facebook or Whatsapp, we experienced some technical challenges such as poor sound quality and time-lag in the audio and video feed during the interviewing process. In such situations, we switched to phone calls. Unfortunately, the high cost of mobile data, low bandwidth, and respondents' general unwillingness to turn on their webcams made video interviews difficult, especially with participants in Liberia. Thus, all the interviews were conducted without video.

Over a period of seven months, I conducted a total of 31 in-depth online interviews using Skype, WhatsApp Call, Facebook Messenger Audio Call, and telephone calls with Liberians in the diaspora and in-country. In consideration of Mayan's (2009) sampling recommendations, the study participants included representatives of Liberian diaspora organisations such as the All Liberian Conference on Dual Citizenship (ALCOD) and some of its regional member groups like the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA), the European Federation of Liberian Associations (EFLA), and the United Liberian Association Ghana (ULAG). The ALCOD claims to represent about 500,000 diasporic Liberians worldwide in their demand for dual citizenship. I interviewed nine (9) representatives from these groups.

In addition, I interviewed 22 respondents from civil society, academia, the media, and other professional groups living in both Liberia and in the diaspora who are engaged in critical debates about citizenship and Liberia's post-conflict development process. The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours and followed a semi-structured format. In some cases, however, after I had established what I was hoping to achieve from the interview, participants tended to lead the discussions and focused their responses on issues they consider essential to their stories and experiences. As a result, some of the interviews veered off into general 'barbershop' talks about economic development in Africa, the woes of the African migrant, Trumpism and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, and several other topics. I believe engaging in such discussions helped me build trust and gain the confidence of some of the respondents. Nevertheless, the semi-structured format meant that sometimes I needed to redirect respondents back to the study's themes. While there was some variation in these themes according to whether I was interviewing representatives of diaspora groups, stakeholders in the diaspora, or Liberians in-country, the following themes were almost always present:

1. Respondents' reflections on what it meant 'to be Liberian', what that identity entails, and its expectations.
2. Diaspora experience and its impact on what it means to be Liberian.
3. Interviewees' views on the dual citizenship debate, what is at stake in the debate for the in-country and diaspora Liberians.
4. Interviewees' views on 'Proposition 1', its potential benefits, risks;
5. The nature of diaspora engagement in-country;
6. Interviewees' reflections on the significance of (ethnic) identity in the civil war;

7. Interviewees' views on the significance of Liberia's history to current citizenship debates.

Quotes from the transcripts of these interviews are a significant component in presenting the chapters that discuss how Liberians abroad and in-country think about and engage with debates on what it means to be Liberian. Tracing the interviews in the empirical Chapters (5, 6 & 7) “enable[s] the reader to ‘hear’ what the researcher heard” (Reinharz 1992, p.39). Concerning the analysis of narrative interviews, some scholars (see Labov & Waletzky 1967; Burke 1969) have provided specific procedures. Nevertheless, Mayan (2009, pp.49-50) indicates that most narrative scholars do not follow any prescribed frameworks. Instead, they use theming as their basic analytical technique. Consequently, I used the computer software NVIVO, which allows for organisation, analysis, and generation of themes from the interview transcripts, enabling me to find insights and present coherent and meaningful empirical chapters.

Sampling Potential Study Participants: Tracing my Positionality in the Process

The production of knowledge is a subjective process. It is shaped by the situational context of the researcher's background, personal characteristics (e.g., race, class, gender, ideology etc.), and relationship with the participants being studied (Arendell 1997, discussed in MacLean 2013). Denzin and Giardina (2019) argue against the positivist insistence that all research must be “judged against a narrow set of criteria—objective, valid, reliable, accounts of the “Other,” and his or her way of life”. Instead, they maintain that “the myth of the objective observer has been deconstructed. The qualitative researcher is not an objective, politically neutral observer who stands outside and above the study of the social world. Rather, the researcher is historically and locally situated within the very processes being studied” (p.6). More so, MacLean (2013) shows that “the relative power and position of the researcher affect both what we study and how we set out to study it” (p.69).

Consequently, my nationality as a Ghanaian and the fact that I had previously conducted fieldwork in Liberia became critical during participants' recruitment. Also, some of the identities I brought to the data collection process impacted the relationship between me and some of my study participants. My ability to connect with both in-country and diaspora Liberians offered me a unique position regarding the insider and outsider status that researchers typically bring to the collaborative data collection process. I recount below some instances that put into perspective how my positionality impacted the data collection process.

Before starting the recruitment of study participants, I identified ‘gatekeepers’ to communities of interest and relied on my social networks to help negotiate my entrée to the target participants. For example, I wanted access to Liberians in-country and abroad playing critical roles in Liberia’s reconstruction process. To help with this, I requested the assistance of Sianah DeShield, a Liberian novelist who, like me, is a Fellow of the Moremi Initiative for Women’s Leadership in Africa³² (MILEAD). A published romance novelist, Sianah is a bright, outspoken young woman who grew up in Liberia but lived in the United States during our correspondence. She has access to both communities due to family and professional engagements. Her assistance in recruiting participants was crucial as she vouched for my ability as a dedicated researcher in an introductory message to some potential participants.

Equally, my positioning as a MILEAD Fellow facilitated my introduction to Kula Fofona, who provided me with the contact details of key actors leading Liberia’s dual citizenship debate. Fofona had served as a Deputy Minister in Sirleaf’s government, so her recommendations were critical to amassing a list of potential respondents. Some of the respondents I interviewed, following recommendations by Sianah and Kula, offered follow-up sessions should I need it and further introduced me to other respondents. As noted by Salmons (2012, pp.17–18), partnering with an ‘insider assistant’ can help “by establishing credibility for the study and thereby encouraging honesty and commitment on the part of interviewees”. The benefits of being introduced to potential participants by these insider assistants was immeasurable. My different nationality and the subject of my thesis were a point of intrigue for most participants, going back to the question of ‘Why is a Ghanaian studying Liberia?’. However, once we got past the need for me to justify my interest, most of the respondents were inclined to patiently respond to my questions. Accordingly, my relationship with some of my respondents confirms arguments that social differences and even an outsider status “can often smooth entrée into a community and enhance the quality of interviews” (discussed in MacLean 2013, p.78; see also Tamale 1996).

The relationship I developed with ALCOD’s chairman, Emmanuel Wette, was also significant to the data collection process. Wette also became an “insider assistant” and, as an academic himself, made sure to suggest other key people on both sides of the debate whose views he thought could help gain a fuller understanding of the matter. I had been quite clear about my nationality and the focus of my thesis in the earlier scoping emails I sent to Wette. From my

³² Moremi Initiative is a sisterhood of African women with passion for transformational leadership on the African continent.

interactions with him, I realised that my outsider status and my positionality as a PhD student defined the power differentials between us. He trusted my acknowledgement of his expertise on the topic and committed to recommending potential respondents. He also sent me documents produced by ALCOD concerning the dual citizenship debate.

My interactions with the majority of the respondents, irrespective of their position on the debate, suggested that they considered the interview process an opportunity to share their views with a ‘neutral third-party’ whose primary interest was listening and learning. MacLean (2013, p. 79) articulates a similar observation when she argues that a researcher’s outsider status can often facilitate “open dialogue with multiple groups on various sides of a persistent conflict”. I present the outcomes of these interviews in Chapters 6 and 7.

Conclusion

This chapter presents my conceptual language in the thesis. I consider identity, ethnicity, belonging and its related politics of belonging as interrelated political concepts that have practical meanings for people and provide platforms for political contestations. I also mobilise belonging as a conceptual tool to explain demands for dual citizenship; noting that while citizenship is much more official than an emotive concept like belonging, my interest is the utilisation of citizenship claims to construct a sense of belonging to Liberia. The second part of the chapter outlines my research design, taking account of my positionality, and details the data collection methods.

The following chapter introduces the reader to the details of settler colonialism in Liberia as it probes the curious case of Liberia’s formation and the ‘settlers’ who formed it. It is guided by the third sub-research question: *What does Liberia’s history tell us about the civil wars and contemporary contestations over identity and belonging?*

Chapter 3: ‘The love of Liberty brought us here’: The experiment of Americo Liberia in the Grain Coast of Africa

“[T]he idea of Liberia was flawed in conception, design and implementation” (Sawyer 1992, p.41).

Introduction

The history of Liberia is a story about belonging. Thus, to fully appreciate contemporary struggles over identity construction and who belongs to Liberia, we need to understand the critical tensions that framed the formation of Liberia as a settler society. In this Chapter, I advance the *movements* of the two main groups from whom Liberia originated. I argue that the Indigenous groups were mostly “native settlers” (Mamdani 1998) because most migrated to present-day Liberia but were turned into natives by the praxis and mechanisation of settler colonialism established through the Americo-Liberian rule. I show that while the Americo-Liberians may have begun their journeys as immigrants, they became settlers following their adoption of settler colonial structures. Consequently, the construction of Liberia through settler colonialism positioned the two groups on the native/settler dichotomy. I argue that the seemingly unending social conflicts that engulfed the two groups before and after Liberia’s formation partly account for current citizenship negotiations and controversies over who can claim Liberian identity. Ultimately, the chapter demonstrates the historic background of contemporary disagreements over identity, citizenship and belonging.

In this chapter, I analyse Liberia’s history through the lens of settler colonial theory. I demonstrate the settler-colonial tools utilised by the Americo-Liberians to legitimise their territorial sovereignty (Chapter 1), including land appropriation, the establishment of settler society and political government, domination over the Indigenous population, and several other colonial strategies. The chapter is divided into two sections, each of which emphasises the ‘Us’ versus ‘Them’ dichotomies indicative of significant aspects of Liberia’s history.

The first section explores the nature of Indigenous political and social structures before the settlers’ arrival. It shows how modern nation-state formation deeply impacted Indigenous political power and institutional arrangements. Changes in taxation, land tenure and governance systems challenged Indigenous traditional powers and beliefs and entrenched the foundations for tensions and conflicts between the two groups which arose once Americo-Liberian settlement began.

The second section reviews the creation of the modern Liberian state. I argue that the inherent racial violence of the repatriation project provided the settlers with a point of departure from Indigenous values, beliefs, and political structures. I present the settlers' sense of separateness as the first step to negotiating their place in, and then coming to belong to, Liberia as a fundamental reason for their colonisation of the Indigenous groups until at least 1980.

The Indigenous Groups of the Grain Coast

Before colonisation, multiple African ethnic groups inhabited the area known today as Liberia. These groups congregated into kingdoms and confederacies that, unlike modern notions of statehood, lacked one central government. Much of the earliest information about the Indigenous people who inhabited the pre-Liberia territory comes from European explorers and merchants, mainly the Portuguese and later the Dutch, who founded trading settlements along the coast of present-day Liberia in the 14th and 15th centuries. In these accounts, it is speculated that the region was inhabited by several different ethnic groups who moved to the area in various waves of migration as far back as the 12th century and possibly earlier (Kraaij 2015). Burrowes (1986) provides a detailed account of economic production and exchange in the area as it relates to crop cultivation, long distance trade, local currencies etc. from 1000 A.D. to the establishment of the formal state in 1847.

The Indigenous peoples who inhabited the area are categorised into 16³³ ethnic groups. Each group has its sub-clans, languages and dialects, traditions, customs, religious philosophies, and other cultural markers. They have been grouped into different ethnological clusters in recent times based on their cultures and language (Dunn-Marcos et al., 2005). They are:

1. the Mel or West Atlantic, consisting of the Gola and Kissi;
2. the Kwa speaking groups, consisting of Bassa, Belle, Dey, Grebo, Krahn, Kru, and Sapo;
3. the Mande-Fu, consisting of the Gbandi, Gio/Dan, Kpelle, Loma, Mano/Ma, and Mende; and
4. the Mande-Tan, consisting of the Mandingo and Vai.

The ethnic clusters provided above by Dunn-Marcos and his colleagues (2005) correspond to the groups' settlement order on the Grain Coast. The movements of these groups into present-day Liberia are not unusual. Such migrations were characteristic of pre-colonial Africa and

³³ There are different estimations, but 16 is generally listed as the official number

were linked to prevailing socio-political and ecological conditions such as “internecine warfare, disasters, the search for fertile farmlands and the colonisation of new areas” (Adepoju 1998, p.387; 1979, p.208). Population movements were unstructured and occurred in groups where members were demographically undifferentiated (Adepoju 1998). According to Levitt (2005), several West African groups “migrated from the old western Sudan to escape intermittent warfare, as warring factions forced smaller, less centralised groups to move southward ...” (p.18). Additionally, smaller groups fled the Sahel into the forest regions of the Windward Coast to escape the slave catchers of more powerful kingdoms who sold members of marginal groups first into the Mediterranean trade and later the transatlantic slave trade (Saillant 2019; see also Burrowes 2019)

As a result of these movements, most of the ethnic groups in Liberia extend into neighbouring countries, although they are sometimes named differently. For example, the Mende and Vai groups are in Sierra Leone, the Kissi, Kpelle, and Loma are in Guinea, while the Gio, Krahn, and Mano are in Côte d’Ivoire. Dunn-Marcos *et al* (2005) have observed that the transnational nature of the ethnic groups that traverse the West Africa region influenced refugee movements during the Liberian civil wars.

By introducing these ethnic clusters, this study does not seek to perpetuate the primordial perspective of ethnicity. Rather, the ethnic clusters show that Liberia has always been a migratory destination for various African population groupings. This suggests their collective categorisation in most historical analysis as Indigenous/Natives/Aboriginal Liberians. It is not completely clear from the literature which of the ethnic groups was first to arrive in the area, making it challenging to pinpoint Liberia’s first people. Consequently, this study defines Indigenous Liberians as the collective population of the descendants of the various African ethnic groups that inhabited the area before the arrival of the African American settlers.

Liberia’s Indigenous groups are not natural entities whose boundaries and collective solidarity remain static over time. As argued in the previous chapter, ethnicity is a *process* in that the Indigenous groups are, at their basic unit, ethnic categories that only crystallise into groups and establish boundaries in order to protect their shared interest. Hence, solidarity among these ethnic categories is not constant but is constructed when needed. In such times of need, leaders can invoke ‘primordial’ markers such as cultural and historical backgrounds as a political strategy to facilitate support from group members. Following is an exploration of the Indigenous socio-political structures to gain a sense of what was perhaps mortgaged with the settlers’ arrival and with it, the promise of ‘enlightenment’.

The Politics of the Indigenous Societies

The migratory patterns of some ethnic groups toward the western parts of Africa (present-day Liberia, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, and so forth) following the collapse of the Sahelian empires (Ghana, Mali and Songhai) were heavily influenced by the development of trade with Europeans along the Atlantic coast. The Europeans bought gold, ivory, persons, malagueta peppers and other goods in exchange for brass, alcohol and other general merchandise. In particular, the growth of the slave trade in the 18th century made the region more susceptible to competition for control over trade routes and markets, triggering inter-ethnic rivalries that flared up into wars from time to time.

Of significance here was the intense rivalry between the Gola, who maintained both an interior and a coastal presence and the Mandingo, who inhabited the hinterlands. They developed socio-political systems to control the markets and trading routes, especially in the slave trade. Their rivalry led to the emergence of two opposing chiefdoms or confederations: the Mandingo Kondo Confederation and the Gola Confederation (Tyler-McGraw 2007, p.130; Gershoni 1985).

The Gola Confederacy

The Gola established a multi-ethnic socio-political structure to facilitate the entrenchment of their power and influence. First, they used their control of the Poro and Sande secret societies to recruit other chiefdoms into their confederacy. Poro and Sande were secret societies entrusted as custodians of culture and to initiate young people into society while serving as a basis for pan-tribal brotherhood and the maintenance of inter-chiefdom solidarity. They provided the major route to socialisation and served as the primary linkage to political and juridical power (Lowenkopf 1976, p.28-30, discussed in Konneh 1996). Second, Gola women were married off to powerful chiefs of other ethnic groups so that the women could influence their sons to affiliate their tribes to their maternal side of the family. The Gola were protective and prideful of their culture and ethnic identity. For example, before the formation of the Gola Confederacy, they were small migrant groups seeking patronage from other ethnic groups and chiefdoms upon whose interior lands they wanted to settle. While the “exchange of women, gifts, and pacts of clientship and cooperation” validated these arrangements, the Gola do not assimilate into their patrons’ culture. Instead, they maintain their traditions and usurp their hosts’ lands as their population increases (d’Azevedo 1969, pp.9-11).

Gola protectiveness of their ethnic identity was expressed more by the women ‘given’ out in marriage to other ethnic groups. These women supposedly “followed their fathers” instead of their husbands and raised their children as Gola, hoping that they would affiliate more with their mother’s ethnic identity and eventually allow the Gola Confederacy to control the said ethnic group or chiefdom. This sense of ethnic attachment is what d’Azevedo (1969) calls “inalienable Golaness”, where the smallest degree of Gola blood is said to be enough to cause one to yearn to be Gola. Consequently, the Gola had contempt for other ethnic groups that sold their people into slavery or allowed their intermarried or pawned children to identify with another tribe (d’Azevedo 1969, pp.9-11).

The Mandingo Kondo Confederacy

The Mandingo dominated most of the long-distance trade in the interior using family networks and contacts within and beyond the Grain Coast. They developed routine regional markets and introduced cash economies to replace the barter system (Sawyer 1992, p.195; d’Azevedo 1969; discussed in Konneh 1996, pp.142-144). Other ethnic groups branded the Mandingo a distinct group due to their domination of the long-distance trade network and local retail production of cloth dying and blacksmithing coupled with their role as proselytizers for Islam. Interestingly, Gola’s control over the secret societies to recruit other ethnic groups did not apply to the Mandingo. The Islamic faith of the Mandingo prevented them from participating in the Poro and Sande societies due to embedded practices of African traditional religions.

Mandingo men married women from other ethnic groups to strengthen an alliance, establish a power base within a community, or acquire land. Yet, Mandingo women did not marry into different ethnic groups because they feared that their husbands would not raise their children Muslim. The Mandingo practice of not allowing women to engage in interethnic marriages hindered trust between them and other ethnic groups (Konneh 1992, p.53;159 discussed in Konneh 1996, p.145). d’Azevedo, for example, talks about the Gola having mixed feelings of respect and antagonism towards the Mandingo and Vai. At the centre of Gola resentment was the solidarity between the Mandingo and Vai, their sense of cultural superiority expressed in high bride price, opposition to intermarriage and extreme proprietorship of their children. Nonetheless, Konneh (1999), while describing the relationship between the Mandingo and other ethnic groups as bittersweet, claims that the Mandingos were purposely excluded from the Poro and Sande organisations because the societies resented the intrusion of the Islamic practices of the Mandingo, particularly, the use of magical charms and medicines (p.144-1445).

The ‘Othering’ of the Mandingo

As outlined above, the Mandingo migrated to the Grain Coast like most of the other Mande speakers and several other ethnic groups. Indeed, they were not the only group that attempted to dominate the Grain Coast’s power structures. Yet, they are considered outsiders and, therefore, non-Liberians. For example, in a paper delivered by Dr Cuthbert Christy – the Chairman of the League of Nations Representative on the International Commission of Inquiry in Liberia (1930) – he categorised the Mandingo as visitors or ‘interlopers’ (Christy 1931, p.519). Accordingly, Konneh (1996, p.142; 144) maintains that the categorisation of the Mandingo as foreigners relates to their continually shifting trade, faith in Islam and cultural ties to several different West African countries. The Mandingo are thus the exception to the view that Indigenous groups are the true citizens of Liberia. Contrary to Konneh’s assertion, Ellis (1999, p.39) maintains that the characterisation of the Mandingo as a people whose home is elsewhere persists even to this day because of people’s memory of them as slave traders (see Burrowes 2019, p.4ff). Ellis insists that crediting the prejudice to the Mandingo to their Islamic faith or role in transmitting the religion in Liberia is incorrect, considering the same discrimination is not extended to groups such as Vai, Gola and Gbandi who follow some tenets of Islam.

Brath’s (1969) ethnicity framework, which highlights the centrality of social relations, provides a lens to interpret the outsider status attributed to the Mandingo. Ethnic identity is a product of intergroup relations (Barth 1969, p.15). It is a “continually negotiated and *renegotiated* process by both internal identification and external ascription [...] via interaction informing cultural standards which signal how to judge ethnic co-members and outsiders” (Hummel 2014, p.50). Therefore, the outsider status attributed to the Mandingo does not stem solely from cultural markers like their Islamic faith (Konneh 1996) or even their participation in the slave trade (Ellis 1999). What distinguishes how the Mandingo is perceived in comparison to other groups like the Vai is not necessarily the content of their culture but their interactions with other ethnic groups.

Since ethnic groups are social constructions and their boundaries are socially determined, establishing ethnic boundaries involves allocating specific “social meanings to a limited set of acts, social controls and sanctions” (Hummel 2014, pp.49-51). The construction of these social sanctions, whatever they may be, is derived from intergroup relationships, which create ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ dichotomies. So, even though ethnic identities change over time and individuals

transfer their membership, groups continue to use the ‘Us and ‘Them’ dichotomy to not only maintain their difference but to either include or exclude others. Intergroup relationships are not always balanced, especially when the control of resources and assets are at stake. As such, crude stratifications can emerge against those groups considered the ‘other’ (Brath 1969, see Hummel 2014).

Consequently, the othering of the Mandingo as outsiders could stem from a perception among the other groups that the Mandingo has broken some social conventions – imaginary or otherwise. These social conventions could include all the issues raised by Konneh (1996), Ellis (1999), Burrowes (2019) and more.

I do not seek to discount the existence of stereotypes that underlie longstanding prejudices or discriminatory practices in most societies. Instead, I am arguing that the othering of some groups, as seen with the Mandingo, is symptomatic of the broader ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ dichotomies that appear to structure Liberian society as early as the Grain Coast period.

At the height of the rivalry between the Gola and the Mandingo confederacies, and with the flourishing of a ‘complex web of trade arrangements and governance’ (Dunn-Marcos et al., 2005), the first group of Americo-Liberian settlers arrived at Cape Mesurado (present-day Monrovia, the capital of Liberia). The nature of the Indigenous societies, coupled with the pride demonstrated in establishing complex social and political organisations for centuries, significantly impacted their relationship with the settlers.

Back to Africa: The imagination of Liberia as a Settler Colony

Liberia was founded in 1822 as a place of resettlement for freed Black people from America under the patronage of the American Colonization Society (referred to hereafter as the Society or ACS). The Society’s settlement was first established in Sierra Leone but was disbanded and moved to Liberia when the harsh climate and malaria caused the death of several settlers. The settlers re-christened the Grain Coast ‘Liberia’ – ‘the land of the free.’ Other American formerly enslaved people later joined the first settlers in Liberia. Additionally, a group of West Indian Blacks who had become dissatisfied with British rule in Barbados, Jamaica, and other Caribbean islands joined the settlement. There were also ‘Recaptives’ believed to be from the Congo River basin who were rescued from slaving vessels on their way to the ‘New World’ by the United States Navy following the abolishment of slave importation (Liebenow 1987). This group of settlers were commonly known as ‘Repatriates’ or ‘Congoes’, and they settled in and around the settler colonies and identified with the Americo-Liberians. According to Ciment

(2016, p.216), the term ‘Congo’ was first used in a derogatory manner to describe all settlers but ultimately became a *neutral* term used by both natives and Americo-Liberians alike³⁴.

The resettlement project originated from the back-to-Africa movement that gained popularity in America during and after the period following the American Revolutionary War. As Ciment (2016, p.217) observes, “the origins of the first republic in Africa lay in the revolution that gave rise to the first republic in the Americas”. Writing about the formation of the ACS, Sherwood (1917, p.209) notes:

What to do with the ‘Negro’ population has almost always been a question before the American people. Since the early date of 1714, its removal to some territory beyond the limits of the United States or to an unsettled area of our public lands has been advocated.

The back-to-Africa movement sought to solve the ‘problem’ of the increasing population of free Blacks in America due to anti-slavery laws in the North and manumission laws in the South. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the increasing numbers of free Blacks triggered fear and anxiety among America’s white population (Ciment 2016). As Boley (1983) argued that the growth of free Blacks threatened the “survival of the American nation ...and [the] maintenance of a white identity” (p.9). The fear was that “America would lose its racial and cultural identity if the ‘Negroes’ were allowed to mix with the whites” (p.6), thus producing “a race of ‘[M]ulattoes’ not worthy of America” (p.8). Thomas Jefferson, America’s third president, wrote in the *Notes on the State of Virginia* (cited in Ciment 2016, p.217):

The slave [usually of the same race] when made free, might mix with, without staining the blood of his master. But with us a second is necessary, unknown to history. When freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture.

Jefferson, like the allegedly liberal-minded planters who founded the ACS, was “concerned about the future viability of slavery [in Virginia] ... and convinced that Blacks and Whites could not – and should not – live together on equal civil, let alone social, terms” (Ciment 2016, p.217). So, the increasing free Black population added to America’s national debate questions about the identity and status of free Blacks and whether Blacks and Whites could (and should) coexist equally in a society that was rapidly leaning toward the total abolition of slavery. Evidently, fundamental to the resettlement project was a white supremacist idea of relocating

³⁴ Some of my respondents maintained that the term is currently used (in a derogatory manner) to describe people presumed to not truly belong in Liberia. See Chapter 7 for the discussion.

Black bodies no longer valuable to America's slavocracy, so they did not stain the lineage of white America.

The ACS and similar organisations were established in the early 19th century by abolitionists to facilitate the resettlement of 'excess' Black people in West Africa. The leadership of these organisations included Southern enslavers, the clergy, and humanitarian and pragmatist groups. The Southern enslavers saw free Blacks as a threat to the institution of slavery. Free Blacks represented freedom and self-reliance, indicating that those values were attainable among Black people. The clergy thought the initiative was an excellent opportunity to spread Western civilisation and Protestant Christianity to the 'dark continent'. The secular humanitarians considered the program a morally just solution to America's racial situation. They supported 'voluntary' repatriation, believing that free Blacks could never compete on equal terms in a society structured on racial discrimination. The pragmatist group saw the initiative as a convenient means to eliminate a class of people who had failed to integrate into American society successfully (Tyler-McGraw 2007; Fitzgerald 1997; Liebenow 1987).

The ACS was founded by prominent white men who saw African colonisation as a route for America's free Blacks to attain social, economic, and political advancement. They believed that Black people did not lack ability, but that white America would never see past the historical subjugation of Black bodies. Thus, the Society viewed repatriation as the only vehicle for African Americans to achieve true freedom, believing that racial discrimination would always be an obstacle to Black citizenship and freedom in the United States (Kelley 2008; see Tyler-McGraw 2007). Still, the ACS idea of America was envisioned as a homogenous white republic (Tyler-McGraw 2007).

The Liberia experiment was not the only proposition for solving racial injustice in America. Indeed, a number of those who envisioned the resettlement of Blacks such as Thomas Jefferson in 1784, Governor James Monroe of Virginia in 1801, James Forten and other free 'Negroes' of the Philadelphia Bethel Church in 1816, initially advocated for the establishment of Black territories or states in North America or Louisiana, Missouri or the Pacific Northwest (Liebenow 1987, p.12). There were also Black Nationalists who believed in the idea of Black people returning to the birthplace of their forefathers. An example is the Pan-Africanist,

Marcus Garvey who advocated for ‘separate but equal’ status for people of African ancestry and the formation of independent nation-states worldwide for Black people³⁵.

Nevertheless, ACS members such as the Southern enslavers were worried about increasing free Blacks, particularly those without civil rights who lived on the outskirts of towns and had no means of support except odd ill-paid jobs. Their worry pertained to the probability of these ‘unstable elements’ inciting other Blacks, enslaved or otherwise³⁶ and jeopardising the slaving industry, which was foundational to the Southern economy and society (Gershoni 1985, p.6). As a result, the Southern slave owners pushed for the December 1816 resolution through the Virginia legislature to

[...] correspond with the President of the United States for the purpose of obtaining a territory on the coast of Africa, or at some other place, not within any of the States, or territorial government of the United States, to serve for an asylum of such persons of colour as are now free and may desire the same; and for those who may hereafter be emancipated within this Commonwealth (Alexander 1846, pp.76-77).

The ACS decided on a colony in West Africa as the most feasible solution to providing refuge for free Blacks’ ‘willing’ to be repatriated to their ‘ancestral home’. In their choice for the location of this settlement, the ACS followed the path paved by Britain regarding their resettlement of free Blacks in Sierra Leone. The colonisation project also provided America with the means to solve the ‘problem’ of African people who were liberated from slaving vessels intercepted by the US Navy following the ban on slave importation by the Act of 1807 and the Act of 1819 (Finkelman n.d.; Liebenow 1987, p.12). The ACS stipulated that only free Blacks could be the object of the Society’s operations (Wickstrom 1958, p.30 discussed in Gershoni 1985, p.7). Yet, some enslavers used the repatriation program to repatriate the enslaved people they considered lazy and unproductive troublemakers (Gershoni 1985, p.9).

³⁵ Some critics including Black leaders in the United States believe that Garvey’s “ideas for resettlement were utopian and financially impractical” (Friedman 2018).

³⁶ The fears of the Southern enslavers were justified. There were numerous slave rebellions and insurrections in America during the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries. Some of the most popular are the revolts by Gabriel Prosser in Virginia in 1800, Denmark Vesey in Charleston, South Carolina in 1822, and Nat Turner’s Slave Rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia, in 1831.

In fact, in some cases, the freedom of Black people was tied to their repatriation to West Africa³⁷.

Thus, while some free African Americans chose to resettle in West Africa in an act of self-determination, many more were whipped and forced aboard ships that transported them to the Grain Coast to start anew (Aje 2013).

Some abolitionists rejected the colonisation movement arguing that the repatriation program sought to remove evidence from America that free Blacks could be industrious if given the opportunity (Liebenow 1987). Many freed Blacks also opposed the program. For example, the Philadelphia Bethel Church leaders labelled the colonisation project “a slur upon their reputation and little more than a plan to dump free Blacks ‘into the savage wilds of Africa’” (Liebenow 1987, pp.18-19). Ciment (2016, p.217) similarly argues that the vast majority of free Blacks were against colonisation, believing they had the right to live in a country they had helped build. Some felt general solidarity with their enslaved racial brethren, while others did not want to abandon families still trapped in slavery. Additionally, some held the same racial stereotypical perceptions as their white neighbours and thought “of Africa as a land of burning sun, tortuous [sic] insects – poisonous exhalations, corrupted water ... unwholesome food and savage men” (p.217).

Despite these objections to the colonisation movement, Liberia was founded by the ACS with support from the US government as a colonial state to serve both as an “engine of settler colonisation and as a mercantile expansionism” (David 1984, p.61). Towards this purpose, the settlers were supposed to be a conduit of Western modernity. The colony was expected to create a ‘humane order’ in the region by civilising and Christianising the Africans and engaging them in an ‘honest industry’ of trading in tropical produce to end the slave trade. The colony was also intended to secure trade arrangements between the African population and American merchants, a business monopolised by Europeans (David 1984). The American government provided the Society with an initial grant of \$100,000 to “assist in the purchase of land, the construction of homes and forts, the acquisition of farm implements, the payment of teachers, and the carrying out of other projects necessary to the care, training and the defence of the settlers” (Liebenow 1987, p.13).

³⁷ An example is the last will and testament of slave owner Isaac Ross of Prospect Hill Plantation in Mississippi who stipulated the sale of his plantation upon his death and the proceeds used to repatriate his slaves, numbering about 200 to Liberia (Huffman 2004; Kraaij n.d.)

Early Settlements and Indigenous Resistance

The first settler community was at Cape Mesurado, an area secured at gunpoint from a Gola leader³⁸ named ‘King Peter’ by the ACS in exchange for “three hundred dollars’ worth of muskets, beads, tobacco, gunpowder, clothing, mirrors, food and rum” (Liebenow 1987, Gershoni 1985). This ‘sale’ would be the first of many transactions in which the Indigenous negotiators would belatedly realise the full consequences of ‘selling’ their lands to the settlers. The area was renamed Monrovia after James Monroe, a prominent member of the ACS who later became America’s fifth president. For some time, the US government maintained an official interest in the colony and used it as an outpost for its anti-slavery campaign.

With time, the settler communities expanded as other US colonisation organisations such as Maryland State Colonization Society founded settlements in the colony (Liebenow 1987). The growth of the settler population meant their expansion into the lands of the Indigenous groups. The politics around land ownership (appropriation) was the cause of numerous wars and was central to the initial tensions between the settlers and the Indigenous groups. The appropriation of Indigenous lands is a defining element of settler colonialism (Chapter 1). Settlers “destroy to replace” (Wolfe 2006), in that, they ‘conquer’ Indigenous lands and lives to facilitate acquisition of territory and the establishment of settler societies. Land appropriation and the destruction of Indigenous societies is the playbook of settler colonies across the globe and Liberia’s construction was not any different. Indeed, the coastal Indigenous groups resisted annexation by waging wars against the settlers as it became evident that the settlers were not just interested in land appropriation but the governance of the area and its people (Liebenow 1987).

Further, the ACS had intended for the African American settlers to engage in agricultural production and so allocated free plots of land for that purpose. The introduction of private land ownership by the colonial state was an alien concept to the Indigenous groups since, among them, land ownership was determined collectively through families or by the entire ethnic group. The settlers, on the other hand, did not understand the practice where land sale had no meaning since it was given out based on “usufructuary right of occupancy rather than individual private freehold” (Liebenow 1987, p.16). Hence, the reality that lands ‘sold’ to the ACS would perpetually belong to the settlers led to several early wars between the two groups (de Lynden 1942, p.89; David 1984; Holsoe 1971).

³⁸ See Holsoe (1971) for an extensive analysis of the purchase of the land and the ensuing disagreements.

In addition to tensions related to land ownership, differences in social values related to the slave trade and the belief that ACS had brought the African Americans to replace the coastal Indigenous groups intensified the hostilities, sometimes resulting in violent clashes (Beyan 1991, p.51; see also Holsoe 1971; de Lynden 1942, p.90).

Indigenous resistance against the settlers' colonising tactics is documented in the *'Historical Dictionary of Liberia'* (Dunn, Beyan & Burrowes 2000), which references several conflicts and treaties between the settlers and the Indigenous groups. For example, beyond the first two deadly wars waged by the Dey ethnic group against the settlers in 1822, there were also attacks on settlements in Sinoe by the Kru confederation in 1856. The Grebo ethnic group waged several wars over land, settlements, and taxes against the independent colony of Maryland (1856) and subsequently against the colonial state when Maryland³⁹ became a county of Liberia (1857, 1875, 1893, 1910) (Dunn, Beyan & Burrowes 2000, pp.xxiv–xxvii; Levitt 2005). George Klay Kieh has provided a helpful breakdown of the cycles of struggle that engulfed the colonial state before it gained independence from the ACS in 1847 (2003, 199-200).

Evident in Kieh's analysis of the conflicts are what was important to the Indigenous populations and the Black settlers at this point in Liberia's history. The settlers wanted to escape the most grievous complaint they had in America – that they would be barred from advancement and their citizenship and identity linked to the provisions made for their race. On the other hand, the Indigenous groups were independent and self-sustaining politically, economically and socio-culturally, so it made absolute sense for them to resist any form of intrusion that threatened to obliterate their identity and socio-political structures.

The following section discusses the change in Liberia's status from a colony of the United States to an independent settler state. It tracks how the shift in status impacted the relationship between the settlers and the Indigenous population.

Republic of Liberia: The Birth of a [Black] Settler Nation

The ACS had hoped that the colonial state would become a site of agricultural production to supply American industries and so provided the settlers with land acquired from Indigenous peoples, and the necessary tools to work it. However, an increasing number of settlers, particularly the light-skinned African Americans, rejected farming and established themselves

³⁹ The Maryland State Colonization Society separated from the ACS in 1831 and started sending settlers to Maryland in Liberia. Maryland in Liberia remained a separate independent colony and later republic until it was annexed by the Republic of Liberia in 1857 (Liebenow, 1986).

instead as merchants engaged in commerce and the import-export trade. The neglect of agricultural production meant a lack of funds for the colonial state. More significantly, after the 1930s the Liberian colony did not receive financial and military support from the US government, as was the custom with colonial outposts and their country of origin. This lack of support was due to the introduction of Monroe's Doctrine, which restricted US interventionist activities overseas (Kieh 2012; Tyler-McGraw 2007; David 1984). According to Kieh (2012), the US treatment of the colony signified the end of the repatriation project, indicating the colony had zero value to the American ruling class, who lobbied the government for grants to initiate the repatriation project.

The Society's lack of funds, coupled with the ambiguous relationship between Liberia and the US government as neither a colony nor a protectorate, compelled the ACS to declare Liberia a self-governing Commonwealth while maintaining some control over its internal affairs. The Commonwealth became an instrument for the settler merchant class, who were well established in their trading activities (Tyler-McGraw 2007; David 1984). The Americo-Liberians, as the different collectives of settlers became known (and who are referred to as such hereafter), declared the Commonwealth independent of the ACS in 1847 and began the process of modern state formation. What propelled the declaration of independence were issues related to the Commonwealth's legitimacy and whether it had the right to act as a sovereign state despite its ongoing ties to the ACS – a philanthropist organisation. Consequently, the refusal of foreign merchants to comply with the laws put forth by the Commonwealth served as the final straw leading to the declaration of Liberia as a sovereign state.

Liberia became the first republic in Africa and today is one of only two modern states on the continent without roots in European colonisation. Identifying colonisation in Liberia as different from European colonisation of African countries relates to my argument that Liberia was established as a settler society. The Americo-Liberians effectively colonised and replaced Indigenous societies with settler institutional arrangements. Hence, Liberia's formation as an independent polity is unlike most African countries where modern state formations were animated by united struggles against European colonisation and racism. Arguably, Liberia's independence story lacks the united rallying characteristic of most African state formations. Instead, the Americo-Liberian settlers were singular in their resolve for self-determination and the zealous protection of their 'hard-won' sovereignty.

The Liberian state, ruled by settlers and their descendants, was largely limited to the settlements along the coast and the St. Paul River, upstream from Monrovia, the main city and capital. A

significant portion of the Indigenous population was under the control of the national government, but much of the country's territory beyond the coast remained under the rule of tribal leaders. The settlers were hampered by the climate of the hinterlands and the many wars they were forced to fight with the Indigenous groups. Liberia's administrative control was only extended to the hinterlands after World War II. By then, British and French colonisers had already grabbed large chunks of the territory⁴⁰. In the early years of the republic, French and German imperial agents sought to terminate the Liberian experiment in self-government by an 'inferior race', arguing that Liberia was hugely in debt, underdeveloped, and could barely control the territory beyond its settlements, much less its far-flung borders. In turn, the Americo-Liberians lobbied the "special ties" they had with the United States to fend off European colonisers who were bent on establishing a political mandate over Liberia (Ciment 2016, pp.223-4).

After Liberia's independence, the country inspired interest and curiosity worldwide. Baron H. de Lynden writes that there was a feeling of expectation for Liberia to perhaps "follow the lines of development inspired by aboriginal genius" (1942, p.89). de Lynden's view is significant as he was a Liberian Minister to the Court of St. James. For example, he was invited by the Royal African Society to address a joint meeting during Liberia's centenary (see de Lynden 1947). The expectation relates to Liberia and Ethiopia being the only African republics not culturally, economically, and politically dominated by white people. However, to follow a development model inspired by aboriginal genius meant gradual development. Using 'development' in the global West as the criteria, de Lynden (1942) argues that for Liberia to be able to adopt the elements of Western political and social economy, it had to include the Indigenous majority without undermining their tribal existence (p.89).

Yet de Lynden crudely describes the Indigenous groups as primitive and their lifestyles as unprogressive due to what he calls 'tribal communalism', emphasising Indigenous peoples' commitment to their ethnic groups as the basis of their social and economic security. As mentioned, de Lynden was part of the settler structure and his views here were illustrative of the settler society's perception of the Indigenous groups. This perception influenced the strict socio-cultural separateness of the Americo-Liberian settlements from the hinterlands, whose

⁴⁰ Ciment (2016) estimates that about two-thirds of the territory Liberia originally claimed was lost through land grabs by European colonisers.

people the settlers categorised as “benighted savages” and “darkies” unfit to benefit from western culture and education (Wegmann 2014, p.689; Ciment 2013).

The minority Americo-Liberians, constituting about five per cent of the total population, were not keen on extending the liberty they cherished to the Indigenous majority. They created an apartheid system modelled after “the system of the plantations in the deep south of the United States” (Bøås 2005, p.79). Except, they assumed the ‘master’ role and used the “apprenticeships” and “pawns” systems to further dominate the Indigenous people. For example, the government-orchestrated forced labour⁴¹ of Indigenous people was so rampant in Liberia that the League of Nations sent a commission of enquiry in 1930 to investigate slave trading⁴² in Liberia.

The Americo-Liberians adopted a constitution based on the American model, institutionalising an in-group made of settlers and an out-group of Indigenous groups. The constitution declared all men free and independent with certain inalienable rights, except the “all men” represented settlers as Indigenous groups were not considered citizens. Perhaps the most vivid example is the settler state’s seal and national motto: “The Love of Liberty Brought us here”, which suggests both the state’s colonial foundations and the fact that citizenship was restricted to the settlers, particularly those with some connection to America. Interestingly, the motto survives to this day.

Americo-Liberia: Contextualising the Indigene/Settler Divide

When people migrate willingly, they are typically driven by a desire for greater happiness, prosperity, and wellbeing⁴³ (IOM 2013, p.23). This statement is very true today as the world is

⁴¹ Known as the Fernando Po scandal, the then Liberian president Charles King was forced to resign when it was determined that the Americo-Liberian elites had connived to illegally ship thousands of boys and young men to work on the plantations of the Spanish island of Fernando Po and French Gabon. The revelation was taken as proof of Liberia’s unfitness for self-rule (Ciment 2016, p.226; Bøås 2001; Dunn, Beyan & Burrowes 2000; Sundiata 1974).

⁴² The contradiction here is palpable considering the Americo-Liberians would typically cite their ‘intervention’ in the slave trade as the critical reasoning for the Indigenous groups opposition. As noted by de Lynden: “The hostility which some of the tribes showed was largely due to the fact that they indulged whole-heartedly in slave traffic which the settlers were determined to put down. Much fighting with the Kru and Gola tribes resulted from this” (1947, p.208).

⁴³ This statement is not to suggest that the pull factors of migration (e.g., free Black people who willing repatriated to Liberia to escape their prejudiced life in America) are of more significance than the push factors that forces people to cross borders. Liberia does contribute to research on migration and forced migration, but this is not the thesis aim at this point.

continuously on the move. Perhaps, it was even more true for the emancipated American Blacks who chose to migrate to Liberia. In her thesis on the role of former Virginians in the making of Liberia, Tyler-McGraw (2007, pp.6-7) suggests that property-holding Blacks considered the move to Liberia an opportunity to escape the narrow and restricted lives they were forced to live in America. These Black Virginians saw Liberia as an opportunity to reconstruct their identity as both Americans and Africans. Likewise, Aje (2013, p.30) claims that some South Carolina Black Americans chose to migrate because “Liberia represented a haven from White oppression – a land where they hoped to find social happiness, a land where they would be able to enjoy every privilege, as well as civil and religious liberty”. The experiment of escaping one nation to create another provided these American Blacks with the opportunity to revise questions of personal and national identity.

Nevertheless, the prospect of moving to an entirely different continent – particularly one with a history of selling off kin into slavery – is bound to have evoked mixed feelings of hopes, fears, excitement and anxieties. According to Philips (2014, p.120), the balance of these emotions could depend on the circumstance of migration, country of origin, and pathways to settlement (discussed in Lima 2016). The emotions of migration, as outlined by Philips (2014) give us a lot to consider in the case of the Americo-Liberians, particularly with regard to their self-identification and negotiation of place and belonging to Liberia.

The Americo-Liberians constructed their identity, both as individuals and as a group, from the circumstances of their repatriation to Africa. Per this thesis’s conceptualisation of identity as the interpretation of our experiences of belonging, the identity of the Americo-Liberians was shaped by the inherent racial violence of their ‘removal’ from America – their birthplace and the land that had seemingly required from them and their ancestors the awful contribution of enslavement to support its own development. Repatriation reinforced both their self-identification with and differentiation from the groups they met upon arrival on the Grain Coast. Their survival and ability to produce a model of Black achievement, anticipated by the ACS, required a keen sense of separateness from the Indigenous peoples of the region.

Like in a typical settler colony, the Americo-Liberians believed that they were superior, and so they cast themselves as the administrators of the civilising mission and *racialised* the Indigenous groups as inferior. I have argued in the introductory chapters, that the settlers while Black themselves embodied and enacted whiteness as a form of power. We learn from Moreton-Robinson (2015, p.xix), whiteness works as property in settler colonial contexts because it has “cultural and social purchase” and enhances the life chances of those who

possess it. Consequently, it is settlers' racialisation of all those they consider *other* that produces the indigeneity of these others. Thus, whiteness not only categorises all *others* as non-white and therefore inferior, but produces the means to segregate settlers (deserving citizens) from natives (non-citizens). Further, settler colonialism has a troubled relationship with home, in that, the formation of the settler collective requires the destruction of Indigenous societies. As Bragg (2015, pp.205) puts it, "'home' is a phantasmatic construction of the colony", but home in this sense is doubled because the settler collective can claim to be both Indigenous and exogenous (see Veracini 2010, p.20ff).

The Americo-Liberians capitalised on their proximity to whiteness. Remember, they were American Blacks, an identity category they believed was superior to the Indigenous Africans. Thus, in Liberia's formation, the Americo-Liberians embodied the system of white supremacy which conferred structural opportunities to the settler society at the expense of the Indigenous peoples whose lands were exploited to advance settler supremacy.

Colourism and Racial Politics in Americo-Liberia

Like most other nation-states, Liberia experienced social division. Interactions between the different groups of Liberians generated forms of social divisions that corresponded roughly to education, occupation, and skin colour. Indeed, it made absolute sense for the settlers to reproduce practices, customs, and traditions from their 'home' country; most migrant communities do that even today. However, the introduction of status stratification based on skin colour would prove most divisive in the new republic. As was the case with the occupational hierarchy of the slave plantations in the American South, Liberia's colour-based stratification was most prominent in the arenas of politics and occupation.

Marcus Garvey, a known Pan-Africanist and an advocate for the 'separate but equal' status for people of African descent, wrote:

Some of us [Black people] in America, the West Indies and Africa believe that the nearer we approach the white man in colour the greater our social standing and privilege and that we should build up an "aristocracy" based upon caste of colour and not achievement in race (cited in Wayne 2014, p.95).

Garvey's contention aptly describes the social categorisations that sprang up in Liberia. Skin colour as an organising tool for identity and social class in Liberia, along with the distribution of education and economic resources, saw the entrenchment of the light-skinned Americo-Liberians' hold on power and the state machinery due to their educational qualifications and

the fact that some owned property. As discussed above, the Americo-Liberians vehemently rejected the Jeffersonian agrarian ideals⁴⁴ initially propagated by the ACS. They associated agriculture with the life of servitude that they or their parents had endured. Indeed, some light-skinned Americo-Liberians only emigrated to Liberia because of their lack of political influence and the vagaries of their legal status in America (Liebenow 1987; Akpan 1975). Thus, their hold on power caused a rift between them and the darker-skinned Americo-Liberians. Abayomi Karnga (1926, p.45) provides an excellent synopsis of the justification for the racial stratification:

The climate was more severe on the colonist with light complexion than on the [B]lack, and that for this reason, the pure [B]lack should go to the soil for subsistence, whilst his brother with blue veins remains in the Government offices to conduct the affairs of the state (cited in Kieh 2003, p.200).

Karnga, a scholar and politician of Recaptive parentage, argued in *Liberia: Before the new world* (1923), that Liberians' socio-racial stratification transformed into a hierarchical caste system with four distinct divisions. The light-skinned Americo-Liberians occupied the upper echelon. The dark-skinned Americo-Liberians were mainly subsistence farmers and labourers, and then there were the Recaptives or the Congoes. At the bottom of the hierarchy was the Indigenous majority. Eventually, the Americo-Liberian category expanded to include children from marriages and informal liaisons between Americo and Indigenous Liberians, and Indigenous children raised by Americo-Liberian families through the ward or apprentice system. The ward and child pawning systems allowed Indigenous and Congo youngsters to be assimilated into Americo-Liberian families to assist with farming and other chores in exchange for education, shelter, clothing, and an opportunity to learn whiteness. The tradition of apprenticing children in others' homes is an African practice. Still, the Americo-Liberians were often criticised for their use of Recaptives, and Indigenous people as domestic and agricultural labour since the status of these youngsters ranged from near-enslavement to adoption (Tyler-McGraw 2007; Liebenow 1987).

The light-skinned Americo-Liberians dominated politics and the economic scene from the declaration of independence in 1847 through their Republican Party until 1870 when they lost the presidency to a dark-skinned Americo-Liberian, Edward J. Roye (Ciment 2016; Liebenow

⁴⁴ The ideals advocated for seeking the serenity of the rural and agricultural existence while renouncing the evils of urban commerce and industry (Akpan 1975)

1987). Roye and his intellectual mentor and campaign advisor, Edward Blyden, were mercantile elites, but they prided themselves on their Blackness. According to Ciment (2016), Blyden was critical of Liberia's 'Mulatto' (light-skinned) elite and thought the Americo-Liberian culture was too slavishly Anglo-Saxon and neglected the many virtues and achievements of native African society. Blyden was one of Liberia's early nationalist thinkers. He wrote of Liberia's 'Mulatto' elite, "There is more 'Negro' hate in those men than they are aware of" (Blyden 1971, p.17).

According to Kieh (2003), the dark-skinned Americo-Liberians formed an opportunistic alliance with the Recaptives, the West Indians, and the coastal Indigenous people to win the presidency. Roye had won the 1869 election partly because he and Blyden wanted Liberia to "not just be *in* Africa but *of* it" (Ciment 2016, p.222), as well as their preference for the greater involvement of dark-skinned Liberians in government.

The light-skinned Americo-Liberians were resentful of Roye's victory and his aspirations to extend transportation, schools, and other infrastructure to the hinterlands to enable the promulgation of an African Liberianess/identity to Indigenous and settlers alike. Consequently, Roye was ousted from the presidency when he negotiated a bad loan deal to finance his government. The light-skinned Americo-Liberians demanded his resignation, questioning the legitimacy of his presidency. His refusal to step down culminated in a battle in 1872 in Monrovia. Roye was imprisoned but escaped from jail and subsequently drowned in an attempt to swim to an English steamer off the coast, and Blyden went into exile in Sierra Leone (Ciment 2016).

Liberia's colour division was a legacy of the experiences of the Americo-Liberians in America. Ciment (2016) explains that although light-skinned Blacks were hardly treated decently by white people, they were considered a step above darker-skinned Blacks. Many light-skinned Blacks accepted white people's valuation of their complexion and viewed darker-skinned Blacks as inferior. The favoured positioning of light-skinned Blacks in the Antebellum South, however limited, was resented by many darker-skinned Blacks who considered them untrustworthy. Resentment of light-skinned Blacks found political expression in Roye's presidency in Liberia (Ciment 2016, p.222). Tyler-McGraw (2007) shows further that many of the Virginia free Blacks who first repatriated to Liberia were light-skinned Blacks who had some education and dominated the local trade and Liberia's merchant class. As the first group of repatriates, Virginians in Liberia often maintained a sense of superiority and "felt themselves

to be more culturally and socially elevated than emancipated slaves from the Lower South” (p.152).

Social stratification based on skin colour only lost its political significance in 1883 when the Black-led True Whig Party (TWP) came to power. Following Roye’s ousting, the light-skinned Americo-Liberians were victorious in two elections through their Republican Party. However, the TWP formed to oppose the aristocracy of the light-skinned Americo-Liberians, under which Roye had won his presidency, dominated the electoral scene until 1980 (Kieh 2003; Liebenov 1987). The unbroken reign of the TWP for 97 years was a uniting tactic among the settler collective. The division between the light-skinned and darker-skinned Americo-Liberians blurred following decades of business deals and intermarriages (Ciment 2016). Indeed, settler unity was critical in the face of internal threats from the mobilisation of the native majority and external threats from prowling European imperialists convinced of the incapability of Black people to self-rule. The darker-skinned settlers “dominated government, but they ruled on the old terms [light-skinned Americo-Liberians] – of Liberia as a nation of ‘civilised values’, ... and disdainful of Native Africans and their culture” (Ciment 2016, p.223).

The unity of the settler collective evident in Liberia is characteristic of settler colonialism. As argued by Weitzer (1990), caste solidarity is critical to settler supremacy in colonial contexts. Settlers use dominant political systems like the TWP to lessen friction among the settler collective. The political machinery rewards loyal supporters and punishes dissenters and thwarts alliances with the natives by dispensing privileges to the lower echelons of the settler caste. Solidarity among the settler collective gives meaning to the enduring nature of the TWP (97 years in power) but more so, the permanence of structural political and socio-economic injustices and inequalities perpetrated by the settler regime.

The Dominance of Americo-Liberians: A Case of [Black] Settler Colonisers

The settler state officially expanded into the hinterlands in the late 19th and early 20th centuries through conquest and the co-opting of Indigenous kings and elders into the state apparatus (Ellis 1999, p.37). Yet, the Americo-Liberians continued to cling to a sense of Americanised Liberian identity despite becoming increasingly multicultural in their composition due to intermarriages. The settlers maintained a stubborn attachment to America as the mother country and recreated its values, culture, and society. For example, the Americo-Liberians constructed their townhomes and streets to resemble Richmond and Baltimore and dressed in Victorian clothing despite the oppressive tropical heat. They also recreated one-room

schoolhouses (which taught Latin), protestant churches (primarily Baptist and Methodist), and voluntary organisations and fraternal societies. According to Ciment (2016, pp.220-1), these organisations were the hub of Liberia's socio-political lifestyle as many political deals were struck at those society meetings. Consequently, every man of note in the political and mercantile class was a member of these societies.

The Americo-Liberians modelled the settler state after British indirect rule, providing a dual legal system (see Appendix 1 on p.249-50). The constitutional government applied only to the settlers, while the Indigenous population were ruled under patrimonial customs. The dual system affected all aspects of social life. It reaffirmed and introduced new tensions between the settler population and the Indigenous majority, and the struggles between the two groups threatened the autonomy of the independent ethnic political structures. There was also the continuous seizure of Indigenous communal lands, forced labour, taxation without representation, and general abuse of the human rights of the Indigenous majority (Munive 2011; see also Richards et al. 2005 and Kieh 2003).

During Arthur Barclay's presidency (1904-12), the dual governance system was formalised as the Barclay Plan, which placed the hinterlands under a single chieftaincy structure. The Barclay Plan provided a provincial administrative hierarchy that abolished the sovereignty of the Indigenous political and social systems through their subordination to the settler state. It also introduced the Frontier Force - a military group that saw rank-and-file troops pulled from the Indigenous population (Munive 2011; Kieh 2003). The Frontier Force was a corrupt institution that employed violent methods in their extortion and abuse of the Indigenous population (Ellis 1999; Akingbade 1977; Ford 1989, 1991). As with the makeup of the Frontier Force, settler regimes tend to manage Indigenous mobilisation by co-opting *othered* groups into the settler structure and arming them with privileges that work to sustain settler supremacy. The impact of the Americo-Liberians' colonising tactics would prove critical to Indigenous relations with the settler state. More so, it will strengthen hostile relations against some Indigenous groups, particularly those viewed to have supported or benefited from the settler regime.

The Barclay Plan also introduced a hut tax that provided revenue to sustain the newly established auxiliary interior bureaucracy and gave the central government the means to maintain control of the hinterlands and coastal Indigenes. The hut tax is considered by many to be one of the most repressive tactics employed by the settler state, mainly because of how the state agents (Frontier Force) handled the tax collection process as it constituted flagrant

violations of the Indigenous people's rights (Dunn, Beyan & Burrowes 2001). The Liberian scholar Amos Sawyer explains that the 'Barclay Plan':

... established a political apparatus for the suppression of Africans. The enormous powers of the District Commissioners, the ruthlessness of the Frontier Force and the exorbitant taxes demanded, drained the hinterland of human and material resources. The implements of exploitation galvanised by the Barclay Plan made it easy for succeeding administrations to manipulate the traditional ethnic system, appointing chiefs and increasing taxation (Sawyer 1973, p.15 cited in Kieh 2003, p.202).

Tensions between the Americo-Liberians and the Indigenous majority intensified with the imposition of settler political authority onto pre-existing Indigenous socio-political structures. How the central government quashed Indigenous rebellions contributed to the frictions, causing the Indigenous ethnic groups to harbour a feeling of separateness from the state.

Some scholars have attributed the settlers' marginalisation of the Indigenous majority to survival tactics due to their small population and commitment to maintaining their separate identity. While acknowledging the abuse and domination of the Recaptives and the Indigenous groups by the Americo-Liberians, Tyler-McGraw (2007 p.135) maintains that the settlers recognised their limited numbers against the Indigenous majority and so sought to defend their cultural survival by any means necessary. She notes that aside from maintaining their oligarchy entrenched through the TWP's dominance, the Americo-Liberians sought to 'persuade' the Recaptives and neighbouring Indigenous groups to adopt settler practices. d'Azevedo (1969, p.4) also justifies the [colonial] relationship between the Americo-Liberians and the Indigenous majority, arguing that the Liberian state was small and unaggressive during this period. To him, had the Americo-Liberians not 'absorbed' the Indigenous population into the national entity, they would have been "swept from their minute communities along the coast" by the Indigenous people.

Similarly, de Lynden (1942, p.90) claims it would have been suicidal for the Americo-Liberians not to cling to their separateness. He maintains that the Americo-Liberians or their descendants would have been enslaved again by white men (European colonial powers—as was happening in neighbouring areas) should they have allowed themselves to be co-opted into the tribal system. He maintains that the ethnic structures of the Indigenous peoples could not compete on equal terms with Western economies and, politically, they could not operate

independently. Thus, it was significant for the Americo-Liberians to cling to their identity as the nucleus of the Liberian state and attract suitable elements from among the Indigenous majority. In this way, they could create a 'Negro' state capable of competing with other nations. It is significant to note that de Lynden was a product of Liberia's settler regime – a society constructed on the whims of white supremacy. As I have discussed before, the Americo-Liberian hegemony of which de Lynden was an official established their colonisation of the Indigenous people on their embodied whiteness – the understanding that they were superior Blacks because they originated from America and not Africa like the Indigenous majority.

In his analysis, Levitt (2005) refutes arguments put forward by Gershoni (1985), Akpan (1975), Bøås (2005), Kieh (2003, 2012, 2015) and others who characterise the relationship between the Americo-Liberians and the Indigenous majority as that of Black-on-Black colonialism or apartheid. He maintains that some Indigenous groups, particularly the Gola, Bassa and Kru, sought to prevent the settlers from establishing a hostile competitive nation. They pushed for the settlers to integrate into their confederacies or chiefdoms. Therefore, according to Levitt (2005, pp.3-4), the relationship between the two groups should be analysed through the lens of 'competitive nations' and not necessarily colonialism or domination, since the conflicts between the two groups were over political legitimacy, economic resources, and land.

Rationalising colonialism in Liberia as done by Tyler-McGraw (2007), d'Azevedo (1969), de Lynden (1942) as well Levitt's (2005) apprehension about categorising Liberia's case as a type of colonisation relates to general anxiety about casting Black people as colonisers. But as I have continually emphasised in this thesis, Liberia was a unique form of settler colonialism because the Americo-Liberians while Black themselves, colonised the Indigenous groups using similar eliminatory logic seen in settler colonies around the globe. Indeed, political legitimacy, economic resources, and land which Levitt (2005) identifies as being at stake between the Americo-Liberians and the Indigenous majority are the foci of settler colonialism. Further, following the Liberia's independence in 1847, successive Americo-Liberian governments made it their mission to exclude the Indigenous population from the societal mainstream. In cases where some Indigenous people were grafted into the settler structure, the degree of their belonging relates to their ability to shed their 'nativeness' and adopt the settler culture which was constructed on whiteness. The Americo-Liberians purposefully ensured that the Indigenous majority did not benefit from the resources of their land. That is domination in all sense of the word and a defining characteristic of settler colonialism.

Consequently, I argue that the settler colonial system established by the Americo-Liberians, particularly their use of indirect rule, meant that the Indigenous peoples were never truly part of Liberia. The nation-state was reserved for people with ‘non-Black’ status – those who had escaped the category of Blackness and its nonhuman positionality (see Chapter 1). The Indigenous people were African Blacks, and so the Americo-Liberians imagined them as entities whose bodies were enslaved, and lands plundered. This enabled the state’s use of organised violence through the Frontier Force and the commodification of Indigenous socio-political structures and people, as evident in the Fernando Po scandal. Just as neighbouring Africans under European colonisation were never considered Europeans, the Indigenous groups in Liberia were imagined not as peoples with rights to exist and function as autonomous communities. Instead, they were co-opted into Liberia but not as citizens with legitimate civil rights and equal prospects for belonging to the polity. Americo-Liberians domination of the Indigenous majority created a unification problem in the ‘post-Barclay Plan’ era when certain Americo-Liberian governments attempted to integrate the Indigenous population into the country.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the politics of the Grain Coast before the construction of Liberia by the Americo-Liberians and examined the unique nature of settler colonialism in Liberia.

Settler colonialism in Liberia is a classic case of the oppressed becoming the oppressor. The Americo-Liberians internalised white American racism and saw themselves as separate and above the category of African Blacks. They believed their survival and ability to produce a model of Black achievement required a keen sense of separateness from the Indigenous peoples, thus explaining their colonial relationship with the Indigenous groups. Bøås’ (2005) argument about the Americo-Liberians creating an apartheid system puts into perspective the reasons some freed Blacks rejected the repatriation project. It is quite intriguing knowing how mistaken the Philadelphia Bethel Church leaders were in their argument that the repatriation project was a circuitous route back to bondage for free American Blacks. Instead, these American Blacks reproduced the same racialised systems they so abhorred in America that caused many of them to emigrate of their own volition to a place they only knew of through folklore passed down by their ancestors.

The Constitution upon which the Liberian state was formulated was deliberate in excluding the Indigenous majority and denying them citizenship and belonging to the state. Racism was

certainly a component of this exclusion. The Americo-Liberians considered African cultures primitive and inferior to the whiteness they valorised. They first expressed their separateness through colourism and its linkages to white American affectation and status, which formed the cultural foundations of the settler state. Following the unity of the settler collective, the Africans were imagined as lacking the qualities required for civic inclusion. This exclusionary framing of the Liberian state is typical of settler colonial logic as it provides a platform for the state's perpetration of atrocities against Indigenous people.

For decades, the relationship between the two main groups and the resulting hostilities would cement the Indigenous-settler divide. Liberia's ruling arrangement would continue to reflect this dichotomy, with the settlers constituting the ruling class until the 1980 coup. Indeed, after 1989 (the start of Liberia's civil wars), this dichotomy would take another form since the settler-Indigenous divide would no longer be the basis for differentiating the combatants in the ensuing civil conflict. Instead, ethnic and settler identities were reconfigured through the war and the resultant state reconstruction processes.

The following chapter analyses some of the impacts of settler colonialism in Liberia, focusing on attempts to integrate the Indigenous majority into the settler structure and the eruption of the coup d'état and subsequent civil wars.

Chapter 4: Dawn of a new era? The brutal end to settler colonialism in Liberia

Introduction

Continuity is a striking feature of Liberia's history. In the previous chapter, I argued that the 'Us versus Them' dichotomies that framed Liberia's formation as a settler colony are reflected in current citizenship debates and questions over who can claim Liberian identity. This chapter develops this argument further by demonstrating the settler regime's systemic political and socio-economic injustices and how the fight to decolonise climaxed into Liberia's devastating civil wars. It shows how the older Indigenous-settler divide was reshaped into new social divisions – divisions that became crucial to the motive and nature of the wars.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first reviews the settler state's attempt to incorporate Indigenous people into the settler society. Here, I examine the presidencies of Tubman and Tolbert as a continuation of the Americo-Liberian oligarchy, focusing on initiatives aimed at national integration. I identify such initiatives as typical of the settler colonial approach where settler regimes continually employ "symbolic elimination" (Wolfe 1994) to manage Indigenous demands within the confines of the settler structure. The section highlights issues of historical injustices, entrenched inequalities, and the desire for decolonisation via the emergence of a new social class and their relationship to the political unrest that eventually led to the 1980 coup.

The second section analyses the civil wars, particularly the first phase (1989-1997). It outlines some of the legitimate grievances expressed by Liberians at the onset of the conflict. This section shows that Liberia's ethnic groupings and the struggle over natural resources made the staging of the war imaginable and very profitable for a select few. Nevertheless, rather than categorising the conflicts simply as 'resource or ethnic wars' like most of Africa's wars, this chapter considers those factors merely as 'vehicles' of the war. I argue that actors like Samuel Doe, Charles Taylor, and other warlords adopted similar tactics of segregation and othering established by the settler regime to facilitate their atrocities against Liberians they considered to be outside their in-group.

Systemic Inequality and the Tubman Years

After becoming Africa's first republic in 1847, Liberia remained divided along settler and Indigenous lines for over a hundred years. As previously discussed, the marginalisation of the Indigenous majority continued into the rule of William Tubman (1944-1971), Liberia's nineteenth president. Tubman made concerted efforts to 'democratise' the settler state 20 years into his presidency. His introduction of the 1964 Unification Policy, 117 years after the republic's formation, extended full citizenship to Indigenous people and women, including the right to vote, and pursued the integration of Indigenous people into the societal mainstream while seeking to address some of their primary grievances. The policy extended the county system of administration and representation into the hinterlands, creating four new counties – Bong, Grand Gedeh, Lofa and Nimba – to add to the original five coastal counties – Montserrado, Grand Bassa, Maryland, Sinoe and Grand Cape Mount (Liebenow, 1987; Kieh, 2003; Ciment 2016). For the first time, hinterland counties had representatives in the Liberian legislature and non-Americo-Liberians were allowed to vote after paying a hut tax. However, a constitutional clause restricting property ownership by Indigenous Liberians remained (Akpan, 1980).

Before the Unification Policy, the hinterlands and the coastal areas were separated by different laws and judicial systems, lack of road connectivity, and disparities in 'formal' education, among other infrastructural deficits. The administrative reforms facilitated the spread of educational, economic, and political opportunities to the hinterlands and gave the residents some representation (Sesay et al., 2009). Eventually, some Indigenous elites were absorbed into Liberia's political and socio-economic life. However, they had to conform to the Americo-Liberian identity and lifestyle (Sesay et al., 2009; see Appendix 1 on p.249-50).

In addition to these administrative changes, Tubman introduced the Open Door Policy, which encouraged foreign businesses to locate to, and invest in Liberia. The policy opened Liberia to foreign investments through joint ventures with multinational corporations, making Liberia one of the most attractive investment climates in the developing world (Clower et al. 1966). Liberia was economically successful due to its significant mineral reserves and domestic and export agriculture. At the time, it was the only African country the World Bank classified as a middle-income importing country (Liebenow 1987) due to "the discovery and exploitation of huge iron ore deposits" (Beleky 1972, p.345). Liberia's economic growth at the time surpassed that of almost every other country except Japan (Carter 1968). Consequently, Liberia prospered as

an immigration destination, with many immigrants flooding in from different parts of Africa and the Caribbean (Pailey 2007). Kieh (2012, p.170) also notes that the period saw about fifty US companies operating in various sectors, including rubber, mining, forestry, banking, construction, and others.

I must emphasise that Tubman's supposed changes (Unification and Open Door Policies) were not democratisation and certainly not decolonisation but a continuation of the settler regime. If anything, those initiatives reveal settler regimes' ability to adapt to the changing realities of global structures of power and recognition by accommodating Indigenous demands for sovereignty and self-determination within the confines of the settler order. In Wolfe's (1994) theorisation of settler colonialism, for example, he categorises such changes as "symbolic elimination", which manifests in various state policies of integration, self-determination, and practical reconciliation. However, as he clarifies, all those policies work to sustain settler supremacy.

So, despite the changes that Tubman's policies triggered, economic prosperity did not deliver proportionate human development and equity. Liberia's economy became a dual system because the investment sector had little connection with the broader economy. Kieh (2012) explains that the Open Door Policy operated on incentives such as tax holidays, duty-free privileges, and the freedom to repatriate profit. Liberia was therefore deprived of much-needed jobs and the revenue required to support better education, medical, and economic infrastructure since the investors repatriated their extracted products and profits to their origin/Western countries.

In their field study of Liberia between 1961 and 1962, Dalton (1965, p. 579ff) and Clower et. al (1966) concluded that "Liberia is growing but not developing". They attributed the absence of development amidst increased economic growth to Liberia's traditional socio-political institutions, arguing that Tubman failed to invest revenues from royalties and concessions into developing rural infrastructure, education and other options for complete economic development. Dalton (1965) further explains that most economists found Liberia's development trajectory quite disturbing, not because of the state of underdevelopment considering growth activities have only begun since 1950. Rather, it was "the absence of those beginnings of a development program which would allow one to believe that the economy will be different in ten or twenty years" (p. 580). Carter (1968) describes Liberia's economic growth during the Tubman era as lacking the structural economic changes needed to absorb a more

significant number of Liberians into new productive activities and with more advanced training and skills.

Ellis (1999) maintains that the Americo-Liberian elites squandered the foreign exchange generated from the country's economic growth to pursue an American lifestyle, thus reinforcing their dominance, and further entrenching the divisions between them and the Indigenous majority (Carter 1968). This extreme economic disparity guaranteed that a vast majority of the Indigenous people remained on the margins of Liberian society.

So despite Tubman's political and socio-economic reforms, the oligarchy established to protect the interests of the Americo-Liberians persisted. Bøås (2001) describes the establishment of the Americo-Liberian elites as an extreme form of neopatrimonialism. He argues that by the 20th century, the Americo-Liberian elites had a firm hold over economic and political power. With this control, they kept the government's power over national resources to a minimum while determining the distribution of the little revenue that made its way to the state coffers (Bøås 2001, p.703). Gifford (1993, p.13ff) similarly argues that:

The multinationals bought off important people in Liberia's ruling elite, who in return for personal gain protected the companies' favourable terms. The revenues which should have flowed to the government treasury flowed instead to influential individuals, like President Tubman, Emmett Harmon [the Executive Secretary of the Joint Liberian-US Commission for Economic Development (1952-1970)], or Richard Henries [Speaker of the House (1952-80), and legal counsel for leading foreign concessions including the Firestone Plantations Company].

Kieh (2012) also maintains that the Americo-Liberian elites were neo-colonial stooges for Western investors, and so paved the way for multinational corporations to exploit Liberia and its people. He claims that "the development of the United States and the underdevelopment of Liberia [were] part of the same dialectical process" (p.171) because American multinational corporations such as the Firestone Tyre and Rubber Company took advantage of corrupt government officials to rob Liberians. Kieh (2012, p.170) provides examples of government failures, such as barring agricultural workers from unionising until the 1980s and making it impossible for mining labour unions to operate effectively due to the leaders' routine harassment and imprisonments. Striking workers demanding better wages and working conditions were also brutalised by soldiers and police and forced to return to work (Kieh 2012).

Irrespective of Tubman's integration efforts, the only significant change in the status quo was that the "cult of the presidency reached its peak" (Bøås 2001, p.704). Tubman was paranoid and dictatorial and amended the constitution to allow him to rule for life (Ciment 2016). Bøås (2001) argues convincingly that Tubman orchestrated his rule around personal power that relied on "exchange systems with other Liberian 'big men' and clientelistic relations with the non-equals" (p.704). As part of his survival scheme, Tubman ensured that real and perceived enemies were either assimilated into the patronage system or victimised and destroyed (Ciment 2016; Bøås, 2001). The cult that grew around Tubman ensured that all Liberians – Americo-Liberians and ambitious natives alike – relied on his favours to get lucrative government contracts, well-paid government jobs, and college scholarships in the United States. As Ciment (2016, p.277) notes, Tubman was the epitome of the African 'big man' leader common in the continent's immediate post-independence era. Consequently, emerging political parties were rendered powerless through stringent laws or were banned altogether (Sesay *et al.* 2009).

Nevertheless, there was some opposition to Tubman and the Americo-Liberian oligarchy. For example, Okolo (1981, p.151) outlines several challenges to Tubman's bid for re-election. He also mentions assassination attempts on Tubman in 1955 and 1963 and on President Tolbert in 1973, which in turn provided a rationale for securing Liberia as a one-party state and the brutal suppression of opposition to the True Whig Party (TWP). Tubman died while in office, leaving behind a governmental structure resembling an aggressive business apparatus dominated by a circle of relatives, other Americo-Liberian families, and the more recent Indigenous recruits assimilated into the 'honourable class' (Bøås 2005, p.78). His vice president, William Tolbert, succeeded him.

The point I aim to underscore here is that the 'Us versus Them' system established initially to protect the interest of the settler population persisted through the Tubman era. Tubman's efforts to officially include Indigenous Liberians in the state apparatus through citizenship and some degree of socio-political emancipation hardly made a dent in the fortunes of the Indigenous majority. His attempt to create a cohesive national understanding of a democratic Liberia that embraced all Liberians – Indigenous peoples and settlers alike – was disastrous because it was a continuation of the settler regime. The Americo-Liberians still considered themselves above the 'African Black category', so political and socio-economic systems were designed to help maintain their supremacy. Thus, Tubman's political and economic reforms were merely symbolic. Like other Americo-Liberian leaders before him, he was simply concerned with entrenching his power and the dominance of the Americo-Liberian oligarchy.

Consequently, the entrenched disparity between the Americo-Liberians and the Indigenous people, be it socio-culturally, politically or economically, damaged the prospect of a unified and inclusive Liberian identity, even after the hinterlands were incorporated into the formal state. The neglect of educational and infrastructural development in the hinterlands deprived the majority of the Indigenous population of opportunities for socio-economic and political engagement with the modern Liberian state and the people at the core. Thus, the Indigenous peoples' continued marginalisation compounded the inherent lack of a Liberian national character, at least among Indigenous Liberians.

Tolbert's Rule and the Emergence of a New Counter-Elites

Like his predecessor, William Tolbert (1971-1980) introduced some reforms, namely an anti-corruption commission and a liberalisation of the political landscape. Liberians paid little attention to his anti-corruption mantra, however, as it became evident that the commission was a façade since Tolbert and his family were significant offenders (Bøås 2005, p.78). Unlike Tubman, whose presidency came at a time of unprecedented economic growth in Liberia, Tolbert came to power when the global recession in the mid-1970s hit, and the Liberian economy was experiencing exceptional hardship. His presidency coincided with the Arab oil embargo and a decline in the value of Liberia's major exports, such as iron, rubber and timber, on the world market (Sesay *et al.*, 2009). Tubman's arrangement with "the Liberian people – economic prosperity in exchange for political subservience – was coming undone" (Ciment 2016, p.227). Tolbert bore the brunt of the TWP's economic mismanagement and the hardships that resulted from the global recession.

To make ends meet, Tolbert initially followed in the footsteps of Tubman and made Liberia a faithful ally of the United States in exchange for financial and military support during the Cold War⁴⁵. There was no separation between Liberia's political and economic power; thus, Tolbert's regime continued to serve almost exclusively the ruling Americo-Liberian elites and the imperialist powers (Kieh 2012; Berkeley 2001).

Further to the economic and political challenges facing Tolbert's government, his supposed commitment to political liberalisation led to the proliferation of student movements, labour movements, journalistic outfits and interest groups. Groups like the Movement for Justice in

⁴⁵ The United States established an outpost for intelligence gathering, a relay station for the Voice of America radio, a CIA station and used the Roberts Field (a US-built airport from World War II) as a refuelling station for their military planes (Kieh, 2012; Berkeley, 2001).

Africa (MOJA), the All People's Freedom Alliance, and the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL) flourished through their anti-government tactics. For example, Ellis (1999) notes the emergence of a new *counter-elite* consisting of Indigenous young men and women who had achieved higher education. Employment in the public sector was still the route to wealth and status in Liberia and these young people sought to situate themselves at the centre of state political power. Ellis (1999) explains that the emergence of these *counter-elites* began during the latter part of Tubman's rule (the 1960s to 1970s). They comprised people of both Indigenous and settler backgrounds who were influenced by student radicalism in American colleges and the ideologies of radical nationalism that were in vogue throughout the African continent at the time. This group questioned the immense powers of the Americo-Liberian oligarchy – a people whose main claim to power was the mere fact that some of their ancestors have emigrated from across the Atlantic (Ellis, 1999, pp.49–50). Ciment (2016, p.227) provides a similar iteration:

All of those newly minted college graduates – frustrated by elite intransigence and a lack of well-paying jobs grew restless. Many were inspired by the American civil rights movement, while others saw hope in the liberation movements on the continent, as the last African colonies achieved their independence from Europe. To them, Liberia, with its stuffy formalism and slavish Americanism, seemed a stifling throwback to a quasi-colonial past.

Tolbert tried to adjust by Africanising the Liberian culture. Out went the former clothing favoured by Tubman, and in came dashikis and safari suits. National holidays celebrating Americo-Liberian triumphalism over Natives were done away with, but it was a little too late.

Tolbert's presidency witnessed an increasing number of Indigenous Liberians in higher education institutions, both at home and abroad, who were hostile toward the government. His rule also coincided with the homecoming of several qualified Liberians from the diaspora who were determined to situate themselves at the centre of power. Manifested in PAL⁴⁶ and

⁴⁶ PAL was formed in the early 1970s by Liberian students in the US who had become dissatisfied with the slow pace of development back home and the personality politics that dominated governance. Led by Gabriel Baccus Matthews, PAL was a radical mass movement of workers, students at home and abroad, the urban unemployed and rural peasants, whose primary aim was to bring a revolutionary change in Liberia through violent or non-violent methods. They demanded greater distributive justice and called for a restructuring of existing foreign concession agreements and changes in the political landscape. PAL used open confrontation, such as strikes, demonstrations and peaceful opposition to the TWP through the ballot box. It gained political party status as

MOJA⁴⁷, members of these groups were highly educated and emboldened politically. They were unwavering in their engagement in national politics and sought to educate the Indigenous people on their rights as citizens to protest against the Americo-Liberian oligarchy (Sesay *et al.* 2009; Okolo, 1981). Due to PAL, MOJA, and other mounting pressures from civil society, Tolbert made more concessions to the people, alienating him from the TWP. Raddatz (2016) indicates that Tolbert's presidency was weak and insecure. He lacked Tubman's charisma and was unwilling to use the same level of patronage and coercion that Tubman had relied on (Raddatz, 2016; Bøås, 2005; Tarr, 1990).

The emergence of interest and political groupings like PAL and MOJA and their constant opposition to Tolbert's government and the Americo-Liberian oligarchy prompted initial debates on dual citizenship and diaspora Liberians' engagement in home politics. According to Wette⁴⁸, the Chairman of the All Liberians Conference on Dual Citizenship (ALCOD), the tactics of PAL, MOJA, and other groups whose membership included diaspora Liberians prompted the repeal and replacement of the 1956 Aliens and Nationality Law. The 1973 version of the Nationality Law automatically forfeits the citizenship of Liberians who have adopted their host countries' citizenship amidst other limitations on nationality at birth. Thus, while the Tolbert government initially abolished dual citizenship to protect the interests of the settler order, in contemporary debates, in-country Liberians purposefully invoke single nationality to prevent a small, privileged group from colonising Liberia again (Chapters 6 & 7). It is evident in the empirical chapters that contemporary contestations over identity, belonging and citizenship in Liberia are hinged on mistrust that dates back to the lopsided development outcomes and opportunities that privileged the Americo-Liberian elites and their cronies from the country's inception.

the Progressive People's Party (PPP) after court battles in December 1979 but was subsequently banned after a few months to make the TWP the only legal political party (see Sesay *et al.*, 2009; Liebenow 1987; Okolo 1981).

⁴⁷ MOJA was formed in 1973 by professors and students at the University of Liberia. Like PAL, the leaders of MOJA described it as a revolutionary movement. They appealed to the middle class of both Indigenous and settler origins, intending to raise the consciousness of workers, students, and farmers about the Liberian society's oppressiveness through industrial action such as demonstrations, work slow-downs and stoppages. MOJA advocated restructuring Liberia's socio-cultural norms to overcome caste, class, and tribal differences in Liberia's culture. They adopted a more continental approach and urged attacks on apartheid and injustices anywhere in Africa (see Sesay *et al.*, 2009; Harris, 1999; Liebenow 1987; Okolo, 1981).

⁴⁸ Interview with Mr. Emmanuel Wettee (Ohio, Columbus) via WhatsApp Call on 1st Nov. 2019. Beside the formal interview with Chairman Wettee as he is fondly called, I had numerous exchanges with him where he shared several documents on ALCOD's activities and recommended other potential study participants.

The straw that broke the camel's back or in this case Tolbert's government was their handling of the popular uprising or what is called the 'rice riots' of 14 April 1979. Tolbert increased the price of imported rice – Liberia's staple food – to supposedly encourage agricultural productivity (Sesay et al., 2009; Pailey, 2007). Baccus Matthews, the PAL leader, called for a demonstration in response to the planned price increase. The organisers argued that the price surges meant further impoverishment for ordinary Liberians in order to enrich the Americo-Liberian elites since Tolbert's family was one of the leading rice importers. Tolbert cracked down on what was essentially a peaceful demonstration with a 'shoot to kill order', resulting in the death of between 40 and 100 protesters, with approximately 500 wounded or maimed, and property damages estimated at USD 35 million. He instructed the arrest of the entire leadership of PAL on sedition and treason charges, which carried the death penalty or long years in prison (Sesay et al., 2009; Okolo 1981; Winfrey 1979).

The government's handling of the protest was a miscalculation concerning the depth of the opposition's frustration and resentment towards the ruling class. Liebenow (1989) has argued that the TWP had become accustomed to monopolising the political scene. Thus, they underestimated the ability of dissidents within Liberia to significantly organise and sustain opposition to any governmental policy. Out of the dust of the 'rice riots' emerged the two civilian opposition groups – the PAL and MOJA – as political forces. Their leaders were energised, members augmented, including a significant third force – the military. The military was critical in this instance because of the prominence of coup d'états in the West African sub-region at the time⁴⁹ (Liebenow 1987).

The 'rice riots' demonstrated conclusively the TWP's vulnerability and marked the end of Tolbert's administration. Tolbert's autocratic actions (despite his supposed liberal policies) combined with the corrupt tactics of the oligarchy, demonstrated that Liberia's ruling class were settler-colonists whose main interest revolved around the supremacy and survival of the settler structure. The Americo-Liberians ability to sustain their oligarchy and protect their 'non-Black identity' depended on the Indigenous Liberians' continued occupation of the 'other' category – the lowest echelon of the societal hierarchy. As argued in Chapter 1, the non-Black identity of the Americo-Liberians justified their continuous perpetration of "anti-[B]lack violence with impunity" (Woods 2019, p.40) against the Indigenous majority.

⁴⁹ By the 1980s, several African states had experienced at least one successful military intervention, with most of those countries experiencing second or more military coups (Chidume 2013; Liebenow 1987).

Nevertheless, scholars have mainly attributed economic greed as the fundamental reason for the settlers' continued marginalisation of the Indigenous people. Bøås (2001), for example, points out that the slaveholding culture foundational to the Americo-Liberians, was founded on economic greed and so they were effectively replicating a system most familiar to them. Berkeley (2001) also promotes the greed narrative. He explains that less than five per cent of the population owned about half, if not more, of Liberia's wealth throughout the 19th century. The Americo-Liberians had become an elite class by syphoning Liberia's natural resources through a system of concession agreements managed between them and a few foreign investors (Moran and Pitcher 2004; see also Gifford 1993; Sawyer 1992; Liebenow 1987). Their ultimate aim was, therefore, to sustain their wealth, status and dominance.

The economic greed analysis is a simplistic, if not infantilising, explanation that does a disservice to most Liberians who continued to endure marginalisation resulting from the injustices and systems of inequality long established by the settler regime. At the very least, underpinning Americo-Liberians' economic greed were racialised divisions purposefully engineered to facilitate their separateness from the Indigenous people. By all accounts, the Americo-Liberians were people who, like the enslavers in the antebellum South, believed Africa to be the 'dark continent' and its people 'backward' with 'inferior' cultures (see Chapter 1). In this scenario, people whose ancestors had never lived outside Africa were considered uncivilised and unworthy of full citizenship and civil rights until they assimilated into the culture and values repatriated from America by the first settler group. Consequently, uneven political and socio-economic development among the Americo-Liberians and the Indigenous majority originate from systems established to institutionalise settler privileges. The Americo-Liberians possess political power and legitimacy, generational wealth, land ownership, education attainment, and other advantages because of established settler structures that have facilitated access to these opportunities. As argued in the introductory chapters, Liberia's case demonstrates the relationship between settler colonialism and structural inequality even in supposedly decolonised nations.

I have argued that the Americo-Liberians embodied and enacted whiteness and racialised the Indigenous majority as inferior (Chapter 1). Thus, even when some Indigenous people attained the hallmarks of the settler culture, they still had lower status due to their lack of an American pedigree. This 'Us versus Them' categorisation continued until the 1980s, when African-ness became acceptable again. Tubman and Tolbert's cumulative failures to deliver on their

supposed reforms after years of Indigenous marginalisation led to Sergeant Samuel Doe's coup d'état, setting up Liberia for a period of brutal violence.

Samuel Doe's Liberia: the 'Near-Background' to the Civil Wars

On 12 April 1980, Master Sergeant Samuel Doe (an Indigenous man) and 16 other enlisted men of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) staged a military coup and assassinated President Tolbert and key cabinet members. Sergeant Doe and his associates capitalised on Liberia's fragile situation following the rice riots to stage the coup.

The coup supposedly ended the 134-year-old settler colonial regime organised and led by the Americo-Liberians. Sesay (1983, p.51) argues that the coup was orchestrated to overhaul the corrupt, inefficient, discriminatory political, economic, and social order administered by the TWP. In his first radio broadcast, Doe announced:

Gone forever are the days of 'Who you know' and 'Do you know who I am?',
We now enter the time of 'What can you do?' This is the people's thing, our
people's thing (quoted in Ciment, p.227-8).

The coup was also intended to free the opposition leaders who had been arrested for organising a 7 March 1980 strike to force out the Tolbert government. Following the strike, Tolbert lost all patience for the opposition and condemned PAL's leader Baccus Matthews and his compatriots to be executed on 14 April – the first anniversary of the rice riots (Sesay *et al.* 2009).

Following the coup, Doe rewarded the leaders of groups who had opposed Tolbert's government with critical ministerial positions. He formed a reconciliatory cabinet that included the leaders of PAL, MOJA, some members of the armed forces and Ministers from the former TWP government (Okolo 1981, p.154). Despite its origins in a military coup, Doe's presidency began with a euphoric feeling of hope and support from most Liberians for unseating the Americo-Liberian oligarchy. Indigenous people, in particular, were incredibly supportive, seeing one of their own holding the reins of power for the first time in Liberia's modern history. The popular belief was that Doe's regime would reverse the injustices of the TWP oligarchy and improve the living conditions of Liberians in the shortest possible time (Liebenow 1987; Sesay *et al.* 2009).

Unfortunately, the euphoric feeling created by having an Indigenous person in power was short-lived. Sesay (1983, p.51) explains that Doe's regime shifted from its principal objective

of “building a new society based on justice, equal opportunity, and full participation... as well as bridging economic and social disparities, equitable distribution of resources and the promotion of genuine national unity”. Instead, he established an unparalleled reign of terror, becoming an oppressive dictator. He suspended the constitution, dissolved the legislature, declared martial law, banned the media and all political activities, and detained and/or assassinated all perceived or real opponents. According to Sesay *et al.* (2009), all other members of the coup that overthrew Tolbert’s government were either killed or forced into exile, while many of the civilians in Doe’s government were subsequently removed or forced to leave the government and some, the country.

Sergeant Doe and the other coup leaders by themselves did not have the experience and intellectual⁵⁰ shrewdness to deliver economic prosperity to the Liberian people, let alone transform the country’s 134-year-old structures of inequality built on exclusion and corruption. His cabinet consisted of elites and politicians from the TWP era and the more recent elites who had made their name through PAL, MOJA and other related movements. However, some have argued that Doe and his band of supporters were suspicious of the country’s intelligentsia and constantly harassed and arrested student leaders and other intellectuals who did not toe the line of his People’s Redemption Council (Raddatz 2016, p.64; see also Kieh 2012).

It is noteworthy that although Liberia is home to 16 officially recognised ethnic groups, there were few inter-ethnic tensions or clashes until Doe’s ascendancy to power (Ellis 1999, p.41). Soon after Doe’s coup, tensions intensified among the various ethnic groups. He surrounded himself with people from his ethnic group, the Krahn, which made up about 5 per cent of Liberia’s population. Doe appointed people from his ethnicity into strategic government and military positions and provided some economic and educational opportunities. Effectively, Doe turned a state institution like the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) into a Krahn-dominated instrument of coercion (Adebajo 2002) and permitted (and sometimes even encouraged) horrendous abuses against other civilians by the Krahn military and police (HRW 1990a). Raddatz (2016, p. 64) argues that the rise of the Krahn in Doe’s government coincided with growing claims of persecution by other ethnic groups, particularly the Gio and Mano.

Doe’s divisive actions are not surprising. The politicisation of ‘Us versus Them’ dichotomies as seen with Doe’s dictatorial regime is a blueprint in settler colonies. His tactics demonstrated

⁵⁰ According to Raddatz (2016), none of the coup leaders, even Doe himself, had more than primary school education or were above the age of 30, giving a reason to the makeup of his initial government.

the divisive and repressive strategy that settler regimes use to keep dominated groups in their place. In Liberia, the settler regime had institutionalised othering, thus making it easier for dominant groups or those in power to blame and target others they consider to be an out-group. Samuel Doe was an Indigenous man, but his bloody rise to power was a result of the lopsided system established by the settler colonial order. It is not at all surprising that Doe replicated and further entrenched a system he was supposedly contesting.

Doe expanded his regime's patronage network to include "other politically vulnerable, but commercially well-connected elites" (Reno 1997, p.9). Mandingo traders are known for their commercial links abroad but had little power at home due to being only four percent of the population, so Doe grafted them into his network. Some of the Americo-Liberian elites also became Doe's allies as he realised early on that he could not run an effective government without their assistance. Besides, these elites had crucial technical skills, access to commercial networks, and considerable local power. This same group had been political and clandestine intermediaries for the Tubman and Tolbert administrations and had amassed considerable holdings in Liberia's natural resources as a result. Reno (1997, pp.9-10) makes the case that even after the supposed toppling of the Americo-Liberian oligarchy, the country's economic resources were still in the grips of a few 'strongmen'. What is apparent here is that Liberia's ruling arrangement had always reflected the settler-Indigenous dichotomy, with the former making up the ruling class. Nonetheless, Doe's coup achieved what would have been improbable few years back as it generated a more diverse elite made up of both Indigenous and Americo-Liberians.

The situation worsened when these inter-ethnic tensions combined with mismanagement of the economy and unparalleled inequality. Genocide Watch (2012) reported that inter-ethnic hostilities and clashes were widespread in the 1980s. Ethnicity in Liberia became even more politicised and polarised, and the difference constructed between the different ethnic groups became even more apparent (Bøås 2005, p.79). Doe's corrupt practices and blatant disregard of abuses by his government further weakened the economy as local and international businesses were not assured a predictable investment climate. This mismanagement, coupled with an inherited debt of \$700 million, caused a tremendous increase in both unemployment and the out-migration of Liberians. However,

Amid a push by the international community in the mid-1980s for democratisation in Africa, Doe 'civilianised' his military regime to facilitate greater international legitimacy. He amended the constitution in 1984 to allow political opposition due to increasing international pressure.

In reality, however, Doe merely transformed his military regime. The Peoples' Redemption Council became the National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL) in order to contest the October 1985 elections slated to return Liberia to civilian rule.

Meanwhile, the international community, particularly the US, played a political 'game of roulette' with Doe's Liberia. The US drastically reduced its aid to Liberia because of the executions that followed Doe's coup. The IMF and World Bank introduced stricter borrowing conditions, effectively condemning ordinary Liberians to further impoverishment. It was the Cold War period, so Liberia, like most African states, were pawns in the ideological war between the West and the East. Adebayo (2002) explains that US absence had opened Liberia to influence from the Soviet Union, Libya, Cuba, and other Eastern European countries. In approximately two years, Liberia again became the darling of the West due to fears of a Soviet stronghold. The US suddenly increased Liberia's military and economic aid⁵¹, and in return, Doe closed the Libyan and Soviet embassies in Monrovia. President Reagan went as far as to describe Doe as "a dependable ally – a friend in need" (Adebayo 2002, p.35) despite glaring human rights abuses under his rule, thus legitimising Doe's military regime. However, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, Liberia's strategic position became less valuable to the US, and so both Doe and Liberia went onto the backburner of US foreign interests.

The 1985 elections set in motion a series of events that became critical to the eruption of the first civil war. Reports of irregularities and voter intimidation at the polls resulted in several protests amidst widespread characterisation of the electoral results as fraudulent by the international community (HRW 1990a). For example, Amos Sawyer's Liberian People's Party and the United People's Party led by Gabriel Baccus Matthews were banned from participating in the elections because their supposed socialist leanings were incompatible with Liberia's national aspirations. Future president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, was arrested on sedition charges after arriving in Liberia to campaign for the Liberian Action Party (LAP). She had delivered a speech at the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA) in Philadelphia, where she spoke of "corruption in the Liberian civil service and of the many idiots in whose hands [the] nation's fate and progress have been placed" (Sirleaf 1987, p.11). Sirleaf was subsequently released following intense pressure from the United States.

⁵¹ The United States continued to support Liberia's failing economy by delivering to Liberia the largest per capita development and military aid in sub-Saharan Africa (Ellis 2007; HRW 1990b).

Despite efforts towards the release of Sirleaf and other political prisoners, however, the US legitimised Doe's victory for the most part. The US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker, endorsed the results because of Doe's claim that he won only 51 per cent of the total votes. According to Crocker, 51 per cent was unheard of in Africa since incumbent rulers commonly claimed victory margins of 95 to 100 per cent (Kieh 2012). This statement signalled to other political parties that Doe's government could not be removed through democratic means (Vinck, Pham & Kreutzer 2011). America's endorsement emboldened President Doe, and he refused to entertain advocacy from opposition groups seeking a more inclusive government and the promotion of fundamental human rights (Kieh 2012).

The protests that followed Doe's electoral victory provoked a coup attempt by General Thomas Quiwonkpa, a native of Nimba County and the founder of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPLF). Quiwonkpa's coup failed, resulting in his brutal and public death and the reprisal killing of thousands of Gio and Mano soldiers and civilians from Nimba County. Sirleaf was again arrested on treason for alleged complicity in the attempted coup. The failed coup also led to the flight of several of Quiwonkpa's allies to neighbouring countries and many to the United States (Sesay et al. 2009; HRW 1990b).

Doe's disastrous handling of the economy, widespread corruption, lack of public services, and brutal suppression of dissents proved to be just as alienating as the preceding Americo-Liberian oligarchy. Liberia stopped functioning under Doe resulting in the displacement of a large portion of the Liberian population (discussed in Raddatz 2016, p.65; see also Chomsky 2006). Regrettably, under their first Indigenous leader, Liberia continued to be a vessel for the elites to protect their investments and social positions. Nevertheless, Doe was operating within a structure long-established by the settler regime. Settler colonialism in Liberia operated on a logic of elimination and exploitation – an institutionalised 'winner takes all' operative logic that catered solely to those in power and their cronies.

Consequently, as we saw with the coup d'état, a change in personnel does not necessarily translate to a genuine shift in governance structures. Elites who survive such changes typically manoeuvre their way back to the helm of power. In Liberia, those in authority have always had unbridled power and control over the rest of the population. And, as shown throughout this thesis, those at the helm have routinely unleashed this power to preserve the status quo.

Hence, Doe's presidency provided Liberian elites with the means to build external informal commercial bonds with regional trading networks. These networks flourished and became even more critical to President Doe when the United States cut off military aid between 1986 and 1987. The networks would later offer avenues for future warlords of the civil wars and played a crucial role in sustaining the flow of arms into Liberia in the 1990s (Reno 1997, p.10).

The Liberian Civil Wars – 1989-1997 & 1999-2003

The ignition of the Liberian civil wars can arguably be attributed to General Quiwonkpa's coup attempt on 13 November 1985 and Samuel Doe's subsequent response. The ethnic alignments that were obvious among the group of soldiers that organised the coup set the stage for Doe's reprisals. Doe orchestrated the killings of civilians and soldiers from Nimba County, the home county of General Quiwonkpa and communities with Gio and Mano origins. According to Adebajo (2002, p.46), the Krahn-dominated military killed a reported 3,000 Gios and Manos to serve as the "single episode, more than any other, [that] set the stage for the exploitation of ethnic rivalries that would eventually culminate in Liberia's civil war[s]."

Officially, Charles Taylor started the war on Christmas Eve 1989 as a rebellion against Doe's regime. The conflict began when about 168 fighters from the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) crossed from Côte d'Ivoire into Nimba County in north-eastern Liberia. General Quiwonkpa founded the NPFL, but Taylor commanded them when they crossed into Liberia and invaded a series of communities in Nimba County. Born in 1948 and the third of fifteen children, Taylor's mother was Gola and his father, Americo-Liberian (Anderson 1998; discussed in Raddatz, 2016). Taylor was one of the 'youngsters' who returned home from the diaspora to join the 'revolution' challenging the TWP settler regime. Like most children of Liberian elites who studied at Western universities, Taylor studied at Bentley College, a private university in Massachusetts, US, where he became famous in student politics as a vocal critic of Tolbert's regime.

Soon after Doe's coup, Taylor became the head of the General Services Agency on General Quiwonkpa's recommendation. The agency was a critical department responsible for bulk purchasing and distribution, giving Taylor access to and control over a sizable portion of the national budget. Taylor fled to the US after a falling out with Doe but was imprisoned there on charges of embezzling nearly US\$1 million from the Liberian government. He was awaiting

extradition to Liberia when he ‘miraculously’ escaped⁵² from a Massachusetts county jail on 15 September 1985 (Vinck, Pham & Kreutzer 2011; Sesay et al. 2009; McGovern 2008; Adebajo 2002). He then disappeared for five years, during which time he re-established the NPFL. Taylor spent a significant part of his five years in Libya as a guest of Colonel Muammar Quaddafi and allegedly underwent guerrilla training there (Noble 1992; discussed in Raddatz 2016, p.65).

Inspired by a century’s worth of grievances and systemic inequality manifested in Doe’s authoritarian regime, many Liberians initially embraced Taylor’s rebellion, thus accounting for the steady increase in NPFL recruits. Vogt (1996) notes that many Liberians outside the Krahn community felt increasingly marginalised and unsafe under Doe’s rule and initially saw the NPFL as a liberation movement.

In the early months of the war, Taylor’s NPFL was poorly armed and disorganised and targeted ethnic groups like the Krahn and Mandingo, which Doe’s government had favoured. However, the NPFL grew in strength and numbers as Doe’s AFL constant attacks on civilians, particularly the Gio and Mano communities, drove young people to join the NPFL (Harris 1999). As the war raged on, Krahn communities and people identified as having Krahn origins were subjected to immense violence because they were members of Doe’s ruling class. The NPFL rebels also targeted wealthy Liberians with large homes, automobiles, and fine clothing. The assumption was that they had accumulated wealth through support for Doe’s regime. But as Berkeley (2001) rightly concludes, while many in the Krahn community benefitted from Doe’s regime, they were not responsible for creating and safeguarding Liberia’s entrenched underdevelopment and wealth inequalities. The Americo-Liberians had done this through the TWP oligarchy.

The death toll in the war reached near-genocidal proportions in the first⁵³ year alone (Adebajo 2002). Civilian casualties mounted as Taylor’s forces advanced towards Monrovia. There were

⁵² Taylor’s escape from jail was one of the biggest mysteries of his career. However, during his trial for war crimes at the Hague in July 2009, he implicated the US in his release. He claims that a guard escorted him to a less-secure unit of the jail, where he climbed out an open window using sheets he tied together. He then met two men he assumed were CIA agents who took him to New York by car without compensation (Keating 2009).

⁵³ Howard French (1998) details the August 1990 Marshall Massacre, where NPFL forces killed about 1,000 Ghanaian immigrants and Liberian sympathisers in the coastal fishing community of Marshall. Taylor’s NPFL targeted Ghanaian residents in retaliation for Ghana’s decision to deploy troops as part of the peacekeeping force. French (1998) again reported that AFL forces loyal to Doe broke into St. Lutheran Church, Monrovia, one night in late July 1990, where about 2000 refugees sought shelter and massacred nearly 600 men, women and

fears among West African states that the conflict would destabilise the sub-region, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) met to deliberate the conflict's management⁵⁴. The United States and United Nations had already decided against intervening due to concerns that the war was a domestic issue. Nigeria took command and led the creation of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG⁵⁵), a regional armed force with a “lofty aim of establishing a ceasefire, overseeing the implementation of an interim government, and convening elections, all within a year's time” (Raddatz 2016, p.69). Two heads of state – Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso and Felix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire – were both opposed to ECOMOG. They had initially supported Taylor's rebellion by providing funds and political coverage⁵⁶. ECOMOG was deployed to Liberia despite these disagreements to “separate the warring factions and stop the bloodshed” (Bøås 2001, p.710).

Both Taylor and Doe initially resented the meddling of the ECOMOG peacekeeping force that arrived in Monrovia on 24 August 1990 (Ero 1995). But Doe became open to ceasefire negotiations with ECOMOG when he began losing the war, and his hold on power as Taylor's forces approached Monrovia. Doe was captured on 9 September 1990 from ECOMOG's Monrovia headquarters by Prince Johnson's Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), a splinter group from Taylor's NPFL. Prince Johnson, a Gio man, was formerly an NPFL commander who had led the group's Monrovia invasion. However, he later broke away to form his group, labelling Charles Taylor ‘a criminal and a rogue’. Johnson was known for his fondness for cruelty. Upon capturing Doe, he supervised Doe's brutal torture on camera,

children with cutlasses and other weapons. Those targeted were those born into or connected with the Gio and Mano ethnic groups.

⁵⁴ Before now, ECOWAS had not deviated from its mandate of promoting the sub-region's development. ECOWAS interactions had focused purely on economic issues and avoided dealing with the region's political matters (Adeleke, 1995)

⁵⁵ Nigeria's President, General Ibrahim Babangida motives for pushing for ECOMOG intervention in Liberia was not entirely altruistic as he was concerned Taylor's ‘civilian’ rebellion against Doe's militarised government might embolden his opponents and that of other West African leaders to move closer to home (Raddatz 2016; Bøås 2001).

⁵⁶ Both presidents' opposition to ECOMOG was anchored in their grudges against Doe. Houphouët-Boigny adopted daughter had married William Tolbert's son, Adolphus Tolbert, both of whom were executed when Doe seized power in the 1980 coup. The family's disdain for Doe's regime transferred to Burkina Faso's Blaise Compaoré when he married Adolphus Tolbert's widow (Adeleke, 1995, pp. 578-9).

with Johnson's forces consuming⁵⁷ parts of the body (Ero 1995; Steyn 2003; Raddatz 2016). Samuel Doe's videotaped death was distributed internationally on YouTube.

Following Doe's death, Taylor and Johnson contested the presidency in something of a political vacuum. After a stalemate in which each declared himself president, they finally agreed to peace talks and a ceasefire in November 1990 amidst an offensive push by ECOMOG forces to get both rebel groups out of Monrovia. ECOMOG had had to change its initial peacekeeping strategy to peace-making and peace-enforcement to protect Monrovia (Ero 1995). Subsequently, with Johnson's support, Taylor established an alternative government and declared himself President of Greater Liberia, with his capital in Gbargna, Bong County. Gbargna was the seat of government for Taylor's National Patriotic Reconstruction Assembly, the 'civilian' arm of the NPFL. Taylor's Greater Liberia had a currency, international airport, deepwater port, newspaper, TV and radio stations, banks and ministries (Harris 1999). Taylor held most of the hinterlands by now, giving him access and control over most of the country's natural resources like timber, diamonds, iron ore and rubber (Raddatz, 2016; Bøås, 2001).

On the diplomatic front, ECOWAS initiated three peace talks over 5 months: Bamako (27 November 1990), Lomé (12 February 1991) and Monrovia (15 March 1991). The failure of all three was partly due to Taylor's insistence on being president for controlling over 90% of Liberia, thus rejecting the legitimacy of the interim government instituted by ECOMOG⁵⁸. ECOWAS could not make Taylor president because his Greater Liberia broke the cardinal rule of African sovereignty: "the maintenance of existing borders" (Bøås, 2001, p.710).

The emergence of a new faction – the United Liberation Movement for Democracy (ULIMO), shattered any hope of ending the war. ULIMO⁵⁹ was a coalition of Krahn and Mandingo ethnic

⁵⁷ Cannibalism became quite common in the war, with the rebels believing that consumers of human flesh were transferred the life, power, and "manhood" of the person they ate. A 2008 BBC News article details the testimony of a former commander who explained that Taylor ordered militias to eat the flesh of Krahn members and ECOMOG and UN peacekeepers they killed to incite fear among the people. Stephen Ellis (1995, 1999) has explained some of the more bizarre and grotesque parts of the war, such as cannibalism and ritual transvestism. He highlights the misuse in the war of some of the occasionally violent rituals integral to Liberia's *Poro* and *Sande* secret societies, which were prevalent among the ethnic groups.

⁵⁸ Both Taylor and Prince Johnson were staunchly opposed to Amos Sawyer's Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) and were particularly aggrieved by its introduction of new currency notes (Liberty Notes). Johnson had supposedly stockpiled large amounts of the Doe-era currency (Raddatz, 2016).

⁵⁹ Some scholars have linked the continuous failures of the peace agreements and the unceasing conflict to Taylor's contempt for the Nigeria led-ECOMOG as well as the rise of ULIMO as a military threat to the NPFL (Harris 1999, p.435; see also Gershoni 1997; Dunn 1998).

groups “motivated by the desire to rid their country [...] of the Taylor menace” (Africa Report 1991, cited in Adeleke 1995, p.581; see Ero 1995). The former journalist-turned-fighter, Alhaji V. Kromah, was ULIMO’s leader. ULIMO joined forces with the AFL and the ECOMOG offensive units and soon took over some strategically essential areas controlled by the NPFL, thus threatening Taylor’s revenue and his claim to legitimacy. Taylor then became open to new peace talks. The NPFL, ULIMO and the IGNU (Amos Sawyer’s interim civilian government) signed the Geneva II agreement on 17 June 1993, subsequently ratified at an ECOWAS summit in Cotonou, Benin.

The Geneva II peace agreement also failed as its predecessors had. Indeed, in the first two years of the war, the warring factions negotiated 11 peace agreements, but they all came to naught because Taylor refused to recognise ECOMOG as a peacekeeping force. He described their presence in Liberia as a flagrant act of aggression and accused them of harbouring support for ULIMO (Raddatz, 2016).

From the ashes of Geneva II emerged several warring factions⁶⁰ constructed on ethnic prejudice, with most of them originating from their leaders’ ambitions. Beyond the militarised rebel groups, some non-military activists came together in Monrovia to attend the National Conference of Unarmed Citizens forum (Adeleke 1995, p.582-3; see Adebajo 2002, pp.46–47; Call 2010; Harris 1999; Ero 1995).

As Bøås (2001, p.711) sadly notes, “the damnation game therefore went on with ethnic groups, warlords and ECOMOG against each other” with civilians, mostly women and children, bearing the brunt of it all. Several splinter conflicts broke out due to the warring factions’ proliferation, with each rebel group seeking claims to a territory with abundant natural resources. It is estimated that Taylor, for example, made an annual income of US\$75 million from exports of diamonds, gold, timber, rubber, and iron ore, including a reported US\$10

⁶⁰ 1. The Liberia Peace Council (LPC) was mainly made up of former soldiers of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) surfaced in late 1993, allegedly with the backing of ECOMOG (Reno 1996, p.214). LPC’s largely Krahn membership was led by Dr George Boley, who had worked in Doe’s administration.

2. The ULIMO split into its Mandingo and Krahn components in early 1994. Alhaji Kromah’s Krahn group became ULIMO-K, and Roosevelt Johnson’s Mandingo group became ULIMO-J.

3. The Central Revolutionary Council (CRC) also emerged in early 1994 and was led by Tom Woewiyu, Laveli Supuwood, and Sam Dokie, all of whom defected from the NPFL and accused Taylor of undermining the peace process to advance his presidential ambition.

4. There were also the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the Lofa Defence Force (LDF) and the Liberia New Horizons (LNH).

million a month from a consortium of North American, Japanese, and European miners as well as US\$300,000 a month from foreign timber firms. ULIMO-K was keen on restoring Mandingo diamond trading links with Sierra Leone; ULIMO-J was engaged in diamond mining in Bomi County; and the LPC exported rubber from Buchanan port (Reno 1999, 1996; Africa Confidential 1991; discussed in Adebajo 2002, p.47). Many ECOMOG officers also profited handsomely by controlling territories such as the ports and collecting bribes from the 'warrior-merchants' who emerged on the scene following international sanctions and sought to exchange weapons for raw materials and looted goods (Bøås 2001; see also Ellis 1998). A rebel's ability to claim a territory provided them access to future peace negotiations. Being recognised as a rebel group somewhat guaranteed the faction leaders a stake in the distribution of political power in such negotiations, as seen with the Geneva II Peace Agreement and others before it (see Harris 1999 p. 435; Adeleke 1995, pp.582-3).

The failure of Geneva II prompted the August 1995 Abuja Accord, which also failed. A second Abuja Accord (Abuja II) followed a year later and achieved what the previous 16 Peace Agreements had been unable to do. It ended the bloodbath in Liberia, if only temporarily. Many things fell into place, particularly a renewed sense of urgency and unity among ECOWAS members determined to find a lasting solution to the Liberian situation. The war had, at this point, spilt into neighbouring countries like Guinea and Sierra Leone. ECOWAS even threatened to establish a criminal tribunal and try Taylor and his lieutenants for war crimes and other related offences (Kieh 2010, 2011, 2012; Bøås 2001; Harris 1999).

Abuja II provided a timeline for disarmament and demobilisation of rebel forces. The factions handed in their weapons, albeit not completely. It also established an Independent Electoral Commission (IECOM) to administer voter registration and elections. The now 10,000-strong ECOMOG forces provided security arrangements throughout the country as the elections took place in July 1997, officially ending the first civil war.

The polls were split mainly between the warlord Taylor and the Harvard-educated banker cum UN senior official Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Sirleaf initially funded Taylor's NPFL but withdrew her support when the NPFL became increasingly violent, claiming she had been fooled about Taylor's true intentions (BBC News 2009). Taylor made it clear he was the only candidate strong enough to ensure peace and told rural voters he had already won the elections. Under Taylor's command, the NPFL forces had perpetrated some of the most vicious atrocities of the war, usually against civilians. Therefore, it is not surprising that people genuinely believed that the violence would continue if Taylor did not win the elections. Indeed, among the most

memorable of his campaign slogans were “He killed my ma, he killed my pa, but I’m going to vote for him anyway,” and “Better the devil you know than the angel you don’t” (Anderson 1998, p.np)

Taylor won over 75 per cent of the total votes, giving his New Patriotic Party (NPP) 49 out of the 64 seats in the House of Representatives and 21 of 26 seats in the Senate. Liberians heard his implicit warnings and brought in the devil they had come to know so intimately. Sirleaf’s Unity Party came in a distant second as she received less than 10 per cent of the total votes. According to the many local, regional, and international observers, the elections were free and fair, perhaps Liberia’s most transparent national elections by 1997 with former US president Jimmy Carter declaring it “a uniformly excellent election process” (Carter Center 1997).

The Second Civil War (1999-2003)

Liberia experienced relative peace following the elections. Although armed skirmishes were common in the hinterlands, the international community moved on from Liberia (Raddatz 2016; see Doyle 2013, 2009). Taylor’s presidency thus avoided international scrutiny until 2000 when an UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone accused Taylor’s regime of being a critical external supporter of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) – a rebel army in neighbouring Sierra Leone seeking to overthrow the incumbent government. Taylor was personally cited for arming Sankoh Foday’s RUF rebels in exchange for diamonds, allegations he fervently refuted. However, the international community’s scrutiny began anew, with the UK and the US labelling Taylor’s Liberia a “rogue state” and subjecting it to economic and political sanctions (Bøås 2001, p.713).

Generally, the beginning of Taylor’s (legitimate) presidency in 1997 was viewed as the end of the civil war. Nevertheless, some believed it was only a matter of time before the war began again (Kieh 2009). Effectively, Taylor had been given the mandate to fix what he had broken. Instead, he continued to exploit the country the way he did the hinterlands and used his victory as a platform to punish those who opposed him during the war. His continued corrupt practices, repression of dissent, exploitation of ethnic divisions, and the frustrating circumstances for most Liberians as the state failed to provide essential services led to renewed conflict within two years of the election (Kieh 2009, 2011, 2013; McGovern 2008; Raddatz 2016).

Invigorated by the US and the UK labelling Liberia a ‘rogue state’, ULIMO-K, the Mandingo-dominated rebel group, increased its military operations in Lofa County – a border county between Liberia and Sierra Leone and Guinea. The faction had re-emerged in mid-1999 with

support from the Guinean government. By 2001, Liberia was in a full-fledged war following a series of clashes between Taylor's forces and ULIMO-K, which by now had renamed itself Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). By 2003, LURD had taken control of much of west and northwest Liberia with sponsorship from Guinea, Sierra Leone, and the United States (Brabazon 2010; discussed in Vinck, Pham & Kreutzer 2011). By now, LURD controlled about 60 per cent of Liberia, including the diamond-mining towns, with nearly half of the population displaced (HRW/Africa 2002b).

Another faction, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), joined the war in March 2003 and launched its initial attacks from Côte d'Ivoire. MODEL's members were mainly of the Krahn ethnic group and were supported by the then Ivorian president, Laurent Gbagbo⁶¹. While the Mandingo and Krahn communities had often been each other's allies during the first phase of the war, they became sworn enemies between the 1997 elections and their subsequent emergence as LURD and MODEL, respectively (Raddatz 2016).

Under increasing pressure, particularly from African leaders, Taylor resigned and went into exile in Nigeria on August 11, 2003. The civil war formally ended on August 18, 2003, when all parties comprising the warring factions, the Liberian government, political parties, and civil society groups signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Accra, Ghana. They established the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL).

Between the various episodes of state breakdown and civil conflict, particularly the first phase of the war (1989-1997) and the bloody insurgencies of LURD and MODEL (1999-2003), about 250,000 Liberians were killed, over one million were internally displaced, and hundreds of thousands became refugees. The atrocities meted out by the various warring factions, including government forces, against civilians, particularly women and children, were ruthless, arbitrary, and of epic proportions as civilians were 'murdered, raped, mutilated and dispossessed' (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia 2017; McGovern 2008).

While Charles Taylor was instrumental in destabilising Liberia in unimaginable ways, the civil wars were by no means the result of one man's actions. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia sums up the nature of the conflict:

Between 1979 and 2003, Liberia has suffered coups, state breakdown, deadly internal armed conflict and international neglect. Every conceivable category of

⁶¹ Gbagbo's support was in retaliation for the assistance Taylor had previously given to the rebel Mouvement Patriotique Ivoirien du Grand Ouest (MPIGO) (Raddatz 2016)

gross human rights and serious humanitarian law violation has been committed by Liberians against Liberians (2017, p.61).

Interestingly, the influence of the Americo-Liberian settler regime that set the stage for the conflict is not incriminated in the above statement.

The transitional government following the signing of the CPA comprised all the warring factions and was headed by Gyude Bryant, a businessman unconnected to any armed groups. The CPA called on the United Nations to collaborate with the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS to establish a peacekeeping mission. It also mandated a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to provide a platform to facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation. The ECOMOG mission deployed 15,000 peacekeepers charged with disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation (DDRR), repatriating refugees and returning internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their homes. They also supported the NTGL by providing essential services, establishing the rule of law, retraining the police and the army, and conducting national elections in October 2005 (Vinck, Pham & Kreutzer 2011; McGovern 2008; CPA 2003). The NTGL lacked popular legitimacy due to its temporal nature. It was also involved in controversial issues such as ‘the renegotiation of contractual agreements with multinational concessionaries involved in Liberia’s important rubber and mining sectors’ (McGovern 2008). Nonetheless, they managed to conduct a peaceful and credible election in October 2005, bringing Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to power in 2006 (Sesay et al. 2009; McGovern 2008).

Reflecting on Liberia's Civil Wars: A Case of Elite Opportunism?

Many scholars explain African wars using “either Africa’s primordial afflictions of ‘tribalism’, or the depredations of the continent’s proverbial poverty and inequalities, or authoritarianism and poor governance” (Zeleva 2008, p.15). These views, prominently expressed in Western media and academic scholarship, are usually ahistorical, internalist, and singular in their explanations of Africa’s wars.

Analysis of Liberia’s civil wars tends to emphasise a similar ahistorical and singular focus. Common within these accounts is the so-called ‘resource wars’ framework developed by Paul Collier and his colleagues (Collier & Hoeffler 2004, 1998, 1999; Collier 2000) to explain the explosion of warring factions, suggesting that Liberia’s natural resources offered commercial opportunities. Others invoke an ethno-communal framework that blames wars on grievances among ethnic and communal groups (Haynes 2007, Kaufman 2001; Lake and Rothchild 1996; Horowitz 1985). Both theoretical frameworks have been vigorously critiqued for their

oversimplifications and generalised application to Africa's wars (see Mkandawire 2008; Cooper, Pugh & Goodhand 2004; Mlambo 2004; Nafziger & Auvinen 2002). Similarly, dismissing Liberia's civil wars as ethnic or resource conflicts does little to help understand the conflicts' origins and impedes effective escalation management and appropriate support during post-war reconstruction.

Indeed, objective factors such as inequalities, group interests, and ethnic and religious differences can generate social conflict, but these frameworks' propensity to limit these issues to Africa is problematic. These causative factors are usually interrelated in how conflict erupts and is sustained over time. Even then, an outbreak of war, its ferocity and duration depend more on the interplay of these objective factors and subjective factors like the psychology of victimhood and persecution, as seen in Liberia's case. Indeed, some scholars have assessed that it is when feelings or memories of oppression, marginalisation, and humiliation, either real or mythologised, are triggered through new threats that wars erupt or endure (Zeleva 2008, pp. 17-18; see also Azar and Moon 1986; Deutsch 1991; Ross 1993; Brown 1993; Namwambah 2004).

Consequently, I argue that the root cause of Liberia's civil wars is an interplay of contemporary and historical processes. The wars originated from "the intersections of politics, economy and culture, ... [and] the role played by national and transnational formations, the state, capital and civil society" (Zeleva 2008, p.16). As argued by Ellis (2009), the cause of Liberia's wars is a "difficult historical question"; nevertheless, analysts agree that the wars' origins extend back more than a century and "are related to the history of a state that presided over many injustices" (p.113).

There is no denying the significant role that ethnic tensions played at the start of Liberia's civil wars in the face of Doe's coordinated attacks on the Gio and Mano. Also, while Doe's coup may have ended the Indigenous/settler dichotomies, the post-coup order benefited elites belonging mostly to Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups and Americo-Liberian people grafted into Doe's patronage network. Political actors used ethnic identity mainly as an instrument to advance their singular agendas in Liberia's civil wars. However, this does not mean that collective solidarity within the Gio, Mano, Krahn, Mandingo or other ethnic groups is a given and remains static over time. Instead, faction leaders like Samuel Doe, Charles Taylor, Alhaji Kromah, and others deployed ethnicity as a calculated instrument to legitimise their call to arms.

As argued in Chapters 2 and 3, ethnicity is a process, meaning it is an identity that can be expressed as a politicised social action in political projects. Leaders of such projects often use ethnicity as a recruiting strategy by invoking primordial symbols in their appeal for support from potential group members. Even then, it is not the primordial markers of the ethnic groups that propels sustained political action, but rather, the situational context of potential members. For example, Taylor transformed farmers and youngsters in Nimba County into armed fighters by capitalising on the legitimate grievances these groups had against the state and other groupings Doe was perceived to have favoured. In addition to the ethnic tensions, the exploitation of natural resources was also a factor in the ongoing conflict.

My point is that Liberia's polarisation at the start of the civil wars went beyond questions of ethnicity and access to natural resources. Instead, the war was a manifestation of the fight to decolonise the Liberian society, which accounts for Indigenous prioritisation in development outcomes and opportunities. The structures of exploitation perpetuated by the settler regime for over a century that saw the interests of a privileged few fiercely protected by any means possible, and these patterns also took shape in the war. Unequal governance structures continued to be significant determinants of Liberians' daily lives even after the overthrow of the settler regime. Consequently, political actors like Samuel Doe, claiming to fight for decolonisation, reproduced the violent character of settler colonialism, further subjecting Liberians to years of brutalities.

Additionally, changing divisions in the Liberian society, be they ethnic or class at the point of the conflict, have been greatly influenced by the historical legacies of the Americo-Liberian rule. The oligarchy they established to protect the interests of the Americo-Liberian settler class had entrenched inequality and uneven development and the acute socioeconomic and political marginalisation of groups outside of Monrovia. These groups have been fighting for inclusion since the creation of the nation-state.

Therefore, while the war's outbreak can be attributed to the ethnic tensions Doe incited in the Gio and Mano communities following General Quiwonkpa's coup attempt, his actions did not happen in a vacuum. Neither was Taylor exploiting Liberia's human and natural resources for political gain. In the first instance, both actors operated within a system that initiated their dubious and bloody claim to political power. It inspired them to 'other' groups like the Gio and Mano and subsequently every Liberian who was not part of their in-group. Doe's ability to organise such horrendous violence against a community because one of the members incited an insurrection against him did not just occur. Instead, he was operating within a system long-

established by the Americo-Liberian oligarchy where the privileged few took precedence over most of the population. Doe and Taylor did not just appear on the political scene. Instead, they were a 'caricature' of Liberian society. Their reigns of terror were a continuation of the elitist system perpetuated by the Americo-Liberian oligarchy for over a century, in which the interests of members of the in-group were fiercely protected by any means possible. A century of oppression made Samuel Doe inevitable. He was not an aberration of settler colonialism in Liberia but rather a symptom of its very structure. Indeed, it would have been someone else if it were not Doe.

Therefore, although ethno-communal divisions are commonly used to explain the root causes of Liberia's wars, this is insufficient, at least for the first phase of the conflict. Much of what caused the wars has its roots in the inequitable and oppressive socio-cultural, political, and economic system established by the settlers in modern Liberia's construction. As Bøås (2005) argues, the Liberian civil wars were a manifestation of a social conflict that had started when the first settlers arrived on the shores of present-day Liberia in the 18th century.

Conclusion

This chapter and the first part of the thesis have shown that at various stages in Liberia's state formation process, either in peace or war, those in positions of power have sacrificed the majority's wellbeing for their enrichment and those in their in-group. The exploitative nature of the settler regime has generated legacies of mistrust and scepticism among the Liberian populace, and that suspicion continuously undermines attempts at nation-building. As noted by Bøås (2005), Liberia has been at war with itself since its formation over what it means to be a Liberian and who belongs to the polity. Divisions in the Liberian society related to class or social groups entrenched over decades of the regime's lifetime continue to frame present-day constructions of identity and debates about who can legitimately belong to Liberia.

Samuel Doe's coup d'état transformed the Indigenous/settler dichotomies as most Liberians fled Liberia and settled in America during state breakdown. Many returned following the end of the civil war to claim their property. Others entered government service following a call to action, first by former President Sirleaf (2006-2017) and now President George Weah, to help rebuild their homeland. Notably, the cultural, economic, and socio-political dominance of the Americo-Liberian regime, particularly as a settler group, is no longer explicit in Liberia's societal mainstream. This is due to intermarriages between Americo and Indigenous Liberians, the overthrow of the TWP oligarchy by Doe's coup, and the ensuing violence that befell the

country from the 1980s to the early 2000s (Ciment, 2016). Nevertheless, economic and socio-political structures established by the settler regime decades before the coup d'état and civil wars continue to shape the country since corruption, systemic inequality, and poverty have remained endemic in the post-war era.

Accordingly, questions about the rights, obligations, and privileges that should underpin a collective Liberian identity remain essential for a durable post-war recovery in Liberia. The following chapters analyse contemporary debates about identity and belonging in Liberia. I use Liberia's settler colonial background as a lens to understand current anxieties around recolonisation by another group of domineering elites if dual citizenship is allowed.

Part 2: Contestations Over What It Means to be a Liberian

Part 2 – comprised of empirical Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 – analyses contemporary contestations over constructing a collective Liberian identity using Liberia's long, contentious dual citizenship debate. At the heart of the debate are conceptions of Liberianess – the ultimate marker of belonging to Liberia in the post-war era. Diaspora Liberians consider access to dual citizenship a practical strategy that formalises their Liberianess and provides them and their children a route back to their 'real' home in Liberia. In-country Liberians fear being colonised by a small, privileged group and purposefully conceptualise Liberianess as an exclusionary tool.

I argue that Liberia's past as a settler society that entrenched inequalities to privilege the settler class is informing these contestations over the construction of Liberianess. A settler colonial lens in these analyses helps us appreciate, in more impactful ways, the role of dual citizenship in Liberia's post-conflict reconstruction processes. It gives context to the fears surrounding some Liberians' opposition to dual citizenship and why they consider it a recolonising tool that facilitates a take-over by a small, privileged group with the means to buy up all the land. Moreover, when we consider the invisibility and enduring nature of settler colonialism even in a supposedly post-colonial Liberia, we can understand the anxieties of in-country Liberians and why they may see dual citizenship as a recolonising tool and diaspora Liberians as the new settler-colonisers.

Chapter 5: The Nature of Liberia's Engagement with its Diaspora

Introduction

In previous chapters, I argued that Liberia was established as a settler regime (Part 1). Drawing on settler colonial theory and key tenets of critical race theory (Chapter 1), I have shown that when Americo-Liberians dispossessed and marginalised the African ethnic groups they met upon arrival, they established the antagonisms and enduring unequal structures that ultimately led to Liberia's civil wars (Chapters 3 & 4). By re-theorising Liberia's history as a settler colony, we are able to understand how past injustices and structural political and socio-economic inequalities established by the settler regime continue to shape the lives of many Liberians today, including their perceptions about the current construction of Liberianess (Chapters 6 & 7).

This chapter provides insight into the motivations behind the Liberian state's engagement with its population abroad. It introduces the second part of this thesis which analyses contestations over what it means to be a Liberian, arguing that Liberia's settler colonial past and present inform debates on identity and belonging in the post-war era. It draws upon an interpretive content analysis of the discourse produced by the governments of former President Sirleaf and current President Weah on diaspora engagement in Liberia's post-conflict reconstruction process.

The political ideologies and policy regimes of the Sirleaf and Weah governments are not entirely different, but how the populace perceives these leaders differs significantly. President Weah is idolised for his rise to international fame as a footballer despite the odds of being raised by his grandmother in one of the worst slums in Monrovia. In particular, Weah represents hope and the will to succeed to the Liberian youth. However, critics often emphasise the fact that he dropped out of high school (he has since completed a degree) and his lack of experience in governance (France 24 2020; BBC News 2018; Jackson 2005). These critics emphasise Weah's unpreparedness to lead a country, much less solve Liberia's daunting socio-economic and infrastructural problems.

On the other hand, Sirleaf had years of experience before becoming president, as she had been employed by the Liberian government, the World Bank, and other international organisations. However, critics often cast her as a cog in the Americo-Liberian hegemony despite her Indigenous background. As this chapter shows, the dominance of returnees/diaspora Liberians in Sirleaf's government made her very unpopular, especially during her second term.

Notwithstanding the differences in how these leaders are perceived, Sirleaf and Weah have both pursued dual citizenship policies. As discussed in the introductory chapter, this thesis uses the dual citizenship debate to interrogate the complex narratives around the construction of a collective Liberian identity in the post-war era. This chapter provides the basis for how the three stakeholder groups – the Liberian government, Liberian diaspora groups, and Liberians at home – are shaping the debate on dual citizenship and, more generally, the construction of collective Liberian identity and a sense of belonging that embraces all Liberians.

I argue that understanding the state's rationale for connecting with its populations abroad puts into perspective the energies behind the demands for formalised identity by diaspora Liberians. More so, it provides an opportunity to interrogate the connections (or otherwise) between the state's attempts at constructing belonging (a collective Liberian identity) and settler colonial structures and processes central to Liberia's formation. In the previous chapters, I argued that settler colonialism is inherently about belonging. The Americo-Liberians construction of a settler regime, their subjugation of and later attempts at integrating the Indigenous majority into the settler structure (Chapters 2, 3 & 4) relate to the "politics of belonging" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011). As conceptualised in Chapter 2, the notion of belonging has a social dimension that states use to establish the boundaries of socio-political locations. In settler colonial contexts, the state deploys such political projects to absorb the dominated group into the settler structure. These political projects are meant to signify a unified nation and the end of colonisation, suggesting to the people and the world that colonialism can only be found in the country's past. The question I interrogate here is whether the (supposedly decolonised) post-conflict state departs from the deflecting tactics of its predecessor (the settler regime) by examining the question of whether the state's pursuance of a New Liberia that includes *all* Liberians – a potentially unified nation – a means of burying its settler colonial past?

The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first shows that while the state expects diaspora Liberians to be partners in its post-conflict reconstruction agenda, its engagement preference is for diaspora Liberians to return home to boost national capacity. I argue that Liberia's engagement with its population abroad is a typical 'politics of belonging' project. Nation-states deploy such projects to establish boundaries of inclusion (and exclusion) but also as a basis to extract resources from those it considers potential members. In this instance, the governments of former President Sirleaf and now President Weah deploy belonging to the New Liberia as a resource in their construction and justification of the boundaries of inclusion in the post-war country.

The second section shows that the Liberian state promotes diaspora engagement as a corrective approach to past exclusionary politics and nation-building mistakes. I argue, however, that underlying the state's messaging about restorative inclusiveness is a calculated tactic to make diaspora Liberians feel included so they do not revert to past practices of sponsoring resistance against incumbent regimes. I contend that the state's emphasis on constructing a New Liberia that is inclusive of *all* Liberians is a typical settler regimes' strategy of claiming colonial completion. Settler regimes utilise collective identity projects to divert their populations and the world's attention from the enduring presence of settler colonial structures and processes. Consequently, the state's pursuit of a unified nation through constructing a collective Liberian identity is a strategy of locating settler colonialism in Liberia's past.

Diaspora Liberians as Partners in Liberia's Reconstruction

'Return Home!': Answering Liberia's National Capacity Problem

In violent conflicts, people typically flee to other parts of the country or neighbouring countries. Some who escape make it to faraway countries across the Americas, Europe, and Australia. Significantly, those who can make it further are often those with the most education and professionally most qualified before or after their flight from the war. Nonetheless, such diasporas, generally described as 'conflict-generated diasporas' (Lyons 2007), often have a significant commitment to engaging transnationally. They carry feelings of 'survivor's remorse' forged through forced displacements and have a keen sense of responsibility towards their homeland and those who stayed. As reasoned by Féron (2017), conflict-generated diasporas "display a strong attachment to their countries of origin, and structure their identities and ideologies around discourses referring to their homeland" (p.360). Coupled with this sense of responsibility and attachment to the homeland, technological advancements and socio-economic developments have radically transformed the possibilities for diasporas to remain engaged in their homelands (Horst 2018).

The Liberian diaspora is primarily made up of people who were forced to flee the country during the many years of political patronage and different stages of the civil war that devastated the fabric of Liberian society. In addition to this group are other Liberians who were 'trapped' in the diaspora because they were abroad for a holiday, business or education before the civil war broke out. The decade-long episodic conflict weakened the advances made in human capital development by way of the hundreds of thousands of Liberians who died or were internally displaced, including the outmigration of skilled labour into the diaspora (GoL 2018a,

pp.33–35; 2008a, pp.143–4). In particular, the war interrupted years of schooling for many Liberians and prevented many others from acquiring work experience. Friedman (2012), for example, explains that, as of 2000, 45 per cent of Liberia's skilled workers (defined as those with post-secondary education) lived outside the country.

Considerable gaps in human development remain one of the devastating impacts of the Liberian civil wars, rendering many people who either stayed or returned when the conflict ended unable to contribute to the developmental needs of the post-conflict state. Added to these challenges were the thousands of jobless ex-combatants who constantly threatened Liberia's fragile peace (Friedman 2012, p.2). In her annual message to the national legislature in 2008, former President Sirleaf emphasised the human capacity challenges facing Liberia:

There is the challenge of national capacity, a clear indication of the loss of skills and commitment over the many years of institutional decline. This affects the implementation of our programs and the expansion of employment, even when financial resources are available. This challenge must be met through a combination of educational and training programs, ... and continued progress in repatriating our talent that lies in the Diaspora (Sirleaf 2008a, p.33).

The daunting human and institutional capacity problems facing the country at the time, and the impact this had on the reconstruction process, were again emphasised in the Lift Liberia Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS – 2008-2011):

The low capacity of Liberia's public and private institutions continues to be a constraint on Government effectiveness and the economy as a whole. The combination of over many years of political patronage and conflict has left Liberia with high numbers of unskilled workers with little technical or professional capacity to produce goods and deliver services. The human resource challenges faced by public institutions and private industry present both serious challenges to development ... Liberia's ability to expand and develop the economy is hampered by limitations in the number of educated and skilled workers (GoL 2008a, p.141).

National capacity challenges are prioritised in both statements because the situation was especially dire during the first term of Sirleaf's government. The lack of adequate public and private institutions or skilled workers with relevant technical and professional experience is generally attributed to the long years of political patronage under the settler regime and the

resultant civil conflict and ‘brain drain’. Both statements suggest that the low human and institutional capacity put Liberia’s reconstruction process at risk due to the state’s inability to expand employment and deliver needed services to the people. The concern is that continuous instability would increase public dissatisfaction, which risks the country returning to war, as has been seen several times in Liberia. The looming threat of violence is not unfounded. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) have shown that post-conflict countries are six times more likely to return to war within five years. Consequently, the Sirleaf government considered the solution to Liberia’s national capacity problems to be the repatriation of skilled and professional diaspora Liberians.

For these reasons, the Sirleaf government sought to engage the Liberian population abroad, many of whom had the necessary skills, knowledge, wealth and experience to help govern and provide essential services to the citizenry. Staffing ministerial and other high-level state agencies was prioritised in these instances. Many of the documents and speeches reviewed for this chapter acknowledge this fact. The government appealed to skilled diaspora Liberians to return home and help with their homeland’s reconstruction process. For instance, at a Diaspora Engagement Stakeholders Consultative Forum organised by the government to “strategise about how the Liberian Diaspora can help in promoting in-country development”, Sirleaf is reported as having “urged Diaspora Liberians to be actively involved in the implementation of the Lift Liberia PRS (2008-2011)” and to have explained “that it is the responsibility of every Liberian, even those abroad and recently returned, to ‘Lift Liberia’” (GoL 2008b).

In addition, with the help of the international community (particularly the UNPD), the Sirleaf government implemented diaspora engagement programs such as the Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN), Senior Executive Service (SES) and other similar projects like the Liberia Emergency Capacity Building Service (LECBS) to strengthen the institutional capacity of her government. These programs were designed to help boost the ability and effectiveness of the civil service and other sectors to drive socio-economic recovery processes and deliver social services to the Liberian people.

In the first policy directives released by both post-conflict governments: Sirleaf’s Lift Liberia PRS (2008-2011) and Weah’s Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD – 2018-2023); sections of each policy document are dedicated to addressing diaspora Liberians with emphasis on what they can do for their homeland – specifically, the role they could, and were expected to, play in the development agenda of the government of the day. The Lift Liberia PRS (2008-2011) has a section that addresses the conditions that caused the

outmigration of diaspora Liberians and the resulting capacity deficit. It puts their numbers at about 12 per cent of the total Liberian population, confirms the government's commitment to creating favourable conditions and better incentives through programs like TOKTEN and SES to enable their return home, and references those who have returned home and are playing critical roles in the reconstruction process. For example, the document in question specifically cites a Dr Robert Dennis, who left a Chief of Plastic Surgery and Vice-Chair of the Surgery Department at Harvard University Hospital to return home to lead clinical operations. This was lauded as a prime example of diaspora Liberians' contribution to addressing the country's capacity problems.

Likewise, Weah's Pro-Poor Agenda (2018-2023) acknowledges the continuous engagement of diaspora Liberians in the national development process – especially in their counties and villages and pledges the government's commitment to prioritising the facilitation of diaspora Liberians' "return to establish businesses, non-profit organisations and charities, that create jobs and expand our social safety net" (GoL 2018a, p.7).

So, considered as a resource with a wealth of potential and specialised skills, as well as the solution to several of the problems that plague the post-conflict country, diaspora Liberians are constantly encouraged to return home, engaged in consultative processes for development initiatives and are routinely updated on the progress of Liberia's reconstruction process. This constant urging is not just in policy directives but also in government speeches. For example, following her 2006 presidential victory, Sirleaf stated in her inaugural address:

... we call upon our colleagues of all political persuasions now in the Diaspora to return home We are aware that we have hundreds of doctors, engineers, and economists, as well as thousands of teachers, nurses, professors, and other Liberians who possess specialized skills currently living abroad. I re-echo my appeal to all of you to please come home!! Please make the sacrifice, for your country needs you and needs you now!!! (Sirleaf 2006).

Similarly, in his first state of the nation address before Liberia's 54th National Legislature, Weah stated:

Many Liberians in [the] diaspora have heard my clarion call to return home and bring their energies, skills, talents, and expertise to join us in the building of a New Liberia (Weah 2018a, p.10).

The relentless call on diaspora Liberians to return to their homeland and contribute their skills, talents, and wealth in varying ways, as seen in the excerpts and discussions above, indicates that the state considers its diaspora a resource for its post-conflict reconstruction agenda.

Indeed, the Liberian state's engagement with its diasporas is not unusual in this regard. The state, in this case, is choosing to include its population abroad within the boundaries of the 'New Liberia' to facilitate the extraction of much-needed resources – skills, technical knowledge, wealth – to support the reconstruction process. Similarly, scholars who have dealt with the politics of migrant-sending countries and their diasporas have outlined a cluster of utilitarian, identity-based, governance, and socio-spatial perspectives to explain the rationale for migrant-sending countries' engagement with their diasporas. The utilitarian explanation is of most significance here. From this perspective, diasporas are considered a source of 'material power' (Koinova & Tsourapas 2018). Their countries of origin thus engage them to provide remittances that sustain households and reduce poverty; provide direct investments in small, medium, and large enterprises (Brinkerhoff, 2008); make philanthropic contributions (Brinkerhoff, 2008; Sidel, 2003); support homeland tourism (Coles and Timothy, 2004); and provide their professional knowledge and expertise to sectors such as engineering, medicine, and technology (discussed in Koinova & Tsourapas 2018).

Related to the utilitarian perspective is the supposition of economic development as the underlying rationale for migrant-sending countries to engage their diasporas. Barry (2006, p.28) argues that the economic disparity between countries in the Global North and South means that most developing countries are engaged in continuous economic state-building and so seek to institutionalise the relationship with their non-resident citizens to enable their inclusion in such economic projects, as well as an opportunity to extract resources from them. To Barry, the earning power of migrants increases considerably following emigration, which in turn increases their value to their homelands. As such, migrant-sending countries increasingly depend on contributions in the form of remittances and capital inflows from their populations abroad (Barry 2006, pp.28-30).

Notwithstanding Barry's argument, which has some truth, the attitudes and policies of a migrant-sending country in certain situations are determined by its national capacity related to both human and institutional factors. This is the case with post-conflict Liberia. As proposed by Koinova & Tsourapas (2018), in scenarios where the state cannot develop expertise and enforce rules due to limited institutional capacities and economic resources resulting from state fragility, the diaspora community is looked upon to fulfil some missing functions. This

proposition explains why Liberia, a country recovering from years of state failure and fragility, continues to rely on its diaspora as a resource for its reconstruction and development agenda.

This discussion reveals that while migrant-sending countries might engage their diaspora for utilitarian reasons, the preferred engagement is usually determined by the state's needs at a particular time. The Liberian case suggests that the state considers a functioning government, supported by an array of effective public and private sector institutions, and staffed by educated and highly skilled personnel, to be crucial to its reconstruction process. As shown in the above discussions, Liberia was at risk of returning to war due to its low governance capacity. So, the state looked to its diaspora as a possible solution, if only to buy some time. This explains the constant call on skilled diaspora Liberians to return 'home'. The post-conflict state thus engages diaspora Liberians to compensate for its limitations and failure to meet its populace's needs. The emphasis on national capacity in the initial phase of Liberia's reconstruction recognises that returnees' socio-economic and political contributions are crucial for the survival of the post-conflict country and providing essential socio-economic services to the citizenry. The hope is that, in the long run, the benefits accrued from the skills and talents of returnees will outweigh the remittances they would have sent if they had remained in the diaspora.

Liberia's framing of its diaspora engagement around the utilitarian potential of its mostly educated and highly skilled professionals abroad is reminiscent of the categorisation of deserving (settlers) and undeserving (Indigenous and unassimilated others) citizens as a basis of the settler regime. This is further explored in the following section.

Beyond Remittances: Diaspora Engagement Preference of the Liberian state

In the previous section, I established the significant role diaspora Liberians are expected to play in their homeland's reconstruction agenda. The Liberian state would prefer its skilled and professional populations abroad to return home to work in the public and private sectors. In this section, I use the state's preference for its diasporas to return home to explain further the state's use of belonging to frame and justify specific demands from its diasporas.

Liberia's current national development plan (PAPD – 2018-2023), defined as “a framework for inclusion, more equitable distribution of our national wealth, and a rights-based approach to national development” (p. xi), is largely unclear about the role of diaspora Liberians in the country's long-term goals. The state acknowledges diaspora Liberians' active engagement in the country's recovery process in terms of “contributing much-needed food, medical

commodities, and returning to work as community service volunteers during emergencies. [In addition,] personal remittances inflow from the Diaspora reached 27.1 per cent of GDP by 2017...” (p.7). However, the framework is contradictory regarding the diaspora engagement preference of the Liberian state.

The state welcomes the impact of its diaspora community on the country’s reconstruction efforts, particularly the large sums they remit to their relations back home. Its enthusiasm for diaspora engagement is articulated in almost all the documents by the Weah and Sirleaf governments. Below are excerpts; the first from Weah’s national development plan – the PAPD, and the second from a speech delivered by Sirleaf to diaspora Liberians in 2012.

The Government of Liberia recognises the sacrifice made by the Diaspora to sustain family and relations back home... continuous engagement will remain a priority to facilitate their return to establish businesses, non-profit organisations and charities that create jobs and expand our social safety net. ... facilitating the inflow of family remittances will remain a priority well into the future (GoL 2018a, p.7).

We are most appreciative of the contribution you make to our national economy with the remittances you send every day. ... The challenge ahead is to determine what kind of investment you could make now that would benefit the nation and also bring you rewards. The remittances are good for emergencies, but I want you to look beyond that and start something that can touch the lives of others, something that can bring you home (Sirleaf 2012a, p.3-4).

As seen in these quotes, both governments have issued policy directives and statements that include an expectation for diaspora Liberians to continue sending remittances home. Both governments acknowledged the sustained commitment of diaspora Liberians towards their homeland’s development process.

However, also evident in both passages is the nature of diaspora engagement preferred by the Liberian state. Sirleaf’s speech suggests there is a temporality to remittance flow to Liberia. Thus, the state emphasises the return of their skilled and wealthy diaspora populations, not just for temporary positions during emergencies, but their relocation back home so Liberia can fully benefit from their skills, experience, and wealth.

The state considers diaspora Liberians to be critical players in the reconstruction process, but their significance to the country’s long-term goals is somewhat tied to their presence in-

country. The expectation of both national governments has been for a continuous engagement of diaspora Liberians through skills and knowledge transfer, investments and the capital needed to move Liberia towards accelerated, inclusive, and sustainable development. As a result, the state packages investment in Liberia and other preferred support as diaspora Liberians' route back home and an opportunity to serve their country and impact the lives of many more Liberians, instead of just the few remittance recipients.

In addition to policy directives, Weah, like his predecessor, stresses the need for skilled diaspora Liberians to return home. Below is an excerpt from a speech he delivered to the Liberian community in Nigeria, where he maintained that Liberia's diaspora is part of his leadership:

If you are Liberian living abroad, you need to come home to contribute your quota. We are looking for nurses, engineers, doctors, lawyers and good ones too. ... You need to come back home and settle... (GoL 2018b).

Weah's call for diaspora Liberians to return home is explicitly directed at professionals and skilled workers who can concretely contribute their 'quota' of skills, wealth and experiences towards Liberia's development aspirations. The notion that remittances are suitable but insufficient for a country like Liberia pursuing accelerated sustainable development is evident in Weah's speech and emphasis on the return of skilled diasporas.

The state's preference for its diaspora populations to return home recategorises other forms of diaspora contributions, particularly remittances to families and communities of origin. It is interesting to note that the Liberian state considers remittances a moral obligation for diaspora Liberians. Augustine Kpehe Ngafuan, the Foreign Affairs Minister (2012-2015) in the Sirleaf government, put forward this view. Ngafuan, who had previously served as the finance minister (2008-2012), indicated this view during a speech at the 39th General Assembly of the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA) in Columbus, Ohio, USA, in September 2013 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of uninterrupted peace in Liberia. From this point of view, the Liberian state assumes that diaspora Liberians have received support from families and communities back home at some point in their life. Therefore, it is morally justified that they reciprocate such support. Further, since remittances do not contribute to the state, diaspora Liberians must not allow homeland politics or whoever is occupying the Executive Mansion to influence their willingness to support and fulfil this moral obligation to their families and communities back home (Ngafuan 2013).

The classification of remittances as a moral obligation stems from the view that such contributions rarely impact the ability of the state to deliver on its promise of inclusive and sustainable development. Remittances are usually earmarked for specific people – mostly relations of the sender – and for particular purposes. Recipients must consciously decide to invest such monies in certain goods and services to have a multiplier effect by possibly creating jobs and incomes for others, whose spending together might help raise national savings. As Barry (2006) suggests, while remittances are crucial to livelihoods in some migrant-sending countries, only a tiny percentage of such inflows directly contribute to the government in the form of taxes or investments in government projects and financial instruments. Migrant-sending countries are thus motivated to recruit from their pool of non-resident populations who are wealthy, both financially and in terms of human capital, to partner with the government and the domestic private sector in national development projects (Barry 2006, pp. 28-29).

Nevertheless, the Liberian state's position on remittances is merely political as opposed to its evaluative impacts on livelihoods and social capital. Indeed, research has shown that increased remittance flows *can* contribute to economic development. Kpodar and Le Goff (2011) have shown that remittances can reduce developing countries' dependency on aid when invested in human and physical capital rather than consumed. Carment and Calleja (2017) have proposed that countries must have regulatory frameworks covering banking and remittance management to harness the productive capacity of remittances. Defined as institutionalised forms of remittance management and allocation (Koinova 2012), these regulatory frameworks may include flexible citizenship laws, visa access, political rights, portable pensions, social services, tax incentives, and other structures that work to deepen the relationship between diasporas and their home countries (Carment & Calleja 2017).

Thus, it is essential to consider Liberia's existing policy environment for its critical role in exploiting the 'productive capacity' of the monies sent home by its populations abroad. The country is still rebuilding most of its socio-economic and political institutions following the war. It does not yet have the necessary regulatory frameworks to manage remittances effectively. In addition, Liberia is one of the world's poorest and most unequal countries. According to the UNDP (2019), about 40.9 per cent of the population lives below the income poverty line (US\$1.90 per day). Hence, it is unrealistic to suggest that the largest share of remittances is not being consumed. This means Liberia cannot rely on remittances as a constant revenue to deliver socio-economic development to the citizenry.

Consequently, diaspora Liberians are routinely encouraged to move beyond remittances and return home, particularly those with financial wealth or human capital. The expectation is that diaspora Liberians can demonstrate they belong to the New Liberia by “formalis[ing] their relationship with the state through investments, volunteerism and capacity building” (GoL 2010). According to the Liberian state, contributions in skills, knowledge transfer, and investments provide diaspora Liberians with a route back home. Also, those contributions allow them to become invested partners in their homeland by improving the public sector’s capacity, developing the private sector to assist the government in creating more jobs, entrenching the middle class, and expanding the social safety net to lift more Liberians out of crushing poverty.

In sum, the state’s framing of diaspora Liberians as critical partners in the country’s reconstruction processes epitomises the politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006; 2011) or what Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (2011) defines as the “regimes of belonging”. Regimes of belonging are a *shift* from the personalised attachment to a place or a group (sense of belonging) to demonstrating actual membership to said group and an ownership stake in said place. Consequently, the state’s expectations for diaspora Liberians to move beyond remittances and return to their homeland is a political strategy of erecting boundaries of belonging. In this case, the Liberian state seeks to include and extract from its population abroad. As argued by Pfaff-Czarnecka (2011, pp.6-7), regimes of belonging insist on groups or individuals making payments for belonging claims through “investments of time and resources, loyalty and commitment.”

Groups – diaspora Liberians in this case – risk being excluded or ostracised if they are perceived to have not paid these prices. Significantly, regimes of belonging are structured by the state’s restrictive rules as well as public opinion. In this sense, the more mistrust the public has of aliens (diaspora Liberians and non-‘Negro’ migrants), the less public acknowledgement of their presence, and the more suspicion they draw from the general public, undermining their claims for belonging.

Further, the state’s discourse of a New Liberia is problematic, especially its emphasis on *home* and the underlying assumption that this New Liberia represents a united and inclusive nation. That is never the case, and even less so when we consider Liberia’s settler colonial past. Like other colonised societies, Liberia could never circumvent the legacies of colonialism, including “the usurpation of home, dispossession of peoples, and contesting attachments and claims on land and to belonging” (Bragg 2015, p.206). In previous chapters, I discussed the centrality of

belonging in the formation of Liberia as a settler colony. I argued that while settler colonial processes and structures provided the Americo-Liberians with the doubleness of home – the ability to claim Indigenous (Liberia) and exogenous (America) status simultaneously – these structures had destructive impacts on Indigenous societies and their institutional arrangements. The state’s articulation of ‘home’ to diaspora Liberians presents some troubling parallels as it relates to the doubleness of home that was available to the Americo-Liberians. Specifically, diaspora Liberians’ considers dual citizenship as a practical strategy that formalises that provides them and their children a route back to their *real home* in Liberia while still maintaining the home the diasporic space affords them. These parallels become clearer in Chapter 7 as I explore diaspora Liberians’ expressions of belonging or ‘at-homeness’.

The following section interrogates the state’s promotion of diaspora engagement to reconcile its settler colonial background. I argue that the state’s promotion of ‘restitutive inclusiveness’ is a tactic for burying its settler colonial past.

Inclusive Development Agenda: Learning from the Past

Another theme evident in my document analysis is what I am calling ‘restitutive inclusiveness’. The Liberian state markets its engagement of diaspora Liberians as a way of addressing the exclusionary politics of the past. In a speech delivered during a consultative dialogue on the formulation of a comprehensive National Diaspora Engagement Policy, former Vice President Boakai opined that:

You will agree that evidence abounds that this Government has, from the onset, adopted ... the principle of inclusion. This has been our guiding principle ... [to] bring every sector of the Liberian population on board in the governance and development of our common patrimony (GoL 2016).

Efforts to engage diaspora Liberians in the government’s inclusive agenda originated from the belief that the turmoil and violence that culminated in the civil war were due to historical antagonisms rooted in Liberia’s settler colonial past. These historic resentments are a result of decades of exclusionary policies, socio-political marginalisation, structural inequalities and ethnic divisions perpetrated by the settler regime established by the Americo-Liberian oligarchy. Following the formation of the Liberian state in 1847, successive governments failed to address these fundamental problems. Eventually, they climaxed in a civil conflict that shook the core of the Liberian society and the West African region. In the same speech, Boakai linked the success of Liberia’s reconstruction to resolving those historical animosities, stating that:

the current generation [of] Liberians has an obligation to right the historical wrongs and put to rest long-simmering resentments so as to put the country on a trajectory of sustained growth and development ... (GoL 2016).

Remarks like these suggest that the state's engagement of diaspora Liberians goes beyond just wanting to tap the wealth, skills, and investment potential that Liberians in the diaspora represent. Instead, we can infer that the state engagement of its population abroad is also a corrective approach, a mechanism deliberately adopted to rectify Liberia's history of exclusionary policies and decades of socio-economic mismanagement that catered solely to the elites. For example, one of the first policy directives (Lift Liberia PRS) produced to aid Liberia's reconstruction process states:

The New Liberia aims to acknowledge and begin to move beyond the divisions, marginalisation, and exclusion of the past and to create circumstances where differences are discussed, not fought over (GoL 2008a, p.20).

The Lift Liberia PRS emerged from a series of consultations, ensuring that the views of all segments of the Liberian population, including those in the diaspora, were engaged in its preparation and implementation. In the introductory letter for this policy, Sirleaf noted this corrective approach was breaking away from Liberia's history of Monrovia-dominated government to a nation that is open, collaborative, and peaceful, "proving that we Liberians can and do resolve our differences amicably" (GoL 2008a, p.7). The characterisation of diaspora Liberians as part of the collective – the New Liberia – was again stressed by Sirleaf when she delivered a special Independence Anniversary message to Liberians abroad:

We are committed to making the Liberian Diaspora our "16th County," with all the rights, privileges, and attention that befits a sub-political division. You are an extension of us. Our challenges are your challenges; our achievements are also your own (Sirleaf 2012a, p.4).

In her annual message to the national legislature the following year, Sirleaf highlighted the inclusion of diaspora Liberians in the consultative process that went into creating the new policy directive, the 'Agenda for Transformation'. Sirleaf maintained that the consultative process was "to allow [all] Liberian people to determine their priorities and make their input into the development agenda for the country" (Sirleaf 2013, p.23).

Weah also emphasised the idea of a New Liberia in his inaugural speech as president (Weah 2018b) and his first state of the nation address (Weah 2018a). In both speeches, Weah

highlighted the importance of a collective Liberian identity that is founded on national unity and embraces those in the diaspora:

During my tenure as President of Liberia, the loudest battle cry ... must be the cry of National Unity! We should all strive to put aside our differences and join hands in the task of nation-building (Weah 2018b, p.3).

Many Liberians in Diaspora have heard my clarion call to return home ... We need them, and so long as they were born in this country, they were Liberians first, and I believe that they should be welcomed back home with open arms (Weah 2018a, p.10).

These remarks by both the current and former presidents show that the New Liberia is determined not to repeat past mistakes of exclusionary governance. Instead, it seeks to engage all Liberians at home and abroad in finding solutions to the problems plaguing the post-conflict country. Where there is a call to action, in most of the documents I examined, the Liberian diaspora is presented as part of the Liberian citizenry, part of an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 2006) that is kept informed through specific watchwords. Phrases such as “Liberian people, including those in the diaspora” (Sirleaf 2017, p.10, 2008b, p.36; GoL 2008a, p.20) and “our people here at home and abroad” (Sirleaf 2012) and others are frequently used in government policy directives and speeches, to both keep diaspora Liberians connected to their homeland and to remind them of their expected role in the reconstruction process.

According to Koinova and Tsourapas (2018, p.313), such characterisations can be clustered under the identity-based perspective in which diasporas are considered by their home countries as a source of symbolic power. Governments reproduce a symbolic link to this imagined community to keep diaspora communities involved in their home countries. Examples of linkages curated by home countries to keep their diaspora communities engaged include support for schools and curricula for diaspora pupils to study their history and language (Koinova, 2018a); the offer of homeland visits to maintain their cultural heritage (Gamlen et al., 2013); sponsoring commemorative events and diaspora days (Naujoks, 2013; Tsourapas, 2015); and the enabling of trans-border media channels for the specific benefit of co-nationals (Waterbury, 2010) (discussed in Koinova and Tsourapas 2018, p.313).

In the case of Liberia, language that defines diaspora Liberians as part of the Liberian citizenry is supplemented by the launching of a diaspora homecoming; delivery of special messaging to the diaspora during the country’s Independence Anniversary celebrations; the formation of a

Diaspora Advisory Board to promote greater diaspora engagement; and several other symbolic gestures and initiatives.

While the idea of including *all* Liberians in the reconstruction of the post-conflict state seems magnanimous, it raises the question of whether this is indeed the motivation. Significantly, some diaspora Liberians have a history of influencing homeland politics. Antwi-Boateng (2011a) argues that the former rebel and president Charles Taylor and former president Sirleaf were members of the US-based Liberian diaspora. These two political figures came to symbolise diaspora Liberians' role in the outbreak and continuation of the Liberian civil war, given that both agreed on the need for an armed insurrection against Samuel Doe's authoritarian regime⁶².

The role both Taylor and Sirleaf played in the formation and start of the insurgency established crucial precedence, illustrating that diaspora Liberians are not only capable but have successfully instigated armed violence in their homeland. Recognising the role diaspora Liberians played at the start of the civil war, the Liberian TRC was mandated by its establishing Act to include diaspora Liberians in its activities (Comprehensive Peace Agreement 2003). This led to the establishment of the Liberia TRC Diaspora Project – a historic first attempt to systematically engage a diaspora population in all aspects of a post-conflict truth-seeking process – which held several hearings for Liberians in the Americas, Europe, and other African countries (Comprehensive Peace Agreement 2003; The Advocates for Human Rights 2009). Bearing in mind this recognition, the argument can thus be made that it is in the interests of the post-conflict government to engage diaspora Liberians, given their potential as both development partners and the risk they may pose to security (as peace-wreckers).

Aside from the tendency of some diaspora Liberians to organise against incumbent regimes, as demonstrated by Taylor and, to some extent, Sirleaf, many of the 100,000 or so Liberians who sought refuge in the United States⁶³ during the civil war were among the country's most highly

⁶² Following this agreement, Charles Taylor's initial rebellion was supported both in ideology and finance by former president Sirleaf who testified before the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that she donated US\$10,000 to Taylor in the early stages of the insurrection. Sirleaf has since argued that the money was a donation towards humanitarian purposes. She maintains that she severed ties with Taylor once it became clear he was not motivated by freeing his homeland from the corrupt grips of Samuel Doe but was, in fact, plundering the country's natural resources for his gain (Antwi-Boateng 2011a).

⁶³ Antwi-Boateng (2011, p.6) has argued that "Although Liberia has active diasporas in Europe and other African countries that are impacting the political and peace-building landscape of Liberia, their impact with regard to matters of peace and war pales in comparison to their U.S-based counterparts, known in Liberia as the sixteenth county".

educated and prominent political figures. As such, it makes sense that some of them not only influence US foreign policy towards their homeland but are also actively engaged in shaping political events in Liberia. Antwi-Boateng (2011, p.6) notes that members of the US-based Liberian diaspora represent a selection of the political, ideological, regional, and ethnic makeup of the larger Liberian society.

Thus, the underlying rationale for the state's engagement of diaspora Liberians in this instance might have been to give them a semblance of a voice in the New Liberia. Perhaps it is a tactic to make diaspora Liberians feel included so they do not conspire against the incumbent government as they did against Samuel Doe and others before him.

Further, the state's emphasis on constructing a New Liberia that is inclusive of *all* Liberians is characteristic of settler regimes' strategy of claiming colonial completion to divert the world's attention from the enduring presence of settler colonialism (Maddison 2019; Strakosch & Macoun 2012). Indeed, even if we accept that Liberia has transitioned to a postcolonial status and that the Americo-Liberian hegemony was defeated in the coup d'état and civil wars, it is typical for postcolonial societies to concentrate on current societal divisions. In these scenarios, instead of a substantive and multi-level approach to transforming the conflictual societal relations that gave rise to the state needing to reconstruct institutions and social cohesion, such societies tend to pursue obvious cracks in reconciliation and/or state-building processes (Little & Maddison 2017; Maddison 2015; Little 2014).

In Liberia, both post-conflict governments have made debates over identity and belonging prominent in their reconstruction agenda. The state appears focused on carving a space in Liberia for its populations abroad to become 'formalised' partners in the post-war development process. Thus, it categorises engagement with diaspora Liberians and proposals for dual citizenship as 'best practice' and a way of correcting past mistakes of exclusionary nation-building. Nevertheless, the question is whether the state's supposed commitment to creating a New Liberia truly considers Liberia's past as a settler regime and how inequalities established centuries ago continue to shape contemporary Liberian society. The question remains whether post-conflict Liberia can move beyond the idea of reconciling *all* Liberians and instead work to dismantle systemic inequality and find concrete ways of addressing the problems of groups and communities that were historically dominated by the settler regime.

Conclusion

This chapter shows that the Liberian state is motivated to develop, maintain, and expand its relationship with its population abroad for complex and conflicting reasons. From the particulars of the state's rationale for engaging with its people abroad and the push for investments and restitutive inclusiveness, in particular, comes the question of dual citizenship and how the state presents it to the stakeholders. Articulated through the language of inclusive development, the state's desire to engage diaspora Liberians in its development agenda appears to be the underlying driver of the dual citizenship proposals put forward by both the Sirleaf and Weah governments. Essentially, the state promotes its post-conflict reconstruction agenda and proposals for dual citizenship as one and the same, suggesting that an allowance of dual citizenship will pave the way for sustainable development.

Indeed, the dual citizenship question was the elephant in the room during Sirleaf's two terms due to diaspora Liberians' critical role in her government. Weah was also quick to jump on the dual citizenship matter upon assuming power, arguing for, among other things, the importance of collective *Liberianness* in the post-conflict era. The connection between the state's motivation for engaging its population abroad and the dual citizenship question is fairly obvious. After all, migrant-sending countries in Africa and elsewhere that have successfully introduced dual citizenship bills have done so to ensure their populations abroad have a formalised attachment to their homeland. Such policies also create an enabling investment environment if diasporas partner with their home state in their development processes. A recent example is Ethiopia's parliament passing a bill that opens the country's financial sector to its estimated five million diaspora Ethiopians who have naturalised elsewhere, including allowing them to invest in shares and start lending businesses in the country's state-dominated financial sector (Hadero 2019).

Liberia's case differs from other migrant-sending countries working towards formalising relationships with their population abroad due to its post-conflict status and unique history as a settler colonial regime. Pailey has established that the 2008 introduction of a dual citizenship bill in Liberia was "in response to increasing pressure from what appears to be a strong transnational tide in Africa and elsewhere" (2016, p.817). Indeed, the state appears focused on carving a space in Liberia for its populations abroad to become 'formalised' partners in the post-war development process. The Weah government may have achieved the formalisation of

diaspora Liberians as development partners this with the passing of the Amendment law in July 2022. However, as already indicated, the debate still continues.

Nevertheless, it serves the post-conflict state for Liberians to be divided over the dual citizenship debate. By refocusing the world's attention on the debate, the Liberian state can avoid addressing the roots of its persistent structural inequalities and the devastating poverty that continues to plague Liberian society. This approach seems to deny that structural change is needed for Liberia to achieve the inclusive and sustainable development the state claims to want to accomplish via the allowance of dual citizenship.

The state's engagement with its population abroad and its promotion of dual citizenship proposals as 'restitutive inclusiveness' can be understood as a strategy intended to demonstrate Liberia's reconciliation with its colonial past. Pursuing a unified nation via a dual citizenship policy is represented as an act of benevolence – an inclusive and unifying policy gifted by the state to its citizenry. Yet, in reality, all dual citizenship would achieve is bolstering the state's hold on power. The following chapter examines the nuances of the dual citizenship debate from the perspective of the state and Liberians in-country and in the diaspora.

Chapter 6: Inequality, Fairness, and the Dual Citizenship Debate

Introduction

Identity and citizenship are politicised in most countries. In Liberia, dual nationality is at the centre of these politicised identity politics, making the dual citizenship debate a concern for many Liberians. This chapter examines the different elements of the debate using data from semi-structured interviews with study participants in-country and in the diaspora, an analysis of state documents and discourses, and some media reporting on dual citizenship. It builds on the previous chapter's exploration of the state's motivation in connecting with its population abroad and establishes why some Liberians view dual nationality as a recolonising tool.

The chapter is structured into three sections. The first presents the origins of the dual citizenship debate to indicate how the state continually uses citizenship and other categories to erect boundaries of belonging to the Liberian society. The section also considers the way the debate conflates dual citizenship and non-Black citizenship and how that confusion shapes advocacy by diaspora groups.

The second and third sections analyse the arguments made by both those who favour dual citizenship and those against it. On the one hand, those in favour emphasise the utilitarian benefits of dual citizenship, thus aligning with arguments by the state (and international development experts). Proponents highlight it as best practice, arguing that it facilitates diasporas' commitment and support for the homeland's development processes (as discussed in Chapter 5). On the other hand, dual citizenship has garnered massive resistance in Liberia, although opponents acknowledge that it could attract more investments and skilled labour for the post-conflict country. I maintain that this resistance is not unfounded and contend that, instead of trivialising the debate as a typical contest over scarce resources, we must consider Liberia's history as a settler regime to understand the frustrations of those opposed to dual citizenship accurately. This argument brings Liberia's settler-colonial nature back into focus, showing how concerns around structural inequalities and possible absorption into a foreign (settler) culture inform the debate.

The Legal Manoeuvrings of Liberia's Dual Citizenship Debate

Liberia's dual citizenship debate has its roots in the infamous 1973 Alien and Nationality Law⁶⁴ – referred to hereafter as the Nationality Law (see Appendix 1 on p.249-50). The Tolbert government introduced the Nationality Law at the height of both in-country and diaspora opposition to the dominance of the True Whig Party (TWP) and the Americo-Liberian hegemony. As Wettee⁶⁵ explains:

In the early 1970s, Liberians began to advocate for their political and human rights. A group of Liberians [in the diaspora] came together and decided there was a need to go back home because Liberia was a one-party system at the time. So, you've got Baccus Matthews, Charles Taylor, and others that founded ULAA [the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas] ... and other groups from the University of Liberia.

So, the government was afraid, and they decided to change the 1956 Alien and Nationality Law.

These opposition groups were people of Indigenous and settler backgrounds influenced by radicalism in American colleges and the nationalism that reinforced decolonisation in neighbouring African countries (Chapter 4). According to Wettee, the Tolbert government designed the Nationality Law to limit the citizenship of Liberians abroad along with their ability to participate in the politics of their homeland fully. Like other representatives of the All Liberian Conference on Dual Citizenship (ALCOD), Wettee laments that the Nationality Law does not allow due process for Section 22.1, which automatically revokes the citizenship of natural-born or naturalised Liberians based on several listed acts⁶⁶. Section 22.2 states:

The loss of citizenship under Section 22.1. of this title shall result solely from the performance by a citizen of the acts or fulfilment of the conditions specified

⁶⁴ The 1973 version replaced the 1956 Aliens and Nationality Law, and the accompanying amendments were approved on 9 May 1974 (Government of Liberia 1973).

⁶⁵ Interview with Mr. Emmanuel Wettee (Ohio, Columbus), the Chairman of ALCOD via WhatsApp Call on 1st Nov. 2019.

⁶⁶ The "Acts causing loss of citizenship" outlined in Section 22.1 of the Nationality Law ranges from making a formal renunciation of one's Liberian nationality, naturalisation in a foreign state, taking an oath of allegiance to a foreign state, freely serving in the armed forces of a foreign state, and voting in a political election of a foreign state.

in such section, and without the institution by the Government of any proceedings to nullify or cancel such citizenship⁶⁷.

The Nationality Law invalidates the citizenship of Liberians who perform any of the acts outlined in Section 22.1, including naturalisation, serving in the armed forces, and voting in a foreign state. The devastating aspect of the law is that there is no burden on the state to adjudicate automatic loss of citizenship since the performance of “Acts causing loss of citizenship” (see Section 22.1 of the Nationality Law) by Liberians is justified grounds for nullification. Consequently, the Nationality Law has become a valuable tool for contesting people’s citizenship status during specific periods in Liberia’s political landscape. Contestations over citizenship status and who can legitimately call Liberia home usually emerge during elections, political appointments, and related arrangements by incumbent governments.

For example, there was a constitutional petition against the eligibility of former President Sirleaf and five other candidates seeking to contest the 2011 elections. The basis of the petition was a constitutional provision that states that people who wish to contest the presidency must have been residents in Liberia for at least ten years immediately preceding the election. The petitioners argued for the disqualification of Sirleaf and the other five candidates because they did not meet the minimum residency requirement. Sirleaf had lived abroad before the extra-constitutional⁶⁸ elections in 2005 when she won her first term. The Supreme Court subsequently dismissed the petition, stating:

[I]t is our opinion that the framers of the 1986 constitution could neither have contemplated nor intended that Liberians faced with the state civil crisis be resident because, at some point in the future, they may want to run for the office of president (Toweh & Valdmanis, *supra.*, Library of Congress 2011).

Sirleaf did go on to win her second term in 2011. However, the petition to disqualify her and the other candidates because they had not endured the war established a precedent. While

⁶⁷ Liberia’s Supreme Court, in a 2019 decision, found Section 22.2 of the Nationality Law unconstitutional and in violation of the dual process clause (Article 20(a)) in the 1986 Constitution (see Alvin Teage Jalloh vs Minister of Foreign Affairs & Others, 23 Dec 2019). Even so, the Supreme Court’s decision did not repeal the ban on dual citizenship. It introduced due process into the loss of citizenship of Liberians who naturalised elsewhere (Library of Congress 2022).

⁶⁸ In 2004, there was a temporary suspension of Article 52(c) of the Constitution, thus allowing President Sirleaf and others who were forced to flee the country during the civil war to take part in the 2005 elections (The Library of Congress 2011).

Sirleaf's case is more prominent, the interviews I conducted for this thesis revealed that it is just one of many examples where rumours and questions about people's citizenship or residential status have been the centre of political controversy in Liberian politics. According to some respondents, dual citizenship is never an issue until someone known to have ties in the diaspora contests or is appointed for a political position.

In 2012, the Sirleaf government established a Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) to review the 1986 Constitution and develop proposals for amendments. The Committee adopted a bottom-up approach to encourage widespread public participation⁶⁹. The process provided a platform for Liberians to voice their apprehensions about the Constitution and the laws they wanted to be removed, updated, or maintained. Among concerns over land rights, secularism, the term limit for public officials, and several other matters, dual citizenship was one of the key issues that dominated the deliberations. The process provided the first formal opportunity for Liberians to confront those in privileged positions about citizenship and its relationship to political power and livelihood outcomes. In particular, it became a vital opening for people to discuss the rift between Liberians in-country and the diaspora.

The preservation of the racial clause and rejection of dual citizenship topped the list of recurring issues the CRC identified from their public consultations and were among the issues the Committee submitted to the Sirleaf government as proposals for a constitutional amendment (CRC, 2014, p.3). The racial clause is enshrined in Section 20.1 of the Nationality Law, which states: "A person who is a 'Negro', or of 'Negro' descent, born in Liberia and subject to the jurisdiction thereof" shall be a citizen of Liberia at birth. On the question of race, as it relates to the eligibility to naturalise in Liberia, Section 21.1 (subsection 1) of the same document states: "No person shall be naturalised unless he is a 'Negro' or of 'Negro' descent". In addition, Article 27 (b) of the 1986 Constitution upholds the racial clause stating:

In order to preserve, foster and maintain the positive Liberian culture, values and character, only persons who are 'Negroes' or of 'Negro' descent shall qualify by birth or by naturalisation to be citizens of Liberia.

I discuss in more detail the nuances of the racial clause and its impact on the dual citizenship debate in the subsequent sections and Chapter 7. Significantly, the prohibition of dual nationality emanates from Sections 20 (Nationality at Birth) and 22 (Loss of citizenship) of the

⁶⁹ The Committee used suggestion boxes, radio talk shows, local meetings, and focus group discussions in Liberia's 73 electoral districts and Liberian communities in the diaspora.

Nationality Law. Contrary to the racial clause, the 1986 Constitution does not explicitly ban dual citizenship; it is silent on the matter. The inconsistencies between the two legal frameworks on citizenship leave room for differing interpretations among Liberians depending on who makes demands or what is at stake.

For example, the Sirleaf government had previously introduced a dual citizenship proposal in 2008, but voting on the proposal was subsequently postponed indefinitely due to staunch opposition to what it symbolised. Pailey (2016) explains that although the proposal was well-intentioned, Sirleaf had to postpone it due to strong views that “naturalisation abroad signifies a rejection of the fundamental tenets of ‘Liberian citizenship’ as bounded by a single, geographical territory” (p.817). While this is certainly true, it is also essential to consider the political atmosphere in Liberia at the time to fully understand why the Sirleaf proposal failed.

Sirleaf sought to ‘right-size’ the workforce she had inherited from the wartime government from 69,000 civil servants to about 30,000. In her inaugural address, she described the workforce as ‘bloated’, leading to the dismissal of hundreds of employees “either for illiteracy or for collecting their wages despite not showing up for work” (ReliefWeb 2006b). Liberians were staunchly opposed to downsizing the workforce since the government was the largest employer at the time, causing many to fear the country could go back to war (Dolo 2006). The Sirleaf government was also harshly criticised for its ties to diaspora returnees. Talk of dual citizenship to enable ‘qualified’ diaspora Liberians to return and contribute to the reconstruction process enraged many Liberians in-country. Consequently, the media and stakeholders, such as the Civil Service Association, tapped into people’s frustrations about the downsizing and encouraged the rejection of Sirleaf’s dual citizenship proposal.

In my interview with Ibrahim⁷⁰, a PhD Candidate at the time who had been one of the many in-country Liberians enraged by proposals for dual citizenship, he explained the political climate at the time as follows:

[Right-sizing the workforce] was one of the governance reform proposals, and the government and the donors were serious about this because nobody trusted the local capacity. Most of the civil servants removed from their position in the

⁷⁰ Interview with Ibrahim (London, United Kingdom), 5 Oct. 2019 (Skype). Ibrahim is an activist, political commentator and an academic. He was pursuing his PhD at SOAS, University of London during our interview and described himself as in-country Liberian. He claims to have changed his positioning on the debate following encounters with diaspora Liberians whom he describes as being committed to Liberia’s development and that giving them dual citizenship is only ‘right’.

name of downsizing and rightsizing were replaced by Liberians from abroad. This was met with massive resistance from the leadership of the Civil Service Association. Beyond the dismissals, they will take you from abroad and put you in a position and pay you \$3,000 a month, while the local counterpart who has been holding a similar position over the years is paid only \$200 a month. This brought in a feeling of resentment against Liberians returning and taking jobs in the Civil Service.

And so, once [the Sirleaf government] introduced the dual citizenship debate, the narrative was they wanted to bring people to take all of the jobs. People who escaped during the war wish to be given citizenship, although some have American passports. So that's what the contention became, and those civil servants were the ones who began to promote and incite the citizens against proposals for dual citizenship.

The 2008 proposal sought to amend Sections 20 and 22 of the Nationality Law. However, its postponement meant the Nationality Law continued to govern citizenship-related questions. So, while diaspora Liberians remain convinced of the *rightness* of their claim for dual citizenship, Liberians in-country continue to use the stipulations of the Nationality Law to guide their opposition. Lack of clarity on dual citizenship has cemented the uncertain legal standing of diaspora Liberians, many of whom were forced to flee during Doe's regime and the country's subsequent descent into chaos during the civil war (see Chapter 4). This contradiction between the two legal documents and the related lack of clarity on dual citizenship forms the basis of advocacy by Liberians in the diaspora.

'Liberia needs all of its sons and daughters, ... to make it whole'

Diaspora Liberians advocated for dual citizenship for many years before the Weah government introduced the much-talked-about Proposition 1. In my interview with Ahmed⁷¹, who described himself as a long-time active leader in the Liberian diaspora community, he summed up the long history of the debate and explained some of the motivations behind the claim for dual citizenship:

⁷¹ Interview with Ahmed (Minnesota, US) via WhatsApp Call on 18 Oct. 2019. Ahmed is a scholar who described himself as a community leader. As the Program Associate for the Advocates for Human Rights', he coordinated community outreach for transitional justice through Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation project.

We have advocated for dual citizenship for years. It is because of dual citizenship that I delayed naturalising as an American citizen. It's not because I don't love America or I'm not eager to be an American citizen, but we wanted to correct the law in Liberia.

We wanted to formulate a policy that accommodated everybody so that Liberia benefited from Liberians who have lived in the diaspora, who have resources, many of whom are educated, well-connected people. We felt Liberia needed all of its sons and daughters, regardless of where they come from, to make it whole, and that was the crust of the advocacy that we had done prior to the most talked-about amended clause [Proposition 1].

Ahmed's reflections here relate to a time when advocacy by diaspora Liberians generally centred on an 'open' dual citizenship bill that would also eliminate the racial clause. Following the seemingly perpetual postponement of the 2008 proposal, two groups emerged in Liberia's dual citizenship campaign: natural-born Liberians in the diaspora and non-'Negro' minority groups in Liberia. Their demands have been different since. Natural-born Liberians want the state to allow dual nationality and reinstate the citizenship of diaspora Liberians who lost their citizenship by performing any of the "Acts causing loss of citizenship" (outlined in Section 22.1, Nationality Law). Non-'Negro' migrant groups want the racial clause removed from Liberia's citizenship laws so they can naturalise as Liberians. Despite this fundamental difference, the demands of the two groups are continuously treated as similar. Imma⁷², one of the in-country respondents I interviewed, captures the confusion that underpins current demands for dual citizenship in Liberia:

What has informed the dual citizenship debate is the racist nature of the Constitution, [which is] outdated [and] does not conform to current globalisation trends and its centrality to international politics.

The Constitution denies people, certainly Liberians in the diaspora, their fundamental human rights. Regarding citizenship, the Constitution is quite unfair to Liberians in the diaspora.

⁷² Interview with Imma Togba (Monrovia, Liberia), via WhatsApp Call on 31 Oct. 2019. Imma is an accounting and finance expert based in the United States but work across Africa. He has consulted for the Liberian government and could be categorised as one of the many skilled returnees who returned to help their homecountry following the end of the war. Imma was in Monrovia during our interview. As he explains it, he was in Liberia to pursue some business opportunities.

I feel several complicated questions related to security issues, and national interests need more attention in the current deliberations.

The first part of Imma's statement recaps the racial factor in the debate, which questions whether Liberia can and should continue to have legal instruments that discriminate against people because of their race. The supposed *racist* nature of Liberia's citizenship laws forms the basis of the demand for dual citizenship by non-'Negro' minority groups in Liberia. In this respect, the Lebanese community is not just the most visible migrant group but the most vocal on demands for dual citizenship (Chapter 7). The second part relates to the *fairness* of natural-born Liberians forfeiting their Liberian citizenship because they have naturalised in a foreign state. Imma's observation about the citizenship debate having *several complicated questions* is accurate. However, his view that the Constitution denies diaspora Liberians their citizenship (a fundamental human right) is incorrect. As shown in the previous section, it is the Nationality Law that causes Liberians who have been naturalised elsewhere to lose their citizenship. The Constitution is silent on the matter. What is clear, however, is that both legal frameworks restrict Liberian citizenship to only people of 'Negro' ancestry (see Chapter 7).

Confusion about which legal document says what about citizenship limitations and the conflation of the demands of the two groups have further complicated the already differing components of the debate. Diaspora respondents deduce that the conflation of their requests with that of the non-'Negro' migrants has muddled their status as Liberians. In the extract below, a respondent I am calling Sheila,⁷³ explains the confusion that underlines the debate. To her, some opponents of dual citizenship exploit the chaos to sway the views of the masses:

So, with the dual citizenship conversation, it's two things being had. One is dual citizenship, and the other is non-Black citizenship. And those two are often conflated, but they're not the same thing. Some people don't understand that they're different conversations, and I think some do and take advantage of confusing the masses that may not understand it.

Many diaspora respondents believe the conflation of their demands with non-Black citizenship taints their legitimate appeal for dual citizenship. To these respondents, the confusing conversation tends to complicate how people evaluate the implications of dual citizenship on

⁷³ Interview with Sheila (Rome, Italy) via Facebook Messenger on 23rd and 25th Nov. 2019. Sheila was born in Liberia but she grew up in the United States of America. She was one of the many skilled returnees who went back to Liberia following the end of the war to help rebuild their country. She was pursuing her PhD in Australia during the time of the interview.

‘ordinary Liberians’ in-country. They argue that some Liberians do not truly understand the complexity of the issue or its long-term significance. This confusion has caused diaspora Liberians to be cautious in their campaign for dual citizenship. Their activism emphasises the natural-born status of diaspora Liberians but, more importantly, the difference between their citizenship claims and the demands by non-‘Negro’ migrant groups.

Diaspora Liberians’ separation of their claims from groups such as the Lebanese community, who do not meet the racial restriction, signifies a shift in the type of ‘open’ citizenship policy informing their campaign. Many respondents believe the racial restriction in the Constitution and the Nationality Law is racist. Still, they maintain that the focus of their campaign was the allowance of dual citizenship for natural-born Liberians and not a change to the racial clause.

The establishment of the All-Liberian Conference on Dual Citizenship (ALCOD) in 2012 to lead the campaign attests to the importance of separating the citizenship claims of diaspora Liberians from the demands of other non-‘Negro’ groups resident in Liberia. ALCOD is the umbrella organisation representing the European Federation of Liberian Associations (EFLA), the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA), the Federation of Liberian Communities in Australia (FOLICA), the Conference of Liberian Organizations in the Southwestern United States (COLOSUS), United Liberian Association in Ghana (ULAG), and Coalition of Concerned Liberians (CCL). It claims to advocate for dual citizenship on behalf of over 500,000 Liberians in the diaspora⁷⁴. According to the ALCOD, the 500,000 number represents diaspora Liberians born in Liberia and those born of Liberian parentage who have become citizens of their host countries. Under the Nationality Law, all these Liberians have forfeited their Liberian citizenship.

ALCOD’s campaign is two-pronged. First, the group advocates changing the sexist (rather than the racial) nature of Liberia’s citizenship laws to allow mothers to pass on their citizenship to their children. This demand relates to Section 20 (Nationality at Birth) of the Nationality Law. ALCOD argues that the Nationality Law discriminates against Liberian women, especially if they have children abroad with nationals of other countries. Section 20 effectively prohibits Liberian women from transferring their citizenship to these children. The gender clause in the Nationality Law contradicts Article 28 of the Constitution, which allows both the mother and father to pass on birthright citizenship to their children. It is also incompatible with Liberia’s

⁷⁴ Information about ALCOD is derived from documents shared with the author by Mr. Wetsee, the Chairman of ALCOD and the websites of some of the diaspora groups such as ULAA and EFLA.

obligations to international human rights treaties and conventions. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Statelessness Conventions (see Tannenbaum et al. 2009; UNHCR 2019). For instance, following a query on this matter by the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC), the Liberian government acknowledged these inconsistencies in its citizenship laws (UN 2017, p.2). Their response to UNHRC clarified that Article 28 of the 1986 Constitution specifies “that children born to one parent, whether it is the father or mother, can acquire Liberian citizenship” (GoL 2018c, p.10). Accordingly, since the Constitution is the organic law of Liberia, it supersedes the gender specifications of the Nationality Law.

The second major prong of ALCOD’s campaign, which is the core of their advocacy, is their demand for changes in the Nationality Law or an amendment of the Constitution to allow Liberians who have naturalised elsewhere to reclaim their citizenship. This demand is explicitly linked to Section 22 (Loss of Citizenship) of the Nationality Law. Through Section 22 and Article 22 in the Liberian Constitution, property ownership is limited to citizens only. Thus, Liberians who have naturalised elsewhere are effectively banned from owning land and other real estates in Liberia and are precluded from participating in domestic political processes. Chairman Wettee clarifies the basis of their appeal for dual citizenship:

The fundamental thing is that only a Liberian can own land in Liberia, so if you owned land here before and naturalised in another country, you are no longer entitled to that land.

Liberia is our country of birth, and we believe that we can all contribute to the growth and development of this country. The ownership of property initiates national development; restoring our Liberian citizenship will make us invest, not just us but also our children and unborn children. As it stands now, I cannot pass my property over to my children born in America because the law doesn’t permit that.

Wettee made this statement in an interview with the Liberia News Agency (Nyenkan 2020) following an invitation from the Liberian Senate to meet with a diaspora delegation. Wettee led the delegates who returned to Liberia to campaign for Proposition 1 in the October 2020 referendum. The statement clarifies that the *descent* of diaspora Liberians is the basis of

ALCOD's dual citizenship campaign, supported by the group's assertion that they represent over 500,000 natural-born Liberians in the diaspora.

Ultimately, ALCOD's advocacy is for a dual citizenship policy that harmonises the Constitution and the Nationality Law or amends the former to grant dual citizenship to diaspora Liberians. The introduction of Proposition 1 by the Weah government was a significant development since the proposal sought to allow diaspora Liberians who have naturalised elsewhere to regain their Liberian citizenship. Unlike the 2008 dual citizenship proposal, Proposition 1 made significant progress as it was approved by the Senate and the House of Representatives. Yet it failed to gain the support of in-country Liberians. Following is a brief overview of its nuances.

Weah's Proposition 1: A Fair Compromise?

In October 2019, the Liberian Senate passed a proposal for a referendum. Dubbed 'Proposition 1', the proposal sought to amend Article 28 of the 1986 Constitution, which establishes the requirements for birth right citizenship, the right to renounce citizenship, conditions for revoking citizenship, and naturalisation requirements. Proposition 1 sought to allow natural-born citizens to hold multiple citizenships. The amendment redefined a natural-born Liberian as "any person, at least one of whose parents was a citizen of Liberia at the time of the person's birth" and upheld their inalienable rights. The interpretation of 'natural-born' allowed women to pass on their citizenship to their children. Proposition 1 sought to nullify existing laws that deprived natural-born Liberians of their citizenship rights. The clarification would have resolved long-standing disagreements over the authority of the Nationality Law and, specifically, its power to automatically withdraw the citizenship of natural-born citizens who have naturalised in other countries. Proposition 1 nevertheless still disqualified dual citizens from elected and some appointed political positions.

The approval of Proposition 1 by both the Senate and the House of Representatives was a significant gesture. It moved the citizenship debate away from the racial clause and instead centred the discussion on the status of Liberians in-country and in the diaspora. It also clarified the evolution of President Weah's stance on dual citizenship in opposition to his earlier remarks that Liberia's long-standing racial clause was racist. Most importantly, Proposition 1 was presented as a compromise between the demands of diaspora Liberians and those in opposition to Liberia, allowing multiple citizenships. By attaching a caveat disqualifying dual citizens from elected and appointed positions such as Chief Justice and Associate Justices of the

Supreme Court of Liberia, Cabinet Ministers, Deputy Ministers, all heads of Autonomous Commissions, Agencies and Non-Academic/Research/Scientific Institutions, and Ambassadors, the proposal attempted to respond to the apprehensions about the impact of multiple citizenships on Liberia's national security, job opportunities and the interest of marginalised people in-country, as well as other concerns such as the handling of corrupt dual citizens.

Proposition 1 also gave diaspora Liberians, particularly the leadership of ALCOD, hope that Liberia would finally allow its population abroad to have dual citizenship. They attributed this progress to Weah's reputation among Liberians as 'one of the people', emanating from his charisma and humble beginnings before becoming an international football star. During the interviews for this thesis, respondents generally believed that people were less resentful of Weah's elite status. The belief was that Liberians in-country would be more open to his government's proposal for dual citizenship because he was considered a son of the land and therefore was one of the people. Interestingly, Sirleaf did not enjoy similar acceptance as she was classified as an elite and sometimes linked to the settler regime, which influenced perceptions of her detachment from the sufferings of the ordinary Liberian.

According to the leaders of ALCOD, the structure of Proposition 1 removed fears that dual citizens would have unlimited access to the country's resources to the detriment of Liberians in-country. Most importantly, it solved the legislative hurdle, as some interviewees believed lawmakers deliberately blocked dual citizenship proposals for fear of competition for their jobs. Indeed, ALCOD, in their campaign for Proposition 1, emphasised diaspora Liberians' lack of interest in jobs available in-country to supposedly assuage the fears of local elites whom they believe blocked Sirleaf's initial proposal, which was more open.

Interestingly, some of the leaders of ALCOD that I interviewed admitted that they were initially against Proposition 1 due to the many restrictions it placed on natural-born Liberians and the fact that Liberia is in dire need of well-educated people who have specialised skills and knowledge to help move the country forward. Eventually, they changed their stance and united under the position of ALCOD. They argued that Proposition 1 was a decent first step in their campaign to establish the Liberian diaspora as the 16th County, not just in name but also in the rights and privileges deserved by the group.

The legislative approval of Proposition 1 generated a great deal of discussion and media analysis that rehashed arguments for and against dual nationality in Liberia (Nyanseor 2019;

Sieh 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). In these debates, some saw the disqualification of dual citizens from elected and appointed positions as the government's way of reassuring Liberians in-country, particularly the lawmakers, about the security of their jobs. The supposed bias⁷⁵ of the Weah government fuelled debate about the *fairness* of Proposition 1. Some thought it was fair and just to all Liberians, be they in the diaspora or in-country, because it followed 'good practice' and, most importantly, it adhered to the Liberian state's plan to protect in-country citizens from further impoverishment. In my interviews, some in-country respondents were quite incensed about the talk of unfairness by those in favour of open dual citizenship. A young economist I interviewed, whom I am calling Jerry⁷⁶, explains:

I think it is an argument that's insincere to the poor. So, it's like all Liberians who left [Liberia] made a conscious decision. If you're giving up the citizenship of Liberia for another country, I think it is fair to accept whatever responsibility, whatsoever regulation, whatsoever society subscribes to you.

Others considered the restrictions unjust to natural-born Liberians in the diaspora who may want to take on the obligation of serving their homeland in either of the capacities that would be disallowed for dual citizens. While Proposition 1, to some extent, signalled a tremendous improvement on the stalemate that had previously characterised Liberia's citizenship laws, the dual citizenship debate somehow came full circle back to the concern that it was about government jobs. Regardless, the deadlock continues because Proposition 1 and all the other seven propositions Weah put forward in the 2020 referendum failed to attain the two-thirds requirement of valid votes. Consequently, Liberia has had to go back to the drawing board to redefine the boundaries of citizenship and belonging in the post-conflict era.

Proposition 1 epitomised a semblance of progress in the debate and yet failed to gain popular support among Liberians in-country even after the Weah government heralded it as a fair compromise. However, the failure of Proposition 1 in the December 2020 referendum suggests that the dual citizenship debate has never just been about Liberia aligning with the current

⁷⁵ Some respondents felt the Weah government was pushing for the approval of Proposition 1 because of personal interests. Aside from the blanket protection Proposition 1 provided for the jobs of lawmakers and other elites, President Weah's wife is Jamaican, and some of his children are American soccer players. Similarly, some lawmakers are rumoured to have family members naturalised abroad. Consequently, some respondents believed Proposition 1 was designed to grant dual citizenship in the interests of the relations of Weah and other lawmakers.

⁷⁶ Interview with Jerry (Monrovia, Liberia) via WhatsApp Call on 12 Oct. 2019. Jerry is an economist who described himself as an in-country Liberian and preferred to remain anonymous as he was working in the economic planning ministry during our interview.

demands of a globalised world, as the state and some supporters have often argued. As I show in the sections below, the debate is mediated by present-day inequality and poverty levels and the historical injustices perpetrated by the settler regime and the impacts these structures continue to have on Liberian society.

As argued in the previous chapters, the Liberian settler regime at various stages of nation-building (from its conception until now), has utilised varied categorical boundaries such as citizenship, identity, ethnicity, and culture to either include or dominate sections of the population. The current dual citizenship debate and its associated proposals are not entirely different from previous political projects of belonging. Fundamentally, the current citizenship debate concerns claims for inclusion (belonging) in post-war Liberian society. However, unlike neighbouring African countries that have enacted new citizenship policies or have reformed their restrictive citizenship laws to align with a world on the move, the stakes in Liberia's debate are much more complex. This is because the debate is rooted in a complicated history of state formation, continuing forms of conflict, and other difficult questions in a highly divided society, making some Liberians appear rigid and uncompromising in their arguments for or against dual citizenship. Consequently, in evaluating possible policy solutions to the political conundrum that is Liberia's dual citizenship, stakeholders are especially mindful of the trajectory of inequalities and poverty levels and how a proposed solution impacts the balance of outcomes and opportunities for themselves and the groups they claim to represent.

Arguments for Dual Citizenship: 'Liberia is our country of birth.'

Those who support dual citizenship have focused on three main arguments: its potential economic utility, human rights, and the need for continuous remittances. Firstly, they argue that diaspora Liberians will help the country's ailing economy grow and develop because they will be motivated to invest more if granted dual citizenship. The argument is that Liberia stands to lose repatriation income from its population abroad as Liberians who have lost their citizenship after naturalising elsewhere might be more inclined to invest in the country where their child is a citizen. In addition, proponents of dual citizenship refer to the sizeable Liberian diaspora, who have the expertise, training, skills, resources, and family ties to benefit Liberia's development. To them, diaspora Liberians represent the intelligentsia and the country's missing middle class. Thus, a dual nationality law will allow diaspora Liberians to return home and invest their talents and resources without sacrificing family unity and the right to family life in their host countries. Some diaspora respondents maintain that their reasons for wanting

dual citizenship should not matter because, as the missing middle class, Liberia needs them and their skills, knowledge, networks, and investments.

Secondly, proponents emphasise the circumstances that compelled most diaspora Liberians to naturalise elsewhere. They argue that Doe's brutal coup, the chaos surrounding his years in office, the subsequent 14-year civil war and the ensuing insecurity and helplessness that characterised Liberian society justify restoring the citizenship of those Liberians who left the country. Like his predecessor Sirleaf did in many of her annual messages to the legislature⁷⁷, President Weah justified this reasoning in his first State of the Nation Address (2018, sec.14) when he defended the need for Liberia to allow dual citizenship along these lines:

I believe that most Liberians who are also citizens of another country probably acquired the additional nationality as a means to escape from the terrible atrocities, which characterized our civil conflict, and for economic survival in their new countries of residence.

And if conditions now exist in Liberia that make them want to return home and contribute their quota to the development of our common patrimony, then I do not think that it is fair to treat them as non-citizens in the land of their birth. Many Liberians in the diaspora have heard my clarion call to return home and bring their energies, skills, talents, and expertise to join us in the building of a New Liberia.

As Weah demonstrated on that day, some diaspora respondents have demanded empathy from Liberians in-country, arguing that they are natural-born Liberians. They believe they have the right to reclaim their citizenship, given that the state was non-existent for many years. Proponents maintain that there was no timeline for the chaos to end, making naturalisation in their country of residence necessary to access certain public services and opportunities, such as the right to help their family repatriate during the war years and the right to access government jobs and other social services usually reserved for permanent residents and citizens. Added to this is the argument that diaspora Liberians continue to support their families, relations, and Liberia itself. They send remittances, set up businesses, return home

⁷⁷ During Sirleaf's 2010 Annual Message to the legislature, she stated "I also welcome the recommendations regarding the Liberian Diaspora ... that Liberians, their relatives and offspring who migrated to foreign parts on account of the civil crisis or who migrated to foreign parts prior to the civil war but remained in foreign parts on account of the civil crisis and, in other instances, had to acquire foreign nationalities, should benefit from dispensation of maintaining their foreign nationalities without forfeiting their Liberian citizenship..." (Sirleaf 2010, p. 46).

for short-term volunteering, send relief packages during emergencies, and have continuous ties to the homeland through various diaspora groups committed to Liberians abroad and in-country welfare.

Based on these arguments, some diaspora respondents accuse those who oppose an open citizenship policy of being protectionists whose main aim is not necessarily to protect Liberia's integrity, as often argued, but to ward off competition against job opportunities in-country. Some proponents suggest that diaspora Liberians should be entitled to most of the rights and privileges available to in-country Liberians except for political positions such as the presidency, vice presidency and similar high-level positions. They believe these high-ranking political positions could jeopardise Liberia's national security interests if assumed by dual citizens. They argue that the opponents of an open dual citizenship policy are mainly local elites, many of whom secretly possess foreign passports or have Permanent Residency in other countries⁷⁸.

Some respondents argued that the local elites are not as educated and skilled as their diaspora counterparts. As a result, local elites purposefully use the Nationality Law to block diaspora members from gaining 'formalised' access despite being aware of the benefits Liberia stands to gain from dual citizenship. For instance, a diaspora respondent I am calling Alfred⁷⁹, who returned to Liberia and worked in the public sector for many years following the end of the civil war and left again following the election of President Weah, explains:

Folks that came to the diaspora and couldn't establish any status in the diaspora and they went back home [Liberia] are also against the dual citizenship bill

⁷⁸ Most of my interviewees suggested that it is an open secret that several people in the Liberian government have dual nationality. For example, Ms Frances Greaves, in our interview, explained that many lawmakers are suspected of having dual nationality or a Green Card from America. Yet, they were voted into power because people knew their parents or understood the circumstances that caused them to leave in the first place. To her, it's an open secret most Liberians in-country are comfortable with, but controversy sets in when demands are made in the name of dual citizenship status. She states: "If I have never accused you of being a dual citizen, but you have said that as a dual citizen I'm entitled to this, but you want to resist my ability to question you, then that's where the problem comes from" (26 Oct. 2019 via phone call).

Ms Greaves is an experienced gender consultant and was the Chairperson of the National Civil Society Council of Liberia during our interview.

⁷⁹ Interview with Alfred (Atlanta, US) via WhatsApp Call 13 Oct. 2019. The respondent I'm calling Alfred was a skilled returnee – a development expert – who provided technical advice to the Sirleaf government concerning the delivery of the MDGs and the subsequent SDGs.

because they feel that some of us [diaspora Liberians] that can go back home and work or make some investments, we are ten steps ahead.

In the interviews, proponents constantly voiced concerns about local elites blocking dual citizenship proposals. As previously discussed, ALCOD's leadership structured their campaign around this concern, linking their citizenship claims to the right to own land and lawfully transferring properties and nationality to their children.

In sum, proponents of dual citizenship – whether in favour of a restrictive policy like Weah's Proposition 1 or an open option like Sirleaf's 2008 proposal – have focused their argument on its motivating role. Thus, allowing dual citizenship will encourage diaspora Liberians to engage more meaningfully in Liberia's reconstruction.

The Liberian state has primarily marketed a similar 'reciprocal approach', suggesting that dual citizenship will encourage diaspora involvement in Liberia's socio-economic development. As a result, the utility – in terms of the wealth and potential – of diaspora Liberians to the country's stagnating economy has been the state's main selling point to in-country stakeholders. Successive governments have also framed dual citizenship as a response to the demands of the changing realities of a globalised world where everyone, including Liberians, is on the move. Thus, like most countries in the West African sub-region, Liberia is following best practices (Conteh 2017; Johnson Sirleaf 2016; Ngafuan 2013). The Ghana example⁸⁰ supposedly represents a reasonable compromise or, in the words of Hon. Augustine Kpehe Ngafuan (Foreign Minister, 2012-2015), what is "palatable and less controversial" (2013, p.24) and is often highlighted as a version of dual citizenship that diaspora Liberians should aspire for. Ghana's dual citizenship policy as a prototype solves the divided loyalty and conflict of interest contradictions raised by some opponents. Nevertheless, Ghana has not experienced the settler

⁸⁰ Ghana's citizenship laws restrict people with dual nationalities from holding certain public office positions such as president, vice president, members of parliament, etc. For example, some Ghanaian politicians were barred from assuming appointed ministerial positions until they renounced their foreign nationality (Manby 2016, p.97). In addition, Section 16(2) of Ghana's Citizenship Act 2000 states: "no citizen of Ghana shall qualify to be appointed as a holder of any office specified in this subsection if he holds the citizenship of any other country in addition to his citizenship of Ghana— (a) Chief Justice and Justices of the Supreme Court; (b) Ambassador or High Commissioner; (c) Secretary to the Cabinet; (d) Chief of Defence Staff or any Service Chief; (e) Inspector-General of Police; (f) Commissioner, Custom, Excise and Preventive Service; (g) Director of Immigration Service; (h) Commissioner, Value Added Tax Service; (i) Director-General, Prisons Service; (j) Chief Fire Officer; (k) Chief Director of a Ministry; (l) the rank of a Colonel in the Army or its equivalent in the other security services; and (m) any other public office that the Minister may by legislative instrument prescribe" (Government of Ghana 2000, p.5). See also, Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992, article 94(2).

colonial history and civil wars that Liberians have endured; thus, such comparisons fail to recognise the complexities in the Liberian debate.

Interestingly, the state's engagement with diaspora groups has a conflicting tone. While the state generally agrees with the diaspora's claims for dual citizenship, government messaging has suggested that they must demonstrate their worthiness through patriotism and continuous support for the country's development agenda. The state implies that the meaningful engagement of diaspora Liberians in-country will eventually create a positive reciprocal atmosphere and nudge opponents to a more agreeable position (Ngafuan 2013, pp.25–26; GoL 2015, 2016). Indeed, this was the conviction of the Weah government when they introduced Proposition 1, believing that emphasis on the utility of diasporas and limiting their direct political engagement would appeal to opponents. As noted earlier, however, Proposition 1 was rejected by Liberians in the referendum.

I have argued throughout this thesis that Liberia's dual citizenship is not a simple contest over resources or belonging. Indeed, the discussions above indicate that it is in the interest of Liberia and its citizens to allow dual citizenship, as usually advised by experts in international development and post-conflict reconstruction and state-building. Dual citizenship formalises the identity and attachment of diaspora Liberians to their homeland, an influential group who have been vital supporters of the country's reconstruction processes. Besides motivating this group to engage more meaningfully in-country, dual citizenship aligns Liberia positively with current global trends of liberal border politics. Consequently, some Liberians' resolute opposition to dual citizenship (discussed below) may seem irrational. Still, this resistance makes much sense when we understand the tensions and contestations associated with the debate as a manifestation of a century-long settler rule that administered the marginalisation of the Indigenous majority and established economic and socio-political structures that continue to frame Liberian society today.

Arguments Against: 'Liberia is not a rented apartment'

I have categorised the arguments of those against dual citizenship into concerns over disparities in job opportunities, corruption, and saturation of Liberian culture. However, these arguments are often reduced to concerns over jobs, especially in media narratives where the catchphrase 'it's all about jobs' became the designated explainer of the dual citizenship debate. Thus, opponents want to secure their jobs, while proponents wish to have access to government jobs.

Many of my interviewees repeated this mantra, arguing that there is a general preference for returnees in government positions because of their Western-acquired professional skills, education, and wealth. And they are not necessarily wrong, as this is common practice in some African countries, even in areas that have not experienced a mass exodus of talent into the diaspora like Liberia. Respondents almost always justified their rejection of dual citizenship on the basis that it would give diaspora Liberians a choice to return whenever they are inclined and take over jobs and high-ranking government and political positions. They accuse diaspora Liberians of treating the country as a '*rented apartment*' that they associate with only because of the benefits they stand to gain.

In my interview with Jerry⁸¹, he linked his opposition to dual citizenship to his experiences working with returnees in Liberia's civil service. Based on this experience, Jerry framed the 'it's all about jobs' mantra as a lack of genuine loyalty and commitment on the part of diaspora Liberians:

They [diaspora Liberians] have their loyalty and comfort in the United States, and they'll just come here and work. Many [state] ministers get recruited and don't have their families here, so all their resources and everything is in the US. When their tenure is up, or there is a problem, they return to the US. They don't invest our resources – the salaries and benefits they gain – in Liberia.

There was an overwhelming belief among the opponents I interviewed that dual citizenship would further entrench the apparent inequalities between in-country and diaspora Liberians. Ambassador Daintowon⁸², Chairperson of the National Commission on Disabilities in Liberia, was one of these respondents who shared strong convictions against dual citizenship. She based her opposition first on the inequalities in education and related opportunities in-country:

I don't support dual citizenship in Liberia. The education system is not good. There are no employment opportunities for those who manage to graduate from university. They work menial [jobs] because there is no enabling environment to earn a decent living. There is no equity; those in the US automatically become a god indirectly. So, if people come from the US and you give them

⁸¹ Interview with Jerry (Monrovia, Liberia) via WhatsApp Call on 12 Oct. 2019. The respondent I am calling Jerry is an economist who was working in Liberia's civil service during our interview.

⁸² Interview with Ambassador Daintowon (Monrovia, Liberia) via WhatsApp Call on 18 March. 2020. Daintowon was the Chairperson/Executive Director of the National Commission on Disabilities in Liberia.

dual citizenship, it's like modern slavery. It would be like Liberians in the US enslaving Liberians who have been on the ground.

Daintowon's likening of the relationship between returnees and Liberians in-country to modern slavery due to the disparities in socio-economic opportunities illustrates my argument about the enduring nature of settler colonialism. While the now 'invisible' structures of the settler regime may continue to privilege certain groups, at the same time, those who were marginalised under the settler colonial regime may still be disenfranchised. As the introductory chapter discusses, poverty is cyclical, and people can be permanently trapped. The situation can be especially dire for structurally marginalised groups because unequal access to social-political prospects and economic outcomes (income wealth, educational attainment, etc.) can translate into fewer opportunities to live a fulfilling life (UNDP 2013; UNICEF & UN Women 2013). The legacy of the century-long rule by the Americo-Liberian hegemony is unparalleled inequality, which resulted in civil conflict, further worsening poverty levels in Liberia.

A respondent I have named Sheila⁸³, as she did not want to be identified, summed up the apprehensions of opponents as follows:

The concern is that because the resources are not evenly distributed and not adequately managed, and many systems have not been developed as they needed to be, when you open the market up or the opportunities up, it could very well lead to the grabbing of resources. This would make it very difficult for those already disenfranchised or have limited access to get into a better position.

Consequently, opponents often categorised diaspora Liberians as opportunists who want to hold onto their foreign passports and all the opportunities this affords them while still demanding an equal share of national resources and opportunities. Some respondents consider the choice and opportunities that dual nationality affords diaspora Liberians and their children unfair. They believe it is a sure means to re-establish a small, privileged group in power again. In this view, allowing dual citizenship will perpetuate the poverty and inequality that still plagues most Liberians in-country.

⁸³ Interview with Sheila (Rome, Italy) via Facebook Messenger on 23rd and 25th Nov. 2019. The respondent I am calling Sheila was a skilled returnee that worked in the post-conflict government but returned abroad to pursue a PhD.

Related to the economic argument are concerns over the impact of dual nationality on national security and corruption. Here, most opponents equate dual citizenship with ‘flight risk’, arguing that it will enable dual citizens who commit crimes to go unpunished. Respondents quickly raised alleged corruption scandals linked to returnees who worked in the Sirleaf government. In such analysis, the ‘scandalous corruption case of Ellen Cockrum’ is often cited with conviction and as a note of caution. Ellen Cockrum is a diaspora Liberian with American citizenship who served in Sirleaf’s government as the Managing Director of Roberts International Airport. She was implicated in a corruption case but escaped prosecution. In 2015, the Government of Liberia filed for her extradition from the United States for economic crimes⁸⁴, but the case failed to progress. The Weah government subsequently dropped the case, enabling her to travel back to Liberia in January 2020.

In our interview, Harold Aidoo⁸⁵, the then Executive Director of the Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD) in Liberia, further explained the connection between dual nationality and corruption in Liberia:

The argument is that with a country known for so much entrenched corruption, if you have people with dual nationality, in a case where people are accused of wrongdoing, they will run back to America, Australia or whichever country they hold their second nationality. How do you deal with those kinds of situations?

Harold was a valuable respondent. He brought a nuanced perspective to the discussions due to his experience working with grassroots organisations and partners at the local and sub-national level on issues of natural resources governance, peace and security, legislative strengthening and accountability, and access to justice, human rights, and service delivery.

Like many diaspora respondents, Ahmed confirms that there were “examples of some bad apples [returnees] who went to Liberia and allegedly committed crimes or were engaged in not-so-decent behaviour.” Nevertheless, he maintained that those few corrupt people do not represent the entire diaspora community. Instead, those corrupt people exist in every society. Thus, as in most modern societies, Liberia should enforce laws that prevent people, diaspora

⁸⁴ It is a highly complex case which involves secret tape recordings of top officials of the Sirleaf government (Harmon 2020).

⁸⁵ Interview with Mr. Harold Aidoo (Monrovia) via WhatsApp and Telephone Call on 9th Oct. 2019. Harold was the Executive Director of the Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD) during our interview.

or in-country, from engaging in corrupt activities. To him, naturalising elsewhere does not necessarily make people corrupt. Harold, in agreement with Ahmed, states:

We [Liberia] need to strengthen our laws and ensure that we have adequate legislation that strengthens and supports these things [dual citizenship] so that as we look at the opportunities, we also prepare for the downsides.

Regarding classifying all diaspora Liberians as possibly corrupt, Chairman Wetsee explains that Liberians are *guilty by association*. He compares the situation of diaspora Liberians as it relates to dual citizenship to the sense of collective guilt and, with it, the collective defence that Liberians were forced to adopt during the civil war⁸⁶. By this logic, all diaspora Liberians are guilty of corruption and are seeking dual citizenship because of the gains they stand to benefit. Ultimately, their collective guilt is founded on the fact that they reside outside Liberia and not necessarily because a few returnees were indeed corrupt.

Interestingly, most of the interviewees, even diaspora respondents, understood the economic arguments of opponents. Some cited the lack of trust between the government and the governed due to increasing poverty among the populace, corruption of public officials, and general ineffectiveness of service delivery and opportunities. Harold provides an interesting analogy that highlights the issue of inequality that seems to underline peoples' apprehension:

We live in a country where, let's take access to land; 90 per cent of the land is owned by about 5 per cent of the population. Many people who acquire these vast tracts of land and other properties are fortunate to be in political corridors and use their influence. And so, Liberians are generally frustrated. Even in the absence of opening up the economy through dual citizenship, look at our situation. So, imagine if we open up more. We are going to be dominated in our land.

So yeah, I totally understand their concerns. Yes, I support dual citizenship, but I also understand the reasons and the genuine fears that ordinary Liberians hold on the subject.

Nevertheless, the representatives of diaspora groups stressed in their interviews the significance of putting the country's needs above that of the individual, arguing that a dual

⁸⁶ See Chapter 4 for discussions of how certain ethnic groups were targeted in the civil conflicts merely because a few people from those communities have played a role in either a coup or an uprising.

citizenship policy is mainly in the best interests of Liberia and Liberians in-country in the long term.

Beyond the lens of inequality, opponents often cited cultural differences and possible saturation of Liberian culture due to the unequal interpersonal relations between diaspora and in-country Liberians. For example, Ambassador Daintowon⁸⁷ observed:

[my objection] is not necessarily about jobs, although returning diasporas are always prioritised. My issue is the interpersonal relationship between local Liberians and their counterparts in the diaspora. So, we can have dual citizenship but not now because of inequality and interpersonal relationship and the saturation of Liberian culture. For example, profane language and other vices by returning diaspora Liberians generally frowned upon in Liberia are not critiqued because of the unequal relationship.

As indicated earlier, Daintowon's apprehensions emanate from the privileged positionality of diaspora Liberians. According to her, the unequal relationship between diasporas and in-country Liberians will contribute to the saturation of Liberia's culture. She explains that the burden of protecting the "positive Liberian culture, values and character" as enshrined in Article 27 (b) of the Constitution will shift to people with dual nationality, people whose values cannot be trusted as being wholly Liberian. Daintowon's views are shared by Imma⁸⁸, who also talked about cultural differences as the basis for opposing dual citizenship:

The cultural differences between most people who got indoctrinated, [and] adapted culturally to certain foreign ways of lifestyle compared to what is cultural in Liberia. For instance, if you have a diaspora Liberian married to his fellow male, do you expect them to live in Monrovia? It is not possible. How will these people be Liberians when they are culturally indoctrinated far away from what we believe as a people?

⁸⁷ Interview with Ambassador Daintowon (Monrovia, Liberia) via WhatsApp Call on 18 March. 2020. Daintowon was the Chairperson/Executive Director of the National Commission on Disabilities in Liberia during our interview.

⁸⁸ Interview with Imma Togba (Monrovia, Liberia), via WhatsApp Call on 31 Oct. 2019. Imma is an accounting and finance expert based in the United States but work across Africa. He has consulted for the Liberian government. Imma was in Monrovia during our interview and as he explains it, he was pursuing some business opportunities.

The views shared by Imma and Daintowon suggest that diaspora Liberians have deviated from the values and the cultural markers that define Liberia as a country and its people by adopting not just the citizenship but also the culture of foreign countries.

Economic arguments dominate the dual citizenship debate. However, other reasonings, such as concerns over the saturation of Liberian culture, are significant and worth highlighting. If anything, these concerns challenge what seems to be an oversimplification of opponents' arguments and move the debate beyond the 'it's all about jobs' mantra. In the interviews, while some proponents of open dual citizenship claim to understand the anxieties of in-country Liberians, they nonetheless seem to mock their opponents' arguments. They appear to link the apprehensions of opponents to limited education or a lack of understanding of the needs of post-conflict Liberia. The back and forth is unfortunate, considering that both the concerns held by opponents and the claims for dual citizenship made by diaspora Liberians' are justified. Still, as I have argued in the previous chapter, it serves the state's interest for this debate to remain contentious. It justifies state approaches to 'solving' these imminent cracks instead of addressing the structural origins of inequality and devastating poverty levels that continue to frame the lives of many Liberians.

I want to emphasise here that in-country Liberians' opposition is not illogical, even in the face of acknowledging the utilitarian potential of Liberia allowing dual nationality. Rather, we can understand the debate as more than a contest over scarce natural resources if we consider Liberia's settler colonial past as a legacy that shapes both the frustrations experienced by opponents of dual citizenship and the claims made by those in the diaspora.

Conclusion: Disavowal of the Marginalised and Liberia's Dual Citizenship Debate

In this chapter, I have presented the foundational arguments about inequality and fairness that continue to shape Liberia's dual citizenship debate. Liberia's post-conflict reconstruction is central to the different views irrespective of the quarters it emanates from. Some believe dual citizenship will help facilitate Liberia's development process. Diaspora Liberians are convinced of this fact even when they appreciate their opponents' arguments. They believe dual citizenship is the best option for Liberia's inclusive and sustainable development aspirations. For Liberia to achieve this objective, it needs its diaspora population with the expertise, training, skills, experiences, and resources to help build the New Liberia. The state's

positioning on the matter, whether by the Weah government or by former President Sirleaf, sometimes suggests that they are in this camp as well, albeit cautiously. The state has continuously pushed for diaspora engagement in-country and has introduced varying legal instruments to pacify diaspora Liberians in their claim for dual citizenship.

Those who oppose dual citizenship link their concerns to current poverty levels in-country. Those in this camp believe that dual citizenship will further entrench inequality and return the country to a time when a small group of people controlled every opportunity and economic outcome. Essentially, the post-conflict era presents an opportunity to implement laws and policies that consider the best interests of the most marginalised in-country. Dual citizenship is not deemed to be such a policy because it would give diaspora Liberians an unfair advantage. Again, the state appears concerned with the apprehensions of these opponents. So, although they link Liberia's development agenda to diaspora Liberians, both post-conflict governments have only pushed cautiously for dual citizenship laws. This was evident first in the Sirleaf government's abandonment of its 2008 proposal and, more recently, in the Weah government's structuring of Proposition 1 to preclude diaspora Liberians from appointed or elected positions. Even then, Proposition 1, with all its compromise, failed to gain the approval of in-country Liberians in the October 2020 referendum. So, the debate continues.

As indicated in the introductory chapter, the Weah government passed an amendment to the 1973 Nationality Law in July 2022. The Amendment Law repeals the ban on dual citizenship. It also affords Liberian women the same rights as their male counterparts to pass on their citizenship to their children irrespective of the nationality of said child's father (GoL 2022; Library of Congress 2022; FrontPageAfrica 2022). Effectively, the two key provisions in the Law serve the demands of ALCOD, marking a victory for ALCOD's leadership, sponsors, partner organisations, and advocates of dual citizenship. The Amendment Law is also a victory for the Weah government as they linked it to their designation of 2022 as a year of diaspora return. The Legislative Committee that sought an amendment to the old law is quoted to have reported:

Liberia has selected this year as a period to re-connect with all persons of Liberian descent in the diaspora and to welcome all persons of Negro descent to our country to participate in its socio-economic development, to re-discover its cultural heritage and strengthen its values.

It is necessary for these amendments to our Aliens and Nationality Law to be enacted into law if we are to achieve the ambition and realise the aspirations we have set for ourselves in 2022 and beyond (Bondo 2022, par.5).

Nevertheless, a quick scan of media discussions following the passing of the law suggests that the amendment does not in any way end the debate nor the underlying antagonisms and frustrations about inequality and fairness. This is because the Amendment law mandates changes in land ownership and access to certain opportunities that previously precluded dual citizens.

Kevin Bruyneel's (2021) insightful framework of *settler memory* is instructive for thinking about the legacies of settler colonialism in Liberia's dual citizenship debate. In particular, how the regime's enduring structures and processes continue to define power dynamics, individual and collective identities, and the political and socio-economic status of stakeholders. According to Bruyneel, dominant groups are knowledgeable of the enduring and systemic inequalities inherent in settler colonial structures and processes, yet that knowledge remains invisible or fails to matter (Bruyneel 2021; see also Jung 2015; Baldwin 1962). As he sees it, the persistence of racial inequality and white supremacy is not a lack of knowledge and understanding of the root causes of those disparities, as the liberal perspective would have us believe. Rather, it is a disavowal that holds at its core "political power, status, identifications, and interests that cannot be eliminated by greater awareness alone" (pp.3-4).

As seen in the discussions in this chapter, contemporary Liberia epitomises the capacity of settler memory and its ability to render Indigeneity and the enduring presence of settler colonialism invisible (Bruyneel 2021). As I have already discussed, Liberia and its diaspora now provide a site where the native has become a settler (Chapter 1). Americo-Liberians and their descendants are not easily identifiable due to years of intermarriages with Indigenous Liberians. As a result, to understand the enduring impacts of settler colonialism and how it is actually experienced in Liberia, we must keep in focus the structural legacies of the settler regime. Bruyneel's articulation of "settler memory as an unattended *productive capacity* of settler colonialism that as well as disavowing Indigeneity and settler colonialism also shields attention away from the standing, interests, and expressions of white settlerness" (p.9) is evident in both the frustrations of opponents and the claims by those in the diaspora.

On the one hand, in-country elites claim to be protecting Liberia's most marginalised population (the Indigenous majority) in their opposition to dual citizenship. They maintain that

an open policy would allow dual citizens – a small, privileged group – to buy up all the land and take over the country again. In these narratives, diaspora Liberians are categorised as the other and cast in the image of the earlier settler colonial antagonists. Consequently, their claim for dual citizenship is unfair to the ‘ordinary Liberian’, and it is interpreted as a recolonising strategy to dominate the Liberian society and further entrench existing structural inequalities.

On the other hand, diaspora Liberians maintain they are the best people to solve the country’s post-conflict reconstruction problems because they are Liberia’s missing middle class. They possess the educational acumen, skills, expertise and professional experiences to deliver development to Liberia and its people. As natural-born Liberians, it is unfair for them to be denied citizenship and the inherent rights and privileges their status as Liberians provides them. Many in this group made it a point to emphasise their Indigenous backgrounds if only to demonstrate the preposterous nature of their portrayal as colonial antagonists in the dual citizenship debate.

The deflecting tactics inherent in the narratives above recall Bruyneel’s insights about the unproductive capacity of settler memory and the role of disavowal in settler societies. Indeed, the indigene/settler dichotomy that framed Liberian society for over a hundred years has transformed into an in-country/diaspora division. Liberia’s settler colonial ‘past’ is evident in the divisions and antagonisms and the narratives groups construct about each other. The division between diaspora and in-country Liberians is the product of settler memory as it renders “Indigenous peoples and settler colonialism invisible or barely visible as active contemporary forces” (Bruyneel 2021, p.3). Consequently, it is not that stakeholders of the dual citizenship debate are not knowledgeable of the country’s settler colonial history and the impacts of this history on enduring inequalities and devastating poverty levels today. Instead, acknowledging the enduring structures of settler colonialism would require actually doing something about it – maybe relinquishing their hold on power. But as argued by Bruyneel, settler memory “plays a key role in the reproduction and securing of ... settler status, land dispossession, and the ‘hierarchies of Otherness’” (p.9).

Indeed, President Weah repealing the ban on dual citizenship provides the best cover for the disavowal of historic privileges and structural inequalities inherent in the debate and frames livelihoods and relationships in Liberia today. This new amendment is practically a ‘spruced-up’ version of Proposition 1 – the supposed ‘fair compromise’ – which failed to attain the two-thirds majority vote in the 2020 referendum. Also, a 2018 Afrobarometer survey found that two-thirds of in-country Liberians were opposed to dual citizenship as a national policy

(Wongbe 2018). Despite apparent popular opposition to dual citizenship, the Weah government is still able to rationalise the allowance of such a policy in the name of socio-economic development. What is evident to me is that the achieved compromise – the Amendment Law – does not really consider the ‘ordinary and marginalised Liberian’ that elites from both sides of the debate seek to supposedly protect in their claims and counterclaims. Instead, it protects and establishes the status, identifications, and interests of those in power and privileged positions. Liberia’s dual citizenship debate, its supposed resolution with the passing of the Amendment Law and the contemporary society as a whole epitomises settler colonialism in practice. Yet, marginalised Liberians and the enduring structures and processes of Liberia’s settler colonial present remain invisible through settler memory and disavowal as argued by Kevin Bruyneel. The next chapter delves into the meanings that Liberians attach to their identity in the post-war era. Through an analysis of the racialised questions in the debate, we appreciate the continual racial exclusion in Liberia. We also understand the dual marginalisation that drives the claims of diaspora Liberians and why in-country Liberians consider dual citizenship as a recolonising tool.

Chapter 7: Between Race & Descent: Constructing Belonging in Post-war Liberia

Introduction

This chapter examines the meaning(s) that Liberians attach to their identity or ‘Liberianness’ (the ultimate marker of belonging to Liberia). Building on the previous chapter’s discussions of the arguments for and against dual citizenship, this chapter explores the racialised questions in the debate by analysing how individual Liberians use different facets of people’s social and economic locations (class, ethnicity, race etc.) and identity narratives to erect inclusive and exclusive boundaries. This illustrates why belonging is continually negotiated between individuals and collectivities (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011; Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011). Further, this chapter underscores the significance of approaching identity construction via an intersectional lens, as argued by Anthias (2013) and Yuval-Davis (2006, 2011), which is evident not only in the claims for Liberianness by diaspora Liberians but also in the demands for dual citizenship by non-‘Negro’ migrants as exemplified by the Lebanese community.

The chapter contends that Liberians who continue to reject dual citizenship do so because of settler colonial anxieties rooted in the divisive period of Americo-Liberian hegemony (see Chapters 1, 3 & 4). This concern is sustained by a persistent fear of being recolonised by a small group perceived to have all the power. The potential agents of recolonisation are the two groups demanding dual citizenship: diaspora Liberians and non-‘Negro’ migrants in Liberia.

The chapter is organised into three main sections. Focusing on Liberia’s infamous racial clause, the first two sections consider racial constructions in the negotiations for dual citizenship. The first uses the Lebanese community to show that the economic positioning of non-‘Negro’ migrants is fundamental to how belonging is being constructed in the post-war era. In the second section, I explore diaspora Liberians’ expressions of belonging or ‘at-homeness’ in Liberia to show that claims for dual citizenship are partly informed by their racialised experiences as ethnic minorities in the Global North. Diaspora Liberians see a permanence to their *otherness* in the diaspora and therefore consider access to citizenship in Liberia a practical strategy that formalises their Liberianness and provides them with a route back to their ‘*real home*’.

The third section of this chapter puts contestations over dual citizenship into perspective by examining how my interviewees construct ideas of Liberianness. As argued in Chapter 2 of

this thesis, I conceptualise belonging as an emotive feeling of being at home in a place. In the interviews, respondents – whether in-country or in the diaspora – utilise Liberianess as an identifier rooted in descent and culture that confers true belonging (ownership) to claimants. Withdrawal or conferring of Liberianess is political and strategic. In-country Liberians are usually the ones who question the legitimacy of citizenship claims. So, they purposefully conceptualise Liberianess as an exclusionary tool to starve off a recolonisation by a small, privileged group. The section shows that current citizenship negotiations are continually shaped by the historical injustices of Liberia’s settler colonial background.

“The ‘Negro’ Clause may be Discriminatory, but it is not Racist”: Arguments for (& against) Continual Racial Exclusion in Liberia.

While this thesis primarily focuses on diaspora Liberians’ desire for dual citizenship, there is another group in Liberia whose experience sheds light on the racial issues underpinning the citizenship debate. Non-‘Negro’ migrants in Liberia have no right to citizenship. These migrant groups have been lobbying the Liberian state to drop the ‘Negro’ clause in its citizenship laws to allow people of non-Black ancestry to adopt Liberian citizenship. Arguments for removing the racial clause have focused on the economic benefits of an open country as argued by diaspora Liberians (Chapter 6) and the fact that it is an archaic practice for a country to be blatantly ‘racist’.

The restriction of Liberian citizenship to persons of ‘Negro’ descent is enshrined in both the Nationality Law and the current Constitution, a significant carryover from the 1847 Constitution, which defined Liberianess for over a century before it was suspended in 1980 when Samuel Doe took over (as outlined in Chapter 4). The race criterion in Liberia’s citizenship laws is “grounded in the historical context of the founding of the Country” (GoL 2018c, p.2). It derives from the philosophy of pan-Africanism and the spirit of self-determination that characterised the founding of Liberia in 1822. As outlined in Chapter 3, Liberia’s formation as a nation-state, among other things, was intended to create a space for liberated Black people barred from advancement in America and elsewhere. For instance, Section 13 of the 1847 Liberian Constitution clarifies (cited in Wilson 1969, p.71, see Huberich 1947):

The great object of forming these Colonies, being to provide a home for the dispersed and oppressed children of Africa, and to regenerate and enlighten this

benighted continent, None but persons of color shall be admitted to citizenship in this Republic.

The ‘persons of colour’ phrase in the 1847 Constitution was later amended to “‘Negroes’ or persons of ‘Negro’ descent” in 1907 (Tannenbaum et al., 2009) because the former was considered too ambiguous in the context of Africa. The 1847 Constitution was modelled after the US Constitution, like many other legal instruments Liberia created in that era. However, while ‘persons of colour’ in America references Black people, those two terms are not synonymous in Africa because there are also some North Africans who are of Arab or Jewish ancestry who might be considered persons of colour but who are not Black (discussed in Ludwig 2016; see also Huberich, 2010 [1947], p. 1018; David, 2014). There were also coloured and Asian designations in apartheid South Africa.

Ludwig (2016) links the earlier designation of Liberia as a space to which Blacks in the diaspora could be ‘expelled’ in the 1800s to Kaj’s (2012) observation that the African continent has been constructed as a ‘romanticised black space’. Kaj (2012, pp.1-2) explains that beyond colonial constructs of Africa as the ‘Dark Continent’, Africa has been “further constructed as a static, romanticised space for Black people by ‘Pan-Melanism’ ideologies (Langley 1965, p.165), and ideologists such as Edward Blyden and Marcus Garvey; and reinforced as a Black space by nationalist movements.”

The idea that the Black ‘race’ is synonymous with the African continent is a fallacy. Africa is home to many non-Black communities such as Arabs, Jews, Amazighs (Berbers), Tuaregs, Indians in Eastern and Southern Africa, Lebanese in West Africa, and Sahrawis in Northern Africa (Ludwig 2016, pp.87–88; see also Mbembé 2002; Anise 1974). Yet the logic of melanism seems to underpin the characterisation of Africa as a continent of racial homogeneity and reinforces the idea that postcolonial Africa, in particular, is devoid of racial consciousness (Ochonu 2019a, 2019b; Pierre 2013).

Indeed, the conflation of race and territory implies that only Black people can legitimately claim an African identity or truly own space on the continent. This is a tragic fallacy. Still, racial limitations are built into Liberia’s citizenship laws as the nationality law, and the 1986 Constitution uphold the racial clause (Section 21, Nationality Law and Article 27 (b), 1986 Constitution).

While most of my interviewees appreciate why Liberia’s founding statesmen included a racial element in the nation’s constitution and citizenship laws, some consider the continued

existence of these laws to be racist and incompatible with changing global migration trends. Most importantly, some believe Liberia should open its citizenship laws because it needs to attract investments to support post-conflict development. President Weah expressed this sentiment in his first State of the Nation Address:

The framers of the 1847 constitution may have had every reason and justification to include these restrictions in that historic document. They, as freed slaves, were fleeing from the oppressive yoke of slavery imposed upon them by white slave owners. They therefore wanted Liberia to be "...a refuge and a haven for freed men of color", and so they restricted citizenship only to black people. This may have been appropriate for the 19th century, and for the threats and conditions that existed at that time. However, here in the 21st century, I am of the view that these threats no longer exist, and that these conditions have changed. In these circumstances, it is my view that keeping such a clause in our Constitution is unnecessary, **racist**, and inappropriate for the place that Liberia occupies today in the comity of nations (2018, my emphasis).

President Weah's address intensified the dual citizenship debate at the time. To some, it signified support for groups campaigning for dual citizenship, including non-'Negro' migrants such as the Lebanese community. It should be noted that beyond the racial clause being racist, it violates Liberia's accession to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (Manby 2016).

Nevertheless, ethnicity, race, and descent have played a significant role in citizenship and nationality laws for centuries. (see Beydoun, 2013; Kaj, 2012; Obi, 2008; Abdullah, 2003; Mariner, 2003). As Mariner (2003, p.65) explains, "citizenship has often been restricted along racial or ethnic lines, with certain groups being excluded from the citizenry". Ludwig (2016) further clarifies that most states' citizenship and naturalisation laws require those seeking membership to fulfil specific requirements outlined by the nation-state. Liberia is not exclusive in its prohibition of dual citizenship, and while the specificity of the racial restriction on naturalisation is unique, so is the 'founding' of Liberia. In the context of Liberia's formation, the racial clause effectively serves as a protective measure, ensuring that Liberia continues to be a space for Black self-determination while at the same time guaranteeing that current and future generations are not ruled by non-Black people (Ludwig 2016; Pailey 2012).

Nevertheless, the understanding that Africa is also home to people of non-Black ancestry gives some buoyancy to the campaign for removing the race criteria. The campaign is championed by migrant groups, including Lebanese, Pakistanis, Indians, Syrians, and non-Black Americans, who have been present in Liberia for many years and have been vital supporters of the modern Liberian economy. While they are banned from acquiring Liberian citizenship, these migrant groups, particularly the Lebanese community, have significant political influence in Liberia due to their economic dominance over the years. Harold⁸⁹ explains further in our interview:

For the past 50 years, Lebanese have come to Liberia as merchants. Over the years, they [have] dominated commerce and created a lot of political influence because they have the financial resources. So, they can shape the political boundaries.

The economic influence of these migrant groups makes them critical stakeholders in post-war Liberia and the citizenship debate. There is an appreciation among interviewees regarding why non-‘Negro’ groups want dual citizenship. The assumption is that they wish to invest more in the Liberian economy and that a legal change in their citizenship status would be a guaranteed means of protecting their investments. One in-country respondent, I am calling Jane⁹⁰, sums up why the Lebanese community and other migrant groups might want citizenship:

I think it [dual citizenship] takes away the fear of those who have money, the Lebanese, even other nationalities who want to be Liberian to invest in the country. When they feel they are protected, they’ll be able to invest in the country more. No one will invest in a country where you are deemed a foreigner.

Jane’s association of the Lebanese community with *those who have money* is not an exaggeration, and neither is Harold’s observation that they dominate Liberia’s commerce. The following section examines the Lebanese community’s political influence and how that factors into the fears some Liberians have about the allowance of open dual citizenship.

⁸⁹ Interview with Harold Aidoo (Monrovia), 9 Oct. 2019 (WhatsApp call & Mobile VOIP) Harold was the Executive Director of the Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD) during our interview.

⁹⁰ Interview with Jane (Monrovia), 7 Dec. 2019 (Mobile VOIP). The respondent I am calling Jane is a lawyer and legal researcher based in Monrovia who wanted to remain anonymous.

The Lebanese Community and Liberia's 'Negro' Clause

The Lebanese community is the largest non-Black population in Liberia (Ludwig 2016), so they are often cited as a reference for all the other non-'Negro' migrants. They were estimated to be about 17,000 in the 1970s, but their numbers were reduced to about 3,000 - 4,000 in the post-conflict era (Paye-Layleh 2018; Luedi 2018). Today, the Lebanese remain a visible minority, given that Liberia's population is fewer than five million.

Lebanese communities in many West African countries tend to be heavily invested in the economy (see Akyeampong 2006, Bierwirth 1999). The pattern of Lebanese immigration and settlement in West Africa has influenced African-Lebanese relations and the process of Lebanese integration. Because of conditions in their insecure homeland, the Lebanese search for home and nationality gives their immigration a sense of permanence, contributing to an antagonistic relationship between them and some African elites (Akyeampong 2006, p.306).

Notably, the seemingly entrenched economic position of Lebanese communities across West Africa dates from before colonial rule. As Akyeampong (2006, pp.306-10) argues, the Lebanese often performed a profitable role as intermediaries between European traders and West African consumers and traders. Indeed, in some West African countries, the Lebanese facilitated the addition of the hinterlands into the European cash economy. Yet, there is no denying that scientific racism helped engineer their intermediary status (Akyeampong 2006, pp.306-10; see also Levitt 2005; Liebenow 1969). So, while their fair complexion facilitated their trading status and economic dominance across West Africa, at the same time, it presently serves as a symbolic boundary that prevents their further integration into African societies.

In postcolonial Africa, the Lebanese community is keenly aware of how politicians shape the business environment and its impact on their livelihoods. For example, in his study of the Lebanese communities in Cote d'Ivoire, Chris Bierwirth (1999) found that while they were generally privileged economically, they were politically vulnerable. Humphrey (2004, p.39) notes that the Lebanese community in Cote d'Ivoire and other West African countries seek accommodations with political power to protect their economic interests. However, such schemes and alignment with politicians have always made them vulnerable to popular vengeance. These activities are arguably comparable in Liberia⁹¹.

⁹¹ Shops and businesses owned by the Lebanese and other non-'Negro' groups were especially targeted during the widespread looting and destruction of property that accompanied the 'rice riots' on 14 April 1979, an event many believed ushered in Doe's coup d'état.

As noted by Jane⁹² and Harold⁹³ in the previous section, the Lebanese community is heavily invested in the Liberian economy. Estimates from Geezaytarr (2014) and Birke (2011) suggest that Lebanese people control about 60 per cent of Liberia's economy. The percentage increases to about 90 per cent in Monrovia's real estate market (Harmon 2013 cited in Ludwig 2016; see also Grossman 2010). In a recent opinion piece, Williams (2020) laments the Lebanese community's monopoly over Liberia's private sector. In an *Africa Report* article, Masseguin and Marbot (2020) profiled a Lebanese entrepreneur, Abi Jaoudi, whose family, beyond owning a chain of supermarkets in Liberia, also heads a corporation that distributes food and vehicles and owns casinos, hotels, restaurants, and many other businesses. News media in Liberia and beyond speculate that Abi Jaoudi had a close relationship with former President Sirleaf and is just as close to President Weah. Such speculation usually centres on suggestions of 'kickbacks' in exchange for political favours. In 2018, for example, Abi Jaoudi was one of the 15 names the government released in an investigation in connection to "missing containers and bags of money amounting to 16 billion Liberian dollars" (Dodoo 2018). However, Abi Jaoudi's name was subsequently 'omitted' from those barred from leaving the country (Harmon & Worzi 2018). The point here is that people take speculations of corruption to heart, especially in a country like Liberia, whose settler colonial past (and present) works to sustain the dominance of those in power and their cronies. Consequently, there is little trust in contemporary politicians irrespective of their background, as people consider them corrupt individuals who hardly work in the best interest of citizens. In Africa, and certainly in Liberia, people generally believe corruption is increasing, and government response has been poor (Keulder 2021; Afrobarometer Survey; Pring 2015).

Consequently, some Liberians are apprehensive about the Lebanese community's economic position and political influence and dread the possible legalisation of their status as naturalised Liberians. Many Liberians believe that recognising the Lebanese as citizens will enable them to own all the land and eventually take over the country and its people. This confirms Ludwig's (2016, p.92) observation that some Liberians believe that the power of the Lebanese would be limitless if they become citizens. The fear of the Lebanese community's further integration recalls the incorporation of other groups into the settler structure engineered by the Americo-

⁹² Interview with Jane (Monrovia), 7 Dec. 2019 (Mobile VOIP). The respondent I am calling Jane is a lawyer and legal researcher based in Monrovia who wanted to remain anonymous.

⁹³ Interview with Mr. Harold Aidoo (Monrovia) via WhatsApp and Telephone Call on 9th Oct. 2019. Harold was the Executive Director of the Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD) during our interview.

Liberian hegemony. To sustain their supremacy, groups recruited into the echelons of the settler structure were given power and privileges detrimental to the Indigenous majority.

Indeed, most of my interviewees expressed an impassioned view against removing the racial clause even when they thought it was racist. Opponents often equate dual citizenship to granting ‘white people’ citizenship and giving them the license to buy land. Accordingly, these ‘white people’ would control the economy and push for policies that would further impoverish Liberians in-country, especially the poor and desperate. Jane⁹⁴ sums up these views:

I think the dual citizenship [debate] is more of a fear of Lebanese. It’s ... the fear of the Lebanese, so they don’t take over.

I think we have to protect property, the property of those who do not have [poor and desperate] or else we create a more unequal society. Because even now, properties go under lease for 15 years, 70 years, and 99 years. Essentially, the property belongs to the Lebanese man. So, I don’t know how we will do that, but we have to do it [dual citizenship] so that people do not completely lose their land.

Like many other respondents, Jane expresses the view that dual citizenship could worsen inequality in Liberia. To her, a policy that allows non-Blacks to own land would open the floodgates to foreign ownership.

Similarly, following President Weah’s address about the racial clause, BBC Africa interviewed Funbi Henries, the leader of Citizens Action Against Non-Negro Citizenship and Land Ownership. Henries argued that, “White people will definitely enslave Black Liberians” if the citizenship laws were widened to include non-Blacks. According to Henries, the non-‘Negro’ clause is foundational to Liberia’s history, and their nation could crumble if President Weah adopts a policy that seeks to undermine that foundation. The group would rather Weah pay attention to getting businesses, agricultural and educational sectors on track and focusing “on the right policies for Liberians” (Paye-Layleh 2018).

Henries’ argument above, as well as Jane’s, illustrates some Liberians’ anxieties about the potential of dual citizenship to facilitate the dominance of a small, powerful and privileged group. As argued in this thesis, systemic inequality is a lasting impact of settler colonialism. Thus, contemporary poverty and inequality levels that continue to frame Liberia’s post-conflict

⁹⁴ Interview with Jane (Monrovia), 7 Dec. 2019 (Mobile VOIP). The respondent I am calling Jane is a lawyer and legal researcher based in Monrovia who wanted to remain anonymous.

(post-colonial?) situation emanate from socio-historical structures established and perpetuated by the Americo-Liberian hegemony for many years.

Phrases such as ‘*white people*’, *own all the land*, *take over* and *enslave Black Liberians* used by Henries, Jane, and several other respondents are reminiscent of the country’s settler colonial history, where a minority settler group enacted whiteness despite their Black skin and marginalised Indigenous communities for over a hundred years. Thus, the fears expressed by in-country respondents, especially about dual nationality, have a painful historical context.

On the other hand, some respondents consider this existential fear against ‘white people’ taking over via dual citizenship to be irrational, if not nonsensical. They maintained that the citizenship debate has lingered without any policy solution because of alarmism. For instance, Sheila⁹⁵ explained her frustrations with how the debate consistently descends into a discussion about Lebanese land ownership, which to her, demonstrated a lack of understanding of how policies work:

The [dual citizenship] conversation becomes, “Oh, well, if we allow dual citizenship, then the Lebanese will come and buy up all the land.”

Sheila associated the ban on dual citizenship with fearmongering among in-country Liberians. To her, some in-country elites purposefully confused Black/dual citizenship and use the economic position of the Lebanese Community to incite fears that dual citizenship would grant ‘white people’ limitless power to buy all the land. She maintained that equating dual citizenship with unfettered Lebanese land ownership is unfounded because Liberia as a state has the power to regulate the rights and responsibilities that accompany citizenship. Like Sheila, other diaspora respondents argue that Lebanese and other migrant groups already own lands or buy them through marriages to Liberian women and intermediaries:

The buying, selling, and leasing of property - although Lebanese can’t own land, they just marry a Liberian and then manage it through them.

The view that Lebanese men use their relations with Liberian women to acquire land, a privilege reserved for only citizens, is widely held among Liberians and some scholars who have researched the issue (Obi 2008; Bierwirth 1999). This belief adds to the fears among in-country Liberians about the recolonisation of Liberian society. Scholars such as Akyeampong

⁹⁵ Interview with Sheila (Rome, Italy) via Facebook Messenger on 23rd and 25th Nov. 2019. Sheila was born in Liberia but she grew up in the United States of America. She was one of the many skilled returnees who worked in the post-conflict government. She was pursuing her PhD in Australia during the time of the interview.

(2006) have referenced this fear as the reason behind Liberia's exclusionary race-based citizenship laws (see also Beydoun, 2013; Bierwirth, 1999; Kaj, 2012; Liebenow, 1969; Mariner, 2003).

In addition, Ludwig (2016) has attributed this fear to the country's founding motivation of being a space absent of "colonisation and subjugation" (p.92) – a view this thesis contests as I theorise Liberia's formation as a unique form of settler colonialism and the Americo-Liberians as settlers rather than immigrants. Yes, the Americo-Liberians may have constructed the settler society to be devoid of Euro-American colonisation. Yet, they colonised the Indigenous majority for over a hundred years (as argued in Chapters 1 & 3), believing that the Indigenous Africans were morally and culturally inferior. Indeed, as Ludwig (2016) and others have confirmed, the Liberian state has historically used citizenship as a racial/ethnic tool to exclude sections of the population (Gershoni, 1985; Levitt, 2005; Söderström, 2009). As she argues, "the lofty goal of Liberia as a haven for a unified and redeemed Black race was far from reality" (Ludwig, 2016, p.92ff). Consequently, defining Liberia as a space for all subjugated Blacks is one narrative when the actual history is far more complicated. The construction of modern Liberian society envisioned by the first settlers and brutally pursued by subsequent generations of Americo-Liberians impacted a large segment of the population much more negatively.

Beyond how race influences anxieties about dual citizenship, what is thought-provoking is the continuous imposition of exclusionary citizenship laws on natural-born Liberians who have naturalised elsewhere. More so, the perception around their claim for dual citizenship is perplexing when one considers the circumstances that caused many Liberians to not only cross international borders but become naturalised in those settings. Perhaps the pervasive fear among Liberians about possible recolonisation if dual citizenship is allowed is not just about what the racial clause symbolises. Instead, there is fear that a small group of settlers/outsiders will again have disproportionate power and privilege. As seen in the discussions above, many Liberians remember settler rule. Indeed, many Liberians' life outcomes and opportunities continue to be defined by the actions and inaction of the Americo-Liberian oligarchy that ruled Liberia for over a century.

Consequently, anxieties about a small, privileged class – whatever their race – taking over and dominating Liberia remains and continue to frame negotiations over who can legitimately claim Liberianess. The following section explores diaspora Liberians' perceived marginalisation concerning the scrutiny of their Liberianess in-country and their lack of belonging in their host countries.

(Dual) Marginalisation & the Demand for Dual Citizenship: Negotiating ‘at-homeness’ by Diaspora Liberians

Recent studies on dual citizenship suggest that individual attitudes towards citizenship are shaped by a country's passport position in the global hierarchy. More than ever before, individuals seek citizenship options as the most effective means of accessing new opportunities. Against worldwide inequality and its impact on mobility and other opportunities, people strive to improve their life chances using citizenship as an avenue (Harpaz & Mateos 2019). In essence, elites from developing economies pursue strategic citizenships that provide them with ‘premium’ passports as well as “access [to] health security and optionality in terms of where they and their families can live, conduct business, study, and invest” (Global Mobility Report, 2021 Q3).

Consequently, citizenship has become a strategic legal institution (Harpaz & Mateos, 2019). The emphasis on the shift from exclusive to portable citizenships has led to arguments that the status of a passport might be more valued than the ties it provides to a specific homeland. This section reviews why, in contrast, diaspora Liberians are adamantly pursuing dual citizenship in Liberia, a country whose passport ranks in the lower 90s out of the 116 countries ranked in the Henley Passport Index (Henley & Partners 2022).

The core arguments put forward by diaspora Liberians for the restoration of their citizenship and the formalisation of their Liberian identity have revolved around their rights as natural-born Liberians and their economic utility to Liberia's reconstruction and development process, and their continuous engagement in-country through cash and kind. Chapter 6 focused on these arguments, juxtaposing them against those against dual citizenship.

This section is about diaspora Liberians' search for a ‘real home’ and a place to belong and how access to dual citizenship factors as part of that search. Diaspora Liberians locate this need for a real home within their experiences of dual marginalisation in both their host and origin countries. In Liberia, they feel ostracised by the constant scrutiny of their Liberianess and are frustrated by the need to justify the ‘genuineness’ of their Liberian identity continually. On the other hand, they also feel ‘othered’ in their host countries and experience a lack of belonging because of their ethnic minority background as Liberians, Africans, Blacks, migrants, refugees, and all the different social stratifications that suggest that they did not originate in their host countries.

The interviews for this thesis were conducted during Donald Trump's America, a four-year tenure (2016-2020) that was rife with racial tensions and "revealed extraordinary fissures in American society" (Dimock & Gramlich 2021). The period also produced conversations (and mass protests) about race and ethnicity and how these and other classifications continue to be powerful forces in defining social divisions and inequalities in America and contemporary societies more broadly. Hence, the views of some of the respondents about their belonging (or lack thereof) may have been shaped by these racialised events. Indeed, some of the interviews with diaspora respondents, in particular, veered into discussions about the racialisation of Black and Brown bodies in the Global North. Others focused on the rise of populist politics across the globe and the erosion of optimism about living in an era of non-discriminatory immigration and citizenship policy.

As exemplified in the previous chapters, race and ethnicity are complex concepts that shape people's lives and identities. It is especially true for ethnic minorities whose experiences and life chances are sometimes linked to these identifiers. Racial and ethnic discrimination influences how migrants negotiate their sense of self and belonging in their host and origin countries. These issues, while not new, were more broadly discussed as Trump's America blatantly exposed some of these racial fractures in contemporary societies.

Therefore, I posit in this section that diaspora Liberians' racialised experiences as ethnic minorities in their host countries are partly responsible for their push for dual citizenship in Liberia and, with it, the *true belonging* it affords them and their children.

Indeed, as conceptualised in Chapter 2, our identities are a product of societal relations, in that individual constructions of identities and feelings of belonging shift with time and context. As a result, in these uncertain times for migrants, it makes sense for diaspora Liberians to centre their identities within the search for attachments and belonging in their homeland. As argued by Yuval-Davis (2006), constructions of belonging are not just cognitive stories; instead, "they reflect emotional investments and desire for attachments" (2006, p.202). Following Elspeth Probyn (1996) and Anne-Marie Fortier (2000), Yuval-Davies contends that identity construction is often transitional and continually reproduces itself through the duality of being and becoming.

In this section, we witness the duality of "belonging and longing to belong" (Yuval-Davies 2006, p.202) in how diaspora Liberians construct attachments to their host and home countries. For example, Anthias (2013) introduced the term "translocational positionalities" to define

belonging as a non-static emotive feeling that straddles the local and global interface. Similarly, we see the interactions between the local and global dimensions of belonging in how diaspora Liberians construct their identities and how they pick and choose when and where they seek place attachments and belonging. Further, their previewed dual marginalisation in their narratives of identity stems from the fact that individuals' sense of "place-belongingness" tends to adhere to the "discourses and practices of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion at play in that very place" (Antonsich 2010, p.644), thus *shifting* from the realm of personalised feelings of belonging to the politics of belonging that is public-oriented and demands formal structures of membership.

The section is further divided into two subsections. The first briefly discusses the scrutiny diaspora Liberians receive about their Liberianess, and the second provides context to their lack of belonging in their host countries.

‘You are not Liberian Enough’: Controversies over the Liberianess of Diaspora Liberians.

Diaspora Liberians feel ostracised in their home country due to constant questioning of their identity. In the interviews for this thesis, they lamented the fact that they must continually justify their Liberianess, especially when they return home. As part of the diaspora, they feel that their Liberianess is under constant scrutiny owing to a widespread belief that what once made them Liberian has been eroded by their diaspora status or the fact that they are unwilling to give up their foreign citizenships. When diaspora Liberians return to their homeland, they are continuously grilled about their knowledge and understanding of Liberian culture in their workplaces and social settings. One of the respondents explains:

You have to prove your Liberian aspect. We're very quick to say: "No, you're not Liberian." Or "you're not Liberian enough." We want you to prove that you're Liberian. Do you know this or that food?

Sheila⁹⁶, who shared the sentiments above, grew up in the United States but returned to Liberia following the civil war to work in the public sector. She mentioned that, before going back home, she had a difficult conversation with her mother, who resides in Liberia, about how she

⁹⁶ Interview with Sheila (Rome, Italy) via Facebook Messenger on 23rd and 25th Nov. 2019. Sheila was one of the many skilled returnees who went back to Liberia following the end of the war to help rebuild their country.

might be treated due to her American accent and other markers that people were going to pick on to demonstrate her lack of Liberianess:

My Liberianess wasn't a given; it wasn't a default. I now had to prove I was Liberian. I knew my accent would be an issue, but I didn't expect to have to prove that I was Liberian practically all the time. I mean, we've been working together for months at this point. [I would say to my colleagues], "You know my mother; you know I'm a Liberian. This is not up for debate, yet you're still quizzing me on whether I know different Liberian foods and things."

Diaspora Liberians consider the constant questioning about their Liberian identity to be a tactic that in-country Liberians use to assert their superior connection to Liberia and ownership of the country's resources and demonstrate their lack of belonging to Liberia. Despite their experiences of being treated with contempt and condescension, diaspora Liberians still consider Liberia their real home. In fact, most diaspora respondents habitually used the phrase 'back home' whenever they referenced Liberia, indicating their connection with their home country. As Ahmed explains:

We work and save for back home. We live in America for 20 or 30 years, but because of the need for the Liberian identity, we plan for back home.

To fulfil that need, they plan for back home more than they plan for their retirement in America, more than they plan for their children's education in America.

Ahmed is part of the leadership of the diaspora community. In our interviews, he moves between speaking about his own experiences and speaking as a representative of the diaspora community. As seen in the quote above, he highlights some of the concerns among the diaspora community, which in essence, reflect his own experience. He criticises those against dual citizenship as lacking an understanding of the dynamics that fuel his life as a diaspora Liberian and the lives of several other Liberians in the diaspora. He notes:

I think it's a lack of appreciation for what the Liberian diaspora really is and what [our] true experiences are.

Diaspora Liberians argue that their demands for Liberian identity have been renewed due to the devastation caused by the civil war. The legacy of the wars helps these respondents believe that being invested in their homeland's reconstruction and development processes is enough to demonstrate their Liberianess. Sheila explains:

What it means to be a Liberian is to feel a connection to the land, people, and culture. Have a vested interest in the activities and the policies that are decided upon and acted on within the country and international policies that have a bearing on the country and its people.

Diaspora respondents cite a feeling of connection to the land, the people, and culture as a legitimate means of expressing their Liberianess. They consider their relationship with Liberia and the different forms this connection manifests as an adequate justification for restoring their citizenship. Continued second-guessing of their identity and belonging in Liberia has compounded their frustrations. In their host countries, their Liberianess is a prominent aspect of their lives and identities as it forms the basis of their ‘otherness’ in the diaspora. At the same time, however, there is no guarantee that their Liberianess will be recognised in their home country.

The need for diaspora Liberians to continually justify their Liberianess to their in-country counterparts speaks to a larger argument about the preferred nature of diaspora engagement in Liberia. The state’s positioning seems clear, with its longstanding campaign for the diaspora’s continuous engagement in-country. The state prefers the return of its skilled and wealthy populations and contributing to Liberia’s post-conflict agenda of inclusive and sustainable development (see Chapter 5). However, it is clear that in-country Liberians, certainly those opposed to dual citizenship, do not share the state’s convictions about Liberians abroad. This apparent contradiction between the state’s views, and in-country Liberians’ rejection of claims by their kin in the diaspora, underpins the messiness of Liberia’s dual citizenship debate. Nevertheless, diaspora Liberians are adamant about their claim for dual citizenship to legitimise their choice of Liberia as their *real home*. The following section explores this reasoning further.

‘Liberia will always be my true home.’: Searching (Lobbying) for a ‘Real Home’

We often equate our home to a place or a physical structure, but home is also a feeling. A key component of our identity is where we feel ‘at home’. According to Roberta Rubenstein (2001, p.1), home is “not merely a physical or a geographical location but always an emotional space.” The idea of home as an emotional space is further developed by Hazel Easthope (2004), who defines home as “the fusion of a feeling ‘at home’, sense of comfort, belonging, with a particular place” (p.136). Blunt and Varley (2004, p.3) also contribute to this understanding when they argue that home is “a space of belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence,

desire and fear, the home is invested with meanings, emotions, experiences and relationships that lie at the heart of human life.” Hence, home is understood here not merely as a location but also as an emotional space that contributes to diaspora Liberians’ identities as individuals and as part of a group. Where they feel ‘at home’ is connected to their sense of belonging or alienation.

Diaspora Liberians seek a real home and consider Liberia to be this home. They believe access to dual citizenship will give them a route back to this home because it will restore their citizenship and formalise their Liberian identity. The formalisation of their identity is particularly important due to the constant scrutiny of their Liberianess. The words and phrases used by Easthope (2004) and Blunt & Varley (2004) in their discussion of home above are comparable to those used by my interviewees to describe what it means for them to feel at home: ‘home is where identity dwells’; ‘home is your comfort zone’; ‘a place that I feel a sense of belonging’; a place they yearn or are eager to return; ‘home is freedom’; home is familiarity; where you have your family, friends, community, network and where your work have an impact; feeling at home is happiness, security, comfort and acceptance; it is about the ‘limitless potential you have in terms of becoming what you want to be (president, vice president, or whatever)’. In my interview with Alfred⁹⁷, for example, he talks of home as comfort, as Liberia – a place where he is committed to both emotionally and psychologically:

As long as I’ve lived in the United States, I’ve never felt so comfortable until I went back [to Liberia] six years ago. When I got home to where my family lives, I felt relief that I could do many things without looking over my shoulder to see who would arrest me for just doing some of the dumbest things. That’s a comfort level for me.

My ex-wife hated hearing me talk about Liberia because she felt we needed to forget about the country and re-establish ourselves here [United States] ..., but I’m always emotionally and psychologically committed to Liberia. I just have not disconnected myself. I don’t know how to do it.

Alfred’s perception of home as a place where he can exist freely without intimidation or fear is influenced by his perception of the racialised experiences of Black and Brown bodies in

⁹⁷ Interview with Alfred (Atlanta, United States), 13 Oct. 2019 (WhatsApp Call). As previously mentioned, the respondent I am calling Alfred was one of the skilled diaspora Liberians who returned to Liberia during Sirleaf’s government. He was a development expert who provided technical advice to the Sirleaf government concerning the delivery of the MDGs and the subsequent SDGs.

America. He was one of many respondents who spoke about racial politics and the blatant racism against ethnic minorities in America and beyond. He spoke extensively about his experiences as a child in pre-war Liberia and his return to Liberia following the end of the civil war to help rebuild his home country. He also spoke of the feeling of community and the sense of worth he experienced working in government and volunteering to teach employable skills to young Liberians in-country. More so, he related his life as a child in Liberia to that of his children in America, emphasising the lack of communal relations in America:

When my kids come home from school in the United States, they can't even leave the house unless I say let's go to the park. That's the farthest they can go, and then we are back in the house. While when I was back home as a kid, I didn't have such supervision, I returned from school, and I was out there somewhere, but everybody in the community knew to watch over the kids. In the US, unfortunately, you cannot do that.

Alfred speaks with longing and nostalgia for his homeland, a place representing safety, freedom, and community. He wishes his children could have a similarly free childhood to the one he had as a young boy in Liberia.

Alfred's sentiments about Liberia in comparison to America highlight scholarly critiques of migrants' construction of home and how it almost always links to feelings of alienation and estrangement in the diaspora. As Parutis (2006) put it, "only through the experience of leaving home does one come to feel a true sense of belonging." Nevertheless, home can be a notion of precarity for diasporas, thus making it "much more complex than approaches to diaspora premised on the power of nostalgia would us believe" (Tsagarousianou 2017p.57).

Alfred's construction of Liberia as his *real home* and its representation of freedom, security and happiness is shared by Imma⁹⁸, who had lived in the diaspora for most of his life but had returned to Liberia during our interview. Imma states:

Home is where you feel most secure, protected, happy, and can do whatever you want. Home is freedom. Liberia is my home ... I spent several years abroad; I've never felt so free, happy, or safe like I am in Liberia.

⁹⁸ Interview with Imma Togba (Monrovia, Liberia), via WhatsApp Call on 31 Oct. 2019. Imma is an accounting and finance expert based in the United States but work across Africa. He has consulted for the Liberian government and was in Monrovia during our interview to pursue business opportunities.

Ibrahim⁹⁹ also emphasises belonging in his construction of home:

Home is where I come from, and I believe I can always return. It is where I feel perpetual ownership of a place. So even if I bought a house in the UK, I still wouldn't consider the UK home because it is not. I don't feel [it is] because it's not where I think I belong.

The perspectives shared by Alfred, Imma and Ibrahim show that our construction of home can be both a geographical place and an emotional space. Whether or not our realisation of our true home derives from feelings of alienation in another place, as suggested by Parutis (2006), our connection to a home provides us with happiness, comfort, and a sense of belonging. How we construct this place or space is significant to how we identify either as individuals or as a member of a group or country, for that matter. As Sara Ahmed puts it, the real home is “the very space from which one imagines oneself to have originated, and in which one projects the self as both homely and original” (1999, p.320). For example, in my interview with Sheila¹⁰⁰, she explained that it was important to her mother that she remained connected to Liberia:

My mother has always made it apparent that although I was living and growing up in another country, Liberia was our first home.

Liberia was our first love. I grew up eating Liberian food and listening to people speak in Liberian [Pidgin] English.

Sheila's connection to Liberia was important to her mother. She explains:

You don't lose your culture and identity when you cross an ocean or land. And that's what you give your children because that's all you have.

Similarly, Alfred¹⁰¹ again spoke of his life in the United States as a transition: “I still feel that we are still living the life of a refugee. That I'm going to go home someday, even if I don't”.

⁹⁹ Interview with Ibrahim (London, United Kingdom), 5 Oct. 2019 (Skype). Ibrahim is an activist, political commentator and an academic who was in the final stages of his PhD at SOAS, University of London during our interview. He described himself as in-country Liberian amid our discussion of colleagues back home describing people like him as 'netizens'.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Sheila (Rome, Italy) via Facebook Messenger on 23rd and 25th Nov. 2019. Sheila was born in Liberia but she grew up in the United States of America. She was one of the many skilled returnees who returned to Liberia following the end of the war to work in the post-conflict government. She was pursuing her PhD in Australia during the time of the interview.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Alfred (Atlanta, United States), 13 Oct. 2019 (WhatsApp Call). As previously mentioned, the respondent I am calling Alfred was one of the skilled diaspora Liberians who returned to Liberia during Sirleaf's

He explains that although he has lived in America for over 20 years and often goes back to Liberia, he still looks forward to finally settling in Liberia, at which point *I will finally be at peace and say yes, I'm home!* Although most of Alfred's immediate family are in the US, and he does have the necessary documentation to remain in America, he still feels like he is living the life of a refugee because he does not feel a sense of belonging in America. In our discussions, he expressed grief about feeling like he does not belong in Liberia either, despite it being the place that offers him the most comfort.

Alfred's construction of Liberia as his *real home* recalls Yuval-Davis argument about the duality of "belonging and longing to belong" (2006, p.202). Similarly, Avtar Brah's (1996) conceptualisation of home as being "intrinsically linked with the way in which the processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It relates to the complex political and personal struggles over the social regulation of 'belonging'" (p.194) and is perceptive to my understanding of Alfred's precarious attachment to America and Liberia as home. Further, Tsagarousianou's (2017) discussion of the contrast between William Safran's (1991) emphasis on diaspora's strong links and identifications with their 'homeland' versus Stuart Hall's (1993) warning that such links to the homeland and the possibility of return is much more precarious is insightful here. As Tsagarousianou explains, "the place called homeland will have "transformed beyond recognition." This is because while the "'back home' has been caught in the process of modernization – diasporas themselves are deeply affected by their position at the centre of contemporary globalisation flows. In that sense, there is no going 'home' again" (p.56ff).

I should note here that Alfred returned to the United States after consulting for the Sirleaf government for several years. He had hoped to continue in this capacity following Weah's election, but as he puts it: *things were going downhill, so I moved back.*

Alfred left Liberia again partly because of family commitments in America but mostly because he was opposed to the political climate that developed following the election of George Weah in 2018. As discussed extensively in Chapter 5, low human and institutional capacity is one of the most daunting problems facing Liberia's reconstruction processes. The Sirleaf government dealt with this challenge through the repatriation of skilled and professional diaspora Liberians. Alfred was one such skilled returnee. However, following President Weah's election, things

government. However, he returned to America when George Weah came to power, citing family commitment and his perception of Liberia at the time as a hostile environment for skilled returnees.

changed, at least for the corps of (returnee) bureaucrats, many of whom had spent 13 years in the Sirleaf government learning and benefiting from their portfolios. But as with most countries around the world, and indeed, in Africa, a change in government usually means a change in personnel. Hence, many of Liberia's bureaucrats were discharged to make room for the donors and supporters of Weah's Congress for Democratic Change party.

Nevertheless, the choice to leave Liberia when circumstances are unfavourable is a privilege reserved for few Liberians, like Alfred. Most Liberians in-country do not have the means to cross international borders when things are bad; they have no choice but to survive it the best they can. The availability of this choice to a privileged few Liberians is one of the complaints that fuels opposition to dual citizenship in Liberia.

In contrast to Alfred's identification with the Liberian diaspora, Imma¹⁰² and Ibrahim¹⁰³ maintain that although they have spent many years abroad, they are not part of the diaspora community. This is because they have spent most of their lives in Liberia, and, more importantly, their lives remain centred in Liberia. At our interview, Ibrahim was abroad pursuing his PhD while Imma had returned to Liberia to explore some business opportunities. As I discuss in the subsequent section, however, Ibrahim and Imma's rejection of diaspora status does not necessarily cement their Liberianess because the people intent on questioning their Liberian identity need only to choose from the arbitrary list of conditions upon which Liberianess is based.

Some diaspora respondents consider their home to be *both* Liberia and their host country. More often than not, those who expressed this dual affiliation left Liberia at a very young age but have kept in touch either through relations back home or because they have returned to visit or to work. Lazarus is one such respondent. He explains what home means to him:

Home is your comfort zone; home is where you are welcomed. Home is where your heart is, where your family is. All that encompasses what it really means for it to be home. So, to me, America is home because this is where I grew up. I fought for this country; I've been to combat in Iraq [and] Afghanistan. But

¹⁰² Interview with Imma Togba (Monrovia, Liberia), via WhatsApp Call on 31 Oct. 2019. Imma is an accounting and finance expert based in the United States but work across Africa. He has consulted for the Liberian government and was in Monrovia pursuing some business opportunities during our interview.

¹⁰³ Interview with Ibrahim (London, United Kingdom), 5 Oct. 2019 (Skype). Ibrahim is an activist, political commentator and an academic. He was pursuing his PhD at SOAS, University of London during our interview and described himself as in-country Liberian.

Liberia will always be my true home because of my lineage, my parents are both Liberian, and that's where I was born too. That's always going to be home.

Lazarus spoke of the perks of being a veteran and the fact that his military service and other social accomplishments provided him with greater social standing among other ethnic minorities in America. Despite this, he maintains that he is constantly aware of his immigrant status and laments how much it bothers him: *the whole immigration conversation hits me hard because not only I'm an immigrant, but I'm a veteran.*

As exemplified in the testimonies above, diaspora Liberians consider their racial-ethnic background key to their identities and sense of belonging in their host countries. They are Liberian wherever they live in the world, even as they strive to belong and make new homes in new countries. Nevertheless, they feel othered in their host countries because their Liberianess is evident in how they speak and dress, the type of food and music they prefer, or their constant reference to 'back home'. They long for themselves and their children to have the 'freedom' linked with at-homeness in their homeland. Yet this same Liberianess is not a given in Liberia. Diaspora Liberians have to justify their belonging continually, and to, Liberia itself because, according to the self-appointed guardians of the "positive Liberian culture, values and character" (Article 27 (b), 1986 Constitution), their diasporaness erases whatever Liberianess they possessed before moving abroad. While for some diaspora Liberians, access to Australian, American, or European passports give them premium mobility and other benefits; this privilege is unable to provide the thing they most desire - a place to belong and call their real home; a place where they, and their children can claim rootedness.

Ultimately, diaspora Liberians' demand for a formalised identity is not singularly informed by their desire to contribute to Liberia's post-conflict agenda, as their position is often portrayed in the debate. Instead, their experiences of marginalisation in their host countries (due to their racial background as ethnic minorities) and in Liberia (because of their diaspora status) further motivate their claims for belonging in post-war Liberia. Diaspora Liberians' consideration of dual citizenship as a practical strategy that provides them with a route back to their *real home* relates to what Antonsich (2010) calls "place-belongingness", which is the personal dimension

of belonging. As seen in the identity narratives of Alfred¹⁰⁴, Sheila¹⁰⁵, and other respondents above, personalised belonging highlights peoples' attachment to place, be it specific to geography or social and cultural spaces (see Fortier 2000; Fenster 2005; Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011; Anthias 2013). These narratives usually emphasise "the feeling of being at home in a place" (Antonsich 2010, p.644). Yet, the personalised construction of belonging is constantly negotiated with the collective.

There is no doubt about the genuineness of diaspora Liberian's need for a real home and their construction of this home to be Liberia. Indeed, their experiences as shared with me in the interviews, confirms the broader research about the uncertainties that frame diasporas and migrants' conception of home, belonging, identity and related concepts. Nevertheless, I would be remiss not to highlight the doubleness of home available to diaspora Liberians despite their supposed lack of belonging in either space. The availability of another place [home] to return to, as seen with the respondent Alfred, is reminiscent of the Americo-Liberian settlers, especially their claim to indigeneity in Liberia while still possessing an exogenous belonging to America. As indicated in Chapter 5, the parallels between the Americo-Liberians and diaspora Liberians as it relates to 'place-belongingness' (Antonsich 2010) is a choice reserved for a few privileged Liberians. In many ways, this choice of a double home is a representation of Liberia's settler colonial history and how power and opportunities were structured to benefit a section of the population. As previously argued, the availability of this choice to a few Liberians is one of the antagonisms that fuels opposition to dual citizenship in Liberia as well as the shifting construction of Liberianess and who can claim this identity.

The following section engages with how Liberians frame ideas of belonging and how in-country Liberians strategically confer or withdraw Liberianess in the name of starving off recolonisation in the post-war era.

Constructing Liberianess in the Absence of a Collective Identity

Identity in Liberia has always been contested (Pailey 2007). As shown throughout the previous chapters, questions over who belongs and can claim Liberian identity date back to the history

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Alfred (Atlanta, United States), 13 Oct. 2019 (WhatsApp Call). Alfred was one of the skilled diaspora Liberians who returned to Liberia during Sirleaf's government to help rebuild their homecountry.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Sheila (Rome, Italy) via Facebook Messenger on 23rd and 25th Nov. 2019. Sheila was born in Liberia but she grew up in the United States of America. She was one of the many skilled returnees who went back to Liberia following the end of the war to help rebuild their country.

of the state formation process. Perhaps the most glaring missed opportunity to establish a collective identity was the first proclamation in the country's original constitution: "We the people of the Republic of Liberia were originally the inhabitants of the United States of North America" (1847 Constitution, para. 1). This statement established Liberia as a settler colonial nation-state. It also foretold the segregation between the settlers and the Indigenous groups and the incipient identity crisis in the new republic. Since then, there have been numerous missed opportunities to create a cohesive Liberian identity.

In recent years, the problem of a collective identity in Liberia has been exemplified by the many tentacles of the dual citizenship debate, some of which have been discussed in the previous chapter and sections. As noted by Alfred¹⁰⁶:

We have a country where we struggle with the crisis of identity. Who are we?
What makes us a Liberian? How can we identify ourselves if we don't have
legal documents to prove that we are indeed Liberian?

Alfred's questions relate partly to how respondents reacted to the question of what it meant to be a Liberian. Most interviewees chuckled at this question, but it was noteworthy how they all paused to carefully consider the question before answering. Underlying their responses were reasonings that resembled Harold Aidoo¹⁰⁷'s articulation here:

The question [of what it means to be Liberian] is one that must be answered
with a lot of history in mind.

The interviewees commonly referenced the founding of Liberia and the state-sanctioned bifurcation between Indigenous and settlers, which impacted Indigenous groups' attachment to their ethnic and/or County groupings over the state. Ahmed¹⁰⁸ explains:

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Alfred (Atlanta, United States), 13 Oct. 2019 (WhatsApp Call). Alfred was one of the skilled diaspora Liberians who returned to Liberia during Sirleaf's government.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Mr. Harold Aidoo (Monrovia) via WhatsApp and Telephone Call on 9th Oct. 2019. Harold was the Executive Director of the Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD) during our interview.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Ahmed (Minnesota, United States), 18 Oct. 2019 (WhatsApp Call). Ahmed is a scholar and a community leader and was instrumental in the Advocates for Human Rights' work on transitional justice in Liberia and the Truth and Reconciliation project.

The Liberian state in its early formation didn't come to the hinterland as a friendly central authority that was seeking inclusion to expand. That was not the experience. So, your sanctuary was your ethnic community ...

The system was bifurcated in such a way that, to express your full Liberianess or your complete identity, you had to retreat to where you came from, where your ancestors came from, or at least your immediate knowledge of that. That's how people identify [and say] oh, I'm from Nimba County, or I'm Krahn.

Indeed, some respondents argued against Liberia ever having a collective identity like other African countries that united under the banner of nationalism to fight against the yoke of European colonisation. Liberia did not have an easily identifiable adversary to unite against like most African states that expelled their colonial masters. In Liberia, the Americo-Liberians may have been colonisers, but their expulsion was never an option because they were also Liberians. As discussed extensively in Chapters 1 and 3, the Americo-Liberians established Liberia as a nation-state and subsequently co-opted Indigenous groups to ward off European colonists. According to the interviewees, the absence of collective Liberian identity and, to an extent, a 'common enemy' to unite against makes it easier for Liberians to turn on the state and on each other. Sheila¹⁰⁹, for example, uses nationalism in Ghana to explain the source of Liberia's identity crisis:

Ghana was colonised, and the tribes were suppressed to have that unified identity of Ghanaian for the purposes of management by the British. And then, when it was time to get rid of the colonisers, that [Ghanaian identity] unified people because people unify over enemies.

Liberia did not have that, so it was very easy to turn on itself.

Like Sheila and Ahmed, other interviewees also reasoned that Liberia's longstanding identity crisis added political salience to the civil war. People's identification with their ethnic groupings or County became even more tangible during the civil wars as the elites orchestrated the weaponisation of such connections (see Chapter 4). Liberians were forced to seek refuge within these attachments, further eroding whatever national pride they had for the state. Once

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Sheila (Rome, Italy) via Facebook Messenger on 23rd and 25th Nov. 2019. Sheila was born in Liberia but she grew up in the United States of America. She was one of the many skilled returnees who went back to Liberia following the end of the war to help rebuild their country.

again, their ethnicity and County affiliations became substantial identifiers of the state's blanket national identity.

Through interviews, it became clear that Liberian elites and the nation-state have always caused people to develop a pang of *collective guilt* with their familial and ethnic relations, be it their clan, ethnicity, County etc., which has translated into a *collective defence* of these affiliations. According to Wettee¹¹⁰, these entrenched attachments have created lasting mistrust between different groups in Liberia, especially people's consideration of the state.

Deep-seated suspicion among Liberians tends to derail consensus-building at the national level. As discussed in the previous chapter, Liberians cannot seem to agree on what is fair in the debate due to entrenched mistrust. As a result, the goalposts for fairness regarding access to national resources, in particular, keep changing. This is particularly evident in the bestowment of 'Liberianness' in the dual citizenship debate. The following section explores the conditions for belonging to Liberia.

'Liberianness is much more than Citizenship': Strategic Construction of Belonging in Post-War Liberia.

Liberianness is *true belonging*. It is a status that affords Liberians ownership of the country and its resources, making it the ultimate marker of belonging to Liberia. Yet, discussion around the conferral of Liberianness tends to manifest in a classic 'us versus them' controversy that takes on different forms depending on what is perceived to be at stake in such negotiations. According to my interviewees, Liberianness relates on some level to the instinctual answer people give to the question 'where do you come from'? As Harold¹¹¹ explains:

[Liberian] identity primarily revolves around claim[ing] ownership to a particular geographic segment of Liberia either as a Krahn, Gio, Mano, Bassa, etc. It is a convolution of having access to resources and feeling a sense of belonging and ownership to these resources either by the mere sense of that belongingness of your geographic enclave or access to the nation's wealth.

Like other interviewees, Harold emphasises origin as a condition for belonging to Liberia. Some relate Liberianness to their ethnic backgrounds, which gives them access to and

¹¹⁰ Interview with ALCOD's Chairman Emmanuel Wette (Ohio Columbus, United States), 1 Nov. 2019 (phone call).

¹¹¹ Interview with Mr. Harold Aidoo (Monrovia) via WhatsApp and Telephone Call on 9th Oct. 2019. Harold was the Executive Director of the Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD) during our interview.

ownership of land and other natural resources. The belief is that Liberian identity is ‘real’ partly because of descent or origin. Descent signifies one’s actual or *real* home, making Liberianess the ultimate identifier in the claim for Liberian identity. Liberianess grants ownership to Liberia as a country and its resources. In my interview with Joel¹¹², he explains that although he has lived in the United States for many years, he does not consider himself a *real* American simply because his origins are in Liberia. He states:

I did not originate from the US. I always have that at the back of my mind
[because] I’m not from here.

Another respondent, Ibrahim¹¹³, further explained that diaspora Liberians with American citizenship will not stop at “I am an American” when asked, “where do you come from?”:

So many Liberians have US citizenship but also say, ‘I’m a Liberian’. That identifies them and points to where they belong and their originality.

Ibrahim was an intriguing respondent who first drew my attention to the gradations of Liberianess afforded to Liberians abroad and those populations who are othered in Liberia. He is a researcher, activist and political analyst pursuing his PhD at SOAS University of London when I first interviewed him. Ibrahim explained that some in-country Liberians use his absence from home as a tool to exclude him and other diaspora Liberians from national discussions:

[We are] not on the ground, and because most of our participation is on the internet, Liberians now have a way to easily get us out of the national discussion by referring to us as internet citizens or netizens.

Both Joel and Ibrahim reference the relationship between nationality and origin and how the state confers identity and a sense of belonging to its people. For example, Appiah (2018, p.97) underscores the essentialising consequences of state recognition when he argues in the *Lies that bind* that the state powerfully shapes our identities and their possibilities. The idea that Liberianess is rooted in descent and ethnic backgrounds (even though these are quite different for settlers and Indigenous in Liberia), which bestow ownership of land and other resources to

¹¹² Interview with Joel (New York, United States), 26 Nov. 2019 (WhatsApp call). Joel is an academic and civil rights lawyer living in the United States of America. He’s had roles as an academic and consultant in Liberia.

¹¹³ Interview with Ibrahim (London, United Kingdom), 5 Oct. 2019 (Skype). Ibrahim is an academic and a political commentator who described himself as an in-country Liberian during the time of our interview. He was in the final stages of his PhD research at SOAS, University of London during our interview.

Liberian people, is shared by all my respondents. Liberianess is the ultimate marker of belonging to the post-conflict country.

However, the condition(s) for attaining Liberianess change depending on what is at stake. Some respondents indicated that ‘Congoness’ and ethnicity are sometimes used to differentiate between outsiders and ‘real Liberians’ – those who belong and can unquestionably claim ownership of Liberia. Such differentiation is prominent in the arenas of political power, including during elections and other political appointments. As discussed in Chapter 3, the ‘Congoes’ were the group of Africans whom the US Navy freed from slaving ships following the abolition of slavery. During the early stages of Liberia’s formation, the ‘Congoes’ occupied the lowest but one echelon of the hierarchical caste system, which saw the Indigenous people at the bottom and the lighter-skinned Americo-Liberians at the apex. However, in recent years, the term Congo has been used interchangeably with Americo-Liberian to differentiate between Indigenous and settler Liberians. Ciment (2016) explains that the Indigenous people first used ‘Congoes’ to describe all settlers pejoratively. But the term eventually became neutral due to its use by both natives and Americo-Liberians alike.

Nevertheless, some of my respondents intimated that some Liberians continue to use ‘Congo’ to describe those they believe to be outsiders pejoratively. For example, in May 2019, President Weah suspended Eugene Fahngon, the Deputy Information Minister, for stoking old ethnic tensions. Mr Fahngon posted on his Facebook page that a planned anti-government demonstration – ‘Save the State’ – scheduled for June 7 was engineered by the “Congo Liberians”. A government statement following Fahngon’s suspension emphasised that the Weah government was “committed to a ‘one country, one people’ policy with zero tolerance on divisive politicking or tribalism” (GoL 2019).

Similarly, other respondents maintained that while Congoness is more a way of life than an ethnic category, it is increasingly becoming an identifier for people deemed not to possess true Liberianess. As explained by Jerry¹¹⁴ here:

From my own experience, people classify others based on their level of education, exposure, travel, and how they live their life. So, it’s like if someone is very educated and conducts themselves with good ethics; they’re going to

¹¹⁴ Interview with Jerry (Monrovia) 12 & 15 Oct. 2019 (WhatsApp & Call). Jerry is a young economist who described himself as an in-country Liberian. He wanted to remain anonymous since he was working in the economic planning ministry during our interview.

blame you as someone who is an Americo-Liberian, a Congo person, as they refer to it.

For example, my parents are from the Bassa ethnic group [but] they classify me as Congo because of my level of education and how I conduct myself. But I'm Indigenous Liberian.

Many of my respondents shared Jerry's argument, particularly those who have spent some time abroad. Consequently, the condition for utilising the Congo identity category in recent times is strategic, as indicated by Jerry, who suggests the identifier is sometimes used to imply a lack of indigeneity. A case in point is the popular classification of President Weah as a son of the land during the initial phases of his political career. At the same time, his predecessor, Sirleaf, was described as Americo-Liberian, although both have Indigenous backgrounds. Considering the classifications that some respondents described, Sirleaf and Weah should be categorised as 'Congo' because they have spent a significant part of their lives abroad. They are privileged in the truest sense of the word – Weah as an international football star and Sirleaf as a senior staff member in international organisations such as the World Bank. Yet it is mostly Sirleaf who receives such treatment. The point here is that the scrutiny of Liberianess is political and strategic since Liberians pick and choose when and to whom to apply these conditions of belonging to Liberia.

Further, ethnicity is again used as justification for excluding those perceived to be outsiders from accessing land and other opportunities. A case in point is the Mandingo, who migrated to present-day Liberia like several different ethnic groups but are constantly isolated as outsiders (see Chapter 3).

Stemming from the degrees of Liberianess afforded to claimants of dual citizenship, the in-country interviewees made a point of differentiating between possessing citizenship and 'being Liberian' (Liberianess). While being Liberian is partly dependent on your citizenship status, Liberianess is much more because it confers belonging to Liberia. As a result, people need more than just legal recognition to belong.

Liberianess is about originating in Liberia. It is about having 'Negro' ancestry. It is about practising Liberian culture and being knowledgeable of the country's way of life, which is sometimes evident by being born to Liberian parents or living in-country for an unspecified number of years, by having knowledge of and love for Liberian food, possessing a Liberian

accent and being knowledgeable of Pidgin English – the list goes on and on. Jerry sums up the conditions of Liberianess as:

If you're a Liberian, it's not just about citizenship; it's about knowing the culture, the environment, and the dynamics of things. Someone who has Liberian citizenship and has lived in Liberia for a substantial period of their life; understands the terrain and is knowledgeable of the Liberian way of life.

[The Liberian way of life] is like the cultural practices: things that Liberians do, how Liberians behave, and how they speak their Pidgin language. Typical Liberian behaviour like someone who was born, grew up and living in Liberia, how they interact with people, what they do, and what they don't do. So, for me, those things are things that make one a Liberian.

As evidenced in Jerry's description above, the list of what constitutes Liberianess is subjective but strategic, as it depends on who bestows or denies this identity. Most interviewees cited a Liberian accent and speaking Pidgin English as markers of Liberianess. Nevertheless, the answer to the question, 'What does it mean to be Liberian?' is not fixed and remains dependent on context.

These contestations over who can legitimately claim Liberianess demonstrate the *shift* from the personal dimension to the social or the politics of belonging in Liberia (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011; Yuval-Davis (2006, 2011). In such situations, people use categorical boundaries such as ethnicity (and 'Congoness'), class, gender, sexuality, race, and other identifiers to negotiate identity and belonging. As Yuval-Davis explains, belonging "is not just about social locations and constructions of individual and collective identities and attachments but also about the ways these are valued and judged" (2006, pp.199-204). We move from the personalised aspect of belonging into the politics of belonging when contestations over ethical and philosophical issues use socio-political and economic locations and identity narratives to establish boundaries of belonging.

Liberia's case demonstrates why Yuval-Davis (2006, 2011) implores researchers to approach belonging with an intersectional lens, arguing that such a lens enables the consideration of belonging as a dynamic process negotiated and constructed along multiple axes of difference.

Consequently, in considering how Liberians are forging new relations with each other and their country in the post-war era, we have to consider the social and economic locations of individual Liberians, their varying narratives of identifications and emotional attachments but also the

ways these positionalities are valued and judged. Hence, Liberia's past as a settler colony – the economic and socio-political structures and the boundaries of identity and belonging established and perpetuated by the settler regime for decades – is significant in these evaluations.

Liberians' current negotiation and construction of identity and belonging along current poverty levels and established inequalities relates to their judgement of the country's settler colonial past. Liberia has a history of powerful groups utilising their positionality to dominate political, social, and economic outcomes and opportunities. A significant portion of the population is marginalised and is seemingly trapped in poverty. Accordingly, it is reasonable for in-country Liberians to argue against dual citizenship and utilise Liberianess as an exclusionary tool to starve off what they believe to be a recolonising tool by a small, powerful group.

Despite the practicality of this strategy, particularly when considering opposition arguments within the context of Liberia's colonial past, our knowledge of settler colonialism suggests that opposition motives may be more intricate than just dual citizenship being a recolonising tool. Indeed, just as I have questioned the true intent of the post-conflict state's pursuance and emphasis on the construction of a collective identity (Chapter 5), it is equally reasonable to interrogate the true objectives of in-country stakeholders in their opposition and heralding of claimants as 'invading foreigners' determined to buy up all the land and recolonise Liberia. As I have argued throughout this thesis, the defining characteristic of settler colonialism is its enduring but invisible structures and logics as well as its disavowed nature. Thus, in settler colonial settings, the state and elites continually invest in political projects of belonging to either bury the colonial past or divert the world's attention from its permanence. Essentially, if it serves the interest of the post-conflict state for Liberians to continually 'fight' over dual citizenship and the borders of belonging to Liberia (see Chapter 5), then it may equally serve the interest of powerful elites in-country for ordinary Liberians to continually look to the diaspora or elsewhere when they apportion blame for their misfortunes. This is because these elites are also beneficiaries of the inequalities established by the colonial regime and would ideally want to protect the privileges those structures give them in today's Liberia.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed how belonging to Liberia is being negotiated and constructed between the state and all Liberians and between individuals and collectivities. It shows that Liberianess encompasses contestations over claims for belonging relating to identity,

citizenship, ethnicity, and other categorical boundaries that raise questions about inclusion and exclusion in post-war Liberia.

I have argued that the shifting conditions that Liberians in-country attach to the attainment of Liberianess and the push for maintaining the racial clause in the country's citizenship laws are purposefully exclusionary. This is because Liberia's restrictive citizenship laws are seen as a protective measure that will ensure the country continues to be a space for Black self-determination as envisioned by its founders, while at the same time guaranteeing that current and future generations of Liberians are not ruled by either non-Black people or a small, privileged group.

Beyond the imagined protective role of Liberia's restrictive citizenship laws, the chapter shows that colonial anxieties from the brutal reign of the Americo-Liberians continue to shape citizenship negotiations today. Diaspora Liberians and non-'Negro' migrants who aspire to dual citizenship are seen as agents of recolonisation. Thus, to prevent Liberia's recolonisation, Liberianess is constructed as dependent on origin and descent but also as emanating from an arbitrary list of conditions purposefully crafted to deny claimants of dual citizenship.

Chapter 8: Conclusion, Reflections & Significance

In this thesis, I sought to answer the research question, "how does Liberia's complex history and present-day reconstruction shape questions of identity and belonging?". The idea for this study emanated from calls by President Weah and former President Sirleaf for diaspora Liberians to return home and help rebuild their homeland. Such calls were often met by requests to rework Liberia's strict nationality laws prohibiting dual and non-Black citizenship. In particular, Liberian diaspora groups have often demanded a formalisation of the identity of tens of thousands of Liberians in the diaspora who have lost their citizenship by naturalising in other countries. I wanted to get to the root of these exchanges and the construction of identity and belonging in post-conflict Liberia. Hence, I used the discourse generated by the country's dual citizenship debate to interpret the complex positions taken on Liberia's identity question. It became clear from the debate that three stakeholder groups – the Liberian government (state),

Liberian diaspora groups, and Liberians in-country – shape the discussions on the construction of collective identity and a sense of belonging that embraces *all* Liberians, both at home and abroad. Moreover, a review of Liberia's history revealed it to be a unique case of settler colonialism, putting into context the anxieties of some Liberians about ongoing structural inequalities and their framing of dual citizenship as a recolonising tool.

This thesis is presented as a two-part study. Firstly, I re-theorise Liberia's history by analysing it as a settler colonial society established by formerly enslaved African-Americans in the 1800s. The colonisers in Liberia's case were Black people, thus differentiating it from the well-known British white dominion settler societies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States (CANZUS states). Significantly, the articulation of Liberia as a settler colonial project exposed gaps in settler colonial studies' theorisation of settler colonialism on the African continent and the need for an integrative framework to account for settler colonialism in places like Liberia. Thus, the introduction of critical race theory and its postulation of whiteness as a form of power structure that can be occupied and moved by different people meant that this thesis provides avenues to build on how race is articulated with settler colonialism. The project's integrative framework reveals settler colonialism in practice concerning Liberia's modern state formation, its impact on Indigenous lives and institutional arrangements, and how the fight to decolonise culminated in Liberia's civil wars. Re-theorising Liberia's formation as a settler colony exposes the structures of the antagonisms Liberians are currently grappling with and clarifies what is at stake in contemporary contestations over Liberia and its resources. The second part of the thesis analysed how identity and belonging are constructed in the post-war era based on this new understanding of Liberia's past as a colonial project that entrenched inequalities to privilege settlers and other elites assimilated into the settler structure. It focused on the rebirth of a new Liberia and the determination of the state not to repeat historical injustices. The state has often proposed dual citizenship legislation as a means to construct a collective identity that unites and encourages investment in the post-war development agenda. Diaspora groups have supported such proposals and urged incumbent governments to amend the Nationality Law. Despite acknowledging the economic benefits, in-country Liberians have remained unconvinced of the need for a national policy on dual citizenship (Wongbe 2018). Hence, the failure of the 2020 referendum to attain the required two-thirds majority. The Weah government has recently passed an Amendment Law that repeals the ban on dual citizenship. Still, the debate continues.

Throughout this thesis I have argued that the dual citizenship debate reflects the politics of belonging and identity contestations that framed Liberia's formation as a settler colony. I contend that the dual citizenship debate illuminates the connection between ongoing structural inequality in Liberia and the country's settler colonial background. Thus, contemporary contestations over identity and citizenship are ultimately about belonging (Liberianness). It is also about formalised access regarding the right to call Liberia home and/or claim ownership of the country and its resources. Concerns about inequality and its manifestations in political power and economic outcomes and opportunities are fundamental to questions of who can claim Liberian identity in the post-war era. Liberians in-country are particularly wary about dual citizenship reinforcing the systems of domination that characterise settler colonialism in Liberia.

In the paragraphs below, I tease out the key ideas in each part of the thesis and emphasise the logic of their arguments and contribution to knowledge.

Part 1: Re-Theorising Liberia's History as a Settler Colony

This part of the thesis is focused on the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological frameworks utilised in the thesis and demonstrates the enduring structures of settler colonialism in Liberia's history. A more robust analytical account and critique of settler colonial theory emerged as I presented Liberia as a unique settler colonial project, demonstrating the nexus of settler colonialism and entrenched inequality in Liberia (Introduction and Chapter 1).

Firstly, my engagement with the settler colonial framework revealed a tilted landscape in the discourse and literature on settler colonialism. Theoretical developments and empirical analysis of settler colonialism have focused on a narrow range of settler societies, particularly those that emerged from British imperial designs (the CANZUS states). The framework's (initial) emphasis on the CANZUS states is logical, considering Patrick Wolfe, the pioneering theorist of settler colonialism, was an Australian anthropologist. Hence it makes sense for his work to focus on Australia and similar contexts.

Nevertheless, I show that African countries such as Algeria, South Africa, Kenya, Namibia, Mozambique, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and others provided the context for some of the formative work of settler colonial studies (Veracini 2013). Still, the framework's emphasis relegates these African countries to the background. The absence of African settler states within the analysis of settler colonialism is due primarily to their decolonised status. There is also the question of

their minority settler populations, which prompts further debates about the applicability of the framework in the African context and the indigeneity of African native groups.

I contest the limited analysis of these African settler states in settler colonial studies, noting that they are primarily in the background because of the framework's emphasis on features that mainly apply to Anglophone settler societies. Indeed, African cases showed how the 'logic of elimination' pioneered in Patrick Wolfe's theorisations of settler colonialism and further developed by Lorenzo Veracini and others had to be curtailed in societies with a large majority of colonised people vis-a-vis the number of settlers. These scholars theorise settler colonisation as an ongoing structure (rather than a historical event or period within a country's history) with an economy structured on the cultural and demographic elimination of sovereign Indigenous populations to facilitate settlers' access to land and property. This theorisation is crucial as it helps us understand and recognise the enduring impact of settler colonisation on Indigenous cultures and societies. Consequently, these African states' decolonisation status has contributed to their summary dismissal in the settler colonial framework. Ultimately, the theory emphasises the ongoing and structural nature of settler colonialism.

Nonetheless, following Cavanagh's (2012, 2013) argument for the inclusion of a postcolonial South Africa in settler colonial studies, I posit that settler states such as South Africa, Zimbabwe and several other African countries demonstrate the lasting impacts of settler colonialism in these contexts even in their postcolonial condition. Using disparities between white and Black South Africans as a lens, I emphasise the political and socio-economic development imbalances. These imbalances relate to systemic inequalities of outcomes (land ownership, income wealth and educational attainment) and opportunities (unequal access to economic gains and political power) in postcolonial African settler states and demonstrate the connection between inequality and the enduring structures of settler colonialism. In sum, while these states are fundamentally different from the prototypical CANZUS settler societies, African societies such as South Africa and Zimbabwe that have decolonised structurally are not able to entirely throw off the impacts of decades of settler colonial rule, especially concerning socio-economic impacts.

Such insights from these African contexts puts Liberia in a league of its own within the settler colonial framework. Analyses in this thesis have shown that Liberia has not achieved what can be logically considered a structural decolonisation nor the dismantling of settler colonial systems and processes even with the coup d'état and the civil war. Rather, the enduring nature of settler colonial structures have produced varying forms of contestations manifested in the

country's contentious citizenship debate. In this sense, Liberia contributes to ongoing discussions about the structures of settler colonialism and whether these structures are indeed permanent as argued by early theorists such as Patrick Wolfe. Scholars have often asked what these permanent structures mean for [Indigenous] agency and resistance and have criticised the field's supposed inability to imagine effective settler decolonisation. This thesis complicates some of these thinking by showing that settler colonial structures do endure. Clearly, however, the enduring structures of settler colonialism in Liberia have not succeeded in stripping people of agency. Instead, they have provided grounds for resistance and contestation.

As I have noted in Chapter 1, debates on the indigeneity of native African groups within settler colonial studies is beyond the scope of this thesis. Yet, the connection between the debate and the minoritised status of white colonists in settler colonial cases on the African continent is worth mentioning. Robin Kelley (2017) has argued that analyses that dispute African indigeneity in settler colonial contexts erroneously erase the presence of settlers in African history. More importantly, such theorisations foreclose discussions about what it means for settler states to decolonise and what that process entails. Indeed, a section of this chapter highlights some Indigenous critiques of settler colonial theory.

I aim to emphasise that an engagement with Liberia and other cases like South Africa and similar others in Africa and elsewhere in the decolonised world should embolden us to amend and move the theoretical framework beyond the CANZUS states.

Secondly, while I have critiqued the absence of an African context in the analysis of settler colonialism, particularly in the work of Patrick Wolfe, I maintain that settler colonial theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the logic of settler regimes and the lasting impact of settlers' extractive processes on native populations beyond the CANZUS states. The approach provides the vocabulary to articulate the structures of domination and exploitation of Indigenous groups in contexts like Liberia.

Yet Liberia's case does not fit neatly into the framework's theorisations of a settler majority, a logic of elimination, and a conceptual structure that maps whiteness onto settlers and Blackness onto Indigenous groups and their cultures. So, how do we adapt settler colonial theory to account for cases like Liberia, where the settler collective was the minority? Significantly, the settlers in Liberia's case were mostly formerly enslaved Black people from America, so I had to contemplate whether Black people could be colonists considering the positioning of Blackness in the slaveholding regime. To do this, I focused on the structures of settler

colonialism in Liberia, the construct of the nation-state to absorb/replace Indigenous lands and sovereign entities especially, and the political and socio-economic domination of Indigenous groups. I argued that Liberia is a typical settler colonial regime because of those structures' presence and enduring nature. Moreso, the colonial relationship the Americo-Liberians developed toward the Indigenous groups and the lands they appropriated.

In addition, I employed some canons of critical race theory, particularly the conceptualisation of whiteness, to explain why the Americo-Liberians were colonists despite their racial background and to examine how their Blackness positioned them in the global tapestry of imperialism. In the slaveholding regime, whiteness was the normative category or the measure against which all other racialised groups were ordered and valued. Whiteness bestows power and structural advantages to dominant groups in settler societies because it operates as an identity category. It is a power structure that works as a form of property, thus enabling its shifting nature but also its holders the ability to accumulate capital and social appreciation. I argued that the Americo-Liberians embodied whiteness and enacted the system of white supremacy that underpins settler colonialism's material reproduction and violent cultural and geographic elimination of Indigenous lives and sovereign entities. The Americo-Liberians embodied whiteness as a form of power. That positioning facilitated the racialisation of the Indigenous groups as 'inferior' and other dehumanising categories that settlers in the colonial world typically deploy to justify their domination of colonised others. In this sense, whiteness becomes a knowledge system, an identity category that can be assumed and reproduced by different actors irrespective of their cosmetic appearance. Accordingly, the 'settlerness' of the Americo-Liberians emanated from their power and establishment of dominant socio-economic and political systems to protect their interests and the racialised relations they developed towards the Indigenous groups.

My integrative theoretical framework enabled a broader analysis of settler contexts like Liberia within the theoretical boundaries of settler colonialism as provided by Wolfe (2006, 2016), Veracini (2010, 2013), Cavanagh (2012, 2013), Mamdani (1998, 2015, 202), Moreton-Robinson (2015), and others while making room for settler colonial theory to speak to other significant theoretical frameworks. Integrating critical race theory, particularly the articulation of whiteness as a knowledge system, facilitated the avenue to reintroduce the settler into Liberia's history. By shifting the analytical gaze beyond the features of Anglophone settler regimes and breaking away from traditional approaches that centre Wolfe's eliminatory logic, this thesis makes a crucial contribution to settler colonial studies. It enriches the research

program on settler colonialism and the work that seeks to further the framework as a transnational paradigm.

Thirdly, I contribute context-specific knowledge to settler colonial studies regarding the praxis and tools of settler colonialism in Liberia. Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrated settler colonialism's operational and enduring structures in Liberia and how it climaxed into the Samuel Doe-led coup d'état in 1980 and the ensuing civil wars from December 1989 to April 2003. These chapters confirmed my theoretical argument that Liberia was a settler colonial project (Chapter 1), although it does not possess some of the characteristics that tend to be emphasised in settler colonial theory. I introduced the nature of African societies on the Grain Coast before the arrival of the Americo-Liberians to demonstrate how settler colonialism impacted Indigenous culture and socio-political structures. We encountered in the Grain Coast a societal arrangement connected to the global economic system through trade and engagement with European merchants and explorers, and a political system hinged on shifting centres of political power due to the abundance of stateless societies that traversed the West African region at the time.

I highlighted the migratory patterns of the Indigenous groups and the 'conquer or be conquered' philosophy typical of the era to support my argument that the 'settlerisation' of the Americo-Liberians did not emerge from their movement to the Grain Coast nor their creation of a sovereign state alone. In this sense, Mamdani's (1998) "Native-Settlers" category, as discussed in Chapter 1, helps clarify my categorisation of the African ethnic groups as Indigenous, despite the majority migrating to the Grain Coast, and the Americo-Liberians as settlers, not repatriates or immigrants as they are commonly categorised.

Accordingly, I argued that categorising settlers as 'geographical outsiders' who establish sovereign political systems does not translate in Liberia's case. I demonstrate in Chapter 3 that the Americo-Liberians and most of the so-called Indigenous groups migrated to the Grain Coast and established sovereign political structures through native conquests. However, following Evri and Kotef (2020), I argued that the settlerisation of the 'moving person' occurs through their relationship with appropriated lands and the people they encounter on those lands. The chapter helps clarify the argument that the Americo-Liberians were settlers because they racialised the people they met on the Grain Coast as 'savages'. As I have previously mentioned, it is common for the settler state to racialise all others as inferior and in need of 'development' in the settler colonial world. Liberia was one such settler state, and the Americo-Liberian

settlers utilised the same racial violence and eliminatory strategies to dominate the Indigenous groups.

This thesis' framing of ethnicity as a process, and identity as a choice, that people/groups prioritise depending on what is at stake (Chapter 2) was particularly insightful. It provided the lens to understand the aims and motivations of the two main groups (Americo- and Indigenous Liberians) from whom the nation-state Liberia originated. Framing ethnicity as a process showed that the groups inhabiting the Grain Coast were not static entities defined by their territorial boundaries and biological traits as alleged by primordial understandings of group origins. Instead, we saw in political formations such as the Gola Kingdom and the Mandingo Kondo Confederacy, as well as the unique alliances and targeting of specific ethnic groups during Liberia's civil wars (Chapter 4), that ethnicity is an identity that can express as a politicised social action. Hence, leaders of political projects harness solidarity from potential members using identity/ethnic markers. Nonetheless, politicised actions in response to these solidarity calls by potential members often emanate from what is perceived to be at stake. Moreover, those institutional arrangements – the Gola and Mandingo Confederacies – demonstrated what was at stake for the Indigenous groups with the arrival of the settlers and their construction of Liberia, and explained the seeming unending social conflicts that marred relations between them and the Americo-Liberians.

Similarly, we come to appreciate the aspirations of the Americo-Liberians. Specifically, how the racial violence of their repatriation process influenced their identity formation on the Grain Coast, their relations with Indigenous people and their sovereign entities, and the eventual creation of the nation-state Liberia to assimilate Indigenous structures.

Identity and ethnicity in their contemporary conceptualisations emphasise societal relations. This lens helps us comprehend the Americo-Liberians' *othering* of the Indigenous groups and the 'Us versus Them' dichotomies that characterised Liberia's formation. The Americo-Liberians were themselves an oppressed group. Yet, they internalised white American racism and saw themselves as superior to the African Blacks they encountered on the Grain Coast. They colonised the Indigenous groups because they believed that they were superior. Their assumed identity and superior status facilitated their construction of Liberia on the affectations of the racial regime they encountered in the Antebellum South. Certain groups had to occupy the lower echelons of Liberia's societal hierarchy. To the Americo-Liberians, it made practical sense for the Africans to occupy this status because they had not encountered whiteness the

same way they had. The Americo-Liberians were superior because they had escaped the category of African Blackness and its 'nonhuman' positionality in the slaveholding regime.

These different identity categories were foundational to Liberia's formation and the structures of domination that characterised Indigenous groups' lives and institutional arrangements for over a hundred years. Throughout the thesis, I argue that the duration of settler colonialism has entrenched systemic inequality in Liberia, producing imbalances in economic and socio-political development between descendants of Americo-Liberians and their supporters versus the majority of Indigenous groups. I presented Liberia's civil wars as a consequence and a continuation of the violent extractive system established by the Americo-Liberian hegemony to fiercely protect their interests and those of their supporters. Therefore, this thesis departs from mainstream media and academic narratives that dismiss Liberia's civil conflicts as 'ethnic' or 'resource' wars.

Instead, I present the war as a manifestation of Liberia's settler colonial history. Consequently, ethnicity, natural resources, and other objective factors commonly considered the root cause of Liberia's civil wars were mere mediums. Faction leaders like Charles Taylor, Alhaji Kromah, Prince Johnson, and other rebels utilised ethnic affiliations to recruit fighters and looters of Liberia's natural resources to finance their violent campaigns. Discussions in Chapters 3 and 4 support my contention that contemporary citizenship debates and related controversies over who can legitimately claim Liberian identity are grounded in historical legacies of systemic inequality. This argument is exemplified in Part 2 of the thesis, where I engage with interview respondents from the diaspora and in-country regarding how they construct Liberian identity and what informs the meanings they attach to the category of Liberianess.

The first part of the thesis also contributes to Liberian studies and other research focused on peace and state-building processes in post-conflict settings. The thesis provides a different lens to interpret the American resettlement program from which Liberia originated, particularly its impact on the racialised relations between the Americo-Liberians and the African ethnic groups. It also provides avenues to rethink Liberia's civil wars. Specifically, how the country's historical legacies of political domination and socioeconomic marginalisation made the emergence of political actors like Samuel Doe and rebel leaders like Charles Taylor and Prince Johnson inevitable. Significantly, the civil wars represented a climax of a social conflict that started in 1822 with the arrival of the first group of settlers on the shores of the Grain Coast, as argued by Morten Bøås (2005).

Part 2: Contestations Over What it Means to be Liberian.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 return the analytical focus to contemporary discussions on constructing a collective Liberian identity and how the three stakeholder groups – the state, diaspora groups, and Liberians in-country – are shaping questions of identity and belonging in the post-war era.

Inequality and current poverty levels were the most critical theme in the narratives on identity construction in the post-war era. Thus, inequalities in Liberia, as they relate to access to power, inclusive economic opportunities and expressions of belonging, are fundamental to the meanings all three stakeholders attach to Liberian identity and their construction of what it means to possess Liberianess. As discussed in the introductory chapter, Liberia is one of the world's poorest and most unequal countries; hence, fears about inequalities and how identity and citizenship claims impact the wellbeing of different population groupings are not at all misplaced.

Consequently, at the centre of the dual citizenship debate are conceptions of Liberianess – the ultimate marker of belonging to Liberia. Diaspora Liberians perceive themselves marginalised in both their home and host countries, and so consider access to dual citizenship a practical strategy that formalises their Liberianess and provides them and their children a route back to their real home in Liberia. In-country Liberians purposefully conceptualise Liberianess as an exclusionary tool to prevent their colonisation by a small, privileged group with dual citizenship. Liberia's settler colonial past and present are evident in the back-and-forth nature of the dual citizenship debate. Indeed, the contested meanings of Liberianess that play out in the debate are related to the historical injustices and structural inequality established by the settler regime. The enduring nature of these unequal political and socio-economic systems and the devastating poverty levels have eroded trust in Liberia's political systems. This lack of trust has generated conflictual and unstable expectations about elites' future behaviour and the implications for the ordinary Liberian. The anxieties of in-country Liberians and why they consider dual citizenship a recolonising tool and dual citizens as the new settler-colonisers are understandable if we consider the invisibility of settler colonialism even in a supposedly post-colonial Liberia.

Nevertheless, the enactment of the Amendment Law by the Weah government in July 2022, despite public opposition, provides an interesting lens to think through the actual winners and losers that emerged from the supposed resolution of Liberia's contentious dual citizenship

debate. In the section below, I tease out some of the key insights and emphasise the logic of their arguments.

Inequality and Claims for Identity and Belonging in Post-Conflict Liberia

Liberia is burdened with devastating levels of poverty and inequality. The loss of human and institutional capacity was one of the most significant consequences of the country's turbulent years of repressive governments, coup d'état and civil wars. Mass emigration of educated and skilled labour into the diaspora meant Liberia was and is faced with a drastic shortage of adequately skilled workers and professionals with relevant technical experience to support the delivery of essential services and inclusive development. The state has thus looked to the Liberian diaspora as a source of "material power" (Koinova & Tsourapas 2018) to support the revitalisation of post-conflict service delivery. As a resource or material power for the state's development agenda, diaspora Liberians are often relied upon to compensate for and remedy the state's inability to deliver essential services and economic opportunities to the citizenry.

Therefore, the Liberian state promotes the construction of a collective Liberian identity via dual citizenship and its agenda for post-conflict reconstruction as one and the same. It deploys belonging as a resource and a justification for the boundaries of inclusion in the New Liberia. Both post-conflict governments have maintained that the allowance of dual citizenship will foster a sense of belonging among *all* Liberians and pave the way for sustainable development. They envisioned changes in the country's strict nationality laws would encourage investment and unite the different cleavages that emerged from the civil war. Liberian diaspora groups are invested in this approach and resolutely believe that dual citizenship will facilitate Liberia's inclusive and sustainable development aspirations.

However, I argued that the reciprocal approach deployed by the state to market proposals for dual citizenship is inherently flawed. By their own admission (in Liberia's National Development Plan (2018-2023)), the Weah government at least recognises that diaspora Liberians do not yet have the means to deliver the kinds of engagement (establish the private sector and/or return to join the local workforce) and investments needed to make the type of developmental jump they have envisioned for the New Liberia. Practically, Liberia does not have the necessary regulatory frameworks such as financial systems and regulations, portable pensions, tax incentives, flexible citizenship laws¹¹⁵, and other structures to facilitate higher investment in-flows and efficient management of remittances (Carment and Calleja 2017). As

¹¹⁵ One could argue the process for this has started with the enactment of the Amendment Law in July 2022.

discussed in Chapter 5, most diaspora remittances are consumed or spent on specific essential services because about 40 per cent of the population live below the poverty line.

In contrast to the beliefs of the state and diaspora groups, Liberians in-country appear unconvinced of the potential for a dual citizenship policy to translate into increased investments and economic opportunities for the citizenry (Chapter 6). Instead, they consider the allowance of dual citizenship as a means of opening the country up to influences from (negative) foreign culture but, more significantly, aggravating the country's already entrenched inequalities and poverty levels. Interestingly, diaspora Liberians are appreciative of some of these concerns. Yet, they resolutely insist that dual citizenship is Liberia's most reasonable choice going forward, believing that it will facilitate the repatriation of the expertise, skills, and human resources from the diaspora.

Contemporary negotiations on identity in post-conflict Liberia crescendos in Chapter 7 as we seek to understand the lingering fears underlying claims for and rejection of dual citizenship. The connection between endemic poverty and structural inequality and Liberia's settler colonial background is prominent in the restrictive framing of Liberianess. The interview respondents utilise Liberianess as an identifier or an identity category rooted in descent and culture but which transcends citizenship. Liberianess confers true belonging to claimants of Liberian identity, enabling legitimate access to Liberia as home, as well as ownership of the country and its resources. To in-country Liberians especially, you could have citizenship and still not possess Liberianess because it is the ultimate identifier. Yet, what constitutes Liberianess is entirely subjective and dependent on what is at stake, who is claiming it or bestowing/denying it.

The claim for dual citizenship by diaspora Liberians emanates from what they perceived to be a dual marginalisation that haunts their reality and their children's futures. Therefore, access to dual citizenship is a practical strategy that formalises their Liberianess and provides a route back to their *real home*. It is also an alternative choice for their children to find a route back to their roots in Liberia. In deciphering how diaspora Liberians conceptualise their Liberian identity and its opportunities, I borrowed Sara Ahmed's definition of a real home. Ahmed defines a real home as "the very space from which one imagines oneself to have originated, and in which one projects the self as both homely and original" (1999, p.320). I considered home not merely a geographical location but also an emotional space that contributes to our identities and who we are. Thus, who we are, individually or as part of a group, is linked to where we feel at home.

Diaspora Liberians certainly do not feel at home in their host countries. Consequently, I argued that their racialised experiences underline their claim for dual citizenship as ethnic minorities in the global North. Diaspora Liberians' need for a real home is located within a perception of marginalisation that they experience in their host countries and when they return to their homeland. Firstly, diaspora Liberians see a permanence to their *otherness* in the diaspora due to their Liberian descent. Their positionality as Black people, immigrants, refugees, and all the different identity markers that shape their minoritised status and racialised experiences in the global North hinders bonds of belonging to their host countries. Secondly, they feel ostracised in Liberia when they return for visits and work opportunities because of their diaspora status. Somehow, their unwillingness to give up their premium passports and residencies in the global North is considered a negative mark on their loyalty to their home country and commitment to its reconstruction and development. Despite the legitimacy of these experiences, I highlight the equivalences between the doubleness of home that appears available to diaspora Liberians as it was to the Americo-Liberian settlers who claimed indigeneity in Liberia but still clung resolutely to their American roots.

It becomes apparent in the interviews that Liberians in-country purposefully utilise Liberianess as an exclusionary tool in contemporary citizenship and identity negotiations in an attempt to thwart a repeat of Liberia's settler colonial history in the post-war era. There is a pervasive fear among Liberians in-country, especially about a possible recolonisation by another group of domineering elites. They argue that if these groups are given dual citizenship, they will buy up all the land, control the economy and push for policies that will further impoverish Liberians.

As indicated throughout this thesis, two main groups are demanding dual citizenship in Liberia. I have discussed the implications of diaspora Liberians' claims more extensively because the thesis is focused primarily on their engagement in Liberia's state-building process. Still, I deemed it essential to highlight citizenship demands by non-Negro migrants, particularly the Lebanese community, who are not entitled to Liberian citizenship because of their non-Black ancestry. Yet, their economic dominance in Liberia means they have significant political influence, thus making them critical stakeholders in the dual citizenship debate. Hence, I used the Lebanese community, arguably the most visible non-Negro migrant group in Liberia, as a lens to interpret the impact of Liberia's infamous racial clause on current dual citizenship negotiations. It was clear from the interviews that the presence and demands of the Lebanese community - even at the fringes of the debate - contributed to the fears some Liberians have

about the possibility of dual citizenship allowance, including its eventual impact on the lives of ordinary Liberians.

In the interviews, diaspora Liberians seemed convinced that the debate had dragged on for decades because most Liberians were confused about the difference between their claims for dual citizenship and the removal of the racial clause. They were partly right in that assumption, bearing in mind that most people, even those from the Liberian government, often talk of the country's strict nationality laws as being racist and in contradiction with international laws and global migration trends.

However, this assumption was disproved when Weah's Proposition 1, heralded by both diaspora and in-country Liberians as a 'practical' compromise, failed to get the constitutional threshold needed to allow dual citizenship in Liberia. As discussed more expansively in Chapter 6, Proposition 1 moved the debate away from the racial clause, thus still upholding Liberia's racial restriction as 'protectionary' and maintaining the country as a space for Black self-determination. Instead, it centred on why many diaspora Liberians were forced to naturalise elsewhere and the benefits of dual citizenship to Liberia's aspirations for inclusive and sustainable development. More importantly, Proposition 1 countered opponents' fears about the impact of multiple citizenships on national security, job opportunities, and the interests of marginalised people in-country, as well as concerns regarding handling corrupt dual citizens by attaching a caveat that disqualified dual citizens from elected and appointed positions. Yet, it still failed to gain momentum among in-country Liberians and a combination of lower voter turnout, a staggering number of invalid votes, and other issues resulted in the overall failure of the December 2020 referendum.

It was apparent from my interviews with in-country Liberians that most people knew the citizenship debate was about two separate items: dual and non-Black citizenship. All these respondents were clear about the legitimacy of the citizenship demands by diaspora Liberians and understood that Weah's Proposition 1 was clear about maintaining the racial clause. Yet, the general view was that it was unfair for diaspora Liberians to gain Liberian citizenship in addition to their already privileged status. In-country Liberians' rejection of dual citizenship was based on the belief that neither dual nor Black citizenship option was in the country's interest, particularly for Liberians who are poor and marginalised. Ultimately, race matters in the debate because giving Liberian citizenship to people without African ancestry are still believed to go against the fabric of the Liberian society and the principles upon which the country was established.

Nevertheless, anxieties about a possible recolonisation by ‘white people’ through dual citizenship are not just about non-Black people, as scholars like Ludwig (2016) and Akyeampong (2006) have argued. These fears are about a small, privileged group dominating Liberia and its fortunes once again, irrespective of their race. Indeed, the phrase ‘white people’ seems to be used as a *metaphor* to describe not only non-Negro migrants like the Lebanese community but also diaspora Liberians. The ‘white people’ category is more about the *positionality* of these groups and what they represent than their actual skin colour. Therefore, providing parallels to the Americo-Liberian settlers’ embodiment of whiteness to facilitate the racialisation and subjugation of the Indigenous majority, as argued earlier (see Chapter 1). The opportunities a dual citizenship policy affords diaspora Liberians (specifically the quality of Liberianess) are illustrative of the shifting and accumulative nature of whiteness.

Therefore, in-country Liberians confer gradations or levels of Liberianess to claimants of Liberian identity to keep diaspora Liberians continuously guessing whether they actually belong or otherwise. No matter how limited, in-country Liberians possess a lot of the power in the construction of a collective Liberian identity in the post-war era. This is because Liberianess is a subjective identity category, and possessing it relies entirely on who bestows or denies this identity. Interestingly, the shifting construction of Liberianess, and its conferral and withdrawal as dependent on what is at stake also shares some parallels with whiteness and its conceptualisation as a form of property. On some level, Liberianess works as a form of property. Possessing Liberianess enable Liberians – wherever they may be located – to formally accumulate capital and social appreciation in Liberia. There is need for further work to determine the mechanics of Liberianess as mutable and accumulative, drawing comparisons between it and how whiteness works to sustain the power of specific groups in settler colonial contexts. Such work could shed further light on the question of who a Liberia is and what that identity actually means.

Moreover, the fact that the Weah government passed the Amendment Law despite the public’s obvious opposition to dual citizenship recalls Kevin Bruyneel’s (2021) articulation of the workings of disavowal and settler memory in settler societies. In Liberia, the dual citizenship debate has been a perfect camouflage. The debate’s back-and-forth nature and eventual resolution are reminiscent of how settler memory works to conceal the workings of settler colonial structures and processes. It provided an effective means of disavowal by the state and elites on both sides of the debate who have rendered invisible the groups and communities marginalised by Liberia’s settler colonial structures. The voices of these continually othered

and dominated groups are muffled, if audible at all, while their needs and demands hardly feature in the actual outcomes. Indeed, these marginalised groups could continue to contest the legitimacy of people's Liberianess. So, the debate will continue.

Nevertheless, the debate has achieved the first step in a long process of attracting investment and socio-economic opportunities to Liberia. Even then, what is evident in the debate's outcome is how even in its restrictive construction (by the limitations it places on dual citizens), the Amendment Law appears to satisfy the interests of a few sections of the population. So, yes, the debate worked, but only to provide a means for diaspora Liberians to formalise their identity. It also provided opportunities for elites abroad and in-country to perceive the threat of open dual citizenship (or the lack of any such policy) and to find solutions to how those situations could risk their hold on power and impact their status and individual and collective identities.

This part of the thesis as discussed in Chapter 7, contributes to the growing body of work on strategic citizenship¹¹⁶. Some scholars have predicted a 'post exclusive turn in citizenship' (Harpaz and Mateos 2019) due to the increasing shift from exclusive allegiance to the nation-state to a more non-territorial status or portable citizenship. The turn is inspired by a global system of inequality that is premised on where one holds citizenship. However, most studies on this 'post exclusive turn' have focused on immigrant naturalisation in the Global North. These research programs mainly ask whether the allowance of dual citizenship in industrialised Western Europe and North American countries increases the likelihood that immigrants there will naturalise and whether immigrants are less rooted. While this body of work has produced some helpful insight, it lacks a diversity of context as well as recognition of the different pathways through which dual citizenship is produced or, in our case, contested. Even when the lens is turned to the Global South, the argument that usually informs the analysis tends to focus on the opportunities that strategic citizenship offers to elites in the Global North.

In recent years, there have been efforts to broaden the study of the strategic citizenship approach. In 2018, Yossi Harpaz and Pablo Mateos edited a special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, which redefined the concept and produced a more nuanced understanding of the practical value of strategic citizenships. This thesis contributes to this

¹¹⁶ While this thesis does not engage with the wider citizenship literature, the section on diaspora Liberians claims for dual citizenship in the Global South and their emphasises on its affordance of a sense of belonging offers interesting insights to the research on strategic citizenship. Indeed, it provides avenues for post-doctoral research.

growing body of work by focusing on diaspora Liberians' claim for dual citizenship in their home country.

Accordingly, diaspora Liberians occupy an exciting space in the global turn towards strategic citizenship. On the one hand, they, like several other elites from the Global South, want strategic citizenship that provides access to health security, quality education and options on where to live, work, and invest, hence their unwillingness to give up their host countries' premium passports. On the other hand, they are pursuing dual citizenship in Liberia because it provides what many diaspora respondents claim to most desire, a place to belong and call home. So, Liberia's passport may rank very low on the Henley Passport Index and may not facilitate effortless mobility and related opportunities. But for many Liberians, the value of a Liberian passport is the opportunity it presents for a formalisation of their Liberian identity. It would be a formal document that acknowledges their claim to Liberia (and its resources). Thus, this case study shows that while Australian, U.S.A., and European Union passports might indeed provide Global South elites the premium mobility and all the other instrumental values promised in the literature, it is unable to provide some with what they most desire, which is a place to actually belong and claim as their real home, a place where they and their children can claim rootedness.

Generally, the thesis contributes to diaspora studies and research on post-conflict identity formations. For example, mainstream diaspora research concentrates on the engagement of diasporas in homeland conflicts, the integration and assimilation of migrant communities into host societies, transnationalism, and the different forms of diaspora remittances and the impact of such remittances on homeland economic development (Koinova 2011). Such studies are limiting when considered in the broader narrative of post-conflict reconstruction, which considers the emergence of positive state-society relations imperative to successful nation-state-building processes (Haider & McLoughlin 2016; Haider 2014). Also, the research program of diaspora studies has failed to capture the multifaceted nature of diaspora engagement in their homelands, particularly their engagement around identity construction and the impact of such engagement on state-society relations and post-war recovery.

The focus of this thesis on diaspora engagement around the question of identity in a post-conflict setting is timely. It provides a framework upon which those engaged in the business of post-conflict reconstruction can work towards sustainable peace and inclusive development. As Kaplan warns (2009, p. 469), "a combination of competing identity groups and weak state structures may not always result in bloodshed, but it does always cripple efforts to promote

development”. Considering Liberia’s settler colonial history and how past injustices continue to structure post-war reconstruction processes, this thesis provides a crucial opportunity to understand the complex negotiations involved in identity construction in post-conflict settings and the motivations behind diverse claims and contestations.

While there is a rich body of literature on Liberia’s civil war, the post-conflict reconstruction process, and the engagement of its diasporas in the homeland (Antwi-Boateng 2012; Vinck, Pham & Kreutzer 2011; Antwi-Boateng 2011a, 2011b; Sesay et al. 2009; McGovern 2008; etc.), this literature lacks a comprehensive analysis of Liberia’s settler colonial background and how that connects to post-war recovery and beyond. A notable exception is Pailey’s (2016, 2018) research on how Liberians resident in Liberia and abroad make sense of their Liberian citizenship. However, Pailey’s work moves strictly within the terrains of citizenship. It does not engage more comprehensively with the subject of identity and the significance of its construction in post-conflict Liberia. Therefore, this thesis bridges the gap in the literature through its argument for a more comprehensive understanding of diaspora activity in post-conflict settings. It builds on Pailey’s research as it extensively explores why formalised identity is essential to diaspora Liberians, the motivations behind their claim, and how Liberians in-country perceive it. The study goes well beyond the ‘remittance’ literature, including that on ‘social remittances’ and citizenship, to examine the broader historical and political debates around identity construction in the post-war era.

Moreover, Liberia’s settler colonial past prompts concerns about possible attempts either by the state or in-country elites to bury the enduring presence of settler colonialism in the past. This relates to the state’s focus on constructing a collective Liberian identity (Chapter 5) and in-country elites’ characterisation of dual citizenship as a recolonising tool (Chapter 7). Claims of colonial completion are often embedded in identity projects of belonging like the one pursued by Liberia’s post-conflict governments. Indeed, we know from settler colonial settings that the pursuit of such political projects is strategic towards averting the world’s attention from the continuing subjugation of historically dominated groups (Maddison 2019; Strakosch & Macoun 2012). Thus, in its claim to be both post-conflict and post-colonial, Liberia provides a rich context for further research on whether contemporary contestations over identity and belonging are a tactic to disavow the enduring presence of settler colonialism.

The findings from this thesis are not intended to ‘trap Liberians in corners’. On the contrary, the thesis is diagnostic as the intent has been to analyse and understand Liberia’s settler colonial

past (and present) rather than prescribe a pathway forward. Such future-orientated work is beyond the scope of this thesis but is something that I would like to take further in postdoctoral research. In future projects, I would like to interrogate (settler) colonial memory in Liberia and how to frame responsibility and reparative policy in a context where the binaries of victim and perpetrator is not clearly defined. Future projects could potentially provide avenues to explore in more detail questions of who has responsibilities now and what kind of responsibilities in reconciling post -(colonial?) Liberia.

Appendix 1

This section provides a timeline for the various legal instruments and proposals that frame Liberia's citizenship laws and the dual citizenship debate:

1. The **1847 Constitution** established the modern Liberian state following independence from the American Colonization Society. Citizenship was restricted to settlers. Notably, the **dual legal/bureaucratic system** was introduced during this period. For example, the Interior Department in 1869 was empowered to govern all aspects of the hinterland, including the exercise of judicial power over the native subjects “with due regard to native customary law and native institutions.” (See January 23, 1869 Act of the Legislature; *Gray v. Beverly* (1 LLR: 500; 1907; Lubkemann et. al 2011).
2. Tubman's **Unification Policy** ended the dual legal system. Officially, the Unification Policy sought to include the hinterlands in the social mainstream. It aimed to bridge the gap between the Americo-Liberians and the Indigenous majority by extending suffrage to the Indigenes for the first time and restructuring the administrative units to facilitate parity in representation (see Frempong 2000; Kieh 1992).
3. The **1973 Aliens and Nationality Law** prohibits dual citizenship. Specifically, Section 20.1 enshrines the racial clause while Sections 20 (Nationality at Birth) and 22 (Loss of citizenship) prohibit dual citizenship. Together with the 1986 Constitution, only people of ‘Negro’ descent can obtain Liberian citizenship by birth, ancestry or naturalisation (see Chapter 6).
4. The **1986 Constitution** does not explicitly ban dual citizenship. Still, it upholds the racial clause enshrined in the 1973 Aliens and Nationality Law in Article 27 (b), stating, “In order to preserve, foster and maintain the positive Liberian culture, values and character, only persons who are ‘Negroes’ or of ‘Negro’ descent shall qualify by birth or by naturalisation to be citizens of Liberia.”
5. Former President Sirleaf's **2008 dual citizenship proposal** – the (parliamentary) voting on this proposal was postponed indefinitely due to staunch opposition.
6. **2012 Constitutional Review**: the Sirleaf government established a Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) to review the 1986 Constitution and develop proposals for amendments. Among concerns over land rights, secularism, the term limit for public officials, and several other matters, the preservation of the racial clause and rejection of dual citizenship were some of the key issues that dominated the deliberations. These two items topped the list of recurring issues the CRC identified from their public

consultations and submitted to the Sirleaf government as proposals for a constitutional amendment.

7. President Weah's **Proposition 1**: In October 2019, the Liberian Senate passed a proposal (Proposition 1) for a referendum to allow for dual citizenship. Proposition 1 was supposed to amend Article 28 of the 1986 Constitution, which establishes the requirements for birthright citizenship, the right to renounce citizenship, conditions for revoking citizenship, and naturalisation requirements. Effectively, the amendment would have allowed natural-born citizens to hold multiple citizenship and women to pass on their citizenship to their children. Significantly, it disqualified dual citizens from elected and appointed political positions.
8. The **2020 referendum on Proposition 1** and other items failed to attain the two-thirds requirement of valid votes.
9. The **25 July 2022 Amendment Law** to the 1973 Aliens and Nationality Law authorises dual citizenship and allow women to pass on their citizenship to their children. However, Liberians who are dual citizens are ineligible to hold any public office as well as an appointment as minister of finance and development planning, minister of defense, and executive director of the Central Bank of Liberia.

Interviews

I am grateful to all research participants, many though not all of whom are identified in this thesis with pseudonyms and hence cannot be named here for research ethics considerations. Thank you to everyone whose interview does not feature in this thesis due to space constraints. Your time was valuable, and your stories will likely be documented in future publications.

No.	Names	Date	Location
1	Anthony V. Kesselley	3 October 2019	Liberia
2	Eddie Jarwolo	4 October 2019	Liberia
3	Ibrahim Nyei	5 October 2019	Liberia Via London
4	Joe Wilson	5 October 2019	Massachusetts
5	Sianah DeSheild	5 October 2019	Minnesota
6	Harold Aidoo	9 October 2019	Monrovia, Liberia
7	George Toto	9 October 2019	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
8	Jerry	12 October 2019	Liberia
9	Alfred	13 October 2019	Atlanta
10	John	14 October 2019	Columbus, Ohio
11	Steph	14 October 2019	Minnesota
12	Ayouba Kamara	15 October 2019	London, UK
13	Mr. Ahmed Sirleaf II	18 October 2019	Minnesota
14	Lazarus F. Siafa	19 October 2019	Columbus, Ohio
15	Adam Sesay	20 October 2019	UK
16	Ambulah Mamey	20 October 2019	Washington DC
17	Clara	24 October 2019	Monrovia, Liberia
18	Joko A. Bryant Jr.	25 October 2019	Minnesota
19	Ms. Frances Greaves	26 October 2019	Monrovia, Liberia
20	Joel Bimba	26 October 2019	New York
21	Ralph Cherbo Geeplay	27 October 2019	Alberta, Canada
22	Emma	31 October 2019	Monrovia, Liberia

23	Abraham Kromah	1 November 2019	Monrovia, Liberia
24	Chairman Wette	1 November 2019	Ohio, Columbus
25	Mr. Arthur Doe	2 November 2019	Gaithersburg, Maryland
26	Alvin Winford	8 November 2019	Washington DC
27	Sheila	23 & 25 November 2019	Rome, Italy
28	Jane	7 December 2019	Monrovia, Liberia
29	Alex Cooper	6 February 2020	Phoenix, Arizona
30	Ambassador Daintowon	18 March 2020	Monrovia, Liberia
31	Constance Bowman- Prempeh	25 March 2020	Monrovia, Liberia

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