

Acrimony in Colonial Liberia¹

Akpojevbe Omasanjuwa²

University of The Gambia, Lecturer, Department of Social Sciences, Gambia

Junisa Phebean³

University of The Gambia, Development Studies Unit., Gambia

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Abstract

This article addresses the development of the acrimonious relationships between freed Black American slaves who settled in Liberia, and their African hosts. The superiority complex of the former made them have derogatory views about their hosts, while the latter, who initially welcomed the repatriates, loathed them for being arrogant descendants of slaves. The sequential transgressions committed against the indigenous people, by the settler class, degenerated to an apartheid situation. Principally, their agonizing experiences revolved around land ownership and inequity. Despite the desolation, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) ignored human rights abuses that were identical with what it denounced in other parts of colonial Africa. However, despite the tragedies they had grappled with, enough precautionary measures are not in place to nip other potentially volatile situations in the bud. In conclusion, the write-up, through qualitative verification of facts, highlighted how problems of finance, education, superiority complex, greed and avarice and duplicity of African politicians complicated the Liberian situation.

Keywords: Contract Labour, Discrimination, Liberia, Settler Colonialism

Sömürülen Liberya’da Çekişmeler

Öz

Bu makale Liberya’ya yerleşen özgür siyahi Amerikalı köleler ile Afrikalı ev sahipleri arasındaki acımasız ilişkilerin gelişimini incelemektedir. Siyahi kölelerin üstünlük kompleksi, onların ev sahipleri hakkında aşağılayıcı görüşlere sahip olmasına yol açarken, başlangıçta geri dönenleri memnuniyetle karşılayan ev sahipleri, kölelerin küstah torunları oldukları için onlardan nefret ediyordu. Yerli halk tarafından, yerleşimci sınıfa peş peşe yapılan kural çiğnemeler, ayrımcı bir duruma yol açmıştı. Esasen, acı veren deneyimleri arazi mülkiyeti ve eşitsizliği etrafında dönüyordu. Terk edilmişliğe rağmen, Afrika Birliği Örgütü, sömürge Afrika’nın diğer bölgelerinde kınadıklarıyla aynı olan insan hakları ihlallerini göz ardı etti. Bununla birlikte, boğuştuğu trajedilere rağmen, filizlenmekte olan diğer potansiyel olarak uçucu durumları kırmak için yeterli tedbirler mevcut değildi. Sonuç olarak, kaleme aldığım yazı, olguların nitel olarak doğrulanması yoluyla, finans, eğitim, üstünlük kompleksi, açgözlülük, hırs ve sorunları Afrikalı siyasetçilerin Liberya durumunu nasıl karmaşık hale getirdiğini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sözleşmeli Emek, Ayrımcılık yapma, Liberya, Yerleşimci Sömürgeciliği

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² masapele@yahoo.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-8005-3924

³ pjunisa@utg.edu.gm, ORCID: 0000-0002-0275-1380

Introduction

In 1794, Toussaint L'Ouverture successfully led a slave revolt in Santo Domingo, (Haiti) during which hundreds of slave owners died (Rossiter 1993, p. 49). Most of the survivors fled to the United States where their gory tales terrified their counterparts. This was before the Thirteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution in 1865.⁴ A similar riot in Brazil failed. Edward Rossiter explained how fear also grew in England of a similar event in a British Caribbean colony (Rossiter, 1993, p. 49). Prior to these developments, a wind of change was already gusting across the United States where about 200,000 slaves had regained freedom because either the death or the decisions of their masters. Consequently, on 26 December 1816, a congregation of Quakers, in collaboration with other concerned individuals met in Washington DC to form the American Colonisation Society (ACS). The aim of the society was to resettle the freed slaves somewhere in Africa. The efforts of the society gave birth to the Republic of Liberia, a settlement for the freed slaves from the United States. Although the US government tacitly distanced itself from the endeavour, it however, offered the organisation \$ 100,000 to establish the settlement, (Parkins, 2019, p. 17).

The iron fist discriminatory government established by the new settlers became discriminatory and polarised the society through its regime that as identified to other apartheid regimes in the continent.

This article examined the tactics adopted by the returnees to subjugate their hosts. In addition, it explains how the government's dire financial situation resulted in its exploitation of indigenous labour, a practice that nearly cost the country her nominal independence. These were integral components of the intractable problems which transformed the country into settler colonialism akin to what was experienced in colonial Southern Africa.

Several studies have addressed diverse aspects of the evolution of Liberia. Correspondingly, there are well-researched works on African colonial experiences (General History of Africa VII 1985; Dillon 2008; Johnson 2004, and Reviewed Works, 1931). Most of these publications, particularly Tegan S. K. Diercks (2011), M'baye Gueye and Adu A. Boahen in (General History of Africa VII 1985:114), are of the opinion that Ethiopia is the only African country without a colonial experience in Africa. This article repudiates the assertion since events show that the settlers were of a different stamp. As was expected, the indigenes posed resistance to 'foreign rule' that had 'grown too rusty to cope with' reforms; this led to the collapse of the Republic on 12 April 1980 (Sawyer 1992, pp. 288-293). Therefore, the essence of the article is to debunk the myth that only Europeans colonised Africa by offering a different view of the role of African returnees who also colonised indigenous societies such as in Liberia.

⁴ The thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolished slavery in the United States. Article XIII. Sections 1 state: Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, nor any place subject to their jurisdiction. Section 2 states: Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation. The amendment was ratified on December 6, 1865.

The Early Settlers

In 1817, the first batch of settlers set sail on the *Elizabeth* with sixty-six men, women, and children. They dropped anchor in Sharbro Island, Sierra Leone, where a substantial number of them, including all the agents of the ACS, died of malaria fever, (Republic of Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission. No year of publication, p. 74). Between 1821 and 1867, during the era of the abolition of slave trade, about 13,000 slaves rescued from the high seas joined the Liberian settlement, (Republic of Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission. No year of publication, p. 74) Health related problems, among others, compelled them to relocate from Sharbro Island to Bassa. They unsuccessfully attempted to negotiate the purchase of land from King Jack Ben.⁵ Another attempt to procure land from King Peters and the Chiefs of Bassa and Dei communities also failed. The failures were due to the indigenous land tenure system, which prohibited the sale of land, which was a communal property. Notwithstanding, the settlers got permission to occupy as much land as they desired, but they were to be submissive to the authority of the kings. The ACS vehemently opposed the condition.

On 15 December 1821, the settlers reached a contentious agreement with their hosts.⁶ The understanding enabled them to occupy a tract of land from Cape Mesurado (Monrovia), on the Atlantic shoreline to stretching 40 Kilometres inland. It is noteworthy that no African participated in the signing and negotiation for the procurement of the territory.⁷

The high mortality rate among the early settlers exposed the ACS and its policies to harsh criticisms. Consequently, other colonization societies such the New York City, Pennsylvania, Mississippi, and Maryland proliferated. Robert Harper founded Maryland Colonisation Society (MCS). Between 1833 and 1849, the MCS procured territories adjacent to the western border of the Ivory Coast, while other colonisation societies acquired separate tracts of land along the Atlantic seaboard (Johnson, 2004, p. 116).

The settlers adopted the name Americo-Liberians, while those rescued on the high seas, on their way to slavery, were the Congo men. With the support of the United States congress and some prominent Americans, the settlers regarded themselves as the first citizens of Liberia. However, they had neither managerial nor political skills. (Sawyer, 1992, p. 99; Shick 1971) Nevertheless, their descendants who were less than three percent of the population were exclusively in charge of the administration of the country until 1980.⁸

⁵ “On April 12, 1821, they signed an agreement with a Bassa chief who had been named King Jack Ben by European traders. Ben agreed to provide the settlers with a place to build their settlement provided they would not disrupt the flow of trade, including the slave trade that was going on in his territory.” (Sawyer, 1992, p. 97)

⁶ “On December 15, 1821, Lieutenant Stockton and Dr. Ayres met with the Dei and Bassa chiefs whose territory was to become the site of the first settlement. After considerable discussion, in a move to speed up the "negotiations," Lieutenant Stockton pulled a pistol, put it to the head of King Peter (one of the chiefs), and obtained a favorable settlement. The "Doukor Contract," as the "agreement" is sometimes called, was then concluded. The land "purchased" was a small island near Cape Mesurado,” (Sawyer, 1992, p. 98).

⁷ “The deed was signed by only White American agents in December 1821. Actually, the Black pioneers were all still residing in Freetown at this time. After the deed-signing ceremony, they relocated to Providence Island. This fact must be clearly stated because from 1822 to the present, a myth persists that liberated Black pioneers took the land from the African rulers at gunpoint,” (Beyan, 1997, p. 13).

⁸ “Essentially Liberia remained an oligarchy where 1 per cent of the population [Americo-Liberians] controlled the rest – some 2 million people” (Meredith, 1980).

The governance structure that evolved from the effort of the ACS was ostensibly fashioned in tandem with the American model. The structure divided the country into two sections. The first comprised the coastal counties occupied by the Americo-Liberians where land was under private ownership. The other part where the indigenes dwell was under the customary land tenure system. The pioneers' effort to administer the territory was fraught with problems largely because the indigenes outnumbered them significantly. Besides, administration of the interior from the distant Monrovia was difficult (Johnson, 2005, p. 121-122). Amos J. Beyan argued that *"Liberia's Founding Fathers had been carefully screened, and, indeed, indirectly selected by the ACS. The members of this class were the ones who had closely identified with the ACS and its values in return for political and material rewards. This was before Liberia attained her nominal independence in 1847"* (Beyan, 1997, p. 5).

He further asserted that although the original agents of the ACS died from malaria in 1820, the centralised political system they introduced survived (Beyan, 1997, p. 3). The governor had absolute powers above what was required for accountability and rectitude. The envisaged checks and balances that are associated with the American political system were absent in Liberia. Besides, there was no room for dissenting voices. A stratified society ensued, in which the ruling party, The True Whig Party, retained the monopoly of power for over a century. The development was an outcome of the autocratic foundation that the early settlers laid. *"Indeed, the promotion of the liberty and material status of a small number of settlers at the expense of the majority of the indigenous population was among the factors that precipitated Liberia's first major coup against Jehudi Ashmun's regime in 1823"* (Beyan, 1997, p. 4). The settlers, who were ignorant of the traditions and political arrangements of the indigenes, assumed that what was good for Americans should be good for Africans, an opinion that later events invalidated. *"With roots in the United States rather than Africa, the Americo-Liberians, consciously set themselves from the tribal majority that surrounded them,"* (Johnson, 2004, p. 118). The Indigenous Africans, under the settler rule literally became servants.

From its inception, the country was characterised by social cleavages that formed the basis of governance and relationships. Although the administration of the settlement was until 1847, run by the ACS, what is not certain is whether the republic indeed attained independence in 1847, the year the ACS relinquished power to Africans of their choice.

The administration of Liberia was colonial in style and nature, identical with those in colonial African states. The fact that Africans governed their like did not make conditions any different from European colonialism. It is essential to examine the infractions committed by a class, against another under the guise of governance. This will unveil the motive of the settlers. Beyan credited Elijah Johnson, a settler, with a statement made to the British authorities in Sierra Leone that: *"We don't want your Flagstaff put on Liberian territory, that*

"Essentially Liberia remained an oligarchy where 1 per cent of the population [Americo-Liberians] controlled the rest – some 2 million people" (Meredith, 1980) "The attempt of about one per cent Of the population to control the destiny of the Republic without regard for the social and cultural outlook of the natives produced difficulties which have plagued the Republic and hindered its development down to the present day." Freeman, 1968, pp. 22-23.

Charles Henry Huberich, The Political and Legislative History of Liberia, 1947, Vol. 1, p. 68. Cited in Jones, H. Abeodu. Bowen. (1997, 9).

will cost us more to bring down than to defeat any local opposition” (Beyan, 1997, p. 11). The expression connotes that the settlers anticipated confrontations like what European colonial powers encountered in some other African colonies.

Events showed that the foundation of the state was rooted in injustice, akin to colonial wrongs committed elsewhere in Africa. The infractions resulted in incessant warfare, which, gradually, shattered the cohesion and social fabrics of the country from 1822 until the end of the Liberia Civil War of 1989-2003. The Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (TRC, stated that from 1822 to 1994, Liberia recorded over ninety violent conflicts (Republic of Liberia 2009, p. 79). Research findings are yet to classify any of these wars as an integral part of African colonial wars.

In addition, the TRC highlights that there were vestiges of slavery and segregation in the country. To add credence to this assertion, the report explained that the eleven stripes on the national flag represent the eleven settler signatories of the declaration of independence, while the white star symbolised freedom from slavery. There is no symbolic representation of the indigenes in the scheme of things. *“Although there are sixteen major indigenous languages in Liberia, spoken by ninety five percent of the population, none [was] selected as the lingua franca,”* (Guseh, 1997, p. 40). The nation’s motto did not represent the indigenes who shared their land with the settlers. Furthermore, a serious anomaly was that only persons of colour could become citizens of Liberia, thereby denying the indigenes citizenship. The settlers revered Thanksgiving Day in celebration of their victory over the indigenes in 1882. The state existed in mockery of its national motto, ‘The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here.’ This serves to reinforce the view that there was at that time, a vast social, economic, and political gap separating the Americo-Liberians from the indigenous majority (Freeman, 1968, p. 49). Similar to the policy of separate development in South Africa, the society had a dual system of education; governance, law, and cultural practices (Foster et al., 2009, p. 53).

The TRC report made recommendations that covered reparation, amnesty, and the prosecution in public sanction courts to foster peace through dialogue, enhance national reconciliation, and healing beginning from the grass roots (Republic of Liberia TRC, p. 12). However, in recommending these laudable objectives, strategies for the avoidance of future outbreak of hostilities received inadequate attention.

The conception of acrimony

When the immigrants arrived in 1822, Liberia was not *terra nullius*.⁹ There were established settlements with political systems in place.¹⁰ Each ethnic group had its own territorial claims. Despite the sundry motives of the colonisers, the ACS barred the settlers from entering land agreements with the indigenes.

⁹ “Terra nullius is a Latin term meaning “land belonging to no one”. British colonisation and subsequent Australian land laws were established on the claim that Australia was terra nullius, justifying acquisition by British occupation without treaty or payment. This effectively denied Indigenous people’s prior occupation of and connection to the land. . .”

<https://australianstogether.org.au/discover/australian-history/mabo-native-title/>.

¹⁰ Oral tradition has it that the pre-colonial inhabitants got into the territory due to mass migration instigated by the successive decline and fall of Ghana, Mali and Songhai empires at different times between the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

As many of the early settlers succumbed to malaria fever, it was imperative that the survivors seek a new abode that is in fine fettle. However, contrary to the American land tenure system, land in Liberia is a communal property. Hence, its procurement by ACS for settlement fomented tension or disagreements. The search, which took them further afield ultimately resulted in the controversial Ducor Agreement, a pact that became the cornerstone of the acrimonious relationship between the settlers and the indigenes.¹¹ Akin to the children of Israel who departed Egypt for the Promised Land, the settlers knew no peace in their new abode. In 1822, the indigenes and settlers fought the Twin Battles of Crown Hill and Fort Hill. Apart from land issues, the expectation of the indigenes that the settlers would be submissive to the authority of African kings was another petulant matter.¹²

The other colonisation societies followed the ACS's footsteps of forcibly acquiring land from the indigenes. As a result, land agreements took the laws of the United States into account. The settlers felt that there could be a cause to invoke the American legal system to their advantage. On the other hand, African Kings started expressing weighty concerns over the alarming rate of land expropriation. Their relationship with the indigenous Africans deteriorated. Coupled with financial problems, and dwindling settler population, the Mesurado settlement (later named Liberia), in 1839, hastily formed a merger with the other settler territories, to forge a more formidable military force against the incessant forays from the indigenes. The settlement became the Commonwealth of Liberia. The cash-strapped country relied heavily on port and other revenues from its territorial waters in running the affairs of state. Moreover, the ACS was not a recognised colonial power in international law. It was difficult to categorise it either as a colony or as a sovereign state. Hence, the status of the country became contentious. Consequently, the country was unable to exert its authority to levy and collect revenue from foreign ocean going-vessels in its territorial waters. Principally on this account, the settlers eventually, in 1847, asserted their independence from ACS, to become the first Republic of Liberia that existed until 1980.

The 1847 declaration of independence is akin to what prevailed in Southern Rhodesia, when the Rhodesian Front under Ian Smith, Unilaterally Declared Independence (UDI) and promulgated the 1965 Rhodesian constitution. Africans resisted the Smith oligarchy until 1980. Similarly, the nominal independence Liberia asserted from the ACS, did not change the indigene's perception of the government as an oppressive colonial rule. The action was nothing short of handing the truncheon of power to a subset of the same hegemony.

¹¹ The agreement was controversial as an American war vessel was allegedly off shore, the presence of which quelled the agitations of subordinate chiefs and people who were opposed to the alleged sale of communal land. In addition, when the settlers learnt that the purported sale was not an everlasting transaction, acrimony started brewing. "In a final act of desperation, the White American agents, Eli Ayers and Robert Stockton, threatened King Peters of Bushrod Island near Monrovia at gun point to sign the deed for the land for the American venture" (Jones, 1997, p. 13).

¹² Precisely the same developments occurred in Rhodesia. When the first settlers arrived in 1890, they met a salvo of resistance movements. Similar to the Ducor Agreement, David Chanaiwa expounded, "The controversial Rudd Concession [of Rhodesia] was obtained primarily by the conspiratorial deception of Lobengula by both British imperial officials and missionaries." Also comparable to the Liberia situation, King Lobengula expected the Whites would 'abide by the laws of his country and in fact be as his people', (General History of Africa VII, 1985, p. 205-206).

Diercks slipped in his judgment when he inadvertently asserted, that Charles Taylor is commonly associated with Liberia's civil conflict. It was Taylor's predecessor, Samuel Doe, who set in motion the events of the total anarchy (Diercks, 2011, p. 73). Liberian civil war was a product of the ACS's colonial heritage. The events marking the foundation of the final cataclysm in the 1980s preceded President Samuel Doe by over a century. They were unwittingly set in motion by the stance the Americo-Liberians assumed towards governance.

An attestation is that despite being a non-signatory, the settlers scrambled for and partitioned Africa within the framework of the European guidelines, enunciated in the 1885 Berlin treaty. They perceived themselves as 'civilized citizens,' and the indigenous Africans as 'uncivilized' and 'backward' (General History of Africa VII, 1985, p. 31-35). Hence, it was a mark of prestige for the settlers to interact with the European imperialists and colonialists, in the acquisition of territories and signing assorted treaties to delimit borders. A long-established fallacy is that only Europeans scrambled for and partitioned Africa among themselves. It would have come as no surprise, had the settlers honoured a formal invitation to participate in the Berlin conference, going by their attitude towards their hosts. Elizabeth Laura West is of the view that *"Liberia did all she could... to comply with the established etiquette enshrined in the Berlin treaty for acquiring and maintaining territories in Africa. This explains why the settlers adopted colonial tactics in establishing [their] hegemony, which she strenuously and haphazardly protected and maintained"* (West, 2012, p. 45-66).

Settler colonialism

The Arab-Israeli conflict and the war of apartheid in South Africa are examples of problems that emanated from settler colonialism. Although the concept exists in various shades, they had some common traits. Baligh Ben Taleb addressed it as a history in which the settlers drove indigenous populations from their land, in order to establish their own national or ethnic communities. Under colonialism, the colonizers went out to the colonies, usurped the land, exploited their resources, and eventually returned home. Under settler colonialism, there was no return home. The colonisers came to stay and occupy the land permanently (Taleb, 2014, p. 4). David Chanaiwa argues that *"European settlers in Southern Africa, unlike their counterparts in the rest of Africa were from the beginning, interested in establishing permanent homes in their new environment. Being attracted by its temperate climate, fertile agricultural land, cheap African labour and an abundance of minerals"* (General History of Africa VII, 1985, p. 194). Sir Harry Johnston made a distinction between colonies of settlements and those of exploitation in relation to Africa, (United Nations Publication, 1975, p. 4). The views of the trio implied that there were two types of colonies namely, that of exploitation, and that of settlement. The USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand were examples of the latter, while all African countries excluding Ethiopia belong to the former. South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Kenya primarily designed to belong to the latter, but indigenous liberation efforts thwarted the various schemes. The case of Liberia was within the ambit, though not exactly like the prevailing situations in Palestine, Australia, New Zealand, USA, and Canada. Liberian settlers were of a different stamp, as they had no capital to invest, neither do they possess the requisite skills vital for the development of the territory. In addition, they lacked the military capability to protect and advance their interests (Gathii, 2004, p. 4-6).

Among the causes of the acrimonious state of affairs was the perception of the indigenes that the Republic's existence was rooted in inequity. Like European colonialism, settler colonialism, from their perspective, constituted an illegitimate interference in their internal affairs. Their perception was not surprising because colonialism, particularly the European version, was nothing short of internationally orchestrated coup d'états which toppled indigenous governments the world over. In like manner, the activities of the Americo-Liberians fomented formidable political problems by disrupting the political arrangements they met, and systems that they did not bother to understand. Liberia was a country where all were supposed to be free, but the majority were in chains. It was a place where all were supposed to be equal, but with varying degrees of equality. From the inception of the Republic, forced labour, servitude, and age-long human pawning, were among the hallmarks of the ruling settler elites, an accusation least expected to be levied against freed slaves and their descendants. To the indigenes, it was an oddity, for descendants of slaves to be their rulers and subject them to slave conditions.

Donald A. Ranard succinctly explains the situation arguing that relations between Americo-Liberians and indigenous Liberians were marked from the beginning by mutual ethnocentrism, which led to conflict. The Americo-Liberian settlers, representing Western culture, considered it their Christian duty to replace the "barbarous" customs, religion, and political institutions of indigenous Liberians with their own "superior" values, practices, and institutions. Indigenous Liberians, in turn, viewed the Americo-Liberians as liberated slaves, who should occupy a lower status in society than they (Ranard, 2005, p. 2).

Under ACS dominion, individuals could not enter land agreements with the indigenes. However, it was a different ball game after the peppercorn independence in 1847. The numerically fewer settlers became stupendously wealthy as they exploited and occupied indigenous land at an alarming proportion. Jeffery S. Makain and Rev. Mommoh S. Foh documented that, "*The minority elite having apportioned huge tracks of lands to themselves and their loyalists used the uneducated, poor, and powerless indigenous majority to work their ill-gotten lands*" (Makain and Foh, 2009, p. 24). Besides, "*The settlers wrestled [for] ownership of land from the aborigines, through legislative enactments which tied ownership of land to citizenship*" (Makain and Foh, 2009, p. 33).

The territorial limits of the republic increased in 1857 when the Maryland colony voluntarily joined. "*Land absorbed into Liberia as it expanded to the east [of Monrovia] was not purchased from traditional authorities, but simply deemed public land by right of conquest,*" (World Bank 2008, p. viii). The Supreme Court of Liberia judgment of 2 May 1920, in the case of *Ballah Karman vs. John Morris*, legitimised land grabbing by the settlers. "*This key decision of the Liberian Supreme Court rationalised this by reference to US Supreme Court holdings on the taking of American Indian lands*" (World Bank, 2008, p. viii).¹³ During the partition of Africa,

¹³ "Typically, under international law, conquest confers sovereignty but does not nullify existing property rights. On the other hand, other colonial powers in Africa - especially in settler colonies - similarly ignored customary land rights and declared large areas of conquered land to be public or in the case of Britain, "Crown" lands."

Liberia lost patches of territories to the British and the French in 1885, 1892 and 1919, but she got vast territories in exchange in the interior (American Geographical Society, p. 1908). Rectification of the last disputed tract of land with Britain took place in 1930. These developments had crucial implications. The bilateral treaties were within the framework of the Berlin Treaty. This qualified the settlers to be among the fold of the colonising powers in Africa.¹⁴ Therefore, Liberia, an ostensibly independent African country, participated in the sharing of Africa within the framework of the treaty. A deed often ascribed to European powers. Treaties pertaining to navigation and boundary adjustments were inclusive (American Society of International Law, 1911).

Despite Liberia's resolute compliance with the provisions of the Berlin Treaty, both Britain and France longed for her territory. On 26 June 1890, the United States had cause to reaffirm Liberia's independence at the Brussels conference. Apart from the formidable international pressure that Liberia grappled with to retain independence, rebellion on the home front was equally challenging. The 1916 Hut-Tax shows that the government was unable to collect the taxes imposed, even with the effort of the Armed Forces (Liberia Frontier Force). To address the escalating economic problems, the government overexploited the indigenes by subjecting tax defaulters to forced labour. Greer Feick pointed out that in October 1860; an ordinance compelled every male adult residing in Monrovia to pay an annual poll tax of 75 cents. Also, every Kruman and Vaiman or any other indigenous resident in Liberia should pay the same for the benefit of political and legal protection. Defiance was punishable with forced labour (Feick, 2011, p. 14).

From the 1850s to 1870s, the government tried to extend authority to the interior to improve trade, tax collection, and security. However, the lack of funds and adequate military capability to enforce the laws thwarted the process. The state of the economy was appalling. Mission schools were responsible for educating and converting Africans to Christianity. The health condition in the entire country was abysmal to the extent that the settlers had more confidence in African herbal medicine than the available western-trained physicians, (Johnson, 2005, p. 122). In 1807, there was a rebellion by the Grebo ethnic group, which took the assistance of the United States to quell. Subsequently, the government punitive measures retarded educational development. The settlers who habitually sent their children to Europe and America had no use for local schools (Johnson, 2005, p. 121-122).

After the Berlin Treaty of 1885 to 1920s, conflicts of resistance to colonial rule intensified. The persistent showdown compelled the government to cajole the indigenes with development promises to ward off aggressive British and French overtures. The move was vital because during the era, one of the requirements in the Berlin Treaty (Article 35) to lay claim to a territory, was effective occupation (West, 2010, p. 45-66; General History of Africa VII, 1985, p. 29). The attempt failed and Liberia lost territories to the imperial powers.

¹⁴ The 1884-1885 Berlin Treaty established etiquette for imperial relations in Africa while apportioning the continent. Although the imperial powers regarded Liberia as an independent country, she neither was at the conference nor exempted from the rules that determined the boundaries of all African countries, including hers. With the moral support and political influence of the United States, she, however, retained her nominal independence as she strenuously charts her course through the rough waters of imperial diplomacy (West, 2012, pp. 45-66).

The dawn of the twentieth century, marked the intensification of extreme draconian measures by the Americo-Liberians in attempt to exert control. This motivated the indigenes to gravitate towards the British and French for improved trade relations and their collective security. During the early years of the Arthur Barclay's administration (1904-1912), his attempt to copy the British indirect administrative system in Sierra Leone failed.

Iron Fist Administration

In their attempt to be economically independent, the Americo-Liberian elites established plantations for sugar cane, cotton, tobacco, rice, and vegetable cultivation. They relied on the servile labour of the indigenes. However, climatic and edaphic factors and oscillation in world commodity prices scuttled their efforts. A successful agricultural enterprise requires a sound financial base. The outrageous foreign loans they contracted complicated matters (Michael Freeman 1968:20-54). In 1930, for example, foreign loan financed 85 percent of government budget, most of which went into the payment of salaries of public officials employed on strict party loyalty basis (Feick, 2011, p. 16).

Rebellion was the strategy the indigenes used in resisting domination. On its part, the government responded with brutal force. In 1915, there was an insurgency by members of the Kru ethnic group. On this account, the country's Attorney General, Samuel Ross, ordered the Liberia Frontier Force, in Sino County, to extort money and other items of value from the Kru, Bassa, and Grebo communities (Johnson, 2004, p. 131). Ross also engaged in the pillage of labour to the extent that the indigenes who could not meet his insatiable demands became infuriated. As the situation worsened, he ordered the execution of a chief and five others, by hanging (Johnson, 2004, p. 131). The resultant mayhem led to an attempted declaration of independence by the Kru. The United States intervened to quell the uprising on the condition that there would be reforms thereafter. Instead of reforms, forty-two chiefs along with other prisoners were executed. Similar to the introduction of Pass laws in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, travelling without a permit, and possession of private firearms, became illegal. The prohibition of firearms exposed the indigenes to attacks, not only from the Frontier Force elements, but also from wild beasts; especially leopards (Johnson, 2004, p. 236-237).

In South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, the pass law empowered the employers to have easy control over black workers. Similarly, a Liberian interior regulation forbade the people in the counties to move into the districts without permission. Consequently, they carried their produce over the frontier instead of bringing it to the coast (Reviewed Works 1931, p. 285. Reginald 1975, p. 66, and Thompson, 2001, p. 166). *"Under the Group Areas Act (1950) and its subsequent amendments, [The South African] government divided urban areas into zones where members of one specified race alone could live and work."* Similarly, the settlers in Liberia lived in the coastal counties, while the indigenes resided in the interior. African settlements adjacent to Americo-Liberian towns had no recognition.

In 1923 the disputed use of a jungle pathway that connects the interior to the coast caused a fracas between the Kru of Po River, and the Grebos which claimed seven lives. Chief Tuweley Jeh appealed to

Superintendent Yancy for action. The superintendent instructed him to act rather than complain. Three Krumen lost their lives when the chief and his people subsequently retaliated, League of Nations Report, 1931, p. 19-21 and Sawyer 1992, p. 368). However, Yancy extorted £160 from Jeh for legal consultation before he passed judgment in his favour. Later, the matter reached Monrovia where Jeh paid a fine of £300 in addition to serving a prison term. He also gave up the murderers. Superintendent Yancy promised to intervene in his favour if he could provide 500 workers for slave labour in Fernando Po. With two villages razed by fire, the local chiefs who initially objected to the demand complied. When Jeh returned home to discover that Yancy had demanded workers, he objected. Once again, members of the Liberia Frontier Force arrested him and then ravaged the village of Julucan. The Frontier Force compelled the villagers to work on Yancy's farm pending the delivery of the required numbers of workers. In 1927, Yancy became Vice President of the republic (League of Nations Report 1931, p. 30-37; Sawyer 1992, p. 368; Johnson, 2004, p. 134).

Amos Sawyer cited examples of measures in vogue designed to cow and exploits the indigenes. A case involving Varnai Quai, Headman from Baimenh, explained the degree of perversion of justice in the country. Varnai Quai in 1928 paid a fine of £17: 5s¹⁵ for road delinquencies and failure to provide porters. Quai had to pawn his two sons for a total of £15. The redemption of his children was pending during his testimony in April 1930. There was also the episode of Johnny Carr, town chief of Bengonow, fined £17. 12s. 6d¹⁶ for road delinquencies. He pawned his son and coffee farm to raise the money. Chief Yarkpasuo of Bopolu equally paid £317 for tax delinquencies. The practice of pawning youngsters was in vogue to raise money (Sawyer, 1992, p. 363).

In 1920, T.C. Mitchell, an American official based in the interior accused a District Commissioner, B.Y. Sandemannie of abusing the indigenes by using them to farm his private farm on government reserve land. The matter was shabbily handled by Monrovia as the ruling elites did all they could to protect their kith and kin from disgrace and prosecution. By 1921, all American advisers to the Liberia government trooped out of the country in protest, (Johnson, 2004, p. 129).

Another case involved J.W. Cooper, Secretary of Interior in President King's administration. He owned a private plantation in the interior, worked with slave labour supplied by the indigenes, and wives of the Liberia Frontier Force men. When American officials brought the matter to the attention of President King, Cooper was sacked, but a few years later, he got a cabinet position. Cooper's case is just one of the numerous instances of disgraced public officers removed from one position and reappointed elsewhere (Johnson, 2004, p. 130).

During the 1929 international Labour conference in Geneva, it was revealed that:

“...when recruitment for the native regiment was in full swing in the neighbouring British Colony of Sierra Leone, over one hundred Mendi Boys crossed the frontier to evade the pressure and arrived at Monrovia looking for work. They were detained and shipped off to

¹⁵ Seventeen Pounds Five Shillings

¹⁶ Seventeen Pounds Twelve Shillings and Two Pence.

Fernando Po by the agents of the Government of Liberia (the German firm holding the contract for shipping the Kru-boys), and head money was collected upon them. These were British subjects seeking refuge in a friendly state and were dealt with by the Liberian government as if they were their own subjects” (International Labour Office Report, 1929, p. 225- 227).

Meanwhile, the forlorn cries of prominent indigenes to discontinue the slave-like contract labour, pawning of wives and children and allied practices failed.¹⁷ However, Didwho Twe confronted the settler hegemony.¹⁸ In 1928, he successfully sponsored a bill in the House of Representatives outlawing the shipment of indigenes to Fernando Po to work on plantations. However, through bribery, the Postmaster General, Samuel Ross, overturned his effort in the Senate, and then the bill was overturned, (League of Nations Report, 1931, p. 16, Johnson, 2004, p. 185, Feick, 2011, p. 50). On two occasions, 1930 and 1950, Twe had to go to exile to avoid persecution from Presidents, Arthur Barclay, and William V.S. Tubman. During his Independence Day speech in 1944, Twe emphasised his effort in securing an exchange of slaves with John D. Crawford, British Provincial Commissioner in neighbouring Sierra Leone. Through negotiations with local chiefs, 2,386 Sierra Leoneans in captivity in Liberia returned home in exchange for 6,721 Liberians captives in Sierra Leone.¹⁹

The Fernando-Po Labour Imbrolio

Western countries have come under immense attack for the exploitation of Africans during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade era, particularly, the immoral procedures adopted by King Leopold of Belgium (Rossiter 1993, Eltiset al., 2000, Genovese E. D., 1974; Oldfield, 1992).²⁰ The negative opinions motivated the United States to show some interest in an unsavoury development. It involved the export of slaves from Liberia, under the facade of contract workers.

Michele Duchet explained that

¹⁷ These include H. Too Wesley, Didwho Twe, Nete Sie Brownell, R. A. Sherman, and Professor Francis W. M. Morais.

¹⁸ Amos Sawyer illustrates the efforts of the Kru ethnic group thus: The Kru travelled widely in West Africa and in Europe. By the 1880s, Kru communities were emerging in Freetown, Cape Coast, Takoradi, Accra, and Lagos. Kru youth attended British-sponsored educational institutions in these cities and many of them returned to Liberia to champion the cause of their people against the Liberian government. During the first decades of the twentieth century, many younger male Kru, such as Didwho Twe, Plenyono Gbee Wolo, and Bishop Patrick Kla Juwle, were educated under the auspices of American missionaries of the Episcopal, Methodist, and Roman Catholic denominations. Many continued their studies in the United States. As was the case with the Grebo, the Kru intelligentsia won acceptance only after a bitter struggle with the Liberian government that did not end until the late 1930s (Sawyer, 1992, p. 191).

¹⁹ “His Excellency, President Daniel E. Howard reported this incident to the National Legislature in his Annual Message dated 12 December. “The latest information from our Anglo-Liberian Boundary tells of the formation of a secrete combination against the Government, occasioned by the attitude of our Commissioner Twe, an efficient and competent young man of the Kru Tribe, who would not countenance the selling of persons by a certain influential chief. Moreover, he was exerting himself successfully, with the assistance of the British authorities, to get back into Liberian territory many chiefs and people who had been sold or forced to flee for refuge on the British side of the boundary.” Dispatches of a later date, however, just received; tells of the settlement of those intrigues.

²⁰ After the official abolition of the trade in the nineteenth century by virtually all the major European actors, The League of Nations (The League), on 25 September 1926, passed the Anti-Slave Trade and Slavery convention outlawing the vestiges of the trade. Four years on, The League prevailed on the International Labour Organization (ILO) to outlaw forced labour in all its ramifications.

“For the abolition of slavery did not by any means imply the abolition of the slave trade. Slavery was abolished in Great Britain in 1807, Brazil in 1836, France in 1848, Argentina in 1853 and the United States in 1865, [in Saudi Arabia 1962 and Mauritania in 1981], to give a few examples. But the trade continued to exist to satisfy the demand for labour in certain countries, and subsequently the demand for ‘forced labour,’ the form of modern day slavery” (UNESCO, 1979, p. 32).

The transformation of European economies from labour to capital-intensive system, during and after the industrial revolution, refined the modus operandi of the slave trade. Plantations started emerging in different African and Asian countries to produce industrial raw materials. Consequently, in the Portuguese-controlled island of Sao Tome for example, slave trade continued in a fashion that was in consonance with the law. Under that condition, contract labour fuelled the already existing domestic servitude as one of the means of meeting the soaring labour demand by plantation owners. Profits lured European powers that had already acquiesced to the eradication of the trade into the practice of hiring contract workers from diverse territories. In 1841, about 425 contract workers from Sierra Leone left for British Guiana while about 600 went to Jamaica, (Sawyer, 1992, p. 212-236). Between 1843 and 1846, schools established for children of freed slaves in Sierra Leone were also recruitment centres for child labour for export to the West Indies, (Sawyer, 1992, p. 212-236). The British company Hyde, Hodges and Company became a leading transporter of contract labour from Sierra Leone to the Caribbean and British Guiana in the late 1840s. Estimates show that as many as 32,000 Africans were taken from Sierra Leone to Saint Helena and British Caribbean colonies, as well as to British Guiana from 1841-1867 (Sawyer, 1992, p. 214).²¹

Portugal abolished the slave trade and slavery in 1836, and 1858 respectively. Ibrahim K. Sundiata cited Kloosterboer as noting that the policy of *libertos* made it mandatory for all manumitted slaves to serve their masters for two or more years without remuneration. While in Portuguese African colonial territories, vagrancy (failure to sign up for contract labour) was punishable by forced labour. Consequently, colonial officials regarded Africans who failed to surrender themselves for contract labour as vagrants. In Angola for instance, contract workers and vagrants worked on cocoa and coffee plantations on the Islands of Sao Tome and Principe. In 1905, one-fifth of the world’s cocoa supply emanated from the tiny islands, a product of forced labour. From estimates, about 4,000 Angolans forcefully relocated to the islands from 1900 to 1910 (Sawyer, 1992, p. 2015). Portuguese and Spanish plantation owners veered into other colonies, like those of Britain and Germany, in search of contract workers.

²¹ Sawyer concisely clarified how the French came up with a more sophisticated modus operandi after abolishing the slave trade in 1817. Their West African territorial range extended from Goree Island in Senegal to Gabon in Central Africa. In Liberia, French companies like *Maison Maes* of Nantes had representation. In Senegal, the policy of *engagement a temps* allows Africans to be employed through purchase and indentured for as much as fourteen years to provide labour on French plantations in the Caribbean and in Indian Ocean Islands. These include Africans indentured for military service in Martinique, French Guiana, and Gabon. Between 1854 and 1862, more than 20,000 contract workers left West Africa to French Guiana, Martinique, and Guadalupe. *Victor Regis of Marseilles* and *Maison Maes* had a field day and reputed for inhuman contract labour practices (Sawyer, 1992, pp. 212-236).

Liberia happened to be among the regions that supplied such labour. Michèle Duckett narrated how, “*from the 1860s onwards, 2,000 to 4,000 Africans were shipped to Sao Tomé (and the island of Príncipe) each year; (UNESCO, 1979, p. 44). From the Angolan interior, labourers were chained together, and shipped off to the cocoa plantations from whence they never returned*” (UNESCO, 1979, p. 44). Stone Glyn equally explained how “... *the Portuguese authorities took advantage of a prolonged drought in Cape Verde Islands to ship inhabitants to São Tomé and Príncipe,*” (Glyn, 2009, p. 4). Ibrahim K. Sundiata further stated that Kru labour was the mainstay of agriculture and other activities on the island of Fernando Po (Sundiata, 1975, pp.25 and 28). The embargo on labour export from British West Africa nearly destroyed plantation farming on the island, save for supplies from Liberia. Glyn further describes the relationship between the elites of Liberia and the cocoa island as symbiotic (Glyn, 1975, pp. 25 and 40).

Until the 1950s, Portuguese African colonies were centres for labour recruitment for South African and European establishments in that region. “*Other ‘workers’ were exported in this way from Mozambique to the Transvaal. There were approximately 80,000 of them a year, arrested by an association comprising 250 ‘recruiting agents.’ The Portuguese Assimilation laws passed in 1926, 1929 and 1933 failed to put an end to ‘forced labour,’*” (UNESCO, 1979, p. 44). Amos Sawyer likewise focused on the second half of the nineteenth century when the largest demand for contract labour was in Africa. He claimed that contract labour from India and China to the Caribbean Islands replaced those from Africa (Sawyer, 1992, pp. 216). This development came as no surprise. Hence, “*It should not be forgotten that the introduction of African labour to America and the West Indies was a direct consequence of the extermination of the indigenous Indians [by European settlers]*” (UNESCO, 1979, p. 33 and Rodney, 2012, p. 88).

During this period, various brands of slavery were prevalent in Liberia. “Pawning,” entailed Liberian political elites, inducing indigenous chiefs, selling their own children as domestic workers to pay off their debts to the state. Secondly, there was a formalised system of slave trading that involved shipping indigenous labour abroad for use in foreign territories. In the late nineteenth century, the Liberian government had negotiated with foreign governments to provide such shipments. An incident was during World War I when Liberia shipped labour to Allied territories in Africa to unload supplies from ships (Feick, 2011, p. 41).

This thriving web of the modern slave trade, disguised as contract labour, entangled Liberia. Prior to this time, the settler government had been exporting labour to various places as an income generating measure. An example being the agreement reached between Liberia and Spain in 1914 for the recruitment of contract workers to some Spanish African colonies.²² Financial inducements, coupled with the government’s inability to raise

²² “Despite earlier accusations of abuse on Fernando Po, the Liberian Government signed an agreement with Spain in 1914 for the export of native workers to the island. Indeed, as early as 1912, Richard C. Bundy, the American chargé d’affaires in Liberia, sent the U. S. State Department a detailed report on abuses in the contract labor system, and the republic’s woefully inadequate record keeping. Although the 1914 agreement imposed safeguards against mistreatment and exploitation, the system depended entirely on the honesty of Liberian agents and the Spanish Consul. With a payment to recruiters of five dollars for each worker brought into service—usually young, illiterate Kru, Bassa, and Grebo men from the counties of Grand Bassa, Sinoe and Maryland—the Fernando Po agreement generated temptations for

money to run the administration, as well as endemic corruption in high places, enticed Liberia into labour exports.

The high demand for labour in Fernando Po, led two representatives of private interests in the island, Edward Baticon and Emanuel Gonzerosa, to offer a generous contract to interested parties in Liberia. Mr Samuel Alfred Ross, an erstwhile Vice President (1919) was the mediator. The result was a private agreement between the *Syndicate Agricola de Guinea* and a group of Liberian citizens. Also, in 1887, through a French intermediary from Gabon, the government approved the recruitment and export of 5,000 workers to Panama, as manual labourers, during the construction of the Panama Canal (Sawyer, 1992, p. 219). Notwithstanding the high mortality rate and appalling work conditions, against warnings from sources that were privy to the atrocious state of affairs, the practice went on unabated. Gary G. Kuhn remarked that critics of both the canal company and the labour contractors alleged that African labour shipped across the Atlantic led to the revival of the slave trade (Kuhn, 1975, p. 43). In 1853, export of workers to British Guiana received official approval. Labour export from the Kru coast of Liberia escalated to as much as 20,000 men annually from the late 1860s. In 1913 however, exports to Sao Tome and Principe stopped temporarily, following the outbreak of sleeping sickness (Sawyer, 1992, p. 226).

Long before the close of the Liberian general elections of 1927, reports were rife of the cold-hearted treatment meted out to indigenous Liberians by the settlers. Thomas Faulkner (along with Father Collins, Didwho Twe, and many others), levied a ruinous allegation against the government, having lost the election to the incumbent, President D. B. C. King. They claimed that senior government officials were involved in forced labour and organised slavery. They were allegedly using the Frontier Force to conscript labourers mainly from the Kru coast to work on cocoa plantations in Gabon, Fernando Po, and Sao Tome. A Faulkner-led delegation tabled the matter at The League's headquarters in Geneva. "*Faulkner claimed that his main reason for appealing to The League was his desire to avoid bloodshed and a lot of poor, innocent people being killed,*" (Johnson, 2004, p. 158).

In response to cries and heart-wrenching complaints from diverse quarters, in 1930, The League, in collaboration with the governments of Liberia and the United States, investigated the allegation of slavery against the Americo-Liberian led government, a practice akin to the fundamental cause of the American Civil War. This was after observations made on the Christian republic by individuals, scholars and agencies revealed that "*essentially Liberia remained an oligarchy where 1 per cent of the population [Americo-Liberians] controlled the rest – some 2 million people*" (Meredith, 1980). The team of investigators mandated by The League to probe the veracity or otherwise of the allegation comprised of Dr Cuthbert Christy, Arthur Barclay, Charles Spurgeon Johnson, and Plenyono Gbewolo as Secretary.²³

compulsion that district commissioners and native chiefs proved unable to resist. Contracted for up to a year, many workers spent far longer on Fernando Po. Those fortunate enough to make it back to Liberia alive often had their wages confiscated or had to pay arbitrary fees imposed by recruiters or district commissioners, leaving them with nothing to show for their labor abroad." (Johnson, 2004, p. 128).

²³ "Dr Cuthbert Christy was a British doctor and zoologist who undertook extensive explorations of Central Africa during the first part of the 20th century. He was known for his work on sleeping sickness, and for the Christy Report on practices very similar to slavery in Liberia in the

Christy and Johnson spent four months in the interior and littoral of Liberia collating first-hand information on the matter. Local chiefs, labourers, and other indigenes furnished authentic evidence on the prevailing situation from their respective perspectives. Martin Meredith explained that the despair of Americo-Liberian rule came in 1931 when the international commission found senior government officials guilty of involvement in [State assisted] organised slavery (Meredith, 2005, pp. 545-548). When the commission's report came out in 1930,²⁴ nations found the results nauseating, as freed slaves who ought to be of sound mind were perpetrating the heinous and an indefensible crime of slavery.

Before the release of the findings, resentments mounted to the extent that in "*June 1930 there was a mass rally in Monrovia, where the crowd demanded drastic changes in the administration, amid personal attacks against President King*" (Smyke, 2005, p. 10). Another was organised by a league of woman, which demanded the resignation of the entire government. It took place in October 1930, Smyke, 2005, p. 10). Consequently, impeachment proceedings were set in motion against President King and his Vice. Intrinsically, the lawmakers fell out with King not for the findings of the commission, but that they felt he exceeded his constitutional powers by accepting the outcome of the investigation. The reactions also had some political undertones since it enabled politicians to undermine each other as an election year was at hand. To avoid public censure, King resigned on 30 December 1930 after his Vice had done so some weeks earlier.²⁵ Two House of Representatives members, P.F. Simpson and M.J. McBorrow, equally resigned. Postmaster General, Samuel Ross, already accused of orchestrating the Fernando Po slave trade, died of an unidentified cause, in 1929 (Feick, 2011, p. 55).²⁶ As the next presidential election was due in 1932, Secretary of State, Edwin Barclay resumed the Presidency.

Apart from public officers, the Christy report mentioned Firestone Rubber Company, an American business in Liberia using forcibly recruited government labour for the benefit of the corporation. Since the US government had supported Firestone's ambitious plans from the onset of its operations, certain Liberians, like Clarence L. Simpson, Vice-President under Tubman (1944–1951) also criticised the US government.

1920s." He represented The League and Chairman, during the investigation. Arthur Barclay a former President of Liberia represented Liberia. Professor Charles S. Johnson was head of the Social Sciences Department at Fisk University in Nashville Tennessee and later became the President of the university, US government nominee.

²⁴ It concluded inter-alia, "that in order to suppress the native, prevent him from realizing his powers and limitations and prevent him from asserting himself for the benefit of the dominant and colonizing race, although originally the same African stock as themselves, a policy of gross intimidation and suppression was for years systematically fostered and encouraged. This is the key word of the Government native policy. In addition, ...Vice President Yancy and other high officials of the Liberian Government, as well as county superintendents and district commissioners, have given their sanction for compulsory recruitment of labour for road construction, for shipment abroad and other work, by the aid and assistance of the Liberian Frontier Force. They have condoned the utilization of this force for purposes of physical compulsion on road construction for the intimidation of villagers, for the humiliation and degradation of chiefs, of captured natives to the coast, there guarding them till the time of shipment [to Fernando Po and Sao Tome.]... Slavery as defined by the Anti-Slavery Convention, in fact, does not exist in this republic. Shipment to Fernando Poo and Gabon is associated with slavery because the method of recruiting carries compulsion with it. Persons holding official positions have illegally misused their office in recruiting with the aid of the Liberian Frontier Force."

²⁵ 'No person shall be held to answer for a capital or infamous crime, except in the case of impeachment...' (Section (7), 1847 Liberia constitution).

²⁶ The cabinet committee constituted to consider the report recommended that all public officials implicated in the slavery and forced labour investigation should stand trial after dismissal. Hence, it was no surprise that there were high incidences of voluntary resignation.

Before the council of The League, on 15 January 1932, The Honourable Arthur L. Grimes divulged an incident, which took place in 1929. Didwho Twe, a Kruman by birth, then a member of the national legislature, discovered that some labourers were about to be shipped out of the country against their will. He appealed to President Edwin Barclay who promptly took action that interrupted the proposed shipment. He had earlier in November 1928, introduced a bill in the Liberian legislature against forced labour and pawning, a move that ultimately led to his expulsion from the House on charges of sedition. Mr. Twe expulsion suggests that it was a punishment for having been responsible for interrupting the shipment, (Johnson, 2004, p. 183, UNESCO, 1979, p. 45).²⁷

The agonising circumstances the indigenes were grappling with compelled most of them to flee beyond the borders. Their action was akin to the refugees, who inundated the Frontline states during the war against apartheid (Johnson, 2004, p. 211). Back in 1922, in his address to the Liberian Parliament, President King explained that the policy of his administration was to encourage, by every means, the return of the population that had fled the country. According to him, *“today everyone seems to agree that the conditions have become worse in recent years. Under these circumstances, the present situation seems to demand a complete and urgent reorganisation of the government of the interior if the future stability of the republic is to be secured, or alternatively saved from failure,”* (Reviewed Works, 1931, p. 285).²⁸ The general condition of the indigenes remained forthrightly atrocious. Twelve years after President King expressed his opinion; in his Independence Day Oration of 26 July 1944, Didwho Twe remarked that:

*“We cannot but concede that there is a general dissatisfaction among the Aboriginal population throughout the Republic. The continuous migration of the natives in large numbers into British and French colonies; leaving the countless number of broken towns behind, is nothing but a passive expression of their disappointment. But it must be clearly understood that the unhappiness of the native population is a legacy handed down by previous administrations for the six-month-old Tubman is in no way responsible. The healing of the deep wounds, which have been inflicted, and the comforting of the remnant of the disappointed population is the task of the present administration.”*²⁹

The Americo-Liberians undeniably colonised the indigenes for over 100 years, with unassailable

²⁷ His case is identical to what happened in Portugal. “As for the export of labour for the purpose of ‘depriving a third person of his liberty’, it was far too useful to be prohibited, as was illustrated only too well when, in 1947, the inspector of the Angolan Colonial Service, who was a member of the Portuguese Parliament, submitted a report on ‘forced labour’ in Angola, only to be given a seven-year prison sentence for his courage.”

²⁸ They have, in fact, to live a harried and half-starved existence or leave the country. Very large numbers have resorted to the latter alternative. On several occasions, the Commissioners in their travels have passed through abandoned villages or seen the now overgrown sites of others. Some of these villages may, have been abandoned in an ordinary way in favour of more fertile or less exhausted sites, or as the result of the death of the chief or other cause. In the present instances observed by the Commission, however, local history afforded a different explanation. Reports have repeatedly reached the Commissioners of villages by the score in other parts of the country unoccupied and falling into disrepair, and of gardens reverting to a bush. The natives have no redress and no one to whom they can ventilate their grievances (Reviewed works, 1931, p. 284).

²⁹ Independence Day oration, delivered on July 26, 1944, at the centennial pavilion in Monrovia.

accounts of chronological injustices. The ill feelings, harboured by the indigenes, of being colonial subjects contributed to the cataclysms that shattered the country in 1980 and the 1990s. Not until 1904, the descendants of the resettled slaves, a class the indigenes perceive as those ‘The Love of Liberty’ brought to the land, denied them citizenship. It was way into the 1950s that they had a feel of a semblance of universal suffrage. Meredith emphasized, “*Indigenous citizens still found themselves all but barred from the political life of the country. A situation that would have tragic consequences decades later, as a horrifying civil war destroyed every last vestige of Firestone in Liberia...*” (Meredith, 2005, p. 545-548).

Under the settler political dispensation, from 1877 until 1980, The True Whig Party tenaciously retained political power. Probably a record equalled only by the Safawa dynasty in the ancient Kanem Bornu Empire.³⁰ Their protracted stay on power was in largely ascribed to the Masonic Order of Liberia. The Grand Lodge of Liberia, established in 1867, encompassed all top government officials. Membership of the body was not open to most of the indigenous populace. Among the age-old resentments, the indigenes harboured, was the manipulations of things strictly behind Masonic closed doors. Property rights were stringently reserved for the Americo-Liberians. Nepotism and Kleptocracy, from 1822 until 1980, were rampant. Precisely, like apartheid South Africa, wealth and power were exclusive reserves of the settlers.³¹

Apart from the discriminatory practices, greed and avarice was common. The Republic of Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission averred “... *much of Tolbert’s efforts were also devoted to amassing a personal fortune and promoting the interests of family members in the traditional manner*” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, 2009, p. 101).

By 1975, the business holdings of the President and his family were enormous, visible and an issue of national debate. The Tolbert’s business interest extended and was by no means limited to fisheries, poultry, heavy equipment, textiles, manufacturing, rubber plantation, rice, and oil palm industries. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia (2009, p. 101). Beyond business, the Tolbert family had strategic holdings in government as well.¹

Prior to the arrival of Firestone in Liberia, employment in the financial sector of the economy had been restricted to a handful of the settler class and the few trading concerns. After 1926, the only major employer of labour was Firestone that employed more than 10,000 manual labourers on its plantations in 1930. More than 8,500 of this number were involuntary workers.³² On 31 August 1961, the Government of Portugal filed a protest

³⁰ The one thousand year reign of the dynasty ended through the action of Uthman Dan Fodio Sokoto Jihad of 1804.

³¹ Meredith further observed that the last of the line of Americo-Liberian presidents was the slain William Tolbert, the grandson of freed South Carolina slaves who had served as Vice-President for twenty years. A Baptist minister, he attempted a series of cautious reforms, abandoning the top hat and tail-coat traditions favoured by his predecessor, William Tubman, selling the presidential yacht and abolishing a compulsory ‘tithes’ of 10 percent of every government employee’s salary that went to the True Whig Party... ‘Despite their origins as descendants of slaves from the Deep South, they regarded black Liberians as an inferior race, fit only for exploitation (Meredith, 2005, p. 545-548).

³² President Charles D.B. King (1920 - 1930) The 1926 Firestone Concession Agreement Available at

with the ILO concerning the contravention, by the Liberian Government, of the Forced Labour Convention of 1930. The Portuguese action appeared to be in retaliation of Liberia's anti-colonial posture against Portugal. Besides, the government of Ghana had earlier on 25 February 1961 initiated a similar action against Portugal for failing to abolish forced labour in her African colonies (ILO Office official Bulletins 1962 and 1963). Before the commission appointed by the ILO to probe the complaint published its findings in 1963, the Liberian legislature, in 1962, hastily enacted a law regulating the recruitment of labour in Liberia. The move officially outlawed forced labour and the associated obnoxious recruitment system.

Analysis

The focus of this article is on the sequential transgressions committed against the indigenous people of Liberia, by a previously oppressed class who became their new oppressors. Their ghastly reaction to the injustices is an outstanding watershed in the history of West Africa. The resultant tragedy precipitated a civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone (1991-2002), and indirectly occasioned a military takeover of the Gambian government (1994). This was at a time the contiguous republics of Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau, and Senegal were grappling with internal political upheavals. To some degree, the mayhem opened clefts among West African states. Some countries like Nigeria identified with Samuel Doe, while Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso pitched their tent in Charles Taylor's camp,³³ and others were in figurative limbo during the Liberia Civil War. Refugees inundated the entire sub-region. There is a need examine the root cause of the Liberian tragedy.

Southern Rhodesian colonial experiences show that the stance adopted by Britain regarding the UDI affair³⁴, mirrored the scenario that destabilised apartheid South Africa. It also resembled the upheaval that rocked South West Africa (Namibia), as a mandated territory under South African administration. In the South African situation, Tom Lodge is of the opinion that *"a succession of protests and rebellions transfigured the country's political life... The relative success of state policies [helped] to explain why the political settlements of 1994 left much of the structure of the extremely inequitable society."* (Lodge, 2011). The three countries eventually achieved stability partly through violent means. Unlike the Southern Africa situations, indigenous Liberians would have preferred passive resistance to armed struggle in addressing their colonial complications. That was the stance of The Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA) and The Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL) that organized a 'rice riot' in 1979. These organisations came into being in 1973 and 1975 respectively. The pressure groups were keen on addressing the injustices of the settler rule through negotiated settlement. However, the situation ultimately got out of hand.

Hannah A. B. Jones remarked that in 1951, President Tubman stated that *"... true as night follows day,*

<http://www.liberiapastandpresent.org/1926FirestoneCA.htm>

³³ A former rebel leader who later became president of Liberia through election

³⁴ "On November 11, 1965, the Rhodesian Prime Minister, Ian Douglas Smith, broadcast a proclamation to the people of Rhodesia that was modelled on the American Declaration of Independence. The proclamation observed that it was an "indisputable and historic fact" that Rhodesia had enjoyed self-government since 1923, claimed that the people of Rhodesia supported their government's request for independence, and lamented that the British government persisted in "maintaining an unwarrantable jurisdiction . . . to the detriment of the future peace, prosperity, and good government of Rhodesia." (Watts, 2012, p. 1)

the tribes of Liberia will produce a president who will be elected by the people of Liberia, not only by a single tribe or number of tribes, but that person can never be Didwho Twe,” (Jones, 1997, p. 17). As radical reforms were not new to the sub-region, it was not surprising that the problems posed by the intransigent settlers could not be resolved amicably. Neither could the first indigenous presidency be established without potential violence and perhaps even bloodshed. Hence, the script on the wall that Tubman could not decipher was that of a violent change.

An African aphorism has it that, a slave made king, will spare nobody. Etrenda Christine Dillon’s opinion, that the Americo-Liberian population caused great atrocities and brought much despair to the indigenous people of Liberia up to 1980, dovetailed with the adage (Etrenda 2008:83). One of the uncompromising stances taken by the settler (colonising) administration was the 1968 treason trial of Ambassador Henry Fahnbulleh narrated by Victor D. Du Bois. It was a demonstration of the settler’s inexorable desire to perpetuate domination. It also showed their aversion for coming to terms with reality, particularly when it concerned appreciating issues from the points of view of the educated indigenes. The ex-ambassador was charged for allegedly conniving with overseas communist zealots to effect a violent change in the administration of the country. An apparent design concocted to silence him for his candour over the despair. During his trial, four prominent Monrovia law firms denied him representation (Du Bois 1968: XI3 (15)).³⁵ It took the jury, contested trial, less than half an hour to find the defendant guilty. He was subsequently sentenced to the maximum penalty permitted under Liberian law, twenty years with hard labour and confiscation of all real, personal, and mixed property (Du Bois, XI6 p.19). President Tolbert later granted him reprieve in 1971.³⁶

The activities of Thomas Faulkner and his associates were another lost opportunity for a peaceful resolution of the predicament. During the 1927 protest over electoral malpractices that they tabled before The League; their contention was that people in Liberia knew that the election was fraudulent. *“According to an official statement, [during the 1927 general elections], President King received 234,000 votes, however, at the time Liberia had only 15,000 registered voters. This won King the dubious achievement of being listed in the Guinness Book of Records³⁷ for the most fraudulent election reported in history.”* Such a sham is indefensible. Thomas Faulkner wrote: *“There is not one person in Liberia who does not know that the last election was wholesale fraud. There is no remedy against such wrongs in any country except the courts, unless the people*

³⁵ Morgan, Grimes and Harmon; Dunbar and Horace; Simpson; and the Barclay Law Firm.

³⁶ “The trial opened on a note of hostility [as] Fahnbulleh objected to the entire jury panel on the grounds that all of its members belonged to the True Whig Party and [were] either pensioners or employees of the government. He claimed, moreover, that the jurymen had taken part in the nation-wide demonstrations against him, which occurred before the opening of the trial. The selection of such persons, he asserted, was a breach of one of the fundamental principles of Liberian law, namely due process, which hears and weighs evidence before it renders a verdict” (Du Bois, 1968, p XI 4 (2)).

³⁷ 1981 edition

The total number of vote cast cited by different authors varies. Amos Sawyer stated that “In 1927, King claimed to have won the elections by 229,527 votes from an electorate of fewer than 15,000 voters. These results were recorded in the 1981 Guinness Book of World Records as the most severely rigged elections up to that time. Sawyer (1992:369).

*resort to harsh measures and bloodshed; which all thoughtful people are trying to avoid*³⁸ (Johnson, 2004, p. 140-141).

Fifty-three years after Faulkner's admonishment, seventeen military officers mutinied during which they assassinated President William Tolbert and some security personnel on April 12, 1980. Thereafter, the heart-wrenching entreaties from other African presidents to Samuel Doe, first indigenous president, to spare the lives of the deceased's political associates went unheeded. On April 22, 1980, thirteen top ranking public officers of the defunct regime publicly faced a firing squad. Some observers perceived the ghastly punishment as a retribution for the sequential iniquities perpetrated by their ancestors³⁹. Ten years later, the entire country was embroiled in a fifteen-year gruesome civil conflict. These episodes epitomised the string of paradoxical events that plagued the country since 1822. They also connote that silence, no matter its duration, is not synonymous with peace.

In his comment on the atrocities committed by the South African apartheid regime, Martin Luther King in 1962 stated that "Colonialism and segregation are nearly synonymous... because their common end is economic exploitation, political domination, and the debasing of human personality."⁴⁰ His view contradicted those of African politicians whose duplicity contributed to the desolation that engulfed Liberia. The silence maintained by the OAU, despite its protracted diplomatic war against the apartheid authorities was puzzling. It was equally ironic that the organisation harboured Liberia, as a revered founding member, despite its appalling human rights records.

To add credence to the puzzles, Elizabeth S. Landis stated that "*In 1959 the [UN] General Assembly, acting on a special report on legal action available to enforce mandate obligations against the Union of South Africa, "invited" legally qualified states to proceed against the Union in the International Court*" (Landis, 1964, p. 193). Paradoxically, Liberia, with the backing of other African governments, was one of the countries the mantle fell on. The other was Ethiopia. These were the states legally qualified to institute the action for being the only African member countries of the defunct League. They subsequently instituted a joint legal proceeding, in 1960, against the Union of South Africa over its illegal administration of Namibia (Weissbrodt et al., 1986, p. 490).⁴¹ The ethics propping Liberia's involvement in the litigation is questionable, taking cognizance of her record of abuse of power and abridgment of the civil liberties of indigenous people with insensitive impunity.

³⁸ The statement was made by Thomas J. R. Faulkner, "An Appeal to Reason," Monrovia, December 22, 1927 cited in Johnson 2004:140-141 footnote.

³⁹ In a brief press interview moments before the commencement of the euphoric execution, President Doe affirmed at a press gathering "It is my pleasure gentlemen that these people we get rid of them because they have kept our country down for so long time. . . .if we feel that if we keep these people alive it would be a threat to the nation and we want to wipe out corruption and so we are not going to forgive them and so we have to execute them and I am happy that the execution is going on now. www.journeymen.tv/?lid=9898&tmpl=transcript Liberia, murder of a country Part III <https://youtu.be/-ulJN2lQOwM>, <https://youtu.be/DnDGgvrD2bM>

⁴⁰ kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopaedia/.../enc_apartheid_1948_1994.1.html

⁴¹ For an explanatory account of what transpired at the International Court, (Gross, 1966). Duke Law Journal further accentuates, that specifically, the petitioning states charge that South Africa, in administering [South West Africa as a Mandated Territory of the defunct League], has practiced Apartheid. Failed to promote to the utmost the material and moral well-being and social progress of the peoples of the territory and has adopted and applied legislation and regulations which are arbitrary, unreasonable, unjust and detrimental to human dignity, (1963,p.310; Gross, 1966).

Equally sardonic is the attitude of the Liberian settlers viewed against the background of Article 1 (4) of the 1847 Liberian constitution, which states that there shall be no slavery within the Republic. Nor shall any citizen of this republic, or any person resident therein, deal in slaves, either within or without the republic, directly or indirectly (Constitution of Liberia, p. 1847, p. 8).

Adell Patton explained yet another facet of absurdity. He believed that Liberia intentionally developed strategies that delayed appropriate control of public health measures in order to stave off foreign settlers from 1912 until 1953. Liberia purposefully delayed the development of public health control measures of disease in order to discourage control designs on its sovereignty. The country had no integrated water and sewage system and strenuously resisted measures, which members of the diplomatic community introduced to remedy the situation. (Patton 2005, pp. 45-46) The policy decimated the indigenous population that could not afford overseas medical treatment. Consequently, the entire country became the breeding ground for various kinds of diseases. The course of action explained why the settlers had more confidence in African herbal medicine than the available western-trained physicians (Patton, 2005, p. 45).⁴²

There was some striking resemblance between the apartheid White minority administrations in Southern Africa and that of the Americo-Liberians. Principally, in both cases, all men ought to be equal before the law, but in practice, some were of a superior caste. The indigenous population, vital for their labour, were objects of segregation and exploitation. The indigenes had no franchise in both cases. Isolation and pass laws were the order of the day designed to keep them in check. In Southern Rhodesia, the education ordinance of 1899, catered for Whites only while the missionaries were responsible for educating Africans. In South Africa, the Bantu Education Act of 1953 made racial segregation mandatory in all educational institutions in the Union. In the same vein, measures were in place to regulate the Christianization of Liberia's indigenous population, while the missionaries catered for their education. Southern Rhodesia enjoyed the steadfast support of most Western countries, especially after UDI. In like manner, Liberia received the resolute tacit backing of the OAU and the United States. Despite the human rights violations, the former in particular failed to group Liberia among the colonial powers, while fighting colonialism and apartheid elsewhere on the continent. These and other inequitable policies that were subtly in force in both settings produced identical results as what obtains in the apartheid zone. (Reginald, 1975, p. 67).

The motives behind the League's 1930 enquiry deserve some remarks. The agricultural policy in the Portuguese colony of Fernando Po, led to the establishment of cocoa plantations. However, the refusal of the

⁴² From 1920 to 1945, physicians, who had been in the country for twenty-five years, listed the following major diseases common to Liberia: malaria (vector *Anopheles gambiae*), helminthic infections (parasite worms), and venereal diseases (syphilis, gonorrhoea, and chancroid-ulcers). In specific parts of the country, schistosomiasis (snail disseminated disease from water contamination), filariasis (disease spread by blood sucking anthropoids—gnats, flies, mosquitoes, depositing larvae) were prevalent. Others include trypanosomiasis (tsetse fly). Absent or not common to Liberia were yellow fever (virus transmitted by bite of female mosquito, *Aedes aegypti*), typhus fever (epidemic louse-borne and flea-borne, unfavourable living conditions), cholera (diarrhea with severe loss of fluids and electrolytes), and typhoid fever (acute infectious disease and causative organism *Salmonella*; food handlers, body discharges, motile bacillus, (Paton 2005).

indigenous Bubi people to work on the farms hampered progress (General History of Africa, VIII 1993, p. 66). With the indigenous Bubi population decimated by disease, the island's economy came to depend on imported *braceros*⁴³. Consequently, itinerant Kru sailors from Liberia, in tens of thousands, became indentured labourers on the island (Martino, 2012, 40; Sundiata, 1975, p. 40).⁴⁴

Enrique Martin traced the intricate labour network in the Bight of Biafra, where the notorious Portuguese and Spanish enclaves of Gabon, Fernando Po, Sao Tome and Principe were located. The territory was literally colonised by illegal labour recruiters from 1926-1935. Thereafter adjacent Nigerian territorial waters from 1935-1945 became another nest. Largely, agencies, mediators, and intermediaries covertly participated in perpetuating the slave trade in the Bight. A disguised slave trade developed and flourished as the indigenous labour in the Portuguese territories proved inadequate, while labours from the coastal mainland proved sporadic concurrently. Besides, the supply of Kru labourers from Liberia increased in the twentieth century (Sundiata 1975, p. 40; Martino, 2012).

The League singled out Liberia for investigation, being a soft target, for certain probable reasons.⁴⁵ Some imperial powers were still involved in contract labour recruitment, after the abolition of the slave trade. The reason could be that the United States government was interested in conserving labour in Liberia, for the Firestone Company that needs more of it for its ambitious plans. That partly explains why during the inquiry, the investigators deliberately did not visit the plantations at Fernando Po and the adjoining territories (Johnson, 2004, p. 276). In addition, the Spanish and Portuguese authorities would have come within the ambit of Liberia as their degree of involvement in the atrocities certainly dwarfs the Liberian situation. It could also be a covert design, meant to discredit the fledging African government.

In theory, the United States distanced itself from Liberia by not laying claim on it. However, its interventionist policies confirmed her membership of the club of colonial powers. In addition, the autocratic Liberian government maintained a cordial rapport with the United States, a situation akin to the relationship, which existed between European emperors and their Prime Ministers, like Clemens Von Metternich of Austria, Count Cavour of Italy, Otto Von Bismarck of Germany and Charles Talleyrand of France. The United States assertion of advancing democracy in Liberia was deceitful, in view of its military intervention in the 1915 rebellion. Another example was the ousted Jehudi Ashmun's administration in 1823. That was a government

⁴³ 'The Spanish term for agricultural contract workers derived from the word for arms.'

⁴⁴ While Marjie Sackett observed that, the cocoa industry has profited from the utilization of forced labour in West Africa since the late 1800s. Despite the Portuguese decree in 1876 abolishing slavery, and the release of cocoa plantation slaves, slave labour was quickly re-introduced, aided by the exploitation of legal loopholes and government officials willing to turn a blind eye. In 1905, after hearing reports of unfavourable labour conditions, William Cadbury dispatched a member of the Anti-Slavery Society to investigate the cocoa plantations. Upon receiving confirmation of human rights violations, Cadbury boycotted Portuguese cocoa and persuaded two other chocolate firms to do the same. Cadbury's actions affected not only the British chocolate markets but also American ones, which eventually stopped using slave-produced cocoa (p.84).

⁴⁵ Slavery was abolished in Great Britain in 1807, Brazil in 1836, France in 1848, Argentina in 1853 and the United States in 1865, [in Saudi Arabia 1962 and Mauritania in 1981], to give a few examples. But the trade continued to exist to satisfy the demand for labour in certain countries, and subsequently the demand for 'forced labour,' the form of modern day slavery' (UNESCO, 1979, p. 32). The League picked on Liberia to demonstrate its abhorrence for the obnoxious trade.

known to the imperial powers for its human rights abuses, but regained office through US military intervention. In addition, its financial contribution towards the resettlement of the freed slaves was sheer double standards. Some Whites supported the relocation of the Blacks for them not to contaminate the White American civilisation.

However, the relationship of the United States with Liberia has another perspective. It would have been anomalous for a racially polarised society of the nineteenth century, to accord Liberia diplomatic recognition, or issue the accreditation of ambassadors.⁴⁶ This partly explained why the US artfully distanced itself from the Liberian enterprise. The refusal of the United States to act as a regulatory authority empowered the manumitted slaves to deprive indigenous Liberians their civil liberties. Their relationship then degenerated and caused shudders in the international community.

The development enabled the Liberian administration to become wayward hence; relationships degenerated to an appalling level. To add credibility to the assertion, the administrative and security apparatus of the European colonial administrators in Sierra Leone and Gabon prevented those territories from sliding into the same situation. These were settlements established to rehabilitate freed African Slaves. The same applied to the blacks repatriated from Bombay, India to Kenya, East Africa (UNESCO, 1979, p. 226).

The imperial powers seem to have tacitly agreed with the United States in tolerating the desolation in Liberia. The scenario tallies with the opinion of Philip D. Curtin, who stressed that Britain did more than any other nation to suppress the Atlantic Slave Trade but allowed South Africa to become independent with full power in the hands of a minority of Europeans... (Curtin, 1974, p. 2 0).

It is indisputable that conditions in Liberia were truly defective. However, horrendous situations existing elsewhere equally deserved the urgent attention of The League.⁴⁷ Also, as other imperial powers were involved in contract labour issues in running plantations in diverse places, the Liberian case could be a diversionary tactic, designed to shield them from censure (Ruetten, 2009, p. 13-40).

The persons, who constituted the Liberian ruling class during and after the ACS rule, were responsible for the causes of the Liberian tragedy. These were freed slaves and their descendants, a barely literate group with neither organisational nor political skills. Despite this vital limitation, they shouldered the responsibility of running the state.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ From 28 July 1915 until 21 August 1934, the United States occupied Haiti, the first independent Black republic, under the pretext of putting down an uprising (Smyke, 2005, pp.18).

⁴⁷ These include the Poland vs. Czechoslovakia confrontation over Teschen in 1919, Italian occupation of Port Fiume in 1919, Vilna conflict of 1920, and Russo-Polish war 1920-1921. Others were Greece vs. Turkey 1920-1922, Memel conflict 1923, Franco-Belgium invasion of the Ruhr in 1923. They also include events as The Manchuria Affair 1931-1933, Italian occupation of Kerkira in 1933, German invasion of Rhineland 1936, Adolf Hitler's denunciation of the 1919 Versailles peace treaty. The list includes a host of others, which demonstrates that even before it dissolve itself in 1946, The League was incapable of preserving world peace, and these letdowns furnished European powers the impudence to foment problems elsewhere like the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935.

⁴⁸ Amos Sawyer revealed that about a quarter of the repatriates had some literacy. Close to 50 percent of all free Blacks who emigrated from northern states were literate. For example, 60 percent of those from Connecticut, 56 percent from New York, and 42 percent from

It is noteworthy, that all the ACS agents and their collaborators were aliens who did not relinquish their American nationality nor regularised their self-imposed African citizenship by any African law.

Instead of seeking the opinions of well-informed Africans, like Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, Benjamin N. Azikiwe and George Padmore, the ACS allied with wayward Black politicians, whose maladministration, the United States sustained by military force.

Upon their arrival, the Americo-Liberians met the indigenous people domiciled in the territory. Hence, their catchphrase ‘The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here,’ which as the national motto, was repugnant, from the perspective of the indigenes. The love of liberty met them in Liberia.

It is truly murky why the freed slaves resorted to such chronic cruelty in their dealings with the indigenes. James Gathii explains an important dimension of imperialism in which the relations between colonial subjects and their masters is comprehensible within the prism of power and control. Thus, the culture, economy, politics, and the entire complexity of ideas of the colonial relations were perceptible in the light of force, “*more precisely their configurations of power*” (Gathii, 2004, p. 5). That was the domineering nature of man over man, a characteristic that American blacks fought against during the American Civil War. In the course of history, ‘man has truly dominated man to his detriment.’ Moreover, it could be that the settlers returned to Africa on a vengeance mission, to settle scores with those they perceived to have enslaved their ancestors into captivity. Therefore, they are compelling indigenous Liberians to atone for the sins committed against them by their White slave masters.⁴⁹

It could possibly be the foul nature of man, for power and greed, gained the upper hand over their conscience. If some or all the adduced arguments were the case, the posture of the apartheid authorities against Africans would be difficult to fault. However, the settler’s mien could be a trait Greer Feick described as

“The fact that the African Americans who migrated to Liberia had neither created nor designed the country’s government and were themselves products of the vastly unequal slave society in the United States. Provides some explanation for why the democratic ideals that were embedded in the Liberia founding document would later be so haphazardly applied” (Feick, 2011, p. 11).

For economic reasons, the colonialists meddled in deeds, such as contract labour, to the extent of risking turning the country into a United Nations mandated territory. Furthermore, in July 1931, Arthur Barclay, who was

Pennsylvania were literate. In contrast, only 17 percent of the immigrants from Virginia, the homeland of close to 36 percent of all repatriates up to 1843, were literate (Sawyer, 1992, p. 99). Tom W. Shick showed that some elementary forms of instruction were given to slaves in certain areas. Free Blacks had access to better educational opportunities than slaves did; however, the educational facilities available to free Blacks varied in quality. The largest group of immigrants was unskilled and the largest groups of unskilled were engaged in agriculture (1971). The professionals included teachers, preachers, apothecaries and pharmacists, missionaries, newspaper editors, and owners of small business enterprises. Many from this category were to form the cream of Liberian society; many too, re-emigrated from Liberia to other parts of Africa or back to the United States.

⁴⁹ The prosecutor of Ambassador Fahnbulleh alleged in his submission that “Defendant Fahnbulleh and his movement have called the pioneers and their descendants’ ex-slaves and strangers from America. But who made us slaves? Who sold us into slavery, welcomed us after more than two hundred years, when our White slave masters returned us to the shores from whence they had taken us away in chains?...” (Du Bois, 1968, p. XI 6 (11)). The expressions connote vengeance.

Acting President, received messages from Britain, Germany, and the United States that include statements like *“His Majesty’s government gives their fullest support to the suggestion which has been made that the Government of Liberia should be committed to an International Commission”* (Freeman, 1968, p. 37).

Similar to the primary motive for European imperialist expansion, it was for economic reasons that the Americo-Liberians hinged their survival on the indigenes (Manson 2011: 93). Contrary to popular opinions, land confiscation in Africa did not commence with the signing of the Berlin Treaty. The Americo-Liberians signed dubious treaties with local chiefs and kings, long before the Treaty came into force. Their action was similar to that of the British South African Company agent that extracted a questionable treaty from the Ndebele King, Lobenguela, of Zimbabwe (General History of Africa VII, 1985, p. 202-207).

The activities of Firestone Rubber Company in Liberia showed that the termination of slavery and allied practices did not end with the release of the Christy report. Despite the League’s 1926 convention abolishing forced labour. The daunting economic problems faced by the Americo-Liberian administration facilitated the entry of the corporation into Liberia.⁵⁰ Three intersected agreements signed between the Government of Liberia and the corporation, with the indirect involvement of the United States, were: (1) the lease of a rubber plantation, (2) a one million acre lease of land to cultivate rubber for 99 years, and (3) a loan of \$333,000 for the leases. However, for almost a century, there were unrelenting entreaties, calling on the government to address the evils posed by the company, in connivance with public officers, in the area of child labour and violation of other labour laws (Koffa, 2015; Department of Labour. . . , 2012, p. 96).

Christy report indicted Firestone of forced labour. Workers in almost all sectors of the company co-opted their wives and children to lend them a hand, the assistants were unpaid as they were not on the payroll of the company. This practice explains why, of the employed 10,000 manual labourers on its plantations in 1930, more than 8,500 of this number were involuntary workers. The inability of the workers to form unions that were free of both government and company interventions was another predicament. The Firestone Workers Union of Liberia represented the company’s interests, rather than those of the workers. Therefore, in 2005, the International Labour Rights Fund filed a suit in a US District Court accusing the company of forced labour (Verite, pp. 24-30; International Labour Office, 1929, p. 226-227; Save My Future Foundation, 2008).

Comments on Findings

This article addressed a fraction of the consecutive indiscretions, which indigenous Liberians tolerated, for 158 years, while towing the path of passive resistance. The extensive literature highlights the chronological injustices that characterised the pre-1980 Liberia, a supposed haven for freed slaves, who could not cope with their American experience. Many factors rendered the administration of the republic burdensome. The findings of

⁵⁰ Liberia and Britain had serious misunderstandings over loan agreements with the latter’s financial houses. The indebtedness of the country to Bank of British West Africa enabled Britain to demand some degree of control over Liberia’s internal affairs, to the extent of attempting to convert it to mandate status. Under these and other precarious financial conditions, Firestone Rubber Company appeared on the scene.

this exercise shows that the indiscrete participation of the freed slaves in colonializing Liberia sum up to the underlying causes of the fall of the republic on April 12, 1980.

Fundamentally, the political culture and practices instituted by the early settlers is the core cause of the acrimony. Going by their poor educational background, they lacked understanding of what the American political system that they claim to copy entailed. Besides, none of the early settlers had the requisite managerial or political skills, being ex slaves. In addition, they and the well-read Black activists had virtually nothing in common intellectually. Although their successive generations received quality education in foreign universities, their inexorable desire to perpetuate domination fortified the decadence.

Violent change became inevitable as the attitude and air of superiority of the returnees negated the expected behaviour of sane manumitted slaves. That, to some extent, explained why they could not extend effective authority to the interior. On their part, the indigenes resisted domination, similar to what prevailed in Southern Africa during the apartheid era. Research findings have classed the activities of the various liberation movements in Southern Africa during apartheid as African colonial wars, whereas the Liberian struggle is yet to gain such recognition. This study unveiled the hypocritical stance of African politicians in shielding the apartheid-styled administration. They collectively condemned apartheid South Africa for its racist policies, but condoned identical situations in Liberia. It equally revealed the turncoat diplomacy of the United States in its links with the colony.

Walter Rodney asserted that:

“During the colonial era, Liberia was supposedly independent; but to all intents and purposes, it was a colony of the USA. In 1926, the Firestone Rubber Company of the USA was able to acquire one million acres of forestland in Liberia at a cost of 6 cents per acre and 1 percent of the value of the exported rubber. Because of the demand for and the strategic importance of rubber, Firestone’s profits from Liberia’s land and labour carried them to 25th position among the giant companies in the USA” (Rodney, 2012, p. 154).

Liberia’s boundaries were, by European standards, inadequately delineated. This equally complicated the administration’s efforts in the interior counties. Moreover, as some powers ‘supposed that Africans should be colonial subjects,’ these shortcomings enticed Britain and France to take undue advantage of her during the partition of Africa.

An imprudent practice, which complicated matters, was the contract labour crisis. Ibrahim K. Sundiata asserted that the spread of Americo-Liberian control within Liberia made possible the continuation of the [human] traffic often under duress and "civilised" direction. This coerced export of labour became an important source of public and private revenue. The elites of the black republic and the cocoa island formed a symbiosis in which both stood to gain at the expense of the migrant (Sundiata, 1975, p. 40). It was the desperate desire of the government to generate revenue that induced it to assert a nominal independence from the ACS. Paradoxically, this was jeopardised, when she resorted to exploiting contract labour under conditions analogous to slave trade. The

scenario infuriated the imperial powers hence it necessitated an international censure. Liberians, in the opinion of Robert Michael Freeman, mistakenly regarded the wanton exploitation of labour in the interior as a source of national wealth (Freeman, 1968, p. 49).⁵¹

The lack of financial and military capability incapacitated Liberia from defending her sovereignty and territory. This compelled her to adjust her boundary, in line with the terms of the Berlin Treaty, while concurrently tolerating British and American interference in her internal affairs. According to Greer Feick, Liberia was paradoxically an independent state that is dependent upon the United States for its independence, (Feick, 2011, p. 28). Besides, Walter Rodney was of the opinion that within the continent-wide colonialism, Liberia and Ethiopia could no longer function as independent states.

“Liberia, in particular, had to bow before foreign political, economic, and military pressures in a way that no genuinely independent state could have accepted; and although Ethiopia held firm until 1936, most European capitalist nations were not inclined to treat Ethiopia as a sovereign state, primarily because it was African, and Africans were supposed to be colonial subjects” (Rodney, 2012, p. 226).

Matters climaxed with attempts at various times to persuade the United States to proclaim Liberia a mandated territory. Due to the latter’s inability to manage its finances (Feick, 2011, p. 61; Freeman 68, p. 52).

The settlers maintained a chequered relationship with the indigenes over land and authority. The Liberia TRC report glossed over this volatile issue. Farming and mining concessions still possess vast tracts of land; in contravention of Liberia’s traditional land tenure system (Foster et al., 2009). The country’s land policy is fraught with ambiguities of the errors of the mind, rather than those of the head. Rachael Knight et al asserts “... *the Public Lands Act not only fails to define “public lands,” but also contains important contradictions.*” An example is the Public Lands Act, which authorizes the President to lease any portion of public land “not appropriated for other purposes” to any “foreign individual, corporation, or company for engaging in agricultural, mercantile, or mining operations in Liberia for a period of up to 50 years, with a possible 50-year extension” (Knight, 2012, p. 52-53). This clause is undeniably a central component of the vestiges of the settler rule.

The renewed agreement of the Firestone one-million-acre concession will expire in 2041; yet, the envisaged development is not on the horizon. Almost 5,000,000 acres of land are presently on lease to rubber

⁵¹ As a repeat of the Haitian experience was feasible, black activists had cause to be worried as the Liberian colonialists entangled themselves with astonishing misdeeds to the extent of risking turning the country into a United Nations mandated territory. On this account, in July 1931, while Arthur Barclay was acting president after the release of the damning Christy report, the country received offensive messages from Britain, Germany, and the United States. Some include phrases like “His majesty’s government gives their fullest support to the suggestion which has been made that the Government of Liberia should be committed to an International Commission” (Smyke, 2005, p. 18). The obvious causes of such messages include the settlers’ demonstrated inability to accept advice while displaying a highly developed talent for gross mismanagement (Freeman, 1968, p. 37. www.journeymen.tv/?lid=9898&tmpl=transcript Liberia, murder of a country Part III <https://youtu.be/-ulJN2lQOwM>, <https://youtu.be/DnDGgvrD2bM>).

plantation owners (Wily, 2007, p. 24).

The objectives of ACS failed partly because Liberia shares with the apartheid authorities and Portuguese African colonies the notoriety of persecuting indigenous people. Though the colony was established, the population of the settlers dwindled, with some relocating to the United States. The despotic practices, which the United States condoned, watered the tree of tyranny. Instead of building an all-inclusive society, which is conceivable going by the Aruba experience, the settlers were intoxicated with conceit, prejudice, and self-aggrandizement, (Vera, 1969).

Propagation of Christian tenets among the indigenes would have eased the burden of administration, as it was the case in neighbouring Sierra Leone. However, opposed to its spread, the repressive rule repelled the indigenes from a faith they perceived as the Whiteman's (Ajayi and Crowder 1974, p. 339). *“The Americo-Liberian government, though composed of nominal Africans, [was] indeed colonial in nature, given its pedigree in the supremacist legacies of the American Colonization Society (ACS)”* (Republic of Liberia. . .TRC, 2009, p. 16).⁵²

The deceit of the OAU, while liberating the continent from colonialism contributed to the desolation. Had the body adopted appropriate impartial measures, the April 12 and 22 1980 tragedies would not have occurred.⁵³ While Southern African liberation movements were savouring the support of the Frontline States and other OAU member countries, indigenous Liberians were weathering their tempest without assistance. The writers of this article found no shred of evidence, that African leaders and politicians ever showed an iota of interest in the Liberian affair, let alone chiding their colleagues for the horrendous atrocities perpetrated under the guise of Black rule, which was domination. However, developments in the apartheid region were more alarming than the Liberian debacle. The former was life threatening to the indigenous black communities, through the policies and mien of the White minorities. As the OAU could probably not address both matters concurrently, African leaders most likely opted to tackle the greater of the two evils.

Black activists of the period under review practiced reverse discrimination. They lacked consensus in denouncing colour bar, colonialism, and allied practices in Liberia. Yet they were unanimous in denouncing the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935. Paradoxically, in 1980 the year Zimbabwe regained freedom from the shackle of colonial rule, Liberia plunged into anarchy. Other African countries were undoubtedly disappointed with Liberia. Despite being an old nominally independent country, Liberia was not among the fold of Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, and the Frontline states in denouncing apartheid. She was of no significance in liberating the continent from colonialism. Her membership of the League was of no benefit to other African states in world

⁵² Liberia disillusioned Africans in general. As Greer Feick puts it, although the Liberian government emphasised the symbolic meaning of its sovereignty, outside of their own boundaries, African self-governance was not something in which Liberian leaders actually had a great interest. During the expansion of African nationalism after World War II, the Liberian government was not sympathetic to the cause of pan-African nationalism. Liberia was one of the only black Sub-Saharan nations invited to attend the founding conference of the United Nations in 1945, and Liberian representatives made little effort to advocate for limits to imperialism in Africa (Feick 2011:64).

⁵³ President William Tolbert was assassinated during a military coup on April 12, 1980. Ten days later, 14 top ranking public officers were executed by a firing squad at Arthur Barclay Training Institute on the coastline of Monrovia.

affairs.

The mien of the repatriates, similar to that of the apartheid stalwart, Hendrik F. Verwoerd, ultimately boomerang and shattered the Americo-Liberian hegemony.⁵⁴ This hampered them from collaboration with the educated indigenes, to establish an all-inclusive society.⁵⁵ Had the settlers resolved the impasse through a negotiated settlement, it would have ensured that ‘the structure of [the] extremely inequitable society’ particularly power sharing, would have benefited their successive generations, rather than bequeathing them acrimony. The issue of their nationality (a potential bone of contention) would have been amicably resolved. They would have secured their ill-acquired wealth, at least to a reasonable extent.

The character of the Americo-Liberians contrasts their opinion of themselves. Trial by ordeal, for both inconsequential and even capital offences, was part of their legal system. In addition, they preferred African traditional medicine men to the available western-trained physicians. They maintained African concubines. They sanctioned their membership of African secret cults and fraternities where they held prominent positions. They habitually visit fetish priests nocturnally where they engage in unchristian practices, such as human sacrifice and ritual murder, especially during elections.⁵⁶ They were, in no perceptible fashion different from the African kings and chiefs who amassed wealth from labour exports in the form of slaves. Yet, they considered it their Christian duty to civilise the indigenes!

The 1980-1990s mayhem in Liberia, confirm that similar to events in South Africa, Kenya, Palestine, and Zimbabwe, a smouldering future full-blown armed struggle would likely wrench the country from the grip of the colonisers, should they make further violent changes a necessity. The potentially volatile complications could trivialise the Zimbabwean situation, involving the interests of diverse foreign mining and other concerns with virtually timeless concessionary rights over incredible tracts of land. Despite the gravity of the situation, observers, actors, and even the OAU, for over a century had no premonition of the country as a potential trouble spot. Consequently, adequate proactive measures were not fashioned to address the land question. The government, under the guise of portfolio investment, is still granting concessionary rights while the indigenes remain landless.

⁵⁴ South African Prime Minister, Hendrik F. Verwoerd stated in 1954: “there is no place for him [the African] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour. Within [his] community, however, all doors are open. For that reason, it is to no avail for him to receive a training, which has as its aim absorption in the European community, where he cannot be absorbed.” Despite the insensitive racist remark, F.W. De Klerk eventually opted for a negotiated settlement to end apartheid.

⁵⁵ The individuals include Nete Sie Brownell, F.E.M. Morias, Senyo JuahNimley, Benjamin W. Payne, Kolli S. Tamba, Didwho Twe, Henry Too Wesley, P.G. Wolo etc.

⁵⁶ ‘In 1979, in a celebrated case, some prominent figures of the True Whig Party in Maryland County *of Liberia* were convicted by a court of law for committing a ritual murder, a sentence that was executed. . . Ten years later, Liberian Defence Minister Gray Allison, a man raised in an American Liberian family, was similarly convicted for killing a police officer whose body was discovered on the Bong Mines railroad, apparently used in a ritual sacrifice. The government at the time displayed blood drained in gallons believed to be that of the dead man. This was at a time when a spate of ritual murders was reported.’ (<https://www.pri.org/stories/2011-08.../liberia-s-elections-ritual-killings-and-cannibalis...>)

James Hyre posits that for Lord Falconer, “*the best time to reform and improve is not at a time of crisis, but from a position of strength and stability*” (Haye, 2004, P. 423). The termination of hostilities at the end of the Liberian war was not synonymous with spontaneous restoration of peace. Rather, the lessons of war should be the chief cornerstone, in addressing the age-long heart-wrenching predicament. Sadly, the TRC failed to address the land question adequately, one of the banes of the problem.

Finally, President Samuel Doe and his tenure suffered incredible attacks and accusations, even in death. Having governed from 1980-1990, the country was embroiled in a fifteen-year civil conflict. Covert manoeuvres by Americo-Liberian exiles scuttled his efforts to normalise the political atmosphere. The annual ratings of freedom, from the look of things were freer under Doe than the Americo-Liberians.⁵⁷ The cataclysmic end of his administration and the ensued tragedy that trailed it, were part of the inevitable consequences of ousting a decadent dispensation by unorthodox means. The fault was not in Doe, but the excesses he attempted to right. He, however, left his footprints in the sands of time. He terminated the authority of the True Whig Party. He eased the grip of the Americo-Liberians on power. A people who knew no reason, justice, or mercy⁵⁸ He liberated the indigenes from the Liberian version of the Group Areas Act (1950), which legalised segregation along racial line. Precisely, like the apartheid authorities, the Americo-Liberians had neither compassion nor fairness for the indigenes. By the time of Tolbert’s assassination and the overthrow of the oligarchy, seven percent (Americo-Liberian families) of the population-controlled sixty percent of the GDP (The Republic of Liberia TRC, P. 112). Doe’s reign ushered in an era that witnessed their tumbling influence. Virtually all apartheid legislations were in various guises, enforced in pre-1980 Liberia, a supposedly free republic. Thus, colonial rule in Liberia had the same effect on the indigenes as the South African Land Act (1913) and (1936), The Population Registration Act (1950), and Separate Amenities Act (1953) had on Black South Africans. The Bantu Homelands Constitution Act (1971) transformed Black South Africans into aliens without legal protection. In colonial Liberia, for so long, only persons of colour were citizens.

Whatever Doe did wrong or failed to accomplish during his tenure, was to a degree a function of his educational background and that of his confederates in government. However, he belatedly strived to develop himself by completing a degree program at the University of Liberia in 1988. What the indigenes longed for was freedom from subjugation, irrespective of the educational background of their liberator. There was the consensus that ‘it is better for them to govern themselves badly than to be governed well.’ The standard of education the country suffers until this day was a colonial heritage crafted to dominate the indigenes, of which Doe was not responsible. Dillon remarks that;

“The rise and fall of Americo-Liberians in Liberia, West Africa surrounds the attainment of education, which emancipated this group and afforded them the opportunity to travel to the

⁵⁷ Readers interested in the Annual Ratings of Freedom in Liberia: 1960-97 should consult “Gastil R., (1990) ‘Freedom in the World’ in (Guseh, 1997, pp. 37-44). The study used the amount of civil liberties and political rights in the society to determine the degree of freedom.

⁵⁸ Alan Paton, the author of ‘Cry, The Beloved Country,’ published a series of articles during the first two decades of Apartheid. He is credited with the saying: “God save us all from the South Africa of the Group Areas Act, which knows no reason, justice, or mercy.”

Grain Coast, which later became known as Liberia. Americo-Liberians then used their education to set in place, the power structures that oppressed the masses of the population. The massive destruction of the county left the masses plagued with high rates of illiteracy and destroyed the infrastructures that were in place. Liberia now bears similar conditions to that which existed when the settlers initially arrived in the early 1800s” (Dillon, 2008, p. 86).

Concluding Remarks

The evidence adduced leads to the conclusion that although the aims of the American Colonization Society were partly attained, it was however marred by the inability of the early settlers to live in harmony with their African hosts. A number of factors accounted for the development. The education and administrative skills required to administer the newly found republic along the American model of governance was seriously lacking among the early settlers who assumed leadership in 1847. Another factor was superiority complex on the part of the settlers who detached themselves from their hosts. While being confronted with seemingly intractable problems, the Americo Liberians were compelled to violate the ideals enshrined in the constitution by engaging a scandalous contract labour business which is tantamount to slave labour. To sustain their grip on power and control, coupled with greed and avarice, the settlers adopted antics similar to those in force in the apartheid region of the continent. In the face of indiscretions, human rights violations, and abuse of power, the Organization of African Unity and Black activists worldwide remained mute by failing to chide an erring African state; this was in an era when all African countries were waging an unrelenting diplomatic war on the apartheid authorities. Akin to the apartheid zone situation that eventually attained stability through violent means, the inability of the Americo-Liberians to sustain their grip on power led to a cataclysm when the government was violently toppled in 1980, a demonstration of the fact that more than a century and a half old silence does not connote peace.

It is evident that it was a serious error of judgement on the part of the American Colonization Society and its American associates to regard the freed slaves as Africans; from the look of things most were culturally different. Their perceptions of life were at variance with those of indigenous Africans whose cultural background sharply contrasted those of the settlers who have imbibed Western values.

Lastly, if the settlers are adjudged Africans, it stands to reason that Africans equally participated in not only partitioning the continent, by they also engaged in colonial domination and exploitation.

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Names	Relationships	Position
Frank Tolbert	Brother	President Pro-Tempore, Liberia Senate
Steve Tolbert	Brother	Finance Minister
Wille Mae Tolbert	Daughter	Bank of Liberia(Board Member)
Tonien King	Son- in-Law	Immigration Commissioner
Jehu Richardson	Son-in-Law	Captain Air Liberia. Board Member
A.B. Tolbert	Son	Member, House of Representatives
Burleigh Holder	Son-in- Law	Minister of Defence
Tonia King	Son-in-Law	Deputy Immigration Chief
Daniel Tolbert	Cousin	Largest Rice Importer
Christine Norman	Third Daughter	Dep. Education Minister- (Instruction)

Members of William Tolbert’s Family holding key positions in his government.

Source: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia (2009, p. 101)