A DIASPORA RETURNS: LIBERIA THEN AND NOW

by Robtel Neajai Pailey

Sankofa is an Akan word from Ghana which, when translated literally, means: ‘We must go back and reclaim our past so we can move forward; we must understand why and how we came to be to know who we are today.’

Introduction

Standing at the apex of Ducor in central Monrovia, Liberia’s capital, one can see why the country used to be a beacon of light for the continent of Africa and its Diaspora. With lush green trees standing in stark contrast to an artist’s vision of modern chromed buildings, only the loss and destruction spurned by a fifteen-year civil war now emanate from the country’s recovering edifice. Liberia’s 160-year past is written in the history books as a tale of tragedy, a reminder of political, economic and social upheavals, as well as the failures of a system structured in dominance. Nonetheless, there are signs of hope everywhere if you take a second look: former child soldiers selling candles on the street; market women in the hot sun bartering their wares; the planting of poplar trees on Broad Street—a major thoroughfare in the country; and the hustle-bustle grind of daily life that evokes a sense of activity, movement, and progress. Another inkling of hope seems to be the wave of Diaspora Liberians who are returning, infused with the ‘Back to Africa’ ethos that buoyed up black nationalists such as Paul Cuffee, Edward Wilmot Blyden, Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Dubois, all of whom saw Liberia as an outpost for their aspirations of cross-continental migration. It follows suit that Liberia’s history is a dialectical pattern of migration, opposition, exile and return.

Liberia’s Tortuous History

Modern-day Liberia is infused with the parallel—and sometimes
diametrically opposed—histories of its sixteen indigenous ethnic groups and the descendants of freed American slaves, called Americo-Liberians anecdotally and referred to as such hereafter, who were settled in the country by the American Colonisation Society (ACS), a private organisation of white Americans who initiated the repatriation of former slaves and free Blacks in the early nineteenth century. The lowest level within the settler grouping was occupied by the so-called ‘recaptives’, those Africans who had been intercepted from slaving vessels by British and American navies and deposited on the ‘Grain Coast’ to start a new life. Of course, the history of the region that is present-day Liberia predates the settlement of repatriated slaves. In fact, the sub-region was an already vibrant outpost of social and political organisations as well as economic patterns of trade routes, coastal ports, and inland posts for a budding commercial sector that had existed for at least two centuries.

After declaring Liberia’s independence on 26 July 1847, the ‘founding fathers’ painted their histories in the books for the world to see. The country’s official seal proclaims boldly below pictographs of a ship coming to shore: ‘The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here.’ The extension of the political control of the Americo-Liberians over indigenous groups was a long and laborious process. From Joseph J. Roberts, the first president of Liberia, to William Tubman and his successor William Tolbert, all of the presidents of Liberia were descendants of Americo-Liberians and members of the True Whig Party—which ruled Liberia for all but six years between 1870 and 1980, until an indigene master sergeant by the name of Samuel K. Doe staged a coup that assassinated President Tolbert and key ministers of his regime.

Tubman came to power in 1945. His regime was infused with single-party chauvinism, and an oligarchic ‘cult of the president’. Fanon chastised the single-party state as a concoction of the landed and elite class: ‘The single party is the modern form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, unmasked, unpainted, unscrupulous, and cynical.’ However, Tubman did make attempts, arguably only cosmetic gestures, to integrate the
hinterlands into his political jurisdiction with a Unification Policy which, some argue, co-opted indigenous leaders in order to push out European imperialist claims on the Liberian state. It was during Tubman’s administration that non-Americo Liberian males were finally granted suffrage by paying a hut tax, and provided with one representative in the Liberian legislature for each of the provinces into which the Liberian hinterland was divided. At the time, Tubman was seeking to increase the political participation of the majority non-Americo Liberian populace, yet his pacification, disguised as ‘openness’, would later rupture under the pressure of increasing opposition. In a letter written to Tubman in 1951, the Liberian pamphleteer, journalist and political activist, Albert Porte, expressed his concern about an atmosphere of ‘benevolent’ suppression: ‘Unfortunately, the citizens of this country do not feel free to express themselves upon vital questions affecting them, but sit by and grumble “the people don’t mean anything”. I am afraid that even in the legislature there is a great reluctance if not the absence of the free expression of thoughts and opinion, especially where the president is concerned.’ Porte would later cast himself as a prickly thorn in the side of Tubman’s regime, and serve on the constitutional reform commission under Doe. This particular recycling of loyalties and political affiliations represents a key node in the structural formulation of the Liberian state and its actors.

Though Tubman ruled for 27 years, his death in a London clinic in 1971 would eventually sow the seeds of an enduring legacy of political patronage and disenfranchisement. With his death the internal contradictions of Liberia’s two-tiered society came to the fore. Workers began to protest with heightened demands for fair play; elements of the intelligentsia began to intensify their demands and to organise in the name of radical political governance; the general populace began to lose the little respect they had for the political machinery; and even elements of the political elite began to distance themselves from the Tubman era, even though they had benefited to a large extent from True Whig Party consolidation. Tubman’s successor, Tolbert, inherited this bubbling political cauldron. He promptly attempted to distinguish
himself from his predecessor by adopting socialist philosophies, speaking out against American paternalism, denouncing Israel as a Zionist state and increasing the price of imported rice—Liberia’s staple food—in order to encourage Liberians to develop their agricultural productivity. His attempts at ingratiating himself with an increasingly radicalised populace under groups like the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA) would falter, while the increase in the price of rice would lead to massive riots throughout the country. Tolbert’s days were numbered. He and members of his cabinet were assassinated during the coup, led by Samuel K. Doe on 12 April 1980, which ended the True Whig dynasty for good.

Throughout the country’s history—and especially with the advent of True Whig Party entrenchment under presidents Tubman and Tolbert—Liberia experienced a unique recycling of political loyalties: dissenters under Tubman and Tolbert would later forge loyalties with Doe; opponents of Doe would support Taylor; and those opponents of Taylor would later support current President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. The cyclical patterns of Liberia’s political landscape point to an inherent rupture and discontentment with leadership. This rupture has encouraged Bayart to theorise about a ‘reciprocal assimilation of elites’, a process in which political elites replicate themselves like fast yielding DNA until divergence, as in the case of Doe in Liberia, throws a monkey wrench into the system of domination. Those on the political margins are bound to want to wield power. However, this is surely not unique to Liberia—or to Africa, for that matter—even though commentators like Bayart, Chabal and Daloz regard the phenomenon of political elite replication as an African ‘peculiarity’. Indeed, this vision of Africa as a monolithic political creature devoid of all the state features that plague modern politics is problematic and has been vigorously contested by radical Africanists such as Cooper: ‘African realities should not be contrasted to an idealised picture of “democracy” elsewhere; there is not a polity on earth where every member has an equal chance to have his or her political opinion heard or where patronage and corruption are absent from political life’.12
Doe turned elite politics on its head, at least initially. During his first broadcast to the nation after assuming power on 14 April 1980, Doe promised that 'our government will actively encourage the wise participation of the people from all parts of the country in the making of decisions that affect them'. He denounced a century or so of Americo-Liberian hegemony, chastised corruption and cronyism under the Tolbert regime and accused it of deliberately miring the country in further underdevelopment. Doe observed an air of disregard for the constitutional rights of Liberians, and pledged himself 'to build a new society in which there is justice, human dignity, equal opportunities and fair treatment for all before the law'. To the naked eye, it looked as though Doe was committed to a reversal of political elitism. He encouraged the return of exiles and preached national reconciliation under a ‘National Unification Policy’, which reformulated the Unification Policy of Tubman. The rhetoric of change and reform was called into question. When Doe’s new minister of finance, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, accused the new regime of misallocation of resources, Doe fired back with accusations of his own, stating that it was under Sirleaf’s tutelage that Liberia incurred astronomical debts. When elections were held in 1985, Sirleaf’s former party, the Liberian Action Party (LAP), was slated to win and to bring civilian rule to Liberia. But only ‘native’ members of the interior were allowed to run, giving Doe leverage because of his political visibility.

These rigged elections provoked an attempted coup attempt by Commanding General Thomas Quiwonkpa on 12 November 1985. It was foiled, and Doe now responded by silencing opposition and politicising ethnic rivalries by filling his cabinet with loyal members of his own indigenous group, the Krahn. This has prompted a good deal of debate. While Aning argues that the nature of policies implemented during Doe’s regime contributed to the creation of a system in which the dynamics of power were shaped by ethnic relations and rivalries, he cautions against this ‘mono-causal’ interpretation of the character of opposition during Doe’s tenure, instead arguing that widespread discontentment with the regime existed long before ethnicity was politically
Doe proclaimed himself winner of the 1985 polls, though his legitimacy on the ballots was contested. Liberia began losing its human and intellectual capital in droves. Doe’s hold on power was so overwrought with economic stagnation and political repression that his former political ally, Charles Taylor—now on trial for war crimes committed in the Sierra Leone Civil War during his presidency in Liberia—invaded the country in 1989 from the Ivory Coast. The attack led to a fifteen-year civil war that would ultimately provoke Taylor’s eventual ouster from the presidency in 2003.

The conflict within Liberia devastated one of West Africa’s most prosperous nations, and destabilised an entire region. It also killed an estimated 200,000 of the standing three million population in Liberia itself. In the first year of the war alone, as many as 700,000 Liberians fled the country, many of them to neighbouring Ivory Coast, Ghana and Nigeria. Those who were able to escape to further corners of the world scattered throughout the Diaspora like germinating seeds, in the United States and elsewhere, in what was a devastating blow to the intellectual capacity of the country. In effect, ‘Nearly 30 percent of Liberians with tertiary education left in 1990, and nearly 40 percent left in 2000, according to a World Bank study.

Doe himself was devoid of an autonomous political philosophy, ‘other than the philosophy of clinging to power’ (as Huband observes). In fact, in the heyday of Cold War politics he cast his political opponents as ‘socialists’, and for that he gained unyielding support from the U.S. president, Ronald Reagan. In exchange for removing sympathisers of the dissident group MOJA from the public eye, re-establishing political ties with the state of Israel, denouncing socialist philosophies, and crushing political opponents, Doe received a hefty aid package of $500 million between 1980 and 1988, the largest American aid package in sub-Saharan Africa in what some would call ‘foreign domination by proxy’. Certainly, the Reagan administration used Liberia as a
military base: satellite telecommunications installations and radio relay stations were constructed in the country. By now it was all too clear that Doe’s People’s Redemption Council (PRC) had failed to fulfil initial promises of establishing a ‘new society’, based on the evocation of inalienable rights for all Liberian citizens. Opposition increasingly coalesced in a new, broad-based coalition of indigenous Liberians, exiled dissenters (Sirleaf now included), and foreign insurgents under the title, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). It was led by an Americo-Liberian descendant, Charles Taylor.

The pattern of Liberian politics was now conspicuous. It was determined by a profound dialectic of repression and exile. It was highly-personalised, oligarchic and exclusive. But it was also striking that the Diaspora had begun to assert its role as legitimate stakeholder and power-broker. Dissenters in America, mainly Americo-Liberians, contacted each other through informal networks and affirmed their support of Taylor as a messiah chosen to lead their people out of the political slavery which Doe had brought. Sirleaf would be one of his ardent supporters, until a disagreement severed their relationship. Indeed, Taylor continued to lose the support of his broad-based network of loyalists as he made his way, ascending to the Liberian throne by way of a brutal civil war which led finally to his election in 1997. In this new contest Sirleaf’s Unity Party had barely made an impact, securing only 9.85% of the votes cast. It is interesting to note that Article 52 (c) of the Liberian Constitution stipulates that in order to be eligible to run in elections for the positions of president and vice-president, a Liberian national must have lived in the country for 10 years. If this clause had been enforced, neither Taylor nor Sirleaf would have been eligible to contest the 1997 elections. As such, the elections were deemed ‘special’, because of the nature of the 1989-1996 war (a justification retrieved later, during the elections in 2005). At all events, what followed now, according to Gberie, brought about a warlord economy that further eroded ‘formal state institutions that were destroyed during the war he started, destroying those still existing’. 
When in 2003 a transitional government under the leadership of Gyude Bryant took over in Taylor’s wake, there were small waves of Diaspora returnees testing the waters, and evaluating the country’s potential for resettlement. These ripples became a high tide when Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected Liberia’s first female head of state, and Africa’s first woman president, in November 2005. Since then, anecdotal evidence has charted a movement back across the Atlantic of those highly-skilled, able-bodied Liberian nationals who had once left the country. This return migration—a phenomenon gaining momentum in countries like Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone—has few antecedents in research and even fewer statistical underpinnings, as post-conflict governments like Liberia are so impoverished that they barely have the capability or manpower to account for the number of skilled professionals moving across borders and into Liberian territory.

Methodological Underpinnings—A Diaspora Returns

During a one-month visit to Liberia in December 2006, I conducted 35 interviews of Monrovia-based returnee Liberians formerly residing in the Diaspora. The central question underpinning my investigation into their motives of return was simple: Why? Why give up a comfortable life abroad—mostly in the United States, as Liberia has a long-standing relationship with the Western superpower—to go back to a country whose infrastructure is shattered, whose citizenry is suffering from post-traumatic stress, whose judicial and legal systems are antiquated, whose very existence has been essentially inert since 1989?

It must be said that finding reliable sources to trace Liberia’s historical trajectories presents a major difficulty. But Dr. Carl Patrick Burrowes, a celebrated Liberian historian and journalist, is surely right to challenge readers of Liberian history to interrogate the nature of secondary sources, which so often paint Liberia as a nation muddled in dichotomies, without references to primary sources about indigenous life. Rarely does Liberian history before President Doe tell the story of non-settlers, and the dearth of
primary sources—or even secondary sources—is problematic. Here, I have consulted newspaper articles—national and international—documenting the return of Liberia’s highly skilled expatriate nationals. The 35 interviews serve as the basis of my evidence and analysis, though I have not used them to construct a measurable scale of Diaspora return because the dearth of quantitative data on the flow of movement in and out of Liberia’s 136 ports of entry is negligible. Instead, they have encouraged me to track patterns, trends, continuities and discontinuities in the small movement of Liberian Diaspora migration that will predictably swell in the next five years, if the current pattern is anything to go by.

Replication of Diasporas into Liberia’s Political DNA: Ol’ Ma’ Ellen Returns to Rule

As the United States celebrated its fallen civil rights martyr, Martin Luther King, Jr. on 15 January 2006, Liberians across the Atlantic Ocean were in high spirits, hailing the return of their proverbial ‘Queen’, the newly elected head of state, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. In November 2005, this Harvard-educated, former World Bank and United Nations technocrat had changed the course of the country’s history by defeating soccer star turned humanitarian, George Weah—the populist favourite among youth and among those sceptical of elite politicians. Now an estimated 400 Liberian Diaspora expatriates returned to the country—in some cases for the first time—to witness the historic inauguration. Many of them began searching for jobs and homes, intent on their own permanent return to the country. Migration research stipulates that one of the major reasons for return migration, as in the case of Liberia, is the ‘perception that positive changes have occurred in those situations in the home countries that brought about or contributed to the original migration’. It comes as no surprise that, as the chief architect of this Diaspora return, Sirleaf has sought to create an enabling environment to reverse Liberia’s ‘brain drain’.

According to the World Bank, one of the major agendas for post-
conflict social reconstruction is achieving a successful transition from a war-torn state to one of peace, a shift which necessarily involves political consolidation. Assessing the political implications of Liberia’s return migration would be incomplete without first evaluating one of the most prominent recent returnees, Sirleaf herself, who was in exile during both Doe’s and Taylor’s regimes. Sirleaf proceeded to appoint Diaspora returnees in major ministries such as Commerce, Finance, Information, Labour and Agriculture. Whether or not this has caused a tide of resentment and political elitism is yet to be confirmed. But the question is a sharp one. Could the returnees constitute a political enclave, a new constituency not based on primordial ethnic or sectarian affiliations, but based on their orientation as people who lived abroad during the war, acquired certain skills, and now have the capital and expertise with which to contribute to the country’s political development?

A New Political Dispensation under the ‘Iron Lady’

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has attempted to distinguish herself from the lot of power-mongering Liberian leaders of the past. Whereas Tubman and Tolbert ruled by virtue of political succession, and Doe’s 1985 ascendancy to power was mired by accusations of a ‘fixed election’, in November 2005 Sirleaf’s Unity Party prevailed over Weah’s Congress for Democratic Change with 59.4% of the vote in what were deemed, by international observers and the domestic electorate, free and fair elections. The Diaspora played a major role in these elections: its three leading campaigners—Sirleaf, Weah, Brumskine—were all Diaspora returnees.

Now Sirleaf’s political dispensation was integrated with former warring faction leaders from the historical trajectories of Liberia’s civil wars; figures like Sekou Konneh of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), and relics of recycled political elites like Winston Tubman. Moreover, today the Liberian president must contend with elected relics of the civil war. She has in her cabinet Prince Johnson, a former ally of Taylor who single-handedly maimed and tortured Doe before
assassinating him. Also elected to her cabinet was Jewel Howard Taylor, the wife of Charles Taylor. To this was attached a unique band of political appointees, most notably internationally recognised Diaspora technocrats. Because Sirleaf’s Unity Party still does not have a majority in the House and Senate, it could be intimated that her decision to hire Diaspora returnees is an attempt to level her political base. If this is so, it certainly offers another example of the forceful re-insertion of Diaspora politics in Liberia. Whereas opposition parties were unheard of during the Tubman regime, Sirleaf’s dispensation now appears to be more tolerant of opposition parties, so much so that many of Weah’s Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) supporters remain in the country, among them a returnee who runs an import/export business in Monrovia.

Something must be said about why the Liberian populace has chosen Sirleaf. Political centrists, and professed neutrals, like Teakon Williams, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Small Arms Control administrator and recent returnee, have observed clear signs of infrastructural development and economic change within the last year of Sirleaf’s regime. Williams, and many others like him, returned to the country because Sirleaf’s administration, along with the level of security in the country brought about by the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), filled them with the confidence to come back home. Not all remain buoyant, sensing that government is still far from transparent. Patrick Cheah, a former stock broker in Washington, D.C.’s Capitol Hill, returned in October 2006 to run an American food security organisation. Cheah remarks, ‘We thought government was ready for change, but they’re not ready to break away from corruption.’ In her turn, Sirleaf has responded to these concerns by cutting government bureaucracy, introducing legislation to limit presidential powers and strengthening a stagnating legislature. And despite the criticisms of her detractors, it is clear that she has created an enabling political environment for Diaspora return. Many of the returnees, like Axel Addy and Ezekiel Pajibo, had political ties with Liberia while abroad. Pajibo, a former lobbyist and debt cancellation activist on behalf
of Liberia, now serves as executive director of the Monrovia-based Centre for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE), where he attempts to infuse the Liberian political landscape with abstract notions of ‘justice’, ‘fair play’ and ‘human rights’. Addy, now a businessman in Liberia, was equally buoyed by the call to be a political ‘change agent’ in his country because of his experiences lobbying on behalf of Liberia while living in the United States:

While abroad I had worked with many community-based organizations doing fundraisers, and promoting awareness of the Liberian crisis. I served on the board of the Waterside Collaborative, a non-profit organization of young Liberian professionals engaged in education, health and economic empowerment projects for Liberians. I also worked with a group of young Liberians and drafted the Petition for Liberia, an online petition calling for U.S. intervention in the Liberian crisis. We were able to collect over 4000 signatories to the petition… Aware of the importance of the elections of 2005, I, along with my business partners, launched Liberia2005, an election portal completely dedicated to the activities of the national elections. We were also advocating external voting for Liberians in the Diaspora.46

Migration research shows that generally Diaspora Africans like Addy tend to be more pre-occupied with politics at home than in their new countries, in which they participate in fund-raising activities for the opposition, formulate exile political parties themselves, or lobby Northern seats of power against dictatorships and wayward governments.47 It comes as no surprise that a vast majority of the recent returnees to Liberia, like Addy and Pajibo, were former political ‘movers and shakers’ in the United States as well as Sirleaf loyalists.

Moran, who has scrutinised the nature of Diaspora politics in Liberia, and its continued entrenchment with the ousting of Taylor and ascendancy of Sirleaf, finds that Liberians in the Diaspora are far from passive observers of the political process on the ground. Rather, they are proxy politicians who have chosen to
momentarily ‘vote with their feet’, though they continue to vote symbolically with their influences abroad.48 She describes how a ‘Liberia Peace and Democracy Workshop’ hosted 26 participants of the Diaspora in Pennsylvania after Taylor agreed to step down from office in August 2003. Working from a draft of the comprehensive peace agreement between representatives of the Taylor government and the two armed factions, then on the table at the talks in Accra, it was the stated intention of the Philadelphia workshop to ‘make recommendations to help the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) effectively to implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in a manner that will lead to and ensure the speedy achievement of sustainable national peace, reconciliation, rehabilitation, solidarity, reconstruction, and unity as well as the socio-economic and democratic political development of postwar Liberia’.49 A follow-up meeting was held in the United States, and, true to the trajectory of Liberian Diaspora influences on politics at home, key organizers and participants from both meetings later traveled to Liberia to join or advise the new government. These included a former University of Pennsylvania professor, Dr. Al-Hassan Conteh, who has now become president of the University of Liberia (LU).50

At large, from Senegal to Mozambique to Rwanda, Diaspora communities all over the continent of Africa constantly work themselves into the political structures of their homelands, and governments are beginning to take note of this increasingly powerful political base. Sirleaf has made this presence explicit, and legitimate. She continues to create political incentives for those contemplating a return to Liberia. A programme called the ‘Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals’ (otherwise known as TOKTEN) is a part of a UNDP/Government of Liberia ‘capacity development initiative’, intended to facilitate the recruitment of at least 20 expatriate national professionals. LU president Conteh has been an administrator, and, sporadically, a TOKTEN returnee since 1995. Professionals like Conteh are expected to support the Government reconstruction and development agenda and to help alleviate the impact of the ‘brain
drain’. Although the TOKTEN programme recruits Liberian nationals from across the Diaspora for short-term posts—like advisor to the Minister of Finance Mr. Barko Freeman—many of them end up staying.

It was an earlier President of Liberia in the 1920s, Charles D. B. King, who said in his first inaugural address: ‘...there can be no doubt as to the desirability of adding to our Americo-Liberian population, settlers from America, who want to come here, and who, if carefully selected and properly aided would help us to build up the country...we need not hesitate to send out to our race in foreign lands the Macedonian cry: “Come over and help us”.'51 Sirleaf will most likely be remembered for re-inscribing the politics of migration into the trajectory of Liberian politics, just as her twentieth-century predecessors had with Americo-Liberian settlers. The question is whether or not her political dispensation will be an exact replica of her predecessors. While it is too soon to tell whether or not Sirleaf herself is capable of replacing the old Americo-Liberian hegemony with a new returnee hegemony, all the signs now point to a complex web of negotiations. In many respects, the Sirleaf era is not conforming to Fanon’s prophetic, if over-simplified, prognosis of a nation dominated by a bourgeois political elite driven by a manifest goal of domination, suppression, and exclusion. To begin with, whereas governments of the past have been mired in patriarchal fisticuffs over power, Sirleaf mitigated the masculine nature of Liberian politics by plucking two female returnees from their former strongholds and placing them in high level government positions: Dr. Antoinette Sayeh, formerly of the World Bank, is currently Finance Minister and Olubanke King-Akerele, formerly of UNDP, serves as Sirleaf’s Minister of Foreign Affairs. This feminisation of higher politics parallels an increasingly active female electorate in Liberia, many of whom brought Sirleaf to the presidency by campaigning in local markets and influencing their children to vote for the affectionately dubbed ‘Ol’ Ma’. This prominence is not quite new: Ruth Sando Perry served as the first African woman head of state when she was appointed Council Chairman of Liberia’s ad hoc government during the Abuja Accords immediately before Charles
Taylor’s election in 1997. But it is suggestive. Meanwhile, rather than maintaining political continuities, Sirleaf has placed bureaucratic neophytes in her cabinet, figures who are not tainted with the violence of Liberia’s torturous past. This is not characteristic of modern African political history, in which changes of government are so often attended by patterns of continuity. At large, the Sirleaf era is defined by the task of nation-building, and any nation-building exercise will be null and void without changing the political landscape to facilitate peace.

The Returnees and Post-Conflict Economic Recovery

In January 2006, the effects of a century or more of economic fluctuations, civil strife, and, finally, a sputtering halt under Charles Taylor, left Liberia in muddy waters. The Liberian treasury was empty, government vehicles had been lifted, and economic morale was deflated. The World Bank noted that in Liberia decades of cumulative investment had been wasted, people had been displaced and large numbers of able-bodied males had been de-skilled and forced to bear arms. Sirleaf inherited an 85% unemployment rate. More than 75% of Liberians were living on less than a dollar a day. A ballooning $3.7 external debt represented almost eight times the country’s annual GDP. According to the World Bank, if all of this was to be salvaged an effective reconstruction strategy must embrace six principles: ‘jumpstarting’ the national economy; decentralising community-based investments; repairing key transport and communication networks; ‘de-mining’ (where relevant and where linked to other priority investments); demobilising and retraining ex-combatants; and reintegrating displaced populations. What the World Bank did not do was to place a high premium on the micro-level attempts by individual citizens to boost their country’s economy. To a returnee entrepreneur like Yoquai Lavala, this might have seemed obvious. Lavala believes that Liberian Diaspora returnees became more industrious while living abroad, and that they have come back to Liberia to revitalize a ‘virgin economy’ that could someday rival its West African counterparts.
Lavala’s presumed revitalization follows a contextual pattern. Historically, Liberia’s contemporary economic quagmire had been defined by a two-tiered (and sometimes three-tiered) socio-economic superstructure. The newly arrived Americo-Liberians of the nineteenth century had opted for careers in trading and politics, leaving agricultural production to those indigenous to the land. Decades later, at the turn of the twentieth century, Liberia had experienced a sustained economic crisis, ended only by President Tubman’s ‘Open Door Policy’, which was instituted to attract foreign investment. Thereafter, the governments of Tolbert, Doe and Taylor, and then the transitional government of Gyude Bryant, brought the economy to its knees through mismanagement and kleptocratic rule. During the years of civil war, the Liberian GDP nose-dived by 85% and agricultural production fell by two-thirds.

This might well have declared that Sirleaf had very little on which to build. But there was a historical glimmer. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s Liberia had been purported to be one of the few fiscal successes among the least developed countries because of its ability to generate revenue from broad-based economic ventures that significantly exceeded expenditures. Yet, as Liebenow has observed, while Liberia during these years experienced a ‘dramatic rate of economic growth’, the country still experienced ‘growth without development’, in which the basic institutions and infrastructures needed for sustainable development remained stagnant. Nonetheless, Liebenow fails to recognize the obvious changes that took place, however small. Under their Open Door approach in this period, Liberian leaders had solicited foreign capital and expertise for the development of the country’s mineral and agricultural resources, leading to unprecedented improvements in education and healthcare. Iron ore mining from rich deposits in several parts of the country had been an early priority and, as a result, a new iron ore mine in Nimba County began work under the aegis of the Liberian American-Swedish Minerals Company (LAMCO). This, in turn, led to the construction of a 165-mile railway and a new port in Buchanan—which became Liberia’s second largest port, rivalling
the Freeport of Monrovia—to transport iron ore from the Nimba mine. The open gates of the Freeport of Monrovia became a symbol of Tubman’s Open Door Policy, as it was the primary port of entry for the import and export of goods between Liberia and its economic partners.\textsuperscript{64}

The erection of roads, bridges, and other infrastructural enterprises brought the inhabitants of the Liberian hinterland into direct contact with their counterparts on the coast and in Monrovia for the first time. But, according to Liebenow, it proved a double edged sword. Taxes were levied on the indigenous population, labourers and soldiers were recruited involuntarily, and a systematic land acquisition by elites replaced the communal nature of land ownership that had been preserved by inhabitants of the hinterland.\textsuperscript{65} At the same time, the free flow of goods and services accompanied the free flow of migratory talent from the coast, and small waves of teachers, medical technicians, and agricultural instructors poured into the interior. Whereas people of the interior had been wedded to a subsistence existence, the new wealth and opportunities of the Open Door Policy introduced to the interior the material trappings of ‘modernity’.\textsuperscript{66} Tubman’s successors maintained this. Under Tolbert’s watchful eye, the policy diversified trading relationships as well as sources of foreign direct investment and personnel. It lowered Liberia’s reliance on the whims of U.S. interests and multi-national corporations such as Firestone, Goodrich, and other American-owned rubber firms. Doe also embraced the Open Door Policy,\textsuperscript{67} but after inheriting a crippling debt of $700 million.\textsuperscript{68}

Far from owning this tradition, Sirleaf has publicly distanced herself from the world of the Open Door policy. In a speech in Washington, D.C., she alluded to Tubman’s economic recovery machinery only very briefly, asserting that ‘unlike the periods of the past when we had growth without development, this time it’s growth for development’. Strapped with budgetary constraints that rely on the whims of donor aid and the setting of political/ economic conditions, Sirleaf has devised a post-conflict fiscal agenda based on four basic pillars which echo not the policies of
her predecessors but the six major elements of reconstruction stipulated by the World Bank: enhancing peace and security; revitalising the economy; strengthening governance and the rule of law, and rehabilitating infrastructure and delivering basic services. Just as the World Bank places a high premium on fostering relationships between newly elected post-conflict governments, donors and international organisations, Sirleaf, in her capacity as head of state and former World Bank technocrat, conforms strictly to its conditional recommendations for post-conflict economic recovery.

It is now stipulated that the Open Door Policy collapsed because it failed to exploit Liberia’s diversity in natural resources; its industrial diamonds, timber, cocoa and coffee. Accordingly, the Sirleaf administration is busily signing new concession agreements with corporations in these extractive industries and agricultural sectors. Once United Nations timber and diamond sanctions on Liberia had been lifted in 2006 and 2007 respectively, the government sought to focus on developing its logging and mining sectors. These had been severely eroded by Taylor’s ‘warlordism’ in Liberia and Sierra Leone – an expression, if ever there was one, of what Bayart and others have described as the ‘criminalisation of politics in Africa’. While some may view Sirleaf’s weddedness to international financial institutions and international donor regimes as a shrewd attempt to bolster Liberia’s economy, others may see these multi-national corporations and donors as malevolent bedfellows for a vulnerable post-conflict government. Fanon, for instance, is harshly indignant, deploring a national middle class that has simply taken up the torch of the old Western empires, thereby setting up its country ‘as a brothel of Europe’, and an extension of Western enterprises. Sirleaf herself clearly does have neo-liberal leanings by virtue of having worked at two of the most entrenched international institutions in the world—the World Bank and United Nations. But she and her cabinet of legislators are far from puppets of the West. This much is shown by a series of renegotiated concession agreements by which her government has attempted to broker in the first two years of her administration.
Throughout its economic history, Liberia has relied mainly on the export of iron ore and natural rubber, timber, and produce such as coffee. This provided much of the government revenue generated in the form of customs duties, consular fees, royalties, and other taxes or fees paid by corporations. In the late 1980s, however, Liberia’s major sources of foreign exchange—iron ore and rubber—nosedived dramatically because of declining world economic conditions. These caused a drop in the country’s hard currency earnings and a correlated shortfall in the country’s government revenue. During the intervening war years, this rate of decline would almost double. Under Sirleaf’s tutelage, Liberia has now begun to recover its iron ore production. An agreement between the government and the world’s largest iron ore producer, Arcelor Mittal Steel, was ratified in April 2007 for a major iron ore concession that will provide investments of $1 billion over seven years (though a confidentiality clause does not make it possible for Liberian citizens to monitor revenue flows to the government). The Ministry of Lands, Mines, and Energy, headed by former African Development Bank (ADB) technocrat and recent returnee Eugene Shannon, was responsible for brokering the major concession.

Meanwhile, Liberian Minister of Labour Samuel Kofi Woods, a human rights activist who fled to Sierra Leone during Taylor’s regime, has been renegotiating a series of concession agreements between the government of Liberia and the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, the country’s largest employer to date. Firestone was the first major concession in the country’s history, and in 1926 it signed a one million acre agreement with the Liberian government to lease six cents per acre for a period of 99 years in exchange for a $5 million soft-loan to pay off Liberia’s balance of payment deficits. The immediate outcry against the asymmetrical nature of this agreement fell on deaf ears. Woods has argued that Firestone’s entrenchment has not boded well for Liberia’s economic vitality: ‘Firestone is part of our social, political and economic evolution…it is clear that it represents a symbol of the historic pillage and denial of the Liberian people over the years... As a government, we have an obligation to guarantee the
highest national interests of the Liberian people. To hold Firestone accountable, Woods is using a government concession about adequate social benefits—of wages, conditions of housing, medical care—which, in turn, will help to increase the domestic productivity of employees on the sprawling million acre plantation in Harbel. Furthermore, Woods is also trying to right the wrongs of a 37-year renewed agreement signed during the 2004-2005 transitional government of Gyude Bryant. At the time, the Firestone debate re-surfaced in political life when plantation workers protested vociferously, holding countless strikes and boycotts. By that time, Firestone’s estimated net profit from Liberia’s raw latex alone was $81,242,190, though workers on the plantation were receiving less than $4 a day for tapping a quota of over 750 trees. Diaspora activists like Emira Woods, who served as a catalyst for the Stop Firestone Campaign, argued that the merciless exploitation of Liberia’s people and natural resources by the company was directly linked to the nation’s impoverishment, as the raw materials produced in Liberia are sent elsewhere for processing, thereby shutting out the possibility of adding value to Liberia’s endowment of resources. Given Firestone’s economic entrenchment in Liberia, the Sirleaf administration will need to refashion its dealings with Liberian workers, not least to improve their earnings.

Beside these immense operations, Liberian returnees are doing much to influence micro-level economic change. Fred Kollie, a businessman who has hired over 200 Liberian employees to build the country’s first major resort, observes that the pioneering spirit of Liberian returnees propels the economy like a roving locomotive. In this context, small business entrepreneurs, like a returnee professional caterer (of the Tolbert lineage), are challenging Sirleaf to show local venture capitalists as much concern as she does to international donors by revamping a ‘Liberianisation Policy’ which gave priority to Liberian business owners in government contracts. Evidently, this has not yielded any tangible results not least because of competition from Lebanese entrepreneurs who have been coming to Liberia for decades. Today, despite the difficulties of operating a business in
a society still reviving from conflict. Diaspora returnees account for the largest sector of GDP growth, after foreign direct investment. Liberia’s GDP increased by 8% last year, and much of that increase can be attributed to post-conflict reconstruction economic wheeling and dealing by recent returnees. The youngest of my returnee interviewees, Eda Henries, farms acres of her family’s 150-acre forest property of cassava, hot peppers, and potato greens, a Liberian staple. Her business will produce, package, and ship hard-to-get food products to Africans now living in the United States. In addition to such small but significant strides, the National Investment Commission in Monrovia is attempting to match that growth with foreign direct investment and sustained capital to support Liberian businesses now working under the aegis of former Wall Street big-wig Richard Tolbert—another member of William Tolbert’s dynasty. Tolbert himself has remarked, ‘We have seen a dramatic increase in the perception of this country, and foreign investors are willing to do business with us more than they ever have.’

Attracting Diaspora wage earners and investors is a similar phenomenon taking place in Sierra Leone, which is attempting to entice its entrepreneurial Diaspora classes—primarily from the United Kingdom—to return in order to absorb the masses of unemployed and underemployed non-returnee citizens. As Liberia and Sierra Leone both share similar histories, it is no wonder that Sirleaf, in the former, and Kabbah, in the latter, have adopted comparable reconstruction schemes. One need not search far, however, to observe that their post-war economic agendas are increasingly donor-centred and do not emanate from the bowels of a purely autonomous state. Could Liberia and Sierra Leone be bartering a history of tyranny to one of international economic hegemony?

A price for perceived economic gains is obvious. The overemphasis of foreign and ‘external’ economics represents a unique feature of the Liberian economic superstructure, and it has, in turn, carved a gulf between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’. In a letter of December 14, 2006, published in The Analyst, one of Liberia’s premier
newspapers, Augustus Daikai Jones of Haywood Mission Chapel pleads with Sirleaf to refrain from perpetuating the uneven distribution of economic wealth because ‘economic difference did characterise our seven years of civil war’. More than this, he criticizes Sirleaf’s appointment of returnee Agriculture Minister Chris Toe (formerly President of Strayer University in Washington, D.C.), by asking, ‘Has he owned a farm? How large is that farm? What has he produced? The people need food. The people need production.’ Jones’s public letter provides two key insights into the current Liberian state. First, its very publication suggests that, unlike regimes such as Taylor’s, the Sirleaf administration has created an environment in which a free press may thrive. But second, and most important, it exposes the reality of compartmentalised classes and social groups in contemporary Liberia. With the ‘Back to Liberia’ movement gaining momentum, such disparities could rupture. At all events, in the years to come Sirleaf will have to reconcile competing loyalties—loyalties to her donors, loyalties to returnee entrepreneurs, and loyalties to the vast majority of non-returnees.

The Sociology of Liberian Return Migration

It is a Friday night on Tubman Boulevard in Liberia’s capital Monrovia and the champagne chutes are filled to the rim in a tucked away restaurant—recent returnee Barkue Tubman’s new hot-spot—just outside a massive white compound. Garrulous voices bounce to the cadence of their own tunes, and there is an atmosphere of movement, gaiety and privileged talk. The Second International First Fridays of 2007 has ushered in Liberia’s young professional class, smartly dressed in suits, sporting African print material, yet speaking with eclectic lilts acquired elsewhere. An air of belonging fills the air as the organiser, Gama Roberts (formerly an Atlanta, Georgia-based telecommunications design engineer) thanks everybody for attending. The picture offers a microcosm of a changing nation and its intersecting social forces—the ‘new Liberia’, infused by a wave of foreign-educated, trained and highly skilled Diaspora returnees who are filled with the same ‘Back to Africa’ ethos that inspired their predecessors centuries before.
Last names, religious affiliations, and ethnicities—broadly defined—are no longer the major pillars of Liberian social relationships, though they play an important role by virtue of their inherent reference to status. What has replaced the familial names, religion and the social structures set down in the nineteenth century is a new fusion of legitimacy, defined by the experience of life abroad—schools attended, associational affiliations, accents, and networks/alliances in the Diaspora. How are we to understand the possible fissures in the Liberian fabric which this return migration engenders?

Burrowes is surely right to criticize Western political theorists who erroneously conflate ethnicity and class in the Liberian context. But in this article I have chosen to define the returnees as a heterogeneous social entity, rather than a homogenous class wielding power without an identifiable source. I evoke an age-old category of 'the civilised', to describe how Liberians, past and present, have defined social hierarchies. I also discuss how the West African ‘trans-national ethos’ has enabled some Liberian returnees to re-integrate into society, while others seem to be barely keeping their heads above water. This leads into an acknowledgement, and a discussion, of the resentment which has accompanied this extraordinary return migration.

Nineteenth century America-Liberian settlers perhaps proved to be one of the most mutable of migratory groups, and their twenty-first century returnee counterparts are just as complex in naming. Neither groups can truly be defined as ethnically homogenous, nor a ‘class’ in the neo-Marxist sense of the term, though some authors would argue that they are. The term ‘elites’, though somewhat accurate, leaves a bitter taste on the palate because of its imprecision. But when one stumbles upon a re-inscribed notion of the term ‘civilised’, the picture becomes crystal clear. It is Brown who restores a debate about the term ‘civilised’ or *kwi* (meaning ‘Western’) to the historical-social lexicon of Liberian relations, arguing that it not only carries moral worth, but also signifies ‘social differentiation’. Sklar asserts that ‘the civilised’ in a
Liberian context derives from fundamental features, such as high status occupation, high income, superior education, and the ownership, or control, of business enterprises. While the politician George Weah could boast of the support of three out of the four makers of ‘the civilised’ during the elections of 2005, his inability to counter Sirleaf’s Harvard degree was a thorn in the side of most people in the country—returnee and non-returnee alike. For in Liberia, education is a fundamental marker of being ‘civilised’. Samuel K. Doe, for instance, was always slighted not only as a young man, but a young man with only a fifth grade education in Liberian political palaver huts. If Doe’s coup in 1980 can be described as a violent rupture of the ‘civilising mission’ precipitated by Americo-Liberian domination, one could argue that Sirleaf’s presidency and administration represents a restoration of that ‘civilising mission’—this time a monopoly of Diaspora returnee political and social manoeuvring.

In the case of returnee migration, the terms ‘civilised’ and ‘uncivilised’ may be the least problematic words to describe how Liberians define constantly changing social relationships. There is mobility in the notion of the ‘civilised’; it is neither fixed, hereditary, nor linear. During Tubman’s regime, members of poor families would send their children to wealthy homes to work as apprentices, in exchange for board and schooling. These ‘houseboys’ and ‘housegirls’ would sometimes be included in the social milieu of ‘the civilised’, and eventually gain the political, economic, and social positions to rise above their meagre beginnings. A similar paradigm shift is happening even within returnee circles, where returnees who would not have been considered ‘civilised’ are now infiltrating Liberia’s social hierarchy because of their experiences abroad, academic skills and a Diaspora ethos marked by a distinctive worldliness. Bayart’s argument that elites assimilate reciprocally applies here too, even in the social sphere. People who wield political power replicate their privilege in the economic realm, which in turn, reinforces their social position.

Contemporary Liberia has been transformed into a
'deterritorialised nation-state', in which boundaries have come to be defined in social rather than geographic terms. The returnees have maintained a trans-national ethos; they have not severed ties with the countries to which they were exiled. Return has enabled people like UNDP Governance Officer Chipo Nyambuya to redefine her old place in Liberia’s stratified society. Having lived in the United States for almost a quarter of a century, Nyambuya remarks that she now has a different appreciation for working class Liberians, and no longer feels the need to inhabit an insular realm of privilege.

While some returnees have deliberately differentiated themselves from their Diaspora counterparts by fully integrating into Liberia’s established social structures, others eat primarily at restaurants frequented by returnees, attend events sponsored by other returnees, or socialise with other returnees. It is hardly surprising. In her book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, African-American educator and current President of Spelman College in Atlanta, Beverly Daniel Tatum makes comparisons with the development of American racial minority identity in the United States. She observes that when a minority group—or a social group in the case of Liberian Diaspora returnees—is placed in an environment of polarised difference, they tend to huddle in familiar spaces, commiserate over familiar experiences and cling to each other for sustenance when they are in the midst of the majority. But in many respects return migration is about being trans-national in orientation while re-discovering social identities. One returnee, a member of the Bostonian Society of Liberia, admits to feeling like a ‘doubly-inscribed’ alien: ‘Home suddenly feels new again…Sometimes I have to relearn what being a Liberian means.’

Although some Liberian returnees may make concerted efforts to re-position themselves in the social milieu, they are still marked out as people who did not endure the dredges of war. This stifles the promise of full engagement with those who remained because the experience of war altered Liberian social patterns. A similar trend is taking shape in Liberia’s neighbor, Sierra Leone, where
non-returnees regard the ‘JC’ (the ‘jus’ cam’ in Krio) ‘with a mixture of exasperation and bemusement, sometimes bordering on irritation and outright hostility’.98 Across the border in present-day Liberia, the same observations can be made about Diaspora returnees— the ‘Johnny Just Come’ people. Experiences of resentment are no different from the resentment that rural migrants throughout West Africa have experienced when relocating to urban centres. Today, Liberia’s twenty-first century migrants fear that this resentment is leaning towards expressions of the occult. In his book _The Mask of Anarchy_, Ellis extrapolates on this notion that sorcery and witchcraft are commonplace in Liberian social relations: ‘These are philosophical traditions in which deeper truths about the destiny of individuals and the course of events are considered to be ambiguous, ruled by forces which have their origin in the invisible world of God and spiritual beings.’99 One returnee desists from eating food offered by strangers and unfamiliar relatives in case it has been poisoned. But the returnees themselves are also seen as the incubators of the occult. In his ethnographic account of Mozambican rural life, _Kupilikula: Governance and the Invisible Realm in Mozambique_, West describes sorcery as a cultural trope that enables ordinary Muedans to make sense of the world around them, riddled with competing forces of power. He perceives that the sorcery of destruction—attributed to colonial administrators, Catholic missionaries, nationalist guerrillas, socialist planners, and neo-liberal economic exploiters—is synonymous with an unwanted imposition of power.101 Liberian returnees might well be suspected of inhabiting an invisible realm that enables them to impose power through witchcraft. To most Liberians—returnees and non-returnees alike—the social machinations of sorcery and witchcraft can only be subverted through organised religion, particularly Christianity. Indeed, Churches have continued to serve as a vital social institution in Liberia because they facilitated the repatriation of former slaves in the nineteenth century102 and are doing the same for twenty-first century Diaspora returnees. It is no wonder that most Liberian presidents have been infused with religiosity, and have often used the church as a social register of
power.¹⁰³

Conclusion: Towards Liberia’s Post Conflict Reconstruction

As there is a dearth of secondary sources on the effect of cyclical migration and its influence on the modern Liberian state, I have set out here to inscribe an analysis of the structural features of Diaspora influence on Liberia’s political, economic and social histories that requires reading between the lines of standard sources.

In this article I have formulated a theory about how the Liberian state functions, based on historical trajectories of Diaspora opposition, exile and return. Whatever the case for Sirleaf’s political consolidation,¹⁰⁴ she has inherited a divided nation based on historically entrenched loyalties, past grievances against political elites, and a ruptured political history often influenced by Diaspora agendas. In her new dispensation it will be important to remember that it was the vast majority of non-returnees who elected the ‘Iron Lady’, and as such, the polity deserves the same amount of support, leverage, and access to the political pie. Similarly, the country’s economic recovery agenda should not serve as a mere replication of Tubman’s ‘Open Door Policy’, but rather an attempt at leveraging aid and investment to meet not only the material needs of the Liberian populace, but also the future needs of the country’s successor government. An over-reliance on donor aid and external funding—especially from the U.S. government—is all too clearly inter-laced with conflicting loyalties. Indeed, as the site of the entrenchment of Diaspora politics and the geographical pinnacle of Liberia’s historical trajectory of opposition, exile and return, the United States must be kept at arms length. If Liberia is to prosper and to revolutionise its own history, it cannot do so as a little Black satellite¹⁰⁵ of the United States.

The term ‘reconstruction’, as used in the heavily politicised phrase, ‘post-conflict reconstruction’, must be put in context before a meaningful discussion of its merits can be attempted.
'Reconstructing' denotes a return to something that existed before. But in many respects, conditions in countries which have been mired in conflict often begin to deteriorate precisely because their old institutions were ill-equipped to sustain the societies in which they operate. If they are to endure, these institutions need to be fashioned to meet the realities, be they ethnic, religious, or socio-economic, that fuelled the conflicts in the first place. In the case of Liberia, a post-conflict 'reconstruction' agenda would be null and void if it did not address the disenfranchisement of non-Americo-Liberians of the past and, perhaps, contemporary Liberians who stayed behind during the civil war. The primary goal must be to re-knit the fabric of a society that has been stretched, tattered, and shredded with each ensuing outbreak of violence. If Liberia is indeed to recover from its past and reclaim a future free from protracted conflict, there must be a concerted effort to reconcile a long history of internal contradictions based on the privileges of a few and the disenfranchising of the masses.

The Sankofa bird is a symbolic representation of what contemporary Liberia would do well to replicate. With a long neck and legs pointed like stilts, its beak rotates in a contorted, counter-clockwise movement backwards, as if looking into some far away, past reality. Sankofa is an Akan word from Ghana which, when translated literally, means: 'We must go back and reclaim our past so we can move forward; we must understand why and how we came to be to know who we are today.' If the Liberian state, as we know it, does indeed function in a constant pattern of dialectic change and replication, as Bayart argues, then reading its civil war through historical lenses may be the only way to curb further political, economic, and social upheaval. For inequality gives birth to inequality and they are yokes of the same egg. Nothing in Liberia exists in a vacuum. Today, Sesay prophesies that unless fundamental changes occur in the 'attitudes, institutions, perceptions, and directions that characterised Liberian politics and society in the past, the nightmare of a war-fragmented nation is likely to haunt the inhabitants.' I would press that observation even further. If Liberia does not reconcile the inherent fissures in its spotted past, future eruptions of war are simply inevitable. It is
now the task of a new generation to see that the replications of a long, dysfunctional history are finally ended.

Notes

4 Ibid., p. 88.
5 Ibid., p. 64.
6 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York, 1963), p. 132.
11 If political elite reproduction were an African peculiarity, figures in the United States—purported to be one of the oldest living Western democracies in the world, and a nation whose political features are replicated in the Liberian Constitution—with the names Bush and Clinton, representative of two last administrations of the twentieth century, would not have resonance in early twenty-first century American politics.
12 (Cooper, 2002:160)
14 Ibid., p. 17.
15 Ibid., p. 61.
16 Ibid., p. 64.
17 Ibid., p. 463.
18 Ibid, p. 94.
20 (Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1986: 118)
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of Regional, U.N. and International Humanitarian Interventions in Liberia (Pretoria, 2005)

25 Ibid., p. 35.
27 Aning, Ibid., p. 2.
28 Taylor’s invasion of the country from neighbouring Ivory Coast was foisted by the support of former dissenters of the Doe regime, particularly those loyal to Quiwonkpa, as well as the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA), which illustrates the recurring pattern of recycled loyalties.
29 Huband, ibid., p. 47.
31 Gberie, Ibid., p. 62.
33 The thirty-five returnees I consulted for this study were as diverse in orientation as any sample demographic set. Due to time constraints on compiling a more scientific demographic study, I focused on established trends, patterns, and continuities. Most of the returnees were young professional entrepreneurs between 23 and 40 who had returned within the past four years from the United States. Compiled in its entirety, the educational skills level ranged from college educated to Ph.D. holders, though the average returnee had at least one college degree. Most returnees reported that they had left Liberia between 1990 and 1995, and at 23 men overwhelmingly outnumbered women. This comes as no surprise, though, as the trend for returnee migration tends to show men often leave families in the Diaspora to pursue a returnee dream, be it professional, personal or psychological. The returnees listed infrastructural deficiencies, the slow pace of life, pressures from Liberian non-returnee family members, and a lack of work ethic as major challenges to their re-integration into the Liberian political, economic and social milieu.
34 My research does not include repatriated refugees or internally displaced Liberians. As a Liberian myself, I recognise that the interviewees’ responses and contributions may have been swayed by my orientation as a national of the country, though I attempted to maintain a neutral stance as an independent researcher.
36 In light of this, I read each secondary source on Liberia’s history, the nature of class construction, Diaspora identity, and trans-national migratory returnees ‘along’ and ‘against’ the grain.
37 Dissertation interview with Bureau of Immigration personnel in Monrovia, Liberia, December 2006.

LURD was one of the warring factions calling for the removal of Taylor in 2003. They began an offensive against Taylor’s army in 2000.


May 2007 interview with advisor to Liberia’s Ministry of Finance.

J. Gus Liebenow, Ibid., p. 1.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 2.

Ibid., p. 5.


Ibid., p. 211.

Ibid., p. 213.

Ibid., p. 60.

Ibid., p. 62.

Ibid., p. 199.

Ibid., p. 147.


In February 2007 alone, hundreds of international investors, corporations, expatriate Liberians, economists, and policy analysts flocked to Washington,
D.C. for Liberia’s Donor Conference, which garnered promises for investment packages. Furthermore, countries such as China, Japan, Canada, Germany and the U.S. have strengthened ties with Liberia because of strategic interests in accessing the country’s endowed mineral wealth. Germany and the U.S. have even made public pronouncements to cancel their share of Liberia’s astronomical debts.

73 Fanon, Ibid., p. 123.
74 Givens, Ibid., p. 143.
75 Ibid., p. 147.
77 The Mittal Steel contract is expected to create mining contract employment in Buchanan—Liberia’s second largest port city and where Mittal’s headquarters will be stationed—as well as develop mining, railway, and port infrastructures.
78 Van der Kraaij, Ibid., p. ii.
79 Ibid., p. iv.
80 Podcast Interview on Pambazuka News Podcasts, April 2007
84 Infrastructural deficiencies such as the lack of lights, water, and roads were listed in this study’s questionnaire as major impediments.
85 May 2007 interview with advisor to Liberia’s Ministry of Finance.
87 Oxford Dissertation Interview, December 2006.
88 See Chikezie and Daramy, ibid., p. 6.
89 See Burrowes, Ibid., p. 24.
90 I have accounted for the stark differences between the Americo-Liberian settlers at the turn of the nineteenth century and the Diaspora Liberian returnees of the twenty-first century in terms of historical trajectories, scale in migration, and identity politics. One example of this difference is the Americo-Liberian settlers who, for the most part, had no prior sensory experience of Liberia or contextual knowledge of the country. Returnees, on the other hand, had spent their formative years in the country and developed a Liberian ethos.
92 See Sklar, Ibid., p. 533.
95 Tatum, ibid., p. 55.
The Bostonian Society could represent a twenty-first century concoction with historical roots in secret societies of elite power brokers such as the Freemasons, or the Poro and Sande secret societies whose exclusively held indigenous member-base began to change with the infiltration of political elites such as Tubman.

Ibid.

See Chikezie and Daramy, Ibid., p. 16.


See Liebenow, ibid., p. 20.

Though Sirleaf does not politicise religion, her background as a United Methodist has legitimised her in a country that appears to be reverently charged, yet seething with socio-religious discord.

Newspapers such as the *Daily Observer*, *Liberian Express*, *New Democrat*, and *The Liberian Analyst* serve as both a watchdog for the Sirleaf government as well as a platform for highlighting challenges to the new political dispensation under Sirleaf.


Bayart observe, ‘the linking and telescoping within the longue duree of systems of inequality and domination can be seen in a historical trajectory.’ See Bayart, *The State in Africa*, p. 104.

See Sesay, Ibid., p. 395.
But, she said Liberians in the Diaspora must return home in order to make the partnership possible. “I propose that serious consideration be given to the opening of a Diaspora Enterprise Entrepreneur Promotion and Investment Office back in Liberia. In short, what I am proposing to you is [that] you have to be on the ground to help make what we want happen. You cannot stay over here [in the US] and say we are waiting for the government of Liberia,” King-Akerele said. University of Toledo professor Sakui Malakpa called on the Liberian Diaspora to be part of the development of their country, irre