# Reconstructed Meanings Of Gender Violence In Postwar Liberia





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ABSTRACT

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The central question guiding this study is, how can Liberia's historical context of colonial state formation and reformation help explain public discourses surrounding gender violence in the postwar decade, 2003-2013? This question is addressed using original data from mixed qualitative methods including participant observation, visual methods, and semi-structured interviews. The research identifies narratives and meta-narratives produced by liberal institutions (including the Government of Liberia and international agencies), as well as informal discourses from adult Liberians of different backgrounds living in Greater Monrovia. Using critical discourse analysis, the argument identifies connections between the narratives that recur, the social realities they recall, and the power dynamics they perpetuate.

These discourses are best understood in reference to liberal and colonial/imperial dynamics from Liberia's settlement period. Liberal institutions addressing gender violence in the postwar period face dilemmas in which universalist humanitarian ideals work in tandem with, and provide justification for, imperialism as a set of discursive and material relations. Non-elite Liberians instrumentalise and subvert both privileged donor discourses as well as long-standing colonial hierarchies of 'civilised' and 'country'.

Additionally, the thesis examines how liberal institutions, traditional institutions, and Liberian citizens interact as agents of discursive construction. It will be shown that this pattern of discourse production is at times harmonious, as in the interactions around promoting male head-of-household responsibilities, and at other times adversarial, as in conflicts surrounding excision as an initiation practice for girls. Liberal institutions, non-elite Liberians, and traditional authorities both collude and compete in this era of dynamic normative contestation.

Both the major discourses and the interactions that produce them can be explained in part by the liberal imperialism and its specific form of settler colonialism that propelled the founding and subsequent stages of state formation in Liberia. The consequences of that residual history indicate inherent – though, not irredeemable – structural limitations to a robust institutional response to gender violence. In this manner the study demonstrates the utility of historicising Liberia's contemporary gender violence discourses, and how doing so can address the longstanding bifurcation between rights and culture in international development and transnational feminist geography.

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*Cover page drawings by James David, c.2009. Used with permission.*

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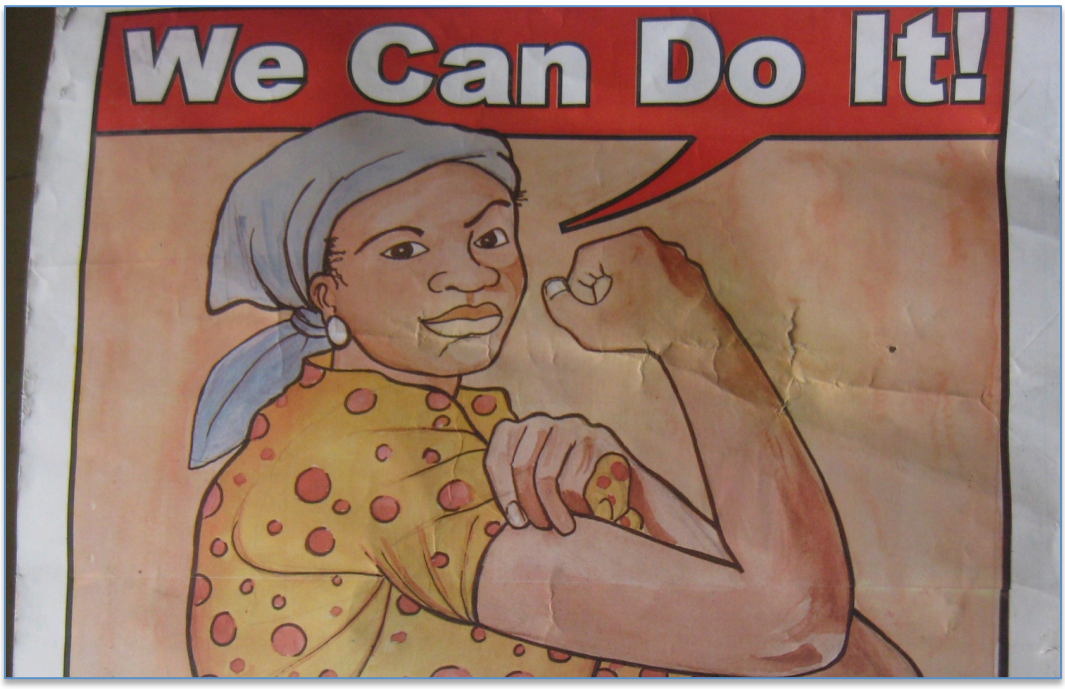



Figure 1. Detail from a Norwegian Refugee Council poster, 2009.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE, INTRODUCTION

**Reconstructed meanings of gender violence in postwar Liberia**.....1
*Texts and subaltern stories*
*Gender violence and memory*
**Summary of research questions and methods**.....13
**Historical background on statebuilding in Liberia**.....17
**Background on 'liberal institutions' and the GBV Taskforce**.....22
*Liberal institutions*
*Liberia's postwar 'propagender'*
*Critical discourse analysis, structure and agency*
**Chapter summaries for a multilinear argument**.....31

CHAPTER TWO, METHODOLOGIES

**Introduction**.....41
*Locations in Greater Monrovia*
*Primary and secondary questions and corresponding research methods*
**Q1: Methods for documenting institutional discourses**.....47
*Interviews and participant observation of GBV Taskforce*
*Visual methods and 'propagender'*
*Visual analysis and coding with QSR-NVivo.*
**Q2: Documenting informal public discourses**.....61
*Semi-structured interviews with adult Liberians*
**Q3: Triangulating data to understand discourse co-production**.....67
**Q4: Historicising gender violence discourses**.....68
*Archival readings*
**Ethical challenges and lingering questions.** .....73
*Anonymisation*
*Sensitivity and respect*
*The Baphomet palaver: 'incommensurate' cultural differences and ethnography*
*A productive palaver*

CHAPTER THREE, GENDERING LIBERAL IMPERIALISM

**Introduction**.....95
**Paradigms of liberalism and imperialism**.....97
*Liberalism*
*Liberal humanitarianism*
*An Arendtian account of imperialism*
*Colonialism and settler colonialism*
*Patriarchies*
*Alternative paradigms of imperialism and colonialism*
**Liberal imperialism**.....113
*Liberal imperialism in the 19th century*
*Liberal imperialism in the post-Cold War period*
**Princess Guanya Pau and the problem of rights versus culture**.....129
*Improved liberal humanitarian theory and institutions*
*Nativist essentialism/autochthonous discourses/authenticité*
*The margins as a space of radical openness*

CHAPTER FOUR, 'LIBERIA IS AN IDEA': LIBERAL IMPERIALISM, GENDER, AND LIBERIAN STATE FORMATION

**Introducing Matilda Newport** ....137
**Liberal imperialism and the utopic dystopia of early Liberia**....140
*The creation of the ACS and initial state formation*
*Between colony and empire: pressures on Americo-Liberian settlers*
*Successive stages of state formation*
**Gender, resistance, and autonomous space**....156
*Discursive constructions of indigenous women in colonial discourse*
*Regional variations in indigenous dual-sex representation*
*Sande governmentality: a 'monopoly on violence against women'*
*'Mutual assimilation of elites' as patriarchal collusion*
**Conclusion**....170

CHAPTER FIVE, INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSES: STATE PRIMACY AND THE POSTWAR *MISSION CIVILISATRICE*

**Introduction**....175
**Textual production of 'propagender'**....176
**A 'privileged discourse' of state primacy**....180
**State primacy discourse as 'common sense'**....200
**Bureaucratic logic and 'institutionalised subjects'**....202
**Patriarchal 'girls power'**....205
**Social contract, sexual contract in postwar, postcolonial reconstruction**...209
**Conclusion**....213

CHAPTER SIX, INFORMAL DISCOURSES: 'CIVILISATION' AND 'CASH VIOLENCE'

**Introduction** ....217
**Barbarism or civilisation: defining gender violence, self and others**....219
**Fashion, films, and 'forehead' as causes of gender violence**....225
*'Dress code'*
*'Those rude shows'*
*'Cash violence'*
**Victim-blaming or symbolic politics?**....236
**Witchcraft, wealth, and child rape as liberal institutional dilemmas**....239
**Conclusion**....253

CHAPTER SEVEN, POSITIVE MASCULINITIES OR BENIGN PATRIARCHY? POSTWAR TRANSFORMATIONS TO GENDER ROLES

**Female father, male wife**....255
**The creation of a GBV discourse on men's financial obligations**....258
*GBV Taskforce messages evolve from 'emergency' to 'development'*
*'Big men' and faith-based organisations engage with gender violence*
**Informal dialogues on male household duties and GBV**....271
*Women and reconfigurations of collective action*
*A range of men rewrite the narrative*
**A pluralist spectrum of advocacy efforts and lessons ongoing**....281
*The IRC changes its strategy on involving men*
*Bystander intervention and mediation near Red Light Market*
*'The Coconut Seller' teaches a lesson in norm entrepreneurship*

**Conclusion**.....288

CHAPTER EIGHT, CONTESTED COLLUSIONS: LIBERAL AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES ADDRESS FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING
**Introduction**.....293
**'If you follow this case, see what will happen to you'**.....294
**From grassroots to zinc fences: a variety of responses to FGC/M**.....296
*GBV Taskforce and donors shift from avoidance to action*
*Activist women's 'participation'*
*GBV Taskforce 'zero tolerance'*
*Cultural sensitivity and its limitations*
*Evasion and collective mobilisation in the urban 'groves'*
**Nation and 'country': liberal statebuilding and indigenous rules**.....320
*Mutual assimilation of female elites?*
**Conclusion**.....326

CHAPTER NINE, CONCLUSION
**Introduction**.....329
**Connecting multilinear narratives**.....330
**Thematic contributions**.....335
*Qualitative versus quantitative*
*Structure versus agency*
*Liberalism with/against imperialism*
*Rights and culture*
**Applicability and further questions**.....342
*Liberian 'lone star' exceptionalism: justified?*
**Princess Guanya Pau, not drowning but waving**.....347

BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDIX I, SAFETY AND ETHICS

APPENDIX II, LIST OF FIGURES

## ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| ACPI | African Child Peace Initiative |
| ACS | American Colonization Society |
| AFELL | Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia |
| ANPPCAN | African Network for Prevention and Protection of Child Abuse and Neglect |
| CBOs | Community Based Organisations |
| CCF | Christian Children's Fund |
| CDA | Critical Discourse Analysis |
| FGC/M | Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting |
| FGM | Female Genital Mutilation |
| GBV | Gender-based violence |
| GoL | Government of Liberia |
| GTM | Grounded Theory Methods |
| HCBF | Healthy Communities Brighter Futures |
| IDP | Internally Displaced Person |
| IEC | Information, Education, Communication |
| INGOs | International Non-Governmental Organisations |
| INPFL | Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia |
| IRC | International Rescue Committee |
| LFF | Liberian Frontier Force |
| LNP | Liberian National Police |
| LURD | Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy |
| MIA | Ministry of Internal Affairs |
| MODEL | Movement for Democracy in Liberia |
| MoGD | Ministry of Gender and Development |
| MoHSW | Ministry of Health and Social Welfare |
| MSF | Medecins Sans Frontieres |
| NPFL | National Patriotic Front of Liberia |
| NRC | Norwegian Refugee Council |
| NTCL | National Traditional Council of Liberia |
| NVTI | National Vocational Training Institute |
| PIO | Public Information Office (UNMIL) |
| RMA | Rape Myth Acceptance |
| SEA | Sexual Abuse and Exploitation |
| SGBV | Sexual and Gender-based Violence |
| SOAP | Servants of All People |
| UNMIL | United Nations Mission in Liberia |
| VAW | Violence Against Women |
| WACPS | Woman and Children Protection Section |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |
| WOLPNET | Women of Liberia Peace Network |
| WPW | West Point Women for Health and Development Organisation |

# CHAPTER ONE
# INTRODUCTION

## Reconstructed meanings of gender violence in postwar Liberia

In the twenty-first century, scholars and humanitarian organisations became increasingly attentive towards the prevalence of gender violence in conflict-affected settings. In Liberia, gender violence has been prominently addressed by the postwar administration of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and the humanitarian apparatus supporting the core functions of the Liberian state.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is defined by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) as 'an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetuated against a person's will, and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females' (IASC, 2005:10). In Liberia the term GBV is used widely, typically encompassing rape, child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or survival sex, domestic violence, female genital cutting or mutilation (FGC/M), forced marriage, underage marriage, and unequal division of family assets.[1] In vernacular discourses there are differing perceptions of what constitutes gender violence, and different terminology for abuse, including 'cash violence' and 'sugar daddies' for sexual exploitation, 'spoiling the child' for child sexual abuse, and 'cruelty' for domestic violence.

This study documents prominent discourses surrounding gender-based violence in Liberia's postwar decade, 2003-2013. It examines informal public

[1] Homophobic abuse and discrimination, which is rife in Liberia, was not on the agenda of most institution-led campaigns at the time of fieldwork. Some underground work was occurring, especially among HIV/AIDS activists (anonymous personal conversations, 2012).

perceptions as well as more formal institutional processes enacted by traditional and liberal governance structures. Multifaceted qualitative data sets were co-produced by myself, my research teammates in Liberia, and participants during five field visits totaling ten months of research. Building upon this empirical basis, the thesis demonstrates the relevance of Liberia's colonial history for explaining trends in public discourses on gender violence. These discursive patterns include the assertion of liberal institutional sovereignty through gender violence awareness campaigns; the symbolic politics of fashion, films, and consumer culture as a perceived cause of sexual violence and exploitation; contestations surrounding gender relations within the family with a trend towards emphasising male-led nuclear families; and the instrumentalisation of longstanding colonial tropes of 'civilised' and 'country'. While some discourses indicate a certain antagonism between liberal institutions, traditional justice mechanisms, and 'everyday' citizens, communication is not always oppositional. These three arenas collude as well as compete to construct gendered social norms in a postwar era marked by institutional flux and social transformation. Where grievances occur, as in repeated disputes over female genital cutting as an initiation rite, the thesis offers evidence that Liberia's unresolved colonial cleavages present inherent structural limitations to a robust institutional response to gender violence.

The core argument elucidates how liberal imperialism, that is the facilitation of colonialism and imperialism by liberal humanitarian ideals, is crucial to understanding the above patterns of discourse construction and performance. This lesson is important because of the recurrent dilemmas that liberal imperialism poses for gender equality in international development and humanitarian processes, which

arise from promoting liberal human rights across distances of difference and hierarchies of privilege. In post-conflict states where both social and sexual contract undergo renegotiation and reconstruction, these dilemmas can be especially severe. In conflict-affected settings with a history of colonialism, they can be the latest iteration of a perpetual set of power relations with associated epistemic and discursive contestations. By way of introduction, two texts and one 'subaltern story' are related below.

*Texts and subaltern stories*

The first is a written text, Joseph Jeffrey Walters' 1891 *Guanya Pau*, widely considered to be the first novel written in English by an African author (Griffiths & Singler, 2004). The novel follows the travails of a young Liberian Vai[2] princess who attempts to escape a forced marriage sanctioned by her indigenous culture. Her increasingly desperate evasions end in suicide by drowning. A Vai himself, Walters was both a Christian and an initiated member of Liberia's Poro secret society (Griffiths and Singler, 2004:35). His positionality is therefore complex as he 'beseeches his "lady readers" to support the project of educating African women' (Griffiths and Singler, 2004:12).

The second text is the radio and printed news coverage of another gendered tragedy, well over a century later. In July 2009, three Liberian youths raped an eight-year old Liberian girl in Arizona, USA, who was subsequently disowned by her parents and taken into state custody. News media covered the events in both countries. In response, the Government of Liberia sent the Deputy Chief of

[2] An ethno-linguistic group in Liberia.

Missions, Edwin Sele, to the United States to reassure the American public that the parents' rejection of their raped daughter was a misunderstanding rather than child abuse, that 'Liberia has one of the strongest anti-rape laws in Africa', and that 'Liberians are a civilised and law-abiding people' (Best, 2009).

These two cases serve as chronological bookends for the intertwining history of liberal humanitarianism, colonialism/imperialism, and gender violence in Liberia. In the first case, a fictional tale about a culture-bound African girl is told by an indigenous African man, in print, to an audience of 'American churchwomen especially' (Griffiths and Singler, 2004:12). In many ways the tale is typical of colonial representations of oppressed native women; typical of discourses intended to justify the 'enlightened' trusteeship of the coloniser (Aderinto, 2007; Burton, 1990; Leach, 2008). Guanya Pau's combination of subject positions and indigenous and colonial values comprise more than just a 'generic' colonial text. Although the book was published at the height of Europe's 'scramble for Africa', by 1891 the Liberian colony of 'freed former slaves' had already existed for seventy years and been nominally independent since 1847 (Liebenow, 1969; Sawyer, 1992a). Under pressure from European interests, the colony would soon thereafter begin a new campaign of territorial consolidation and 'decentralised despotism' (Mamdani, 1996:18) in the hinterland, bringing with it a spate of sexual violence committed with impunity by Liberian Frontier Force (LFF) soldiers against indigenous women (Akingbade, 1994; Akpan, 1973a; Davis, 1975; Ellis, 1999).

In the second case, an African statesman responds to violence committed against an African girl in America by defending the 'civilisation' of his state. In a subversion of the familiar script of rape imposing nationalist politics upon the female

body (Baines, 2003; Hayden, 2000; MacKinnon, 2006; Turshen, 1998), the Liberian government used an instance of sexual violence upon a female body to contest notions of civilisation or barbarism that this act projected upon the nation. It did so during another period of government (re)formation in Liberia; the postwar 'reconstruction' following years of warfare (1989-2003) and state dysfunction beforehand.[3]

The agents that produced both texts are self-conscious of the image they promote of Africa abroad. Both use girls' rights to legitimise Liberian state formation simultaneously towards 'native' Africa and also 'the West'.[4] *Guanya Pau* implied the necessity of a benign civilising mission, while the state visit to America sought to vindicate Liberia as already civilised under the rule of law and international human rights. Both instances refer to the idea of 'civilisation' without challenging it. Both concern disturbing acts of gender-based violence; neither is narrated by their principal subject, a Liberian girl.

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[3] Academics have disputed which label of state dysfunction best suits Liberia's war years; some have classified it as a 'failed' or 'anarchic' state (Gros, 1996; Helman & Ratner, 1992; McGovern, 2005) while Ellis (1999) counters that basic government structures operated even throughout the worst moments of crisis. They do concur that some label of state dysfunction applies.

[4] The term 'native' appears frequently in colonial discourse alongside other charged terms such as 'barbaric', 'primitive', 'savage'; this extends to equally problematic romanticised descriptions of indigenous peoples as 'childlike', 'carefree', and 'innocent' (Goggin, 2011; Jahn, 2005). However, in the twenty-first century the connotations are evolving. Some indigenous scholars and activists reclaim the term (see for example, King, 2005), and this dissertation uses 'native' and other such labels albeit with caution. In Liberia, words such as 'country', 'civilised', 'tribe' and 'bush' appear in everyday parlance with both ironic and unironic intended meanings. Where such a word appears in this thesis it should be assumed to hold a descriptive and not merely a technical function, that is, that it has been consciously chosen to convey the numerous meanings with which it is burdened and is not an uncritical replication of hegemonic language.

The female, African, and indigenous subalternity of these events makes the audible contestations surrounding them all the more politicised. The debate is about, rather than with, marginalised subjects and subjectivities. The third 'text' is at once high-profile and neglected, a subaltern story layered together from several interviews and participant observation. Despite its relative obscurity in the literature, this 'subaltern story' demonstrates the force with which marginalised or subalterned agents are capable of advocating on their own terms.

In January 2010, a Liberian Grebo[5] woman named Ruth Berry Peal was kidnapped by Gola elders of one of the Sande 'secret societies', female-led traditional authorities that appear in several Liberian ethnolinguistic groups and often work alongside the male-led Poro. The Sande leaders subjected her to female genital mutilation, and detained Ruth in the 'bush' for weeks before she was released. Despite the customary threat of retribution for speaking of the ordeal, Ruth took her kidnappers to court (28 Too Many, 2014). This incident, and the landmark court case it set in motion, gathered modest national and international media attention in the years thereafter (National Traditional Council of Liberia, 2012; Urban, 2015; York, 2012). Overseas donors launched a high-visibility campaign against the practice, the Government of Liberia was forced to confront its ambivalent stance toward excision, and female community organisers protested against the Sande leaders, sometimes at great personal risk.

The above précis covers official events as they are documented in media and human rights literature. However, as in much social and political life in the Mano

[5] Grebo is an ethno-linguistic group in the Southeast region of Liberia. The Gola group is predominant in the North.

River Region, the 'underneath of things' (Ferme, 2001) reveals a far richer world of gendered social transformation as well as contradictory partnerships between state and indigenous institutions. During Ruth's detention, the Ministry of Gender and Development (MoGD) mobilised a response via its network of Gender-based Violence (GBV) Focal Persons based in the counties. One of these staff happened to be an initiated member of the Sande society, and as such was permitted entry to the 'bush' to monitor Ruth's recovery and to ensure she was not being harmed (personal communication, October 2012). It was in her capacity as a Sande initiate that the GBV Focal Person could find, approach, and communicate with the society; it was as a government representative that she investigated, monitored, and reported back to the national and expatriate human rights staff.

International donors who supported indigenous[6] female leadership were, by the time of Ruth's kidnapping, already facing the dilemma that many of those leadership structures support marital rape and female genital cutting or mutilation (FGC/M) (Fuest, 2010; Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, 2011). Some

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[6] Academics and practitioners hold differing opinions on whether to capitalise the word 'indigenous' as a matter of decolonial linguistic practice. While I respect other writers' reasons for doing so, in this thesis I have chosen not to capitalise 'indigenous', nor racialised labels such as black or white. This is because of my concern that treating 'Indigenous' as a proper noun would imply that geographically and culturally disparate populations should be categorised under a monolithic heading. While one might argue that indigenous peoples are united in facing certain conditions of settler colonialism, I seek to write for the plurality and difference that many wish was better acknowledged (L. T. Smith, 1999). I hope this will not be interpreted as less than respectful of all peoples affected by past and present colonisation, including in my home country Canada. Another recommendation is that anthropologists should not italicise words from non-European cultures, because it exoticises those words and treats them as perpetually alien to the Eurocentric gaze. Following this advice, I did not italicise Sande and Poro as some texts do; however, in certain instances I felt it would add clarity to italicise. This is consistent with italicising French or Latin phrases such as *mission civilisatrice*. (For more detail, see the University of British Columbia terminology list at http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/identity/terminology.html)

branches of government were more antagonistic than others towards native customs in general and Sande authorities in particular; in fact, the county court supported the Sande, and jury members threatened the complainant before the case was moved to Monrovia where the elders were eventually sentenced (interviews, West Point Women, October 2012). After 2010, donor-led 'zero tolerance' for FGC/M led to violent clashes with indigenous female authorities, conflicts that do not sit comfortably with the liberal state's ambition to resolve longstanding native/settler cleavages in Liberian society. The contradictions in postconflict gender equality engagement escalated into violent confrontation, simultaneously opening new possibilities for open dialogue and collaboration.

At first glance, the connections between these three stories may seem merely thematic and not causal. Thematically, each instance involves gendered abuse, state formation or reconstruction, and international interference that some scholars perceive to be colonial in nature (Doe, 2009; Odhiambo-Abuya, 2005; Paris, 2002). The individuals at the centre of each story are 'subaltern' in the sense that they have the most direct, corporeal experience of the situation and yet are not 'audible' in the texts as authors of their own representation (Spivak, 1988). Additionally, there is an element of the 'humanitarian spectator' (Hunt, 2008:222) embedded in the publication, media coverage, and legal and diplomatic responses to each case. That is, that the spectre of violence or violation figures prominently in materials that typically claim to assign dignity to victims, yet overlooks their authorship as primary subjects (Calain, 2012; Hunt, 2008). Thus survivors of violence can be both hypervisible as the objects of scrutiny in human rights literature, and also profoundly marginalised from mainstream texts (Fassin, 2012). Epistemic violence compounds

gendered violence (as well as other acts of violence) particularly when privileged agents ignore victims and survivors' self-representation, and assign importance to their suffering only insofar as it can be leveraged for other ends (Das, 2007). Finally, and related to the preceding point about privilege and representation in human rights discourse: each 'subaltern story' reflects a certain uneasiness in addressing cultural difference within universal human rights paradigms, an uneasiness that has long plagued international feminist theory and action (Benhabib, 2002b; Hyndman, 1998; Povinelli, 2001).

This dissertation will demonstrate the utility of historicising Liberia's contemporary gender violence discourses, and how doing so can address the ongoing bifurcation of international feminism between a 'discourse of rights' and a 'discourse of culture' (see, for example, Abu-Lughod, 2002; Appiah et al., 2007; Benhabib, 2002a; Goggin, 2011; Mamdani, 1996; Nussbaum, 1999). Extending the above comparison of the three 'subaltern stories' beyond thematic similarities, one can infer a more direct historical connection. Each case is a product of the same enduring set of predicaments that characterise the politics of gender, 'civilisation', and violence in Liberia. That is not to suggest that Walters' novel set in motion events that directly precipitated the gang rape in 2008 or the forced mutilation in 2010. Instead, the three events were products of gendered processes of colonialism, state formation, and settler/native relations that produced these outcomes, and the agents who represented and responded to each event played a role in supporting or resisting this set of relations. The gender norms underlying individual episodes of violence can be interpreted as products of past influences, and thus a form of social memory (Das, 2007; Shaw, 2002).

*Gender violence and memory*

To integrate historical context into contemporary matters of gender violence requires more than simply compiling a chronology of past events. Anthropologists and historians of the Mano River Region have looked to the past, in particular the Atlantic slave trade and Euro-American imperialism, to explain current social relations and conflicts (Ellis, 1999; Moran, 1990, 2006; Richards, 2006; Shaw, 1997, 2002). For example, Moran (1990) examines the impact of colonisation on the Grebo of Southeastern Liberia, whose 'dual sex' prestige structures were altered under a patriarchal liberal governance system, increasing women's household dependency as they aspired to 'civilised' status. Both Ferme (2001) and Shaw (2002) link practices and beliefs among the Temne and Mende groups in Sierra Leone with the trans-Atlantic slave trade, aiming to 'reconceptualize ... gender discourses in terms of social memory' (Shaw 2002:45). Shaw observes a connection between spousal alienation and distrust, and gender sodalities such as the Poro and Sande, whose secrecy and authority developed partly as a protective mechanism against slave-hunters. Yet more scholars have examined the impact of colonial gender norms on law and culture (Aderinto, 2007; Mamdani, 1996), the invention of tradition (Ranger, 1983), the occlusion of female political leadership and consolidation of patriarchy in colonial encounters (Amadiume, 1997; Leach, 2008; van Allen, 1972), and the impact of these events on armed conflict in the post-Cold War era (Ellis, 1999, 2010; Moran, 2006; Richards, 1996; Sawyer, 2005).

Despite the importance of colonial history in transforming gender relations across West Africa, the timeframe of most postwar surveys on gender violence in Liberia is restricted to the short term. Studies by international organisations (IOs)

and global health scholars are distinctly ahistorical, often going no earlier than the outbreak of armed conflict as a factor in current patterns of gender violence.[7] Such approaches also tend to be positivist and quantitative, offering necessary data on the extent and characteristics of gender violence while being limited to survey methods in terms of qualitative detail. Moreover, in qualitative or narrative-based human rights reports, 'the past' is implicitly associated with indigenous and/or rural peoples and their 'traditions', rather than analysed as a set of events influencing contemporary social practice. My research therefore seeks to resolve some of these missed connections by acknowledging the present, current, and immediate temporality of both 'town' and 'country' Liberians as well as the historicity of the problems they face. This strategy evolved into a finding as well as a method of analysis; it will be demonstrated that ahistorical tendencies in gender violence scholarship and activism are an oversight that has weakened some programmes and policies. This thesis similarly critiques historical and ethnographic studies that fail to take into account gender as a central operative of human social organisation, especially where such studies have missed an opportunity to contribute to urgent questions in contemporary feminist development discourses.

Building historical context is not without its quandaries. Methodologically, studying the past is difficult and at times impossible due to the vast, cavernous

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[7] For example, survey-based findings that focus on the postwar era include Atwood et al., 2011; Sobkoviak, Yount, & Halim, 2012; Tayler-Smith et al., 2012; UNMIL Legal and Judicial System Support Division Coordinator, 2008; Vinck & Pham, 2013. As my own collection of qualitative data grew, so too did the range and quality of publications on specific gender issues in Liberia, and vastly improved quantitative and methodological work on sexual and gender-based violence globally. (See, for example, recent quantitative and survey research from 28 Too Many, 2014.; Ellsberg et al., 2014; Jewkes et. al., 2014; Michau et. al., 2014)

silences in existing sources, especially where female and indigenous representations are missing or questionable (Aderinto, 2012; Butalia, 1998; Spivak, 1988). The various techniques that I and other researchers use to address this challenge will be outlined in Chapter Two, which examines methodology. Analytical challenges add to methodological ones, where there are unresolved questions of structure and agency, continuity and change, and the unreliability of grand narratives. This study accepts Piot's (1999) warning that historicising African affairs is not solely a matter of linking their past to global processes, or in other words, 'bring[ing] Universal History to a people without it' (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1992:5). Many scholars attempt a balance between acknowledging globalised/globalising configurations such as the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Shaw, 2002), European imperialism (Arendt, 1948), and patriarchy (Hunnicutt, 2009), without accepting the monolith of 'universal history' that many reject (Guha, 2002; L. T. Smith, 1999).

Gender norms under contestation in postwar Liberia cannot be reduced to mere 'debris' of empire (Stoler, 2008) just as gender violence itself is not the totality of its victims' life experiences.[8] Notwithstanding, historically-grounded ethnographies add important historical facets to contemporary issues, including the proposition that gender relations themselves can 'echo' historical processes

[8] This thesis occasionally uses 'victim' in addition to the conventional feminist term 'survivor', in recognition of the bare fact that not all survive gender violence. While tropes of 'helpless victims' in development discourses should be critiqued, I concur with Nussbaum (1999) that recognising victimcy need not imply an erasure of that individual's agency. It is simply an acknowledgement of wrongdoing committed against them. Researchers of gender violence in the Mano River Region, such as Coulter (2009), explicitly avoid one-dimensional depictions of 'victims'. This sets a reasonable standard for this balanced approach.

(Schramm, 2011). If such an approach is valid, then what kind of past do violent gender relations embody?

**Summary of research questions and methods**

The core question guiding this project is, how can Liberia's colonial past help explain public discourses of gender violence in the postwar decade? Dividing this overarching question into more specific ones, the sub-questions are:

- What are the prominent institutional discourses on gender violence in the postwar era?
- What are the prominent informal discourses on gender violence?[9]
- How do liberal institutions, traditional institutions, and Liberian citizens interact as agents of discourse construction?
- How can Liberian colonial history help explain how certain narratives are politicised or leveraged? What do these discourses and interactions imply about the long-term significance of Liberia's colonial history, within broader globalised contexts of imperialism and liberal humanitarianism?

Both the research questions and the means of approaching them were developed using Grounded Theory Methods (GTM), in which 'the iterative process of moving back and forth between empirical data and emerging analysis makes the collected data progressively more focused' (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007:1). As Stern (2007) details, there is much debate over what exactly grounded theory is and to what extent it should be formalised according to the initial approach of its founders,

[9] Informal in this context meaning, in the public sphere but not organised under a specific institution or structure. Abramowitz, (2014) labels similar discourses 'vernacular' and I occasionally use her descriptor as well as 'non-elite', and 'everyday'. This is not to suggest that there is a 'lumpen' population holding together across the diversity of ideas and life experiences in Monrovia. 'Informal', 'vernacular', and 'non-elite' are united more by their externality to formal representative structures rather than internal commonality (though I am receptive to others' arguments that this could be the case).

Glaser & Strauss (1967). The aspects of GTM that I prioritise in my research are its iterative and participant-driven strengths. Iterative, in that five field visits over five years have allowed for a cyclical development of questions, follow-up questions, and building connections to existing literature. Participant driven, in that the major themes of analysis arose from participant observation and interview data, and required flexibility, self-reflexivity, and responsiveness to the emerging data. The process was cognisant of issues and paradigms that dominate research in postconflict Liberia, without restricting research to the conventions generated by these approaches.[10]

GTM benefited this study by offering formalised guidelines for pursuing a methodological 'journey without maps'.[11] The GTM approach is particularly well-suited to exploratory research on a topic that does not have an extensive or detailed foundation within one field of academic literature (Stern, 2007). Grounded theory enabled 'serendipity' in fieldwork, and strengthened accountability to the participants and the data (Miller, Nelson, & Moore, 1998).

From five fieldwork visits between 2008 and 2013, my research generated rich and multifaceted sets of data. This includes an archive of 180 examples of gender violence awareness campaigns, collected or photographed, which comprises

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[10] For instance, much has been written since the 1990s on Liberia and Sierra Leone's 'crisis of patrimonialism', examined through the experiences of migratory youth and ex-combatants (Coulter, 2009; Hoffman, 2011; Keen, 2005; Richards, 1996; Utas, 2003). I have resisted the temptation to over-rely on these paradigms in a region where so much is neglected. Ignored or recently 'discovered' issues in Liberia such as intimate partner violence, female genital cutting, and subaltern indigenous voices, are demonstrably important despite, or even because of, their lack of a well-established literature base.

[11] To borrow from Graham Greene's account of his travels in Liberia (Greene, 1961).

the largest existing archive of Liberian anti-violence materials.[12] Substantiating and triangulating much of the data from the visual archive, are written notes from over 50 semi-structured interviews with staff of agencies working against gender violence of various kinds, participant observation of key meetings and retreats, and grey literature including several key training manuals intended to reduce gender violence within the security sector or in other settings.[13] This data forms the basis for documenting institutional discourses. Archival research and literature review on 19th century colonial relations adds an indispensable longitudinal perspective to the contemporary social problems and theoretical frameworks. I interpret these sources of original data using critical discourse analysis, reading 'against the grain' and with attention to telling silences. Data for informal discourses came from more than 70 semi-structured interviews with a diverse cross-section of adults in the Greater Monrovia area, supported by participant observation in the specific field sites, and abiding relationships of friendship, collegiality, and familiality outside of official field work 'there and then' (Hyndman, 2001).

Greater Monrovia as a field location was well suited for a number of reasons. Geographically it is a fascinating place for examining postconflict gender issues with a postcolonial lens; it was the first site of colonial settlement in Liberia, the seat of governance throughout the history of Liberia, an epicentre of urban fighting and

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[12] Footnote: as compared to individual NGO archives which are not formally curated, the Ministry of Gender and Development resource centre in Monrovia, and the John Hopkins Media/Materials Clearinghouse sections on West Africa, http://www.m-mc.org/mmc_search.php

[13] The reason for approximating 50 interviews is that after 50 interviews I stopped scheduling interviews as events and instead worked on ongoing communication with some key contacts. Additionally, sometimes an interview with one or two key staff would expand into a group discussion if the interviewees decided to call in more staff.

forced migration during the Liberian war, and is a city densely occupied by humanitarian and development institutions working in postconflict reconstruction. Furthermore, situating the pursuit of my questions within a smaller geographical region added precision to a research endeavor that weaves together multiple theories, methods, disciplinary approaches, narratives, and temporally distant events into a tapestry-like monograph.

Human geography, and feminist geography, is an exploratory and interdisciplinary subject area, which as a disciplinary platform empowered my research to form lateral and synthetic links across different areas. The dissertation draws from a multidisciplinary literature base to make an interdisciplinary contribution to its primary field of interest, gender and development. One major challenge of building an interdisciplinary study out of multidisciplinary sources is in synthesising disparate sources of data and background information into a coherent and focused analysis. Building connections across sources improves the originality and applicability of my argument, but also it inevitably creates vulnerabilities that would not be present in a disciplinary-bound niche study in a well-established field. In order to present my lateral and synthetic analysis in a relatively linear manner, there are several places in the thesis where an 'interesting' digression into a related question was ignored in favour of an indispensable discussion of central concepts that move forward the argument. For that reason, the reader should expect to encounter several points that relate to an area of literature but do not investigate it in depth. Several potentially relevant topics were circumvented for this reason, and upon careful reflection.

Before elaborating the core contributions of this thesis by describing how each chapter shall build a multi-layered argument, the following sections will review essential background information related to gender violence and the Liberian context.

## Historical background on statebuilding in Liberia

Charitable institutions and foreign governments have a long and intimate history of statebuilding in Liberia. The American Colonization Society (ACS) was founded in 1816 to establish a utopic colony for 'freed' African American slaves. The first settlement in 1822 was named Christopolis until the ACS elected the names Monrovia and Liberia in 1824 (American Colonization Society, 1852) and over the following two decades approximately 4,500 settlers arrived from the United States (Dorsey, 2000). The nascent colony generated contentious debate, with critics who castigated the social experiment for its racism, exploitation, and permissive stance towards slavery (Garrison, 1832; E. Smith, 1833; Stuart, 1833), and defenders who claimed the settlers' peaceful and civilising influence would abolish slavery in West Africa and replace it with 'enlightened' liberal governance, agriculture, and trade (Alexander, 1846; Hodgkin, 1833; Nisbet, 1851). Many agree that the Americo-Liberian settlers' own geo-political restrictions, and pressure to vindicate black self-rule, heightened the hegemonic aspects of settler governance (Brown, 2008; Liebenow, 1969; Sawyer, 1992a; Temperley, 2000). One of the ways in which settlers enacted these aspirations was by performing the prevailing norms of 'civilisation'

through European fashion, discourses of Christian enlightenment, and a *mission civilisatrice* towards indigenous Liberians.

Other 'charities' founded similar missions and projects along the coastline south of Monrovia. In 1947, these geographically contiguous coastal areas united and declared independence as the nation of Liberia. After the American Civil War, the population of settlers grew and eventually reached approximately 15,000 by 1900, in towns along the coast (Akpan, 1973a:218). Approximately 3500 'recaptives' from seized slave-trading vessels settled in the 1850s and 1860s (Clegg, 2004:245), but high mortality rates and a disadvantageous socio-economic position kept the 'Congoes' and 'Igboes' (as the recaptives were named due to their lands of origin) from exerting an elitist influence on Liberian politics in the manner of the Americo-Liberian ruling class. 'Congo' evolved to denote all Liberians of non-indigenous descent, including indigenous Liberians who achieved the status of 'civilised' through adoption, apprenticeship, religious conversion, or official marriage (Moran, 1990; Sawyer, 1992b).

Thus, the evolution of 'civilised' versus 'country' identity positions grew into an entrenched, yet also mobile and aspirational, social and political hierarchy that affected gender roles, and deepened resentment between indigenous and settler Liberians (Moran, 1990). 'Civilised' or *kwii* versus 'bush' or 'country' nomenclature as an expression of divisions is often more accurate than 'Americo-Liberian', or 'settler', due to the mobile and ideological nature of these categories (which can be contrasted against other colonies' stratification of social hierarchies; see Mamdani, (2001) for example). Gendered and relational colonial norms of 'civilised' versus 'country'

persisted over the long term and appear in the 2003-2013 decade in public discourses on gender violence.

Until the early 20th century, there was little colonial occupation of inland Liberia and inland indigenous groups retained a high level of autonomy. Responding to escalating competition from European colonies in West Africa, President Arthur Barclay launched a campaign of territorial consolidation in 1904 (Akingbade, 1994). The creation of the Liberian Frontier Force (LFF) for this purpose led to widespread atrocities in the counties, by all admissions including those of several Liberian presidents and Barclay himself (Akingbade, 1994; Akpan, 1973b; Ellis, 1999; R. Smith, 1964). Security sector reform, though it was not labeled as such in the early twentieth century, arrived in Liberia in 1909 through American-sponsored efforts to build capacity and reduce incidents involving the LFF, including sexual violence (Clegg, 1996; Pham, 2009). The purpose of this American intervention was both to strengthen the professionalism (and to some extent the accountability) of the LFF, and simultaneously to consolidate Liberian control of those regions.

Moving this summary forward for the sake of brevity to the mid-20th century, it was under the presidency of Tubman (1944-1971) that the Government of Liberia made its first sustained attempt to resolve ongoing resentments that arose from colonisation (R. Smith, 1964). Tubman's 1944 'Unification Policy' acknowledged some past harms, abolished the widely detested Hut Tax, restructured the counties, and brought customary rule and indigenous customs closer to formal government recognition, for example by creating the National Executive Council of All Chiefs and Elders (Akingbade, 1994; Akpan, 1973a). The above reforms, while well-received, did not produce widespread transformation of prestige and representative structures in

Liberia, and dissatisfaction with the governing class intensified during the presidency of Tolbert, culminating in a military coup led by Samuel K. Doe in 1980. He ruled first as military leader and after 1985 under the mandate of an election victory. As the first indigenous (Krahn) Liberian president, Doe promoted himself as a 'man of the people' but machinated ethnic strife in the counties and established networks of corruption and patronage that excluded most citizens (Ellis, 1999; Moran, 2006). This in turn was a factor for the beginning of the Liberian War when the NPFL under Charles Taylor invaded from the Cote D'Ivoire border, after which the INPFL faction under Prince Johnson tortured and killed Doe in 1990 (Ellis, 1995; Utas, 2006).

The Liberian War proceeded from 1989 to 2003, with a brief 'post-conflict' period starting from Charles Taylor's dubious election victory in 1997 (Harris, 1999) and lasting until the invasion of LURD and MODEL rebel forces in 1999 (Brabazon, 2010; Utas, 2003). Ethnographic histories by Hoffman (2003, 2004, 2011), Keen (2005), Richards (1996, 2005, 2006), and Utas (2003, 2005, 2006) review the events of the armed conflict with the level of precision and deep consideration they merit. For the purposes of this introduction, I will simply note the humanitarian scale of the conflict and the arguable 'state of exception' (Agamben, 2005; Lechte & Newman, 2013) it generated for some survivors. An estimated 100,000 people were killed,[14] two-thirds of Liberia's population was displaced internally or internationally, heavy periodic fighting occurred in all regions of the country including protracted urban fighting in Monrovia, and rebel factions enacted (or failed to prevent) crimes against

[14] See the appendix in Ellis (2006:318) for details on estimates of fatalities.

humanity throughout the war including forced recruitment, targeting of civilians, training and deployment of child soldiers, sexual violence, and torture (Abramowitz, 2005; Basini, 2013; Cain, 1999; Human Rights Watch, 2004; Isis-WICCE, 2008; Liebling-Kalifani et al., 2008; Sesay, 2003).

A 2003 ceasefire enforced by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), an interim government and the election of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in late 2005 brought basic levels of human security closer to 'normal' expectations (Abramowitz, 2014). However, in addition to gendered abuses committed by combatants during the war, there is strong evidence for high rates of sexual abuse and domestic violence continuing after the war (Atwood et al., 2011; Tayler-Smith et al., 2012).[15] While there are points to critique about the reliability of major studies, the persistence of high levels of gender-based violence from the conflict period well into the postwar decade is a consistent finding within both academic and policy-based studies.

Thus far this brief background history has focused on the most prominent aspects of Liberian political history, a succession of key events that most books and journal articles recount following a predictable formula of 'official' historical exposition.[16] Many mainstream narratives leave scarce room for exploring historical perspectives grounded in the roles and experiences of indigenous peoples, and native

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[15] Note that pre-war data is weak or unavailable, and therefore there are unresolved questions of to what extent the war 'caused' an escalation in gender-based violence. Verbal accounts from interviewees in my research were mixed, with some interviewees recalling the peaceful 'normal time' before the war, and others identifying postwar gains in women's rights that give them new options in preventing or responding to violence.

[16] Works which address this official history with more intricacy include: Ellis, 1999; Liebenow, 1969, 1987; Sawyer, 1992b, 2005.

and settler women. Where women (and 'gender', which is often conflated with 'women') appear most prominently is in the human rights publications that examine sexual violence during and after the war (Isis-WICCE, 2008; Swiss et al., 1998), and in news and publications from the postwar period, where women and gender equality gained unprecedented political visibility in the peace process and elections (Fuest, 2008; Sawyer, 2008). Reciprocal engagement between research and policy/implementation arenas in the postwar era has influenced responses to gender violence as well as the lenses through which these responses are analysed.

## Background on 'liberal institutions' and the GBV Taskforce

### *Liberal institutions*

Liberia's postwar administration, in tandem with bilateral donors, the United Nations, and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), has been notably dedicated to gender equality, under the auspices of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and 1820 which support gender equality in peacebuilding (Barrow, 2010; Shepherd, 2008). The international community and media lauded President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in the first term of her administration (2006-2011), and she was awarded the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize, although criticisms multiplied during her second term over corruption and lack of gay rights in Liberia (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012; Nyanzi, 2013).

Addressing the postwar 'epidemic' of gender violence has been a major part of postconflict reconstruction. Significant legal reform proceeded especially around sexual assault prosecution (Bruthus, 2007; Medie, 2013). Security sector reform

integrated both gender equality and gender violence issues, for example by actively recruiting female police and military personnel (Pruitt, 2013), creating the Woman and Children Protection Section (WACPS) of the Liberian National Police (LNP) to respond to gender-based crime, and reforming the Rape Law of Liberia (Kaufmann, 2011; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006). Medical and psycho-social support for survivors of gender violence have also been strengthened, especially in Monrovia (Tayler-Smith et al., 2012). Following a series of scandals involving sexual exploitation by staff of government and humanitarian agencies, (Save the Children-UK, 2006; UNHCR & Save the Children-UK, 2002) many organisations have also implemented internal reforms such as zero-tolerance training to prevent sexual abuse by peacekeepers (Higate & Henry, 2009; Murphy, 2006; Nduka-Agwu, 2009). Institutions have supported community mobilisation and awareness-raising, targeted at reducing sexual violence and domestic abuse as well as addressing 'harmful traditional practices'.

A GBV Taskforce is jointly run by the Ministry of Health & Social Welfare (MoHSW), and the Ministry of Gender & Development (MoGD), under the supervision of the SGBV Joint Programme funded by UNDP (Medie, 2013). The GBV Taskforce is composed of representatives from all organisations and ministries that have an involvement with gender violence. Representatives are required to attend monthly meetings, though in reality attendance varies (Medie, 2013). The SGBV Unit, based in the Ministry of Gender & Development, often takes the lead in administering this process. Many have credited Liberia's active women's movement for inspiring this robust institutional response (Bauer, 2009; Bruthus,

2007; Fuest, 2008), while others emphasise the role of international donors and expatriates (Abramowitz, 2014).

Despite the ubiquity of the term 'gender' and 'gender-based violence' in liberal institutions in postwar Liberia, most initiatives specifically address violence against women and girls. Child protection programmes normally include male survivors of gender violence, but it is common to see adult male survivors overlooked in 'gender-based violence' initiatives. While I fully concur with the anti-essentialist appeal for male survivors and female offenders to be included in gender violence frameworks, (Linos, 2009; Onyango & Hampanda, 2011; Shepherd, 2008; Solangon & Patel, 2012), and contend this can be done within a feminist analysis of violence, it was nevertheless in the interest of grounded theory to reflect GBV terminology as it appears in the offices and streets of Monrovia (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007a). This thesis therefore shares the same focus on violence against women and girls, though it does not replicate this pattern uncritically.

Donors buttress basic state services by providing large-scale funding, equipment, and even personnel to government ministries. Interactions within and between organisations closely resembles Duffield's description of 'contingent sovereignty': 'a zone of donor and NGO experimentation in the biopolitics of state reconstruction, basic needs and self-reliance' in post-conflict governance (Duffield, 2007:28). In addition to providing resources, INGOs can also be recipients of large grants and can benefit from cooperation with ministries in competing for donor resources (Interview, Dede Kwekwe, MoGD, April 2012). The result is a fluidity between state governance, donor intervention, and NGO-led service provision that renders impossible attempts to establish where state involvement in gender violence

ends and donor involvement begins. For these reasons, I have classified the Government of Liberia, United Nations, and large NGOs together as 'liberal institutions', while recognising the heterogeneity within this classification. This thesis uses the less cumbersome term 'state' interchangeably with 'liberal institutional', particularly when identifying messages that emphasise state authority. The reader should assume that this term signifies a high degree of international liberal institutional involvement in the state's core functions. The term liberal in 'liberal institutional' is meant to distinguish from other institutions such as traditional or religious ones. It also specifies the liberal 'technology of government' at work (Duffield, 2007:6), and the paradoxes embedded therein (Jahn, 2009; Paris, 2004).

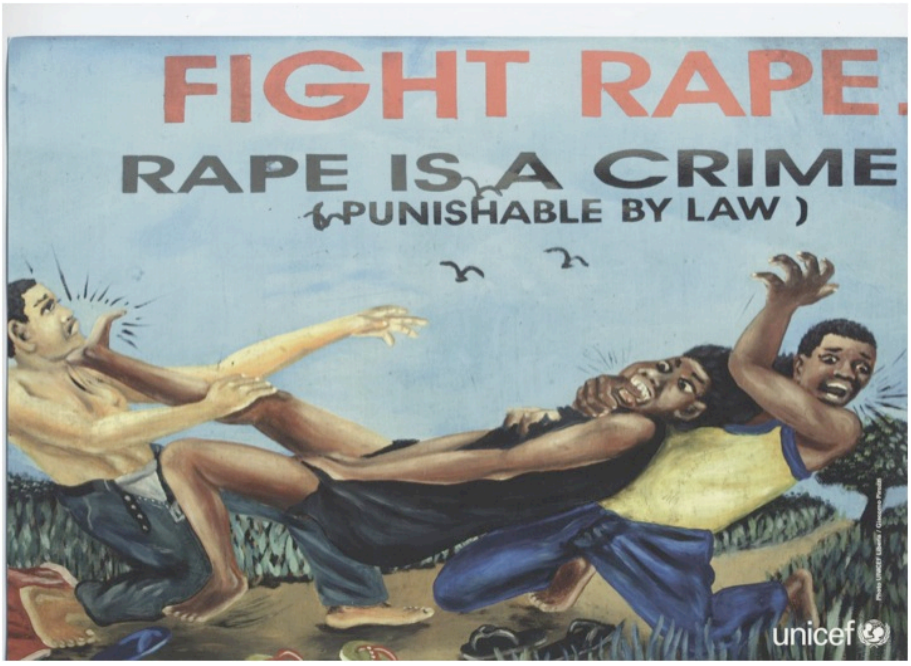
Paradoxes of liberal governance have been the topic of extensive theoretical and grounded inquiry (see for example, Appiah, 2001; Duffield, 2007; Jahn, 2005, 2009; Paris, 2004). Key among these is the tension between the state's monopoly on violence and its role in protecting citizens from violence. Questions of social contract theory that beset liberal theory are given more depth by feminist analyses of 'sexual contract' (Das, 2007; Pateman, 1988). A more detailed examination of the paradoxes of liberal governance and its relation to liberal imperialism will be outlined in Chapter Three. The point I wish to introduce here is that gendered liberal imperialism is a common thread running through the postwar liberal state 'reconstruction' efforts, and earlier periods of Liberian settlement and state formation and territorial consolidation in the early twentieth century.

*Liberia's postwar 'propagender'*

Globally, both quantitative and qualitative research has identified social beliefs and attitudes as a high priority for changing violent behaviour (Bohner et al., 2005; Burt, 1980; Jewkes et al., 2014; Michau et al., 2014). In Liberia, public advocacy and awareness-raising has been a visible part of liberal institutional engagement with the public. Within a wider global setting of scholarship that is increasingly attentive to violence and gender beliefs in conflict affected settings, research and action have informed each other. In addition to the aforementioned legal and security sector reform implemented by the postwar state, liberal institutions also campaign to change minds and attitudes in the general public (Carvalho & Schia, 2011; Medie, 2013; Thornhill, 2012). This era of normative renegotiation is not restricted to institutional processes. Many non-elite Liberians have informally involved themselves in dialogue and action around gender violence in their personal lives, in addition to participating in institution or donor-led campaigns (Abramowitz, 2014; Thornhill, 2012). One of the principle means of promoting these desired changes is through the creation of visual materials such as billboards, bumper stickers, t-shirts, bracelets, and posters in order to deliver a high-profile message about gender violence.

Monrovia at this time was geographically unique as a site of norm contestation, as the concentration of these advocacy initiatives transformed its streets into a gendered 'ideoscape' (Utas, 2006). Gendered discourses competed for attention by visually occupying the urban terrain. Violent images emblazoned on roadside billboards reminded the newly arrived expatriate that they were at Africa's ground zero, witnessing the remnants of 'postmodern' destruction wrought by the

'new barbarism' of post-Cold War armed conflict (Kaplan, 1994).[17] Like other Mano River Region researchers such as Richards (1996), I reject the 'new barbarism' paradigm, and share Cramer's (2006) perception that describing postconflict regions as spectres of hyperviolence serves neoliberal interests better than it does egalitarian human development. Nevertheless, it was apparent to me in my first visit in 2008 that Monrovia's physical and socio-economic infrastructure had been razed by armed conflict, poverty, and forced migration. This was especially so in the first few years after ceasefire when billboards more frequently showed graphic depictions of rape, and their bold colours stood out in contrast with Monrovia's stark, unpainted and dilapidated 'urban warscape' (Hoffman, 2011:164).




Ch. 1, Figure 1. An illustration from a UNICEF brochure collected in August 2009 but created using billboard artwork from earlier, likely around the time the Rape Law passed in 2006.

[17] One professional commented to me in July 2009 that the anti-rape billboards appear on many expatriate blogs as examples of extreme difficulties the country faces.

Despite the ambiance of desperation, or perhaps because of it, the self-confidence of the institutional rescue mission was tangible: one billboard showed a confident President Sirleaf declaring 'Liberia will Rise Again!'. Over time the gender violence images became less horrifying and their presence less intrusive as new buildings, fresh coats of paint, and commercial advertisements became more common. I term these communication materials 'propagender', a portmanteau of 'propaganda' and 'gender'. As Chapter Five will elaborate, the term implies a parallel to iconic 20th century propaganda; namely, bold visual messages that convey a subtext of state primacy in determining citizens' choices (Coventry, 2007; Gullace, 1997).

While there are increasing numbers of studies on Liberian citizens' perceptions of gender violence, (Abramowitz, 2014; Men's Resources International, 2008; UNMIL, 2008; Utas, 2005) there is relatively little documentation or discussion of the messages disseminated by the institutions that govern them. Some researchers, myself included, question the emphasis that institutional advocacy places on reporting GBV to the police (Carvalho & Schia, 2011; Kaufmann, 2011; Thornhill, 2012), but the academic discussion is far from saturated. My project joins Hyndman in 'repositioning the academic gaze' to 'study up', and 'analyse ... institutions, organisations, and other power brokers that govern human relations' (1998:242). Fassin's (2012) work on humanitarian philosophy used a similar approach of studying ephemeral media to better understand the hierarchies constructed by these 'everyday' texts. Much advocacy revolves around differing perspectives on 'the question of culture' in relation to gender violence (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012). This is not limited to Liberia; liberal theory itself has persistently

struggled with accounting for plurality and difference while exploring universal claims to human dignity (Appiah, 1992; Jahn, 2005; Sen, 2009). Liberal institutions' messages deserve close examination, primarily because of the power of discourse in constituting social realities and enabling action, as both critical discourse analysis (CDA) constructivists and poststructuralists agree (Culler, 1983; Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Shepherd, 2008).

### *Critical discourse analysis, structure and agency*

Discourse is defined here as 'use of language seen as a form of social practice, and discourse analysis is analysis of how texts work within sociocultural practice' (Fairclough, 1995:7). The dissertation's method of discourse analysis is informed by both critical discourse analysis (CDA) approaches and poststructuralist challenges to the CDA constructivism. Broadly speaking, most approaches to interpreting discourse fall on a spectrum between these two positions. CDA deconstructs texts to reveal their ideological underpinnings and expose hierarchies of race, class, and gender (Fairclough, 1995; Lazar, 2005; van Dijk, 1993). The value of this approach is to examine textual production and interpretation in light of power inequalities; to identify frames and ideologies at work and to acknowledge their role in constituting social realities, while not assigning these ideologies a deterministic role. The poststructuralist school disrupts the facile morality of some CDA methods by emphasising the ubiquity of power, the agency of even marginalised subjects, and the multi-layered nature of social communication and textual production (Culler, 1983; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Shepherd, 2008). There is greater emphasis on the

agency of the text's author, and on multidirectional power dynamics (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

As Culler (1983) argues, it is more accurate to treat these two 'opposing' viewpoints as a continuum rather than a binary. Many find it useful to combine the strengths of these two approaches; for example, Fluri offered a scalar discourse analysis of advocacy by the Revolutionary Afghan Women's Association in the context of US geopolitics and the 'war on terror' (Fluri, 2009). Scholars in such disparate contexts as Liberia, Western Sahara, colonial and post-independence India/Pakistan, and asylum detention centres in Europe draw upon legal texts, written accounts, and spoken interactions to identify 'official' or 'privileged' discourses on vulnerable subjects (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012; Das, 1997; Fassin, 2012; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2009; Mani, 1986). I follow what appears to be a consensus between Mano River ethnographers in identifying both structure and agency at work in the discursive production of social dynamics.

Moreover, subtext may reflect power dynamics or evoke meanings external to the authors' intentions (Fairclough, 1995; Feldman, 1995), after the figurative 'death of the author' (Barthes, 1977). For example, emancipatory and egalitarian messages produced by British abolitionist campaigners in the eighteenth century were undermined by racist iconography that positioned enslaved Africans as supplicating, silent victims (Hochschild, 2005). Similarly, in this thesis a poster for 'girl power' in Liberia is deconstructed to reveal patriarchal scripts that belie 'girl power'. The subtext exercises some independence from the intended purpose the text. This distinction is important when etically identifying messages with problematic aspects that were most likely emically unintended by their authors. The

goal of examining gender violence discourses in this way to indicate connections between the narratives that recur, the social realities they recall, and the power dynamics they perpetuate.

**Chapter summaries outlining a multilinear argument**

Moving from background information to the contributions to be made in the following chapters, this final section of the introductory chapter will summarise the upcoming contributions in the rest of the thesis. The chapter summaries below should illustrate how this dissertation compounds an original argument in three stages.

The first stage, (Chapters Two, Three, and Four) sets methodological, theoretical, and historical/historiographical foundations while also introducing questions, terminology, and debates that are relevant to the substantive contributions. These chapters present original work and fresh perspectives on their respective questions, but ultimately serve as a precursor to the data-dominated chapters.

The second stage, Chapters Five and Six, each focus on relatively distinct arenas of discourse production for gender violence issues; Chapter Five elucidates institutional or 'donor' narratives while Chapter Six attends to perceptions of the general public in Greater Monrovia; each of these two chapters examines the data most closely associated with those two spheres.

The third stage of the thesis, in Chapters Six and Seven, adds political and social complexity by illustrating the interactions between various interest groups in

negotiating gender norms and gender violence in postwar Liberia. Importantly, earlier chapters introduce questions and some data that successive chapters build upon; in doing so, some seemingly disparate topics or lines of discussion remain unresolved for several chapters or until they are drawn into a conclusion towards the end of the thesis. Each chapter adds a successive layer to the recurring themes. These themes include: liberal humanitarianism as an enabler of imperialism/colonialism and how this process is gendered, liberal gender equality and its strained relationship to cultural difference and privilege, the replication of patriarchy through structural embeddedness as well as performative means, and the persistence of the past, including its echoing subalternities, in contemporary postwar reconfigurations. These themes appear in varying ways in the narratives of individuals and of the institutions that ostensibly govern them. More detail follows below:

*Chapter Two, Methodologies*

The methodology chapter details the mixed qualitative methods I used to approach the initial and subsequent research questions. It outlines how my methods compensated for silences and gaps in the existing literature on gender violence in Liberia, scholarly literature on perceptions of gender violence more generally, and archival silences and subalternities. It contends that grounded theory method (GTM) and responsive, flexible questioning schema are well-suited for researching topics of relative neglect in the literature. Secondly, it discusses more practical matters related to conducting field research in an exploratory yet safe and ethically rigorous manner, and how drawing inferences from what is said and what is left

unsaid became a valuable part of the fieldwork process. Moving from data collection to analysis, it explains how discourse analysis was used to interpret the visual, textual, and ethnographic data that was produced and co-produced with participants over the field visits. Finally, the silences and subalternities that relate to privilege, difference, and representation are an equally important, if more abstract, aspect of my research process. This point is pursued with a selection of ethnographic encounters that present both lessons and lingering questions related to the 'incommensurability' (Povinelli, 2001), of culturally-situated perspectives on gender and violence. These vignettes carry not only methodological significance for the dissertation, but also theoretical and analytical features; they illustrate the recurring difficulty of achieving a thriving and pluralistic enshrinement of difference in transnational gender equality initiatives.

*Chapter Three, Gendering liberal imperialism*

How, if at all, does liberal humanitarianism enable colonialism and/or imperialism? This chapter delves into an extensive discussion of terminology and competing theoretical approaches, with extra attention paid to paradigms of liberalism and imperialism. It argues that imperialism as conceptualised in the Arendtian sense played a role in the initial evolution of liberal humanitarian institutions in the 19th century, and moreover that there are strong, if imperfect, parallels in more recent international development and humanitarian initiatives. Furthermore, this symbiosis is intrinsically gendered in that colonial femininities and masculinities underpin the colonial project, and these gender norms are typically the product of patriarchy/patriarchies. Thus, the problem of 'liberal imperialism'

argued to persist in international development originates from the very theoretical foundations of liberalism, and applies equally to the arena of gender and development despite the efforts of many transnational feminists to eradicate unequal relations of all kinds. Gender violence in particular is embedded with issues of liberal humanitarianism and colonial conquest, and in the postwar era, sits at the intersection of 'social contract' and 'sexual contract'. Three means of attempted resistance to liberal imperialism are introduced, all of which correspond to forms of activism encountered in the fieldwork. These are: improving liberal theory with greater attention to cultural pluralism within universalist scopes of human dignity; fostering an essentialist view (strategic or otherwise) of the marginalised and/or indigenous subject and uncovering the de-centred, anti-universalist or autochthonous 'nativist' truth claims made therein; and a postmodern unpacking of identity positions in favour of the epistemic liberation of individuals and groups, thus strengthening their ability to self-represent without the constraints of either universalism or essentialism. These restitutional approaches, in addition to their theoretical value, characterise many of the subject positions adopted by Liberian individuals and groups regarding gender and violence.

*Chapter Four: 'Liberia is an idea': liberal imperialism, gender, and Liberian state formation.*

This chapter examines both the history and historiography of successive periods of Liberian state formation. Rather than providing a historical 'background' in the form of a set of key events, it contributes to ongoing debates about Liberia's colonial history. In doing so, it sets the foundation for understanding how the past is

politicised in gender violence discourses in the postwar era. The section will demonstrate that the contradictions embedded in the founding mission contributed to the particular pressures placed upon, and the consequent narratives of, Americo-Liberian settler society. Consequently, it will be shown that liberal imperialism was foundational to the creation of Liberia and successive stages of state formation, and a forerunner of the 'modern' humanitarian eras to come. There are two main approaches to characterising settler-indigenous relations: the 'black colonialism' position, which emphasises settler tyranny (Akingbade, 1994; Akpan, 1973a; Gershoni, 1985), and the 'mutual assimilation of elites' stance, which emphasises settler-native collaboration (Ellis, 1999, 2010; Moran, 2006). Drawing together the colonial history of gender in West Africa with debates on Liberian politics, I reframe the 'mutual assimilation of elites' as a form of patriarchal collusion between male indigenous elites and the male-led settler state. The contradictory positions this created for Liberia's heterogeneous indigenous leaders resulted in marginalising female indigenous authority, yet strengthening their autonomy (or autochthony). In particular, the Sande societies' argued 'monopoly on violence against women' was able to continue relatively unscathed into the late 20th century and, it is debated, into a new era of gendered prestige in the 21st century. Throughout, the chapter demonstrates that the symbolic politics of the past persist in public dialogue and expression in the current era.

*Chapter Five, Institutional discourses: state primacy and the postwar mission civilisatrice.*

What are the most prominent discourses emerging from the GBV Taskforce agencies in the postwar decade? Applying a quantitative and qualitative analysis to the archive of 'propagender' visual materials, I argue that liberal institutions in the postwar decade use advocacy against gender violence to foreground the role of state institutions and to consolidate state intervention into the lives of citizens. These discursive patterns form a dominant, privileged discourse of state primacy that persists beyond any immediate intention of the creators to buttress liberal institutional sovereignty. Focusing on examples of state primacy and colonial subtexts in advocacy materials creates space for discussions of agency and structure, liberal imperialism and core liberal dilemmas.

*Chapter Six, Informal discourses: 'civilisation' and 'cash violence'*

What are the most prominent informal discourses of gender violence and what underlying ideas or messages might they convey? This chapter presents and interprets a selection of the most prominent informal public discourses on gender violence in postwar Liberia, as expressed in conversations with adults Liberians living in Greater Monrovia. It identifies discursive patterns in public perceptions of gender violence and focuses on how gender violence was defined and leveraged in support of desired outcomes in discussions. These discourses conveyed a strong sense of historicity, as terms like 'barbaric', 'civilised', and 'educated' were deployed to make a speaker's point about sexual assault or domestic violence. Out of diverse viewpoints, certain common themes emerge. The discourse on women's dress code

as a perceived cause of rape illustrates similarities with 'rape myth acceptance' (RMA) research in cross-cultural contexts, and key departures from it based on Liberian specificity. The second major trend addressed in this chapter is the perception that occult rituals (witchcraft, juju) are the main cause of rape against children. The main argument is that interviewees instrumentalise the topic of gender violence to comment more broadly upon power dynamics in society, and their self-representation strategies during interviews re-construct Liberian colonial tropes of 'civilised' and 'educated'.

*Chapter Seven, Positive masculinities or benign patriarchy? Postwar transformations to gender roles.*

Aside from discourses that appear primarily in liberal institutional materials or primarily in the general public, what kinds of messages about gender violence are disseminated via interactive encounters between groups? One notable example was the inclusion of unequal divorce and inheritance, and male abandonment of their families as a gender violence issue by the GBV Taskforce organisations. Chapter Seven adds to prior chapters by demonstrating how civil society was able to influence donor priorities albeit in a manner both supported and restricted by donor interests and frameworks. Advancing forward from the theoretical discussion of patriarchy (or patriarchies) as relational and embedded, this chapter examines the renegotiations of 'traditional' gender roles, identifying a tensions between advocating for more male commitment and responsibility towards their families, and the paternalism this has evidently generated towards 'women and children'. The perception of tradition, like in earlier chapters, is fluid and multi-layered, with some

groups treating male-headed nuclear families as 'traditional' and 'African' despite the existence of dual-sex representative structures and female-headed households in the country. The numerous examples of bystander intervention and normative negotiations illustrate that the 'rights versus culture' binary so often appearing in liberal universalist claims to gender equality is insufficient to explain progress towards gendered emancipations in Liberia, which are patently pluralistic. Feminist anti-violence advocacy appears in traditional and neotraditional forms of collective action, religious communities, INGOs, initiatives led by powerful men, and bystander interventions by marginalised actors; equally, none of these arenas holds a general advantage over the other in promoting egalitarian gender norms. In the case of men's household obligations, these pluralistic interactions proceeded largely in a spirit of collaboration and mutual support between citizen, 'culture', faith, and state. In stark contrast, Chapter Eight's discussion of these same groups working on FGC/M shows that relations were more antagonistic.

*Chapter Eight, Contested collusions: liberal and traditional authorities address female genital cutting*

Why is FGC/M such an adversarial topic within gender violence debates in the postwar era? In addition to the relatively harmonious interactions between state, citizen, and religious organisations over male head-of-household roles and responsibilities, the harsh disputes over FGC/M and the status of 'traditional' Sande women's authority offer interesting contributions. Political participation of women, recognition of indigenous leadership including female leadership, and stopping gender-based violence are three worthy goals that have been highlights of Liberia's

postconflict project. This thesis demonstrates that these goals are not always mutually supporting. At times, they come into direct conflict. The chapter will survey the changing nature of debates surrounding harmful traditional practices in the postwar decade, over the furor surrounding FGC/M since 2010, and the formalisation of the National Traditional Council of Liberia (NTCL), which claims to administer all 'traditional' affairs. It will draw on various incidents to demonstrate the limitations of 'culturally sensitive' anti-FGC/M programming, and contend that 'contested collusions' as well as Fuest's 'contested inclusions' are occurring between traditional authorities and the liberal state. My research, including aspects of it that gather conclusions from silences, suggests that the lack of a longstanding, collaborative, formal history between Sande leaders and the Liberian government is partly to blame for the conflicts and antagonism specifically over gender issues: who has the responsibility to define and punish sexual violence, whether or not bush school is legitimate, and how marital relations are socially and legally sanctioned. These matters elicit core issues within social contract, and sexual contract, governance and legitimacy. Despite the adversarial nature of the FGC/M debates, or because of it, rapid institutional adjustments seem to be underway as of the time of writing, which suggest a 'mutual assimilation of female elites' and new possibilities for Liberian citizens to embrace or evade their ideas of traditional values and acts.

*Chapter Nine, Conclusion*

Chapter Nine draws together these multiple discussions, clarifies the contributions and limitations of the dissertation, and addresses subsequent questions.

For example, the chapter anticipates the potential for comparisons to Sierra Leone, other conflict-affected countries, and other countries with a colonial history. It will also reaffirm how this dissertation speaks to larger set of debates around gender violence, gender and development, and feminist geography.

# CHAPTER TWO
# METHODOLOGIES

## Introduction

There is no user's manual for conducting research in dynamic, distressed 'frontier'[1] zones of human development. Existing precedents can only approximate the scenarios that arise from emergent research. This realization confronted me one day in April 2012 as I considered the ethics of spying upon Pakistani peacekeepers at bagpipe practice. It was purely by accident that my host brother and I witnessed their Sunday afternoon ceremony. James David Junior and I had climbed to the top floor of the Hotel Africa ruins, which dominate the landscape of the informal settlement where we lived. We stepped carefully over broken glass and tiles covering the decrepit steps, which on the first three floors were filthy with litter and human sewage. The higher floors were clean and gave us a refreshing breeze and clear views of the coast, the surrounding neighbourhood, and, we realized, an illegal bird's eye view of the UNMIL Pakistan Battalion. My first instinct, to move away at once, gave way to curiosity as I noticed that the music wafting up to us was live bagpiping, to which the soldiers marched in a noble and aesthetically pleasing formation. Bolstering my amusement was an uplifting sense of affirmation, a confidence that time spent in 'wild West Africa' would never go stale, but constantly surprise my research questions with fresh information and new paradigms.

[1] As Comaroff & Comaroff, (2012) characterise 'the Global South': 'While Euro-America and its antipodes are caught up in the same all-embracing world-historical processes, old margins are becoming new frontiers...In many respects, Africa, South Asia, and Latin America seem to be running ahead of the Euromodern world, harbingers of its history-in-the-making' (121).

At its foundation, my mode of inquiry is iterative, grounded, and synthetic. Recognising this is crucial to understanding both the contributions and limitations. The research is iterative in that over successive fieldwork visits, the findings for initial questions informed the creation of subsequent questions. As the introduction explained, the research is grounded in that fieldwork and interviewees' comments are assigned primary importance in building an analysis and theoretical framework, and because the research methodology was consistently designed to be flexible and responsive to field events, and the priorities and perceptions of Monrovian residents who interviewed with my teammates and me. It is synthetic in several ways; it draws together multiple research methods as well as secondary sources, and follows several lines of questioning in the analysis that unify towards the conclusion. I consider this 'whole' to be more than the sum of its parts because there are parts of the analysis where multilinear patterns of questioning provide relevant context or answers for each other.[2]

The UNMIL bagpipe practice is at the lighthearted end of a range of fieldwork moments that combine feelings of captivation, delight, bafflement, moral confusion, and, at times, profound grief and rage. I share Theidon's contention that 'how was your trip?' is an unanswerable question for researchers of difficult topics, and her careful negotiation of safety, ethics, and self-care resonates with my own experience (Theidon, 2014). This chapter will describe my own negotiations of

[2] My mode of inquiry is distinct from other methods of interdisciplinary scholarship because rather than advancing upon a pre-existing base of interdisciplinary literature, I build an interdisciplinary analysis out of multidisciplinary sources. For that reason, this thesis does not contain a literature review *per se* but rather presents several sections where a disciplinary-bound debate related to gender violence in Liberia can contribute to recurring questions of development, discourse, and difference in feminist geography.

methodological techniques, rigor, ethics, safety, and ultimately the lessons and lingering questions that grew from this study. It will begin by giving a brief overview of the fieldwork locations and timing, and a chart listing questions and methods. Then, an overview of each applied research method is organised around the four research sub-questions. The section on participant observation in host communities concludes the chapter with two vignettes in which I aspired to 'disagree in solidarity' with marginalised individuals and groups. Throughout the above process, my study observes and pays attention to silences, whether they be telling omissions in interview statements, gaps in existing literature, or archival silences and subalternities. Acknowledging these silences in the research methodology benefited the process in terms of obtaining and interpreting findings, as this chapter will argue; confronting silences and unresolved questions also became a necessary and beneficial process of building my argument.

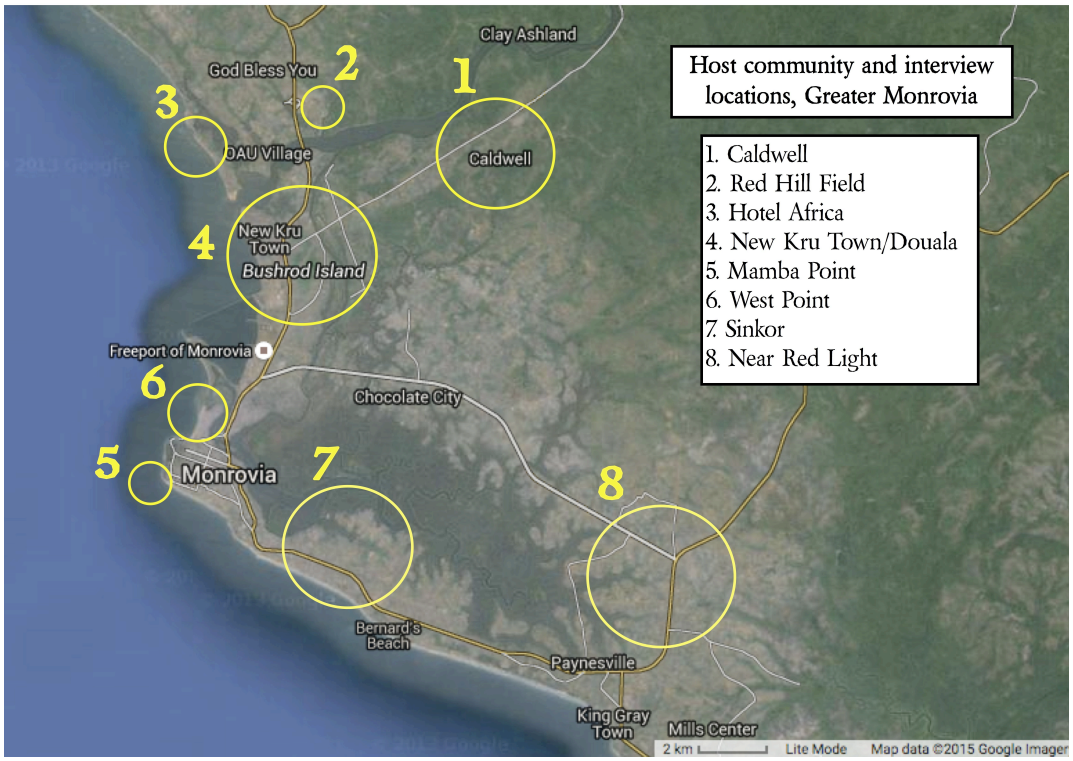



Figure 1, Ch. 2. Map of locations in Greater Monrovia.

*Locations in Greater Monrovia*

Fieldwork occurred over five visits comprising ten months between 2008-2013. The first independent field visit to Monrovia was in preparation for my M.Phil in Development Studies in July 2008. During this time I lived with staff from the African Child Peace Initiative (ACPI) community-based organisation in Caldwell township, Greater Monrovia. The second visit came a year later in July-September 2009, as research for this same degree programme at Oxford Department of International Development. The initial plan was to live with ACPI staff member Prince Flowers who had agreed to work as my primary research teammate; however, when Flowers had the opportunity to emigrate to Canada we adjusted this plan and he recommended a former colleague who, like him, had

returned to Liberia from the Bududurum Refugee Camp in Ghana. I therefore shifted my living arrangements to Red Hill Field neighbourhood on the outskirts of Monrovia, hosted by Ms. Edna Hutchinson and a female-led community-based startup, Healthy Communities Brighter Futures (HCBF).[3] After a year away from academic study, spent in Ghana and Canada, I returned to Oxford in 2011 to begin my doctoral studies at School of Geography & the Environment. In April 2012 I returned to Liberia for one month, reuniting with Edna and her two teenage children, James David Junior and Francelia. By this time, the family had relocated to an informal settlement at Hotel Africa in order to save money for a permanent house, and Edna retained her connections to HCBF but worked full-time at a skills training centre, the National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI). I therefore lived in Hotel Africa that month and for my next visit from August-November 2012. In my latest visit in early 2013 I shifted locations to the upscale Mamba Point neighbourhood in order to gain a closer perspective on expatriate life in Monrovia. Over these field visits, primary research questions led to secondary ones, and interviewing techniques were piloted and then improved in order to strengthen data collection. The matrix below summarises the research methods at a glance:

[3] Neither ACPI nor HCBF are members of the GBV Taskforce, and therefore were not sites for investigating institutional discourses generated by GBV Taskforce organisations. Being hosted by non-Taskforce communities conferred the advantage of learning about community-based perspectives on Liberia's postwar development while circumventing a potential conflict of interest (Iyenda, 2007). Their willingness to integrate me into their midst brought invaluable participant observation of neighbourhood-level development processes, personal insights, and a truly outstanding degree of logistical support in a low-resource setting. I also developed an extracurricular partnership with the We-Care library in central Monrovia, and in 2012 co-hosted a weekly cartooning workshop for teenagers. This was non-research related but another means to learn about Liberian life and culture in a non-directive manner.

*Primary and secondary questions and corresponding research methods*

| Primary Questions | |
|---|---|
| **Q1** | What are the prominent institutional discourses on gender violence in the postwar era? |
| **Q2** | What are the prominent informal discourses on gender violence? |
| **Secondary questions** | |
| **Q3** | How do liberal institutions, traditional institutions, and Liberian citizens interact in producing discourses of gender violence? |
| **Q4** | How can Liberia's settlement history help explain how certain narratives are politicised or leveraged? What do these discourses and interactions suggest about long-term gendered trends in Liberia's colonial history, and/or the broader globalised history of imperialism? |

| **Research Method** | **Data Collected** | **Relevant Question** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| Documentation of visual materials produced by GBV Taskforce | ~180 photographed and/or collected examples produced from 2003-2013. | ✓ | | | |
| Semi-structured interviews with staff of initiatives addressing gender violence. | Detailed notes from 50+ interviews from 2008-2013, 20-90 minutes in length. | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Participant observation of GBV Taskforce meetings. | Minutes and notes from GBV Taskforce meetings and conferences from 2009, 2012, and 2013. | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Semi-structured interviews with adult Monrovians of diverse backgrounds. | Detailed notes from 70 interviews from 2009-2013, 30-90 minutes in length. Notes from 3 different township workshops/fora on GBV, facilitated by myself and research teammates. | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Contemporary fiction/non-fiction written by Liberians. | Notes from various written materials, such as the Seabreeze Journal of Liberian Writing. | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Archival research. | Notes from 19th century primary sources, such as the American Colonization Society annual journals and missionary memoirs. | | | | ✓ |
| Grey literature from UN, GoL, and NGOs. | Several training manuals, brochures, and reports. | Used as background information and triangulating main data sources throughout the dissertation. | | | |
| Participant observation of host families and communities. | Notes from 9 months of fieldwork, in 5 periods from 2008-2013. (July 2008, July-September 2009, April 2012, August-November 2012, January-March 2013) | | | | |

### Q1: documenting institutional discourses

To author a discourse analysis of gender violence, it was necessary to gain an accurate understanding of what narratives and discourses were circulating in the postwar era, starting from the institutions most centrally involved in addressing the problem. The first stage therefore, was to establish basic information about gender violence 'awareness' work in Liberia.

Source material was far from comprehensive in 2009 and 2009. The aforementioned surveys on war-related trauma (Abramowitz, 2005; Liebling-Kalifani et al., 2008; Swiss et al., 1998), smaller case-based studies on sexual violence in the post-conflict era (Bruthus, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2004; Save the Children-UK, 2006; United Nations Secretariat, 2006) and the UNMIL-directed survey on beliefs and attitudes (UNMIL Legal and Judicial System Support Division Coordinator, 2008) gave liberal institutions some idea of the extent and nature of the sexual and gender-based violence they were attempting to address. Yet, sources on how these institutions sought to change public opinion and reduce instances of GBV, and precisely what information was conveyed by the ubiquitous 'awareness' campaigns, was virtually undocumented at the time of 2008 and 2009 research, and only somewhat ameliorated over the years thereafter.

In order to document awareness campaigns rigorously, I relied on several techniques which resulted in a rich and multifaceted collection of data. These included interviewing key staff, participant observation of GBV Taskforce meetings and retreats, documenting visual advocacy materials (which I term 'propagender'), and collecting GBV training manuals or otherwise learning about community

'sensitisation' curricula. The intent was to track public discourses that taskforce institutions were creating and disseminating. This eventually meant that although participant observation of 'internal' processes and intra-community discussions was vital to understanding the production of these discourses, the resulting 'texts' themselves, which occupied the public sphere, were ultimately the most important means of documenting institutional discourses. The coordination and communication between INGOs, national NGOs, GoL, and the UN was complex even for professionals working on inter-agency GBV coordination, as several staff explained. I therefore took the GBV Taskforce and its constituent organisations as a delineation of official institutional textual production (Fairclough, 2003). The following section describes in more detail my interviews and participant observation with the GBV Taskforce agencies, and the visual data collection and analysis.

*Interviews and participant observation of GBV Taskforce*

Using lists of contacts obtained from the MoGD and GBV Taskforce meeting attendance sheets, I attempted to systematically contact each current Taskforce member in 2009, while making repeat visits to NGOs such as the American Refugee Committee (ARC) with whom I had established contact in 2008. Specific to the Government of Liberia, I contacted key staff by phone or in person at Liberian National Police (LNP) headquarters and district offices, UNMIL, MoHSW, MoGD, (including the GBV Secretariat and the UN-GoL Joint Program which oversees the operations of the GBV Taskforce). These high-level institutions and the staff that led them were largely welcoming, especially in 2009 when it was relatively rare for researchers to appear in their offices. Most staff were open and even

hospitable in offering access to spaces, materials, and arranging interviews. I was allowed and at times even invited to attend GBV Taskforce meetings. Several staff and offices were visited multiple times over one fieldwork period, and/or returned to after a period of absence. Some staff recognised me from previous visits, which I believe led them to perceive me as a researcher with a long-term commitment to the country, and consequently permit my presence at meetings and workshops as an onlooker and occasional participant. This further generated opportunities for informal discussion, updates, and keeping in touch via email and social media. The total number of staff interviews is above 50. The reason for giving a non-exact number is firstly because after 50 interviews, I focused more on follow-up and casual communication around specific questions, communications which were difficult to quantify even though they were recorded in my notes (for example, asking a key informant follow-up questions while we both attended a GBV Taskforce retreat). Secondly, sometimes the interviewee's assistant or co-worker would sit in for part or all of an interview, and it was sometimes ambiguous whether this counted as one or more interviews although all staff were given information about my research intentions and their consent to participate was documented by signing a form.

All interviews took place at the interviewee's office or a nearby cafe. Questions were semi-structured according to the professional responsibilities of the interviewee, and responsive to the issues raised or evaded as the interview proceeded. I normally began with asking open-ended questions about the individual's job duties, background, key successes and challenges, how their organisation related to others working on GBV, and specific questions about the

creation of advocacy and training materials. For follow-up interviews or interviews later on in the fieldwork, I tailored the questions to specific issues.

I also welcomed questions from the interviewee about my research, which included a discussion around confidentiality before the interview and afterwards if a sensitive disclosure had been made (R. M. Lee, 1993). Several staff asked me how I planned to share or diseminate my findings. As a fieldworker I was eager to share my ambitions for meetings and workshops I hoped to organise in order to share my work-in-progress. I also normally left my contact email and my Liberian phone number if appropriate, and encouraged them to contact me with any further questions or concerns. When interviewees were satisfied with my answer to this question, they would typically expend more time and energy on interviewing with me. Being accompanied by host partners and research teammates such as Fatu or Edna had various effects on this process; in some cases, agency staff were eager to speak to them and welcomed me more enthusiastically because of my connections to communities outside of the typical expatriate haunts of Mamba Point and Sinkor. This was particularly true of Liberian interviewees such as the staff of The West Point Women for Health and Development Organisation (hereafter referred to as West Point Women or WPW), corresponding with other experiences of hospitality shown by NGOs towards 'insiders' (Iyenda, 2007). In other cases, interviewees spoke more candidly when it was a one-on-one conversation.

Despite the permissive attitude shown towards foreign researchers, I encountered challenges with interviewing high-ranking staff.[4] This was not a matter

[4] I use the term 'high-ranking' due to the vital work accomplished by interviewees, and because the word 'elite' might be a misnomer given the low salaries and constrained spheres

of access, as some researchers find (Mikecz, 2012). Rather, it was often difficult to elicit candid viewpoints and build repoire in a professional environment that some staff described as marked by labrynthine intra- and inter-agency politics. The challenges of interviewing high-ranking staff became more apparent as my research questions became more sophisticated, and the limitations of what information respondants were actually willing to provide became tacitly clear. For example, as I sought to triangulate findings on particular incidents surrounding FGC/M, it became obvious that some elite interviewees who were ostensibly eager to participate were evasive in answering questions. By 2012 and 2013, it was apparent that certain key staff were accustomed to interviewing with first-time researchers in Liberia, and seemed to structure their answers along a certain set of preliminary questions about their office while avoiding my more specific and advanced questions about particular events and challenges. One focal person recounted a lengthy children's story about a lion and reflected on her values as a mother and a Christian (interview, October 2012). These reflections were of a genre that would likely be charming to the first-time researcher, but they left little room for specific questions, I suspect intentionally so. Working with respondants' varying degrees of candidness was therefore a challenge, as other interviewers have reported on working with high-ranking staff and 'elites' (Mikecz, 2012; Rice, 2010).

While I made sincere and proactive efforts to engage liberal institutions and communicate preliminary findings, I found that the MoGD staff were not particularly eager to participate in any proposed meeting or to read publications I

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of influence held by many key national staff. Certainly, some interviewees expected to be approached with a great deal of deference and humility, and I made every effort to be courteous and respectful in this regard, responding to their cues.

sent them; in general these staff (quite understandably) demonstrated more interest in research that aligned closely with immediate Taskforce objectives, or was conducted in partnership with a Taskforce member organisation. In one circumstance in 2012, I offered to facilitate a special meeting for GBV Taskforce staff who I felt might be interested in my findings related to public perceptions of GBV and GBV-related services. Prior to requesting this meeting with the MoGD, several MoGD and MoHSW staff had informally told me they would be eager to attend this, as well as my proposed discussion about trends in GBV messaging across institutions. However, a key staffperson at the MoGD informed me that if I wished to hold such an event, I would be responsible for paying a venue rental fee. Since I did not agree that it was appropriate for me to finance this workshop out of my own pocket, I left the invitation open but did not make more attempts to arrange my proposed sharing of findings.[5]

Many opportunities to build repoire with staff on a more social basis were missed because I lived outside of Central Monrovia and almost always attempted to reach home with my host partners before dark. Many expatriate and some national staff communicate informally via social events and spontaneous meetings at popular restaurants and cafes. Many refer to this scene as 'Funrovia'. By 2013, it seemed that my distance from 'Funrovia' was becoming a noticeable omission in the data collection process. I therefore attempted to manage this by spending the final three

[5] In contrast to the sometimes alienating encounters with high-level staff, I had several collaborative engagements with community-based organisations. I also placed a higher priority on communicating with low-resource groups, reasoning that the more elite groups had better access to email and Skype if we wished to communicate after my departure from Monrovia. Low-resource groups were more restricted in this regard.

months of fieldwork (January-April 2013) living with Danish expatriates in Mamba Point, a neighbourhood where expatriates and rich Liberians live and partake in social events. Long-term expatriates invited me into their social circles in part due to their curiosity about the cartooning workshop I initiated with the We-Care Library, which became widely known after I presented some of the teenagers' artwork at a soirée in Sinkor for part of the 'Nerd Nite Liberia' series.

Living in 'Funrovia' provided the means to interact with human rights staff in spontaneous and 'serendipitous' ways (Miller et. al.,1998), and to have ethnographic encounters with expatriates working in the humanitarian and development sector, and to a lesser extent, commercial sectors. This resulted in a more intimate participant observation of how professionals experience their work and their various perspectives on governmentality, security, and development in Liberia. I was no less an anthropologist in these spaces than I was in the Liberian townships I had lived previously. The addition to my study was not in the form of a quantifiable list of data points, but rather notes, impressions, and opportunities to triangulate data. Furthermore, and in line with the confidentiality in participant observation principles outlined in a later section, many of my contacts' specific comments and anecdotes were not repeated in full in order to respect privacy. On a final note, my objectives for this field visit were in part limited due to a family emergency in Canada which led me to leave Monrovia earlier than anticipated.

The above discussion of GBV Taskforce interviews and participant observation focused on specific data collection techniques and how challenges were approached. There are also ethical issues related to these methods and they will appear in the ethics and safety sections later in this chapter. The following section

shall refocus on how institutional GBV narratives were documented, by outlining the visual data collection and interpretation process.

*Visual methods and 'propagender'*

In 2008 I had started collecting or photographing examples in and around Monrovia, of posters, billboards, t-shirts, and bumper stickers. My initial expectation in 2009 was that interviewing staff of gender violence programmes would yield the most reliable information on institutional discourses or institutionalised perceptions of gender violence. The benefit of including visual methods, I soon realized, was precisely because of their publicity and intent to communicate certain points. Consequently, I attempted to document every example of 'propagender' that I could find. Over 2008-2013 this collection of photographs and items grew into a database of 180 visual materials, all of which mention or depict some form of gender-based violence, and all produced by members of the GBV Taskforce since the 2003 ceasefire. As noted earlier, I term these communication materials 'propagender' due to their visual similarity to classic 20th century propaganda and their messages of strong state support. Staff of GBV Taskforce member agencies sometimes refer to these materials as 'Information, Education and Communication' or IEC materials. Other researchers refer to this type of campaigning as 'social marketing' (Pfeiffer, 2004).[6]

[6] Social marketing usually refers to the promotion of products believed to create positive change, such as mosquito nets or condoms, but can also include a concept or behaviour.




Figure 2: An example of 'propagender'; an anti-rape silicon bracelet advocating for police involvement, 2012.




Figure 3: A street-side advocacy piece by the American Refugee Committee, from 2008 or earlier. Text in speech balloon reads: 'My Friend, take your hands from on me!!!'.

Documenting discourses through radio or news media would have also brought useful results; however, to do this systematically over a period of several years would require a 'corpus' of those media and a system of content analysis to apply to a large body of data, as Baker et al., (2008) tracked discourses on immigration in British media. One advantage of tracking visual materials produced

by GBV Taskforce members is that the number of materials, 180, is manageable for examining each item and then generating memos and themes from that qualitative examination following a grounded theory method and using QSR-NVivo (Hutchison et al., 2010). It is also a sufficiently large sample (>29) for basic quantitative methods to apply. Furthermore, the 'propagender' database can be considered to represent the approach of a specific set of institutions, whereas media discourses would be more ambiguous in their public/private authorship; no less interesting for that reason, but indistinct as a documentation of institutional discourses. Examples of media from years in which I lived in Liberia are more heavily represented than others. Nevertheless, the collection is strong and arguably representative, based on the fact that I encountered repeat examples frequently towards the conclusion of fieldwork.[7]

*Visual analysis and coding with QSR-NVivo.*

I coded the content of the visual materials using QSR-Nvivo. Visual coding followed a similar method of content analysis to Wigston's (2002) review of AIDS representation in South African political cartoons, though I did not restrict the analysis to content alone, which as the author indicates, leaves unexamined more systematic power dynamics that may be perpetuated by those texts.

To track prominent trends in the visual materials, I used labels to formulate a matrix comparing the following queries:

[7] There are also communication materials that have been excluded from the 'propagender' database because they focus on gender, or violence, but not gender violence, or because they were produced by individuals or organisations acting independently from the Taskforce. These sources have been used to contextualise findings from the 'propagender' database.

| **Label** | **Sub-label** |
|---|---|
| Depiction or mention of traditional or community-based mechanisms | Positive or neutral |
| | Negative |
| Depiction or mention of state service | Legal service such as police, courts, or general reference to the law. |
| | Educational |
| | Medical/health or psychosocial |
| Specific mention of sexual exploitation | |
| Specific mention of rape | Exclusively mentions child rape |
| Includes Liberian English | |
| Includes imperative tone | |

I chose the above categories, which are by no means exhaustive, to test hypotheses based on my observations of the visual materials. Assigning these labels required careful consideration. For example, the question of which materials included violence was not straightforward. An item that mentioned 'cruelty' or 'our old ways' was ambiguous; should these items be excluded from the database for not directly naming or depicting a form of gender violence, or should they be included for what I knew to be a reference to domestic violence and harmful traditional practices? Ultimately, I applied the labels etically based on my own interpretation of the texts. However in doing so, I was mindful of any known context related to how the texts were produced, such as interpreting the word 'conflict' or 'palaver' as a common euphamism for domestic violence, or incorporating knowledge about the text's production from an interviewee of the same organisation. Coding by year would have been useful but it was not possible to obtain perfect data on the year of publication for each material, and ambiguous due to successive printings of certain materials. I applied all labels conservatively so as to avoid confirmation bias in support of arguments that had started to emerge in relation to the data. Then, I queried all fields in relation to all other fields in order to see relationships between

these labels. Coding the 'propagender' database corroborated some of my initial insights, which I do not hold as an appeal to 'objectivity', but simply a precise and quantifiable aspect of my textual interpretation. The coding process also disproved some of my hypotheses and helped me to focus on issues more strongly supported by the data. For example, based on my interviews and impressions, I hypothesised that child rape was a dominant discourse in sexual violence advocacy, possibly to the exclusion of sexual violence against adults. To the contrary, only nine items mentioned child rape exclusively. However, the coding process was able to identify the overlap between materials referencing the state, materials using imperative tone, and every example of child rape in the 'propagender' database (as Chapter Five elaborates). Therefore, NVivo was useful in illustrating connections between the categories I assessed while also bolstering or countering my hypotheses (Hutchison et al., 2010).

Qualitative interpretation demanded even more complexity and nuance. The visual dimension of discourse generates numerous insights and debates, especially when combined with text (Rose, 2001; Wilson, 2011). Within this broad and multifaceted field of research, there were few examples to which my own study adhered closely. Other studies that use visual analysis in development or conflict-affected contexts are distanced by topic area, region, and discipline. Studies on propaganda are dominated by propaganda during wartime, and/or produced by totalitarian regimes (Coventry, 2007; Gullace, 1997; C. Lee, 2007; Stocchetti & Kukkonen, 2011). I found more in-depth sources discussing cartoons as visual archives (see, for example: Mbembe, 2001; Medhurst & Desousa, 1981; Moran, 1988; Wekesa, 2012; Wigston, 2002) compared to visual analysis of social marketing

in development (Anderson et. al., 2011; Pfeiffer, 2004; Van Rossem & Meekers, 2007; Wilson, 2011). The studies related most closely to my work focus on gender identities and representation in other African countries. For example, Moran's (1990) review of 'civilised' women in Liberian newspaper cartoons was highly informative, as are more recent critical perspectives on global health (Calain, 2012; Pfeiffer, 2004), neoliberalism (Wekesa, 2012), and African women's representation (Anderson et al., 2011; Sesanti, 2009).

Barthes posits that 'all images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a "floating chain" of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others' (1977: 39). Working with my own collection of visual materials, I examined the intertextuality between photos and text, in addition to intertextuality between different materials. To give an example, one colour poster locally-produced in or around 2009 by Women of Liberia Peace Network (WOLPNET), combined photographs of different women with several lines of text imploring the reader to stop violence against women, such as 'Why Must she be Raped?' and 'Help Stop NOW!!!'. The photos showed a black women in professional attire looking calm and confident, and two white woman cowering in fear.




Figure 4, Ch. 2. An anti-SGBV poster by Women of Liberia Peace Network

From a textual and visual analysis perspective, the words lent an air of urgency and feminist 'fury' (Daly, 1978) to photographs that were not particularly dramatic standing alone. The words themselves served as images conveying urgency, using capitalisation, italics, large text, and exclamation points to reinforce the passion behind the message. From an intertextual perspective, that is, the poster's set of meanings existing in relation to other texts, it had an interesting incongruity with other advocacy materials. It was one of the few items I had seen, in years of working in gender violence advocacy, that depicted African women as happy and confident, in the same text where white women were positioned as severely victimised and in need of rescue. Whether the creators chose this as a counternarrative to depictions of African women that reduce them to an

embodiment of suffering (Autesserre, 2012; Hunt, 2008; Oyewumi, 2003) or whether there was some other reason for the choice of photographs, is not an answer contained within the poster itself. In this sense, there was fluidity in the significance between words and images, as well as intended or unintended intertextuality between the poster's message and other such advocacy messages. Therein lies the capacity of visual materials to engage their viewers; 'visual communication is powerful because it binds the viewer in a communicative relation where agency is hidden and meaning is ambivalent'. (Stocchetti & Kukkonen, 2011:4)

The above section described a range of analytical methods used for visual materials in this dissertation. The fluidity between the written texts, photographs, and known and unknown conditions of its production illustrate the richness of the narrative material I examined within the 'propagender' archive. There is much more to be said on discourse analysis and textual interpretation, and some relevant points will follow in a later section on archival reading. Directly below, I move on from the 'propagender' methods to outline the semi-structured interviews with adult Liberians.

### Q2: Documenting informal public discourses

By the final weeks of fieldwork in 2009, it became clear to me that one of the arenas for constructing and negotiating gender violence perceptions in Monrovia was the informal public sphere; that is, public or semi-public social spaces including shared cars, tea houses, chop stands, street corners, and markets. A radio ad would provoke a vehement debate between strangers in a shared car, for example, or a janitor or watchman would approach me in a staff person's office to share his

thoughts on gender and GBV. Conversations in my host family and community networks were likewise becoming apparent as a rich and under-studied element of gender violence norm contestation. I therefore piloted and then developed a novel approach to interviewing members of the general public about their perceptions; novel for combining the conversational element more common to ethnography with the sponteneity and diversity of approaching strangers at random, and via a well-honed and rigorous ethics and safety protocol. Throughout 2012 fieldwork, these semi-structured interviews with 'ordinary' Monrovians became an indispensable research method for exploring informal or 'vernacular' (Abramowitz, 2014) discourses.

*Semi-structured interviews with adult Liberians*

The purpose of the interviews was not to determine one monolithic 'Liberian viewpoint' but rather to obtain a cross-cutting perspective on competing and shifting narratives surrounding gender violence. Returning in 2012 and 2013, I conducted public interviews in cooperation with a small group of research teammates chosen from my network of long-term friends and acquaintances.[8] Thomas Barlue, Mary Duncan Dahn, Fatu Harding, and Vivian Mussah supported me during doctoral field research in 2012/2013, and chose the name 'Team Agents of GBV Focus'. They participated as volunteers and I offered a small honorarium for their time in addition to food and transportation on days we met. I would partner with one team

[8] For master's research in 2009, I worked in partnership with Edna Hutchinson and Fatu Harding, and prior to starting my master's degree in 2008, Prince Flowers and Thomas Barlue from the African Child Peace Initiative of Caldwell Township. Micheal and Yvonne Weah, Enoch Carlwolo, and other staff at the WE-CARE Library, as well as the National Vocational Training Institute personnel were tremendously supportive throughout, though not directly involved in my research.

member for each day of 2-5 interviews, and they led the introductions, and main interview questions. The team was diverse in terms of age, ethno-linguistic background and religious and political affiliation, but all members were leaders or activists in some way and all had experience working with sensitive and confidential matters.

Departmental approval was gained from Oxford Department of International Development prior to 2009 MPhil fieldwork and Oxford School of Geography & the Environment prior to 2012/2013 doctoral fieldwork, and the safety and ethics protocol continually revisited in the field as new issues emerged in interviews and participant observation.[9] I developed the safety and ethics protocol for interviews with Liberians from my own background training in rape and domestic violence crisis support, my personal and professional experience working with refugees in Canadian non-profit work, and by adapting the best practices guidelines created by lead researchers from the WHO multi-country study on violence against women (Ellsberg, Heise, Peña, Agurto, & Winkvist, 2001; Ellsberg & Heise, 2002, 2005; Jansen, Watts, Ellsberg, Heise, & García-Moreno, 2004). One major difference between my research and the WHO methodologies is that I was not requesting information on the interviewee's personal experiences as a victim and/or perpetrator of gender violence, but rather their personal opinions in general. Rather than setting a narrow parameter of accounts of violence or particular beliefs, I chose the more productive semi-structured and open-ended format that positioned interviewees, myself, and research teammates as co-producers of findings.

[9] One specific unexpected safety and ethics challenge is addressed in the Safety and Ethics appendix.

Before conducting interviews, I consulted with teammates on our ethics and safety protocol, choice of neighbourhoods, and question phrasing, and they made several insightful recommendations. For example, following the WHO guidelines I assumed that female interviewees would be more candid with female interviewers, and males with a male interviewer. Thomas and Vivian, the youngest team members, were confident that such 'old-fashioned' social divisions would make no difference, except perhaps in interviewing elders. Following their advice I changed our protocol. While I would not dismiss the effect of sexual difference entirely, mixed-sex interviews were equally likely to be cordial, candid, and informative. Our team noticed a selection bias towards friendly and welcoming individuals, a result of our safety protocol of avoiding anybody with a hostile demeanour. My presence as a 'stranger' certainly influenced results (Weinreb, 2006). It appeared that my foreignness polarised responses rather than biased them in a single direction.

Before beginning each interview we made clear five points: 1) I was a student who planned to write a 'book' that would eventually be made available in Liberia, 2) we were not connected to any NGO or government ministry, 3) we would not ask about violence that happened to them or people they knew, 4) that we did not offer money or any other reward for participation, 5) that we would never use their name without their permission. We asked the interviewee if they had heard the term 'gender-based violence' before. If they claimed they had, then our first question after the preliminary statements was how they personally defined the term. If they had not heard of GBV, we explained it using familiar and simple terms as "raping cases, cash for sex, beating your spouse, and things like that". It was necessary to provide a definition in order to ensure the interviewee understood the sensitive topics we

proposed to discuss with them. We requested to sit down with them in an outdoor location but out of earshot of other people, and asked if they had any questions for us before and after the interviews. A front porch or a bench by the side of the road usually balanced safety with privacy, and the interviewee's motivation for finding (or not finding) a suitable location suggested their level of genuine interest in the interview. One of the four teammates led the interview in Liberian English while I listened, added questions, and took written notes.

The primary questions, which Team Agents of GBV Focus phrased in simple English or Liberian English, began with: "how do you personally, in your own way, define gender-based violence?, or, if we had already furnished a definition, an open ended "so these issues we are talking about, how do you see them?". This first question alone often led to a long discussion led by the interviewee. Following this was a series of questions to establish what kinds of connections the interviewee might hold with the GBV Taskforce institutions or other related organisations. We firstly asked if the interviewee had been through any "training or workshop" on GBV, to which the answer was almost always no. Then, we asked if they had seen any news report, video, or radio ad about it, and also if they had seen any posters or t-shirts or bracelets. There was more frequently an affirmative response to this. We asked if any of these things had "changed their thinking" or not; if so, how. We also asked if the interviewee ever discussed any type of gender violence issue with their family or friends. If so, what discussions took place? Were there ever disagreements or debates? For all of these questions we would ask follow-up questions where appropriate and take cues from the interviewee's level of interest in the question. At a natural time in the conversation, we asked a carefully-worded uniform question,

"what do you think is the cause of the raping cases happening in Liberia today".[10] The purpose of asking this question in a similar manner each time was to ensure that the responses were comparable. We then guided the final sections of the conversation towards solutions, asking how they thought 'people' could stop different types of violence, what the government is doing or should be doing, and what international solutions they saw as valuable.[11] Finally we asked if the interviewee had any questions for us.

In keeping with the WHO guidelines, my partners and I kept information about where to access information and services for survivors of gender violence, in case an interviewee requested that information. Informed consent was a necessary but not sufficient requirement for starting the interview. As Halse & Honey (2005) contend, informed consent is a process rather than an event, and it requires a balance between respecting the agency and the vulnerability of marginalised subjects. Our goal was active engagement in a conversation of interest to interviewer and interviewee. If someone agreed to an interview but showed a lack of interest, we politely ended the conversation. Interviewees frequently related, without our prompting, GBV issues they had witnessed in their families and neighbourhoods. We took our cue from the interviewee's motivation to tell their stories, listening actively and asking follow-up questions only if they seemed non-intrusive.

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[10] We took care to specify 'today' in the question phrasing, because in some pilot interviews, discussants would restrict their answer to sexual violence committed by combatants during the war.

[11] In 2012, after learning more about the increased controversy around FGC/M, we added some careful questions about "education" and "tradition" which led the interviewee to share their views about Sande 'bush school', or to evade the line of questioning if they wished.

At the end of every day of interviews, the interview leader and I reviewed the notes together to clarify and add detail. We determined whether we considered the interview to be an "A", "B", or "C" grade interview based on quality and detail of the conversation.[12] We met regularly, one-on-one and as a team, to debrief and monitor our own well-being (Campbell, 2002; Sexual Violence Research Initiative, 2015), and to consider emerging issues with the interview protocol. The resulting data was written notes and reflections for 70 interviews, 52 of which were conducted in 2012 or 2013.[13] In contrast to the guidelines provided by Hutchinson et al. (2010), I did not find the NVivo software particularly useful for generating themes and memos in written interview notes, and relied instead on colour-coding my notes, creating compilations according to the themes I identified, and working with those notes in a more immersive way.[14]

**Q3: Triangulating data to understand discourse co-production.**

Once the initial questions of this study were answered by data collection and a flourishing of scholarly publications about GBV in Liberia, numerous secondary questions emerged. One addressed the ongoing contestations of gender norms and gender violence perceptions by examining more closely the co-production of certain prominent narratives. In particular, it appeared that the inclusion of property and

[12] For what this subjective grading system is worth, 40% of our 2012-2013 interviews were graded "A" quality, 46% were "B" grade, and the remainder "C" grade.
[13] This total does not count several from the 2009 pilot stage that I discarded due to dissatisfaction over some element of the interview setting or results.
[14] My literature notes are kept on the Mendeley citation software library, which greatly aided the writing up process by allowing me to verify citations rapidly and to look up documents along with my notations, by keyword.

inheritance rights as a GBV issue, and the promotion of male paternal responsibilities, were not originating solely from institutional discourses nor the informal public arena. Rather, through the interviews, visual data, and ethnographic engagement it became evident that there was a strong degree of co-production and collaboration on these particular narratives. Investigating this question further did not require a new method or approach, or new set of questions, but simply more careful attention paid to interviewees' comments about male roles, more focused follow-up questions if they brought up the issue, and a re-examination of the visual data. As Chapters Five and Seven will outline, the overall presentation of masculinities in GBV awareness materials shifted dramatically over the postwar decade, from violent and graphic depictions of male violence to positive masculinities intended as role models. Therefore, by the 2012 and 2013 field visits, there were numerous opportunities to document new narratives of positive masculinities (or benign patriarchies) in and around Monrovia. These postwar reconfigurations of gender norms and identities deserved long-term historical and ethnographic contextualisation, as did the other findings in response to Q1 and Q2.

### Q4: Historicising gender violence discourses

'The past is a foreign country' (Hartley, quoted in Gregory,1995), is an observation that the distance between the researcher and their era of interest goes beyond temporality. For this project, the past was not a distant borderland to be crossed, but rather an immediate and intimate element of the interviews, conversations, and participant observation. Throughout the fieldwork, interviewees

invoked words, phrases, and concepts that brought long-term historical issues to the forefront of postwar gender violence discussions. Investigating this long-term history through secondary literature between field visits enabled me to more clearly recognise some of the references present in interviewees' comments, such as 'civilisation', 'tradition', and comparisons to slavery. Studying the origins of the Liberian state also brought a fresh perspective to the postwar era of liberal institutional reconstruction. In order to pursue this very promising line of questioning in a rigorous manner, I sought to expand my reading of primary and secondary sources as much as possible within the constraints of an already multi-dimensional research agenda. The purpose of working with archives and secondary material in this manner was to use historical approaches developed by other specialists in a fresh and novel manner by applying them to better understand contemporary gender violence discourses.

### *Archival readings*

Liberian archival material is limited by the destruction of legal and historical archives within Liberia during the Liberian civil war (Osborne, 2009). Both the physical availability of sources and the silences within them present limitations to researchers' ability (and that of 'everyday' Liberians) to investigate and better understand the past. Concurrently, however, digitisation initiatives and visual archival projects such the Indiana University Liberian Collection,[15] make previously obscure sources of information more widely available. One key source is the

[15] www.onliberia.org

published records of the American Colonization Society from 1821. The first decade of these records provided the primary archive for this study, along with other 19th century and early 20th century primary sources from missionaries and explorers, which were housed at the University of Oxford Rhodes House Library and recently relocated to the Bodleian Library.

Chapter Four will show that I interpreted ACS records in light of their unique positionality and intent, not as 'objective' sources. They can be considered a form of early humanitarian propaganda in the sense that they were designed to raise awareness of the colony and to elicit donations from sympathetic readers. Like the abolitionist literature on the middle passage, shackles, and branding (Hochschild, 2005), they offer information to 'humanitarian spectators' (Hunt, 2008:222) presumed to be sympathetic, while promoting the organisation. They contain statements of gratefulness to generous donors, examples of goodwill, specific appeals for funding and goods, and financial and organisational reports. Thus, in going through ACS records I read them not as objective or value-neutral reports but as compilations representing an institutional consensus on how the ACS members intended their project to be viewed by the American public; they reflect both the colonisation society's own perspectives on African colonisation, and in doing so they also suggest the prevailing and shifting norms of their time.

In addition to the ACS records, the reading could have expanded to include primary records of other colonisation societies along the Liberian coast. However, because the ACS records pertain to Montserrado county, where my fieldwork occurred, it seemed reasonable to set boundaries on the original primary sources according to geographical area, and rely on secondary literature for the relevant

counties. To this I added select primary sources from outside the ACS, including travelogues from the 19th century, missionary memoirs, and prominent debates about the legitimacy of the colony. Liberian literature from the 20th and 21st centuries, whether non-fictional, highly narrativised, or fictional, gave additional insights to the living memory of past colonial encounters in public dialogues. The most persistent difficulty was obtaining sources written by and for non-settler Liberians, particularly indigenous women.

Even within settler-oriented materials, the invisibility of indigenous and female voices posed an obstacle to better understanding colonial encounters beyond official discourses. These sources include a mosaic of missionary or anthropological encounters with indigenous Liberians, scattered throughout ACS and missionary records, and passing references to gender violence without elaboration. Most academic works about Liberia have a historical background section, due to academic consensus around the contemporary importance of Liberia's 'unique' history although perspectives differ on what that history is. Despite this, and despite the emphasis that feminist anthropological work places on the gendered nature of 'civilised' and 'bush' identity positions, there exists no comprehensive, detailed, and rigorous history of gender roles in Liberia.[16] Where records on the subaltern exist, they are a testament to the breadth and depth of information lost.

Attempting to 'read against the grain' and draw inferences from silences (Feldman, 1995) was therefore a valuable part of my archival research efforts. Tempering this was an avoidance of presuming the relevance of pre-configured

[16] This chasm in the literature will soon be addressed at least partially; medical anthropologist Sharon Abramowitz is currently writing a 400-year history of gender violence in Liberia, using the Bloomingon archives (personal communication, March 2015)

critical frameworks in reading texts. The field of imperial visual iconography and colonial images was enriching because it bridged both the visual methods and the historical aspects of my research process (Apter, 2002; Hunt, 2008; Monks, 2011). In particular, I found inspiration in Willis and Krauthamer's (2013) methods of interpretation, which used visual methods to explore black American family life and aspirations under both plantation slavery and emancipation. One section focused on two African American women commanded by their slavers to strip to the waist and be photographed for a pseudo-scientific study on racial classification. While connecting this incident to wider issues of sexual and racialised exploitation, the authors refuse to speak on the women's behalf: 'we cannot know what Delia and Drana saw or thought when they looked at the camera and its operator' (Willis & Krauthamer, 2013:7). In recentering the 'gaze' to the survivor's perspective, the authors make no presumption to see through her eyes. The humility of this approach compares favourably to Hunt's 'acoustic register', which in spite of its methodological originality, is perhaps overconfident in its claims to 'hear' 19th century Congolese women as they suffer sexualised and imperialist violence (Hunt, 2008). I took this as a lesson in careful reading. In both archival reading and in critical discourse analysis of interviews, I sought to be cognizant of the multiple and layered significance of certain words and phrases, while not presuming to 'know' all the meanings associated with interviewees' speech.

## Ethical challenges and lingering questions.

### *Anonymisation*

Writing up, I faced the decision of whether to anonymise informants who had given their full names and stated that they would be happy seeing their comments, names, and locations in an eventual book. Some interviewees were clearly interested in having their name published and they deserve acknowledgement for contributing to the project. To second-guess that motivation would be a form of 'ethical paternalism' (van der Geest, 2003:17). However, the possibility of unforseen negative consequences from participating in this study must also be taken seriously (Clark, 2006; Sin, 2005). To resolve this, I combined approaches to anonymisation. I did not state interview locations or last names unless those last names were part of an alias chosen by the interviewee ('Miatta Macdonald', for example). Some interviewees chose grand and descriptive pseudonyms ('Bosslady', 'Mr. Nobody'), reminiscent of the Jlao Kru naming tradition (Tonkin, 1980), and aliases of fighters in the civil war.

This makes it prohibitively difficult for a third party to find those individuals based on my thesis. Occasionally, an extra-sensitive comment (criticising the state, relating an incident of GBV, or giving information about FGC/M) is assigned a false name. This allows participants the possibility to read my thesis or other publications,[17] identify themselves by first name and broadcast this fact if it pleases them, but if for any reason they regret participating or wish to not be identified, they

[17] The dissertation and any resulting publications will eventually be made available at the WE-CARE Library and the Ministry of Gender resource library, as we told interviewees who asked. A PDF copy of my book chapter has already been sent to several locations including the Library.

have plausible deniability. With seventy interviewees and a large network of personal acquaintances from several different areas of Monrovia, assigning first names and initials to comments does not make anyone's participation obvious. There are occasional exceptional cases where the speaker's identity is important for interpreting their valuable comments, for example the Museum of Liberia historian Lamie or musician Soloblii. In these cases I have carefully considered possible negative implications and believe that the non-sensitive content of their quotes combined with their informed consent is a sufficiently rigorous safeguard for publishing their names.

This is likewise true for several interviews with GBV Taskforce organisation staff. In a handful of interviews, high-ranking staff were breathtakingly candid about sensitive aspects of their work. In those cases, I communicated with the interviewee about writing up their comments in a politically sensitive manner and being aware of potential implications of sharing their stories. In some cases I have shared the information without giving identifying details, and in other cases decided the risks did not outweigh the benefits of publishing their sensitive comments. The greatest challenge was with organisations who wished to be named and given a profile by appearing in my work, but also wished for certain information to be shared anonymously. Despite my careful notation of interviewees' preferences for confidentiality, balancing an interviewee's desire for publicity combined with secrecy requires much caution.

There were similar anonymisation challenges related to my host neighbourhoods. Living as a guest of 'Hotel Africa', I was privy to neighbours' private matters, which were discussed with me, in front of me, or simply within

earshot of my window. These discussions occasionally had direct relevance to my research questions, and others simply demonstrated some aspect of Liberian society such as conflict resolution, financial anxieties, or matters of the heart. None of these incidents involved relationship abuse, which would have posed dilemmas of how to respond appropriately. There were frequent arguments in the street, occasionally involving the whole community. Some were well-organised and involved elders, but most were spontaneous. It puzzled me that these arguments were relatively few during my April 2012 visit, and almost daily when I returned in August 2012. The landlady next door informed me that for the first month of my stay, she had intervened in audible disputes, telling neighbours to be quiet because "we have a foreigner here", and it would be inhospitable to "make palaver". As this example demonstrates, the presence of a foreigner can change individuals' behaviour in ways that are not always apparent.

Rising interest and flourising publications present another factor of confidentiality that can be difficult to predict. For example, in 2013 I learned that a prominent anthropologist was including Hotel Africa in a multi-sited study of Monrovian architecture and postwar urban sociality (Hoffman, personal communication). In the event of rising anthropological interest in this small informal settlement, I re-examined my discussion of host encounters in that community, and carefully re-evaluated any statements, rumours, relationships, or anything that realistically might result in a neighbour's hurt feelings. It would clearly be unethical to broadcast the private matters of my neighbours unless they gave their enthusiastic consent, which would be impolite to request. However, it is difficult to determine the

boundary between public and private life in an informal settlement with much palaver and little privacy.

While interview locations for individual interviewees are not revealed, anonymisation of neighbourhoods is not a realistic goal. Anonymising entire places is an unreliable means of assuring privacy, and I am skeptical that other researchers' efforts to do so are effective (van der Geest, 2003). For example, both Hotel Africa and West Point are geographically particular neighbourhoods of interest. West Point is the target of countless GBV initiatives, investigative reporting and gonzo journalism (MacDougall, 2013; VICE, 2010, respectively) and a special region of concern for agencies in Liberia. It was also a neighbourhood where numerous interviewees shared information about Westpoint-specific events in the FGC/M controversy. Writing this up was by far the most challenging section from an ethics standpoint. Chapter Seven discusses an unnamed neighbourhood 'Near Red Light', in which several interviews I conducted on one street are interpreted collectively as a narrative on community intervention, gender violence, and responsibility and guilt. Only someone who was already familiar with the private events that transpired would be able to determine the location. There is also a discussion of young male community leaders in New Kru Town, very close to the Douala neighbourhood that has been covered in ethnographies (Hoffman, 2011), and a location where many interviewees talked specifically of New Kru Town and the Kru people. In those cases their comments were not politically sensitive.

*Sensitivity and respect*

Chapter One outlined my aim to reverse the 'gaze' that assigns authority to institutions but not marginalised populations (Hyndman, 1998). I also hoped to resist the format of some human rights literature that treats experiences of violence as raw material for extraction and processing abroad but excludes the primary narrators as analytical agents, as experts on their own condition. If there is qualitative detail, it is usually a victim's recollection of violence, or 'perceptions' organised and contained within a survey-based framework that asks all the questions. bell hooks questions the 'author, authority' power dynamic of researching marginalised populations (hooks, 1989). In some cases these accounts constrain their subjects under an objectifying lens that adds to their dehumanisation, as critics have noted in Sierra Leone and Eastern Congo (Coulter, 2009; Hunt, 2008). Although some 'extraction' methods of research are justifiable, ethically conducted, and contribute to understanding and stopping violence, and this thesis references these studies for exactly those reasons, a commitment to emancipatory scholarship goes beyond. Ethnographic literature on the Mano River region has repeatedly addressed the dilemna between acknowledging harm (slavery, poverty/inequality, violence) and avoiding the objectifying gaze that treats Africans as one-dimensional figures of suffering.

To some extent this 'authorship' dynamic was unavoidable in this study. However, my teammates and I respect interviewees as whole persons following extensive methodological research on best practices (Campbell, 2002; Ellsberg et al., 2001; Ellsberg & Heise, 2005; Skinner, Hester, & Malos, 2005). Mindful of the notion of 'collective trauma' (Abramowitz, 2005), we treated all people we approached with the understanding that their lives had most likely been affected by

violence in some way, and extended to all interviewees (and those who declined) a level of sensitivity appropriate for known survivors. This is not to say that we treated them like wilted flowers, fragile objects defined solely by their worst experiences, but that we acted with courtesy and a willingness to listen actively and respectfully, and to answer their questions of us with sincerity, as Campbell advises (2002). In line with these approaches, it was not surprising to find that interviewees, even those who were profoundly victimised by inequality or violence, asserted discursive authority over how they represented themselves, their society, and their perception of my 'American' society.[18] I concur with other feminist scholars who argue that recognizing constructivist constraints on survivors' lived experiences does not deny individual or collective agency (MacKinnon, 2006; Nussbaum, 1999).

In addition to these discursive and representational dimensions to respectful behaviour, there are practical and pragmatic best practices that benefited my fieldwork methods. Prior to learning how profoundly Liberian fashion is politicised, I noticed the positive attention that strangers and friends paid me when I dressed in "old school"[19] wax print ankle-length skirts. While questions of 'appropriation' come up in critical race and indigenous scholarship (Hill Collins, 2004; Mendieta, 2012), my doubts were put to rest by the encouragement I received from interviewees, strangers, friends, and host family. Clothing seemed to immediately signal my distance from widespread negative perceptions (and facts) of how white people behave, which in turn helped create space in interviews for candid, unprompted reflections. Previously living and working in other West African countries taught me

[18] I am a dual Canada/UK citizen but did not wish to interrupt interviewees with that point of information.

[19] This was my ACPI colleague Prince Flowers' term.

the importance of hospitality, greeting people with respect, practicing patience, assigning more importance to relationship-building compared to outcome-seeking, and demonstrating appreciation of West African food and culture. Friends would sometimes introduce me with statements like 'she can even eat pepper', which seemed irrelevent to me but was widely interpreted as a sign of my respect for 'Africa'.

*The Baphomet palaver: 'incommensurate' cultural differences and ethnography*

Eating pepper soup and wearing florid wax print skirts was an enjoyable way to demonstrate my willingness to immerse culturally. This convenience did not transfer to all aspects of my guesthood. One exemplary incident of disagreement occurred at a friend's house, where several of my acquaintances gathered to watch a favourite documentary. My friends 'Bosslady' and 'Emma' explained to me that the video, *The Wicked Music Industry,* exposed the practice of satan worship among American celebrities. It was a VCD copy of a YouTube broadcast that was self-produced by an evangelical Christian man from the southern United States.

In the introductory segments, the narrator offered spurious evidence for these supposed rituals, and alleged that the singer Beyoncé is a 'top-level witch'. Pictures of celebrities' hand gestures were 'proven' to signify the satanic number 666, indicating membership in the 'Illuminati'. A clip of Kanye West rapping about selling his soul to the devil was construed as purely literal. Bible passages were read out at intervals as if to invoke God's own condemnation of the super stars, and a macabre image of a fictional occultist goat, 'Baphomet', appeared on the screen periodically (image on next page).



Figure 5, Ch.2. A composite image shown in *The Wicked Music Industry*. Right: A drawing of 'Baphomet', originally from *Dogme et rituel de la Haute Magie* (Lévi, 1861). Left: celebrity performer Rihanna supposedly revealing her Illuminati connections by taking the form of the 'Sabbatic Goat' in a music video.

In addition to these mystic claims, *The Wicked Music Industry* conveyed certain cultural critiques of the music industry, such as 'the music industry teaches our women to be whores'. My friends found this riveting. They answered my initial protestations with cries of "you will see!" and "watch the video, it's true!". They told me that the DVD was popular in Monrovia and had sold swiftly when it first came out, a statement that several other contacts corroborated later on. Among expatriates in Liberia, the popularity of *The Wicked Music Industry* is often dismissed as a typical example of 'bizarre African beliefs', along with water spirits (Ferme, 2001) and juju.

I immediately detested the film, and was unsure how to respond. My friends' statements demonstrated that *Wicked Music Industry* had strong emotional significance for them and therefore it would be rude to mock it. Discourse matters, I reminded myself. There is a reason why my intelligent and caring friends think this pernicious

film is important. However, if I pretended to agree with them my insincerity would be apparent. Moreover, it would be racist and patronising to shun dialogue, to inwardly dismiss their 'bizarre African beliefs', as if my friends were incapable of reason. It seemed the best option was to sit patiently through the film, and ask questions to better understand their interpretation. At that point I would introduce my concerns with the video. I speculated that Emma and Bosslady might not take the film literally. Maybe they thought the American music industry was morally bankrupt, a reasonable enough assessment, and understood that there was no valid evidence for the sinister goat devil or the '666' symbolism.

This turned out not to be the case. After watching the documentary, I asked Emma and Bosslady what specific parts of the video they agreed with. Emma began by saying that celebrities like Rihanna went around "half-naked" and that this was "against the Bible". And, she added, they were getting their wealth from worshipping Baphomet in the Illuminati. Bosslady spoke similarly, making a cultural criticism of the music industry's decadence, women's nudity, and agreeing that Baphomet was involved. I responded that disapproving of immodest dress was a matter of opinion, which I would not debate, but that the video did not offer logically sound evidence for Baphomet worship, just visual and rhetorical tricks. The responses were vociferous. My friends questioned my lack of religious piety ("Are you a Christian? Do you believe the Bible is the word of God?"), insisted that the video offered irrefutable proof, and noted that "Satan never gives something for nothing".

I attempted to counter these responses by pointing out how easily one could invent the kind of 'evidence' offered in the video, and that any one of us could be the

victim of such speculative gossip. Emma rejected my arguments with "I have my faith. I have my God", and by reiterating her disapproval of female celebrities' attire. She also advised that I "go on the internet and do research". At one point, frustrated with their belief that sabbatic goat devils confer wealth and fame, I thoughtlessly declared that "you Liberians just don't want to believe that someone can be successful on their own talent and hard work". Even while speaking I was aware of this statement's insensitivity to the fact that my friends have never experienced meritocracy, that the cruel arbitrariness of life or death, wealth or poverty in their lives demanded a better explanation than 'talent' or 'hard work'. I continued my tirade with a needlessly detailed description of Beyoncé's well-known professionalism.

Bosslady interjected, "so why are you afraid of spiders then?", eliciting a well-deserved laugh at my expense. Her question forced me to concede the irrationality of my own fears, to admit that my own aspirations to rationalism were far from flawless. At our next meeting, Emma and I greeted each other courteously, and I shared a hug and a laugh with Bosslady over the argument. But I did not speak out loud my underlying anxiety: were our points of view irretrievably and irreconcilably locked in 'incommensurate' (Povinelli, 2001) cultural and religious differences? The tension lingered in my heart for longer than it strained our friendship.

I hope this vignette conveys a sense of fairness by exposing my own faults, such as 'parrhesia' or rather, tactlessness (Foucault, 1983), while conveying a well-founded frustration with my friends' misguided evangelism and selective invocation of reason and evidence. That this was an emotionally charged discussion for all

involved speaks to its importance in defining the nature of our cross-cultural friendship. How did this experience help me to interpret public discourses on sexual and gender-based violence in Liberia? It did so by reinforcing a number of insights that I iterated over the course of the project, and also by challenging me to confront certain lingering questions. Crucially, it speaks to the issue of 'incommensurability' in international human rights discourses versus regionally particular and 'vernacular' systems of meaning and values (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012).

Firstly, discourses constructed upon occult suspicions can communicate very real anxieties. This point has been developed in reference to several events in Monrovia, including *radio trottoir* rumours circulating in the pre-war period (Ellis 1989), and spiritual interpretations of the torture and death of Samuel K. Doe (Utas, 2006). This became a central methodological issue, especially for interpreting interviewees' statements linking witchcraft with child rape. Occult rumours often contain a grain of truth. While I maintain my stance that *The Wicked Music Industry* is spurious, Bosslady and Emma's insights were astute in recognizing the otherworldliness of extreme affluence, and the alienation it inheres. In that sense there is a convergence in our viewpoints; in fact, I sometimes wish my own culture of origin would recognise the pathologies of excess wealth in the way that Bosslady and Emma do. During interviews, I noted that mystical beliefs about the rich and powerful tended to be voiced not in an adversarial manner, but rather with an ambivalent combination of jealousy, admiration, and fear. Moreover, there is admittedly a factual basis to Emma and Bosslady's belief in secretive, influential membership societies. Although Illuminati allegations seem fantastical from my own upbringing, Liberia has a long history of powerful and secretive groups including the

Sande, Poro, Leopard, and the Freemasons (Ellis, 1999). Therefore, genuine issues are implicated in fantastical devil worship allegations, both in the sincere fears and suspicions they convey, and sometimes as a factual fulcrum upon which those fantasies are leveraged.

Secondly, contextualising 'uniquely Liberian' perspectives often demands an awareness of transnational and/or globalised discourses. My friends used their situatedness within 'Africa' and their interpretation of the Christian faith to make truth claims about the validity of an American video which spoke to their struggles; situated truth claims from which I was naturally excluded despite my protestations to have a stronger link to North American culture. The contribution this approach potentially makes to the feminist literature on gender violence, as this thesis will show, is in demonstrating the interplay between gender violence discourses with other deeply felt social issues and symbolic politics. These symbolic politics need not be 'local' in their geographical purview in order to be produced and reproduced in localised vernacular discourses (Abramowitz, 2014).

Numerous scholars have pointed out the cosmopolitanism embedded in West African ethnolinguistic groups and in the Mano River Region, over the past several hundred years at least (Piot, 1999; Shaw, 2002; Tonkin, 2002). Yet human rights research frequently persists in diminutive and parochial terms for non-Western communities of shared meaning: 'local', 'attitudes', 'stigma', 'taboo', 'tradition' and 'cultural beliefs' (see, for example Allen & Devitt, 2012). Such essentialism has fallen under increasingly mordant critique in recent years (Goggin, 2011; Nyamnjoh, 2012). Thus, the Beyoncé-Baphomet palaver raises questions of incommensurability, universal reasoning, and cross-cultural dialogue while also

illustrating the limitations of certain simplistic identifications upon which 'difference' is presumed to rest (Benhabib, 1992). These ethnographic encounters apply to interviews with gender violence. My research teammates and I became adept at listening supportively to interviewees who earnestly explained that women rape men five times more frequently than men rape women, and that a girl's choice of clothing is the primary cause of sexual assault. We wanted informants to speak as frankly as possible. Outside of interview settings, however, my male and female friends openly celebrated our outspokenness for women's rights, congratulating me for retorting "I am your auntie" to cat-calls of "hey baby", or in Bosslady's case, publically berating the negligent father of another woman's child. There was a sort of cognitive dissonance between our goodwill towards the brave, caring, and insightful interviewees we met, and our misgivings for some of their more virulent victim-blaming or rape-myth accepting statements.

Ethnographies of marginalised and/or indigenous groups often function as a counter-narrative to neocolonial perceptions of those peoples as savage and inscrutable. For example, Richards' (1996) *Fighting for the Rainforest* is explicit in its opposition to Kaplan's 'coming anarchy' paradigm, which interprets African civil wars as chaotic and anarchical (Kaplan, 1994). These counter-narratives are consciously applied against the neocolonial view and in defense of our shared humanity. Unintentional double standards or problematic messages can sometimes emerge as a by-product of these ethnographic counternarratives. Highlighting ways in which indigenous, rural, or non-Western peoples are 'threatened' can invoke genocidal tropes of indigenous frailty, rigid and objectified notions of native 'authenticity', and the inevitability of their disappearance through the ascendancy of

neoliberal globalisation (King, 2005; Saul, 2008). For this reason, key concepts within indigenous rights and postcolonial scholarship include hybridity and its discontents (Spivak, 1999), internal contradictions and conflict (L. T. Smith, 1999), and restitutional and decolonial paradigms of indigenous women's rights (Mankiller, 2004; A. Smith, 2005; Spivak, 1981).

Shifting these larger narrative issues back to the scale of interpersonal ethnographic relationships, new tensions emerge. The absurdities, moral failings, and petty cruelties that a Western scholar would condemn in her own culture can be effaced in the African context by the ethnographer's commitment to empathising across the chasm of difference and the hierarchy of privilege. This distorts the debate on gender violence issues such as FGC/M, child marriage, marital rape, inheritance and divorce rights, and domestic violence. The literature on FGC/M is particularly rife with uncritical and essentialist 'cultural' defenses, with ethnographers such as Piot accepting the practice in Northern Togo based on the 'finding' of its perceived link to fertility and preventing androgyny (Piot, 1999).[20] Not all anthropologists are flippant or uncritical in their cultural relativism; in general, the Mano River Region ethnographies are carefully balanced between respect for unfamiliar ways of life, and empathy for the corporeal suffering of individuals who are victimised within traditionally-sanctioned power structures. Furthermore,

[20] Anthropological scholarship linking FGC/M to beliefs about androgyny and fertility is well-established in literature dating back several decades (28 Too Many, 2014; Dorkenoo, 1994; Gruenbaum, 2001; Walker, 1993). In *Remotely Global*, Piot did not cite the existing studies but framed his own interview data as a novel contribution. Adolescent girls were not included as informants. Furthermore, the ethical discussion of FGC/M is not even central to the ethnography but a rather cavalier aside. The book's lack of a sustained discussion on gender equality combined with the undeserved authoritative tone on FGC/M made those sections unconvincing. I see this as a major flaw in an otherwise insightful historical ethnography.

anthropologists have good reason to construct counternarratives against ethnocentric and imperialist notions of 'gender equality' that vilify men of colour and patronise women (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994; Oyewumi, 2003). In light of this, the tensions I identify are not leveled as a critique against the Mano River Region ethographic canon but are simply an identification of core challenges facing Western researchers who wish to promote respect for both individuals and their groups.

Some lessons can be garnered from ethnographic research on groups whose values or objectives the researcher fundamentally opposes, such as extremist far-right groups (Blee, 2007), or evangelical and intolerant religious communities (Han, 2010). However, 'know thine enemy' research poses different quandaries than confronting insupportable beliefs held by friends and loved ones. There were few examples of debate, conflict, or disagreement to compare to my own experience. Incidences of ethnographers experiencing conflict with their host communities are discussed tacitly, although most researchers acknowledge that conflicts occur. Utas (2003) described his entrance, inclusion, and eventual exclusion from 'lumpen' excombatants living in 'the Palace' on a Monrovian beach. Appiah's (1992) account of family conflict surrounding a funeral is intensely personal, yet his story is more applicable to an 'insider-outsider' research positionality. Coulter (2009) mentioned tense relationships and lack of trust between herself and female ex-combatants, and Abramowitz (2014) discussed disagreements in a host family over how to deal with a child rape. While these accounts give the impression of honesty and self-reflexivity, they advance the broader points of the authors' ethnographies rather than focusing on an interpretation of episodes of confrontation themselves.

With high respect for the above literature, I aim to advance this reflexivity by putting bluntly the questions of my own ethnographic engagement. What do you say to the woman who tells you that the devil will shower a man with wealth if he murders or rapes a child? To the older man who observes that small girls are "calling for rape" because "their titties can be shining"? To the hardworking, gregarious man who declares his "human right" to rape his wife? To the devoted community organiser who believes a parent has the right to break their child's arm as a matter of discipline? To the beloved and admired friend who declares that transgendered people are a sign of the impending apocalypse?

Feminist ethnography persistently struggles to balance a methodological respect for collective identities without neglecting the rights of low-status actors victimised within those groups (Abu-Lughod, 1990). How can one 'disagree in solidarity' with marginalised populations whom a feminist and decolonising research methodology seeks to dignify? Or, as Povinelli (2001) queries, are these opposing views 'incommensurate'? How can transnational feminist researchers act in support of marginalised populations, even when they find prevailing viewpoints to be misogynistic, bigoted, or simply false?

The above questions are not only dilemmas of 'outsider' positionality but can be intra-cultural conflicts as well. How can the perceptive strength of ethnography better serve a Liberian woman threatened with dismemberment for criticising genital cutting as an initiation rite? When writing up, how can an outsider be honest in representing these internal and external contradictions without bolstering white supremacist stereotypes of black African barbarism? Exploring the supporting beliefs, socially constitutive power dynamics, and 'grains of truth' in some of these

statements can be academically fruitful. This alone, however, is insufficient to centralise marginalised subjects and dismantle hierarchies. A pluralistic system of 'open values', as Sen (2009) envisions, is one that could resolve these tensions through dialogue; however, Sen does not confront the question of how an 'open' contestation of values can function across structural inequalities. Even for those who concur with the theory, Sen's pluralistic 'idea of justice' is an archetypal vision rather than a methodological roadmap.

The value of 'unpacking' my white, First World, and (more recently) upwardly mobile class privilege cannot be understated in conducting research in West Africa, including in relation to so-called elites (Harvey, 2003; Kaufman, 2001). The ethnographic discussion on privilege is gaining nuance from candid discussions about multidirectional power dynamics (Theidon, 2014), and invaluable contributions from 'insider' ethnographers (Nyamnjoh, 2012). I hypothesise that for privileged researchers, the greater their commitment to dismantling their own complicity with structural violence, the more ethically grounded and rigorous will be their ability to 'disagree in solidarity' with marginalised peoples. Thus, feminist decolonial solidarity with research counterparts is meaningful because of difference, not despite it. If the commitment to decolonising privilege is sufficiently robust, then I suggest that an authentic and respectful disagreement becomes possible. Feminist geographers offer strong approaches for this complex engagement with pluralism (Benhabib, 1992; Fluri, 2009; Hyndman, 1998) and I concur with Goggin, (2011) that human rights scholarship and to a lesser extent the ethographic canon stands to benefit from this conversation. Ethics need not be exoticised when ethical reasoning

can be contextualised across cultural difference, and cognizant of structural violence at different scales.

The questions I listed in this section are not ones I claim to have resolved conclusively. To do so will be an iterative process that I expect to span my longterm research, as it has for others. Rather than 'resolving' the above dilemmas, I will simply note their value in orienting my scholarship to values that at times come into conflict. This helped to make underlying areas of tension more explicit and therefore more confidently situated in my research ethics framework. The concluding vignette below gives a sense of the possibilities of this dialogue.

*A productive palaver*

In 2012, an interviewee in New Kru Town requested that my teammates and I conduct a workshop on gender violence, for which his community group would provide space and food. At the workshop, Mary and I faced an audience of twenty-five men from the Kru community, only one of whom (the organiser) had formal training in gender issues. There was also one woman, who had been hired as a caterer. I opened by noting that I would have preferred an even gender balance, but praised the men for their interest in taking leadership against gender violence, which in my opinion compared favourably to the level of male involvement in Canada and the UK. Mary and I explained that we were here to talk about points of view, not 'preach' opinion as fact, and that we believe everyone is an expert on their own life. We introduced the topic of gender violence through a series of anecdotes from around the world, moving into a discussion of how to organise against domestic violence and sexual assault.

It was unsurprising that this workshop on viewpoints and activism swiftly became palaverous. Several men voiced their opposition to 'women's rights', becoming particularly charged about their dislike of the Ministry of Gender and Development, the international community, and the cultural betrayal they perceived in women's immodest clothing. Not all the men agreed with this and there was a debate, after which I offered my response. Rather than defending the Ministry or the 'American' lifestyle, I welcomed the critique. I responded with a 'counternarrative' to the typical human rights discourses around gender violence, identifying several ways in which 'African values' are superior to 'Western values' in fostering respect, cooperation, and problem-solving. This moved the conversation past the impasse of whether or not one approves of the Gender Ministry.

A second disagreement emerged over the issue of whether poverty 'caused' gender violence. One young man made several evidence-based points about how poverty increases vulnerability to violence. Respecting his contributions, I again offered some counterpoints (and counternarratives), arguing that people in the so-called 'ghetto' are demonstrably harder working, more creative, and more compassionate than the rich, and therefore better equipped to address violence within their homes and neighbourhoods.

Listening and validating the men's feelings of exclusion from prominent GBV interventions made it easier to compartmentalise the issue, at least in that forum; to separate their resentment towards the international community from their potential as Kru men to oppose gender violence. This made room for a productive discussion about shifting responsibility from victims to offenders, without necessarily relying on rich outsiders or abandoning traditional values, invented or not. Like

many interviewees, the male community organisers at New Kru Town understood gender violence as a uniquely African phenomenon. Reframing it as a global problem by reminding them that Europe and North America had seen devastating events of mass rape, genocide, warfare, and poverty, resisted reproducing the internalised inferiority reflected in the perception of gender violence as an 'African' problem. Correspondingly, it eroded the possibility of defending violence and gender inequality using 'African' values. The intense hours I had spent carefully listening to interviewees' responses prepared me for the intellectual and emotional standpoints of this group of men. The fact that the participants felt confident to express their disagreement, and that I felt comfortable challenging them in turn, made this dialogue possible. Retreating to our respective corners of 'incommensurability' would have precluded it altogether.

**Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the research methods by which primary and secondary questions were explored. Initial data collection, which sought to identify dominant narrative patterns, led to secondary questions on specific interactions such as gendered household roles, masculinities, and the place of customary authority as promoted in gender violence advocacy. In outlining the interview, visual data, and ethnographic methods, this chapter shifted between detailing the techniques of data collection, and the thematic and substantive areas related to the data and its interpretation. Lingering questions from ethnographic encounters such as 'the Baphomet palaver' directly contribute to the core discussion of countenancing

pluralism in transnational and cross-cultural gender equality endeavors, and recognising the importance of colonial history as a factor in these dilemmas. This motif will reappear throughout the thesis from different theoretical and empirical departure points, the first of which being the next chapter's theoretical framework that examines the gendered dimensions of liberal imperialism.

CHAPTER THREE
GENDERING LIBERAL IMPERIALISM

## Introduction

When J.J. Walters' fictional Princess Guanya Pau ran away from a customary forced marriage, she found refuge only in death. Walters did not petition his Vai countrymen and women to change their traditions, but rather, implored American readers to support mission education in Liberia. That many a *mission civilisatrice* pointed to the 'barbaric' customary treatment of women to legitimise colonial conquest is well established in gender and postcolonial studies. So frequently are causal connections drawn between efforts to 'rescue' native women and efforts to colonise their societies, that one could argue this has attained the status of a 'grand narrative' within critical gender studies.[1] The critique of what some call the 'white woman's burden' (Burton, 1990) is not directed at the past alone, but argued to apply to contemporary international feminism, including postconflict gender and development projects (Fluri, 2009; Hyndman, 1998; Mohanty, 1988). These diverse approaches all share in common an examination of the connections between liberal humanitarian ideals and colonial or imperial hegemony.

The first section of this chapter outlines paradigmatically the following terms: liberalism, liberal humanitarianism, imperialism, colonialism, and patriarchy. It argues for the relevance of a multifaceted Arendtian concept of imperialism, combined with other theoretical approaches that focus on the gendered, relational, and discursive aspects of colonialism/imperialism (see, for

[1] See for example, discussions of 19th century colonial 'rescue' by Burton, 1990; Leach, 2008; Mills, 1991, continuing into contemporary critiques of modern white feminism from a range of scholars including Abu-Lughod, 2002; Ahmed, 1996; Ali, 2007; Oyewumi, 2003.

example: Hunt, 1989, 1997; Mamdani, 1996). Arendt's work on imperialism is important because of its focus on the 'scramble for Africa', its relevence to the creation of modern human rights institutions and their discontents, and its engagement with exclusionary nation-statehood, the creation of refugees, and 19th century globalisation (Benhabib, 2002; Lee, 2011; Parekh, 2013).

Following the argument for an Arendtian view on imperialism, the chapter engages literature on the collusion between liberal humanitarianism and imperialism both in the 19th century conquest of Africa and in post-conflict development today. The debate over the persistence of colonial or imperial tropes in contemporary international affairs is fundamentally guided by the definitions and conceptualisations used to define these issues. Recognising the salience of liberal imperialism in explaining events in postconflict gender and development does not require an immutable stance on the extent of liberal imperialism in world affairs, which is an area of ongoing debate in international relations and human geography (Duffield, 2007; Fluri, 2010; Hyndman, 2009; Jahn, 2005a, 2005b, 2009; Paris, 2002, 2004, 2010). As such, my contribution to this theoretical dialogue resists an evaluative approach to liberal imperialism (such as the ubiquitous question of whether certain interventions are 'colonial' or not); instead it attempts to advance the conceptual clarity of those questions, as frameworks for evaluating humanitarian activities and their subtextual politics. A key argument this chapter develops from this approach is that some of the counterpoints to the existence of liberal imperialism are actually arguments for it, if we follow an Arendtian conception of imperialism. Following the data-oriented approach of Grounded Theory Methods, this theoretical framework enables the following substantive chapters to discuss how the case of Liberia corresponds to

the theory. Throughout, I draw upon feminist theory to note how intrinsically gendered this old and new history is, and how gender violence in particular is embedded with issues of liberal humanitarianism and colonial conquest.

## Paradigms of liberalism and imperialism

### *Liberalism*

Liberal political theory has evolved many forms ranging from proto-liberal Hobbesian theory (as noted by Arendt, 1948; Paris, 2004) to liberal and neoliberal economic thinking to theories of liberal intitutionalism and law (Mill, 2011; Rawls, 1971).[2] Liberal feminism is mainstream in gender studies (Kensinger, 1997; MacKinnon, 2006; Nussbaum, 1999) as are numerous critiques of both liberalism and neoliberalism (Daley, 2008; Eisenstein, 2004; Hyndman, 2009; Wilson, 2011).

Defining liberalism is a complex endeavor, since liberal theory extends into many different areas. This thesis uses the definition of liberalism as a style of 'governing life through its freedoms', as provided in the introductory chapter,[3] with the caveat that the cultural and philosophical underpinnings of liberalism extend beyond the 'technologies of government' intended to house it. This observation coordinates with Sen's observation that scholars' tendency to hold

[2] Liberal interventionism is widely discussed in political theory and international relations, (Atkinson, 2008; Stedman, 1992); please note that this thesis does not directly engage with the question of liberal interventionism. It focuses instead on particular aspects of liberal political theory, and their associated paradoxes, that are comparatively more applicable to the original data and historical background surrounding discourses of gender-based violence in Liberia. It addresses the less episodic long-term setting of liberal-colonial collusion that has evolved over time and influenced gender roles and social stratification in many settings including, I shall argue, Liberia.

[3] 'Liberalism is a technology of government that supports freedom while governing people through the interconnected natural, social and economic processes that together sustain life' (Duffield, 2007:6).

institutions primarily responsible for public 'good' neglects the possibilities of 'good' enshrined at the individual or social level (2009). Sen seeks to address this silence by focusing on more fundamental questions of what a just society is. Rather than simply following this approach, I take it as a point of departure, and so the data in this thesis reflects both institutional (liberal or otherwise) and individual agents that construct gender violence norms in postwar Liberia.

### *Liberal humanitarianism*

Liberalism as a 'technology' of optimising human interactions originates from archetypeal ideals of 'liberal humanitarianism'. Liberal humanitarianism encompasses principles of universality, and of human entitlement to dignity and freedom that is unmitigated by the 'birthright lottery' (Shachar, 2009). Philosophers do not agree on precisely which rights, capabilities, and entitlements are most important, and how individual or cultural differences should be enshrined. That there is an archetype of idealised goodness, or justice, seems to be held in common by most liberal political theorists (Appiah, 2001; Sen, 2009). This common ideal is held even by those concerned with difference and plurality; 'there is something that holds together our liberal ideals. That is the idea of a dignified human life' (Appiah 2001: 331).

It is the archetypal purity of liberal humanitarianism that makes the relationship between liberalism and imperialism so troubling to the utopian thinker. In order to conceptualise liberal imperialism, the following sections will first discuss perspectives on imperialism and colonialism.

### *An Arendtian account of imperialism*

Arendt's account of late 19th century European imperialism forms the backbone of her monograph, *Origins of Totalitarianism*. For Arendt, imperialism is

not 'merely conquest' (1950, pp.ix) but a specific set of consequences resulting from capitalist expansion and nationalism. 19th century imperialism resulted from an excess of capital and relative political autonomy of the bourgeoisie in Western Europe (Wolfe, 1997). From this surplus of capital and overseas investment opportunities grew an ideology of never-ending growth and territorial expansion, in which expansion became worthwhile for its own sake, over and above any specific geopolitical justification (Arendt, 1948). Cecil Rhodes' declaration, 'I would annex the planets if I could' prefaces the *Imperialism* volume of *Origins of Totalitarianism* as a distillation of this self-perpetuating logic of expansion. The investment class was uninterested in the duties of governance but in need of the 'material power of the state' (Arendt, 1948:136) to provide insurance and trusteeship for overseas investments, and thus supported the formation of colonial rule. The result, in Africa and elsewhere, was the annexation of overseas territory without extending rights of citizenship to the colonised. This for Arendt was a pivotal difference between European imperialism and other periods of conquest.

Another specific element of European imperialism was its invention of national identities and, Arendt argues, the nation-state's precipitation of modern humanitarian crises. The emergence of state-like administrations overseas without including subjects as citizens provoked the rise of nationalist thinking and 'race-thinking' as a justification, or what Arendt calls the 'conquest of the state by the nation' (Arendt, 1948:230). Instead of annexing foreign populations into the polity, European states found alternative ways to govern foreign lands, using the 'two main political devices of imperialist rule': racism and bureaucracy.

> *'[Bureaucracy] was a consequence of that administration by which Europeans had tried to rule foreign peoples whom they felt to be hopelessly their inferiors and at the same*

> *time in need of their special protection. Race, in other words, was an escape into an irresponsibility where nothing human could any longer exist, and bureaucracy was the result of a responsibility that no man can bear for his fellow-man and no people for another people.'* (Arendt, 1948:207)

Other scholars similarly identify bureaucratic management as a key component of settler colonialism and imperialism. For example, Mamdani joins the subalternist school in arguing that management and 'knowledge' of subjects supported epistemologies of colonial superiority (Mani, 1998; Spivak, 1999) (Guha). Bureaucracy was both a mechanism of rule and an underlying ideology of knowing, seeing, and classifying colonial subjects. European bureaucracy also reinforced racism and other calcifications of human identity, by classifying religion, caste, and ethnicity under rigid categories (Mamdani, 2001; Mani, 1998). Other geographers such as Scott (1998) and (Diamond, 1998) place less emphasis on the connections between bureaucracy and colonialism, and indicate the role of bureaucracy in the origins of state rule and taxation, law, and other hierarchical political regimes. Taking these approaches into account, one could argue that at its foundation, bureaucracy is better designed to capture surplus rather than expand it hubristically. Nevertheless, this counterpoint is a caveat to, not a contradiction of, the role of bureaucracy in imperialist expansion and settler colonial governance.

Nationalism, the 'conquest of the state by the nation', influenced the course of early humanitarianism. Specifically, the role of the state in securing rights for its citizens was qualified by national membership, rather than an entitlement shared by all individuals in the Hobbesian social contract (Arendt, 1948). The ascendancy of the idea of universal human rights took place at the same time as the ascendancy of exclusionary nationalist claims to state

protection. *Origins of Totalitarianism* notes the inherent paradox to universal rights being guaranteed by governments limited to national membership. Furthermore, the 19th century colonial notion that one state could administer a population outside its territory and without equal citizenship rights had already established a double standard enshrined by racism and bureaucracy in the colonies and protectorates. A similar double standard was swiftly applied to populations of refugees and stateless peoples in Europe in the 20th century, who Arendt argues had less advantageous legal status than criminals (Arendt, 1948:274).

Arendt thus places empire and especially the 'scramble for Africa' within a historical trajectory leading to totalitarianism and genocide in Europe. Departing from Arendt, this thesis maintains 'scrambled Africa' as the region of interest and attempts an African-centred view on European imperialism and settler colonialism from American plantation slavery to the creation of Liberia. This does not require wholesale agreement with Arendt's historical account, which has been critiqued for not drawing sufficient causal connections between imperialism and totalitarianism (Lee, 2011). Related to this point, I observe a missing link in Arendt's history, since it excludes the role of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the formation of race-thinking, in contradiction to numerous accounts from critical race theorists and African and African-American historians (Dorsey, 2000; Hochschild, 2005; hooks, 2005; Willis & Krauthamer, 2013; Willis, 2010). Furthermore, despite Arendt's contributions to understanding 'race-thinking' and its threat to human dignity, her opposition to the colonisation of the African continent is not visibly based on an egalitarian respect for African people and cultures; for example, she writes elsewhere that Swahili is an inferior language to German and therefore not a worthwhile

subject for university teaching. (Arendt, n.d.-a, n.d.-b; Gines, 2014). That is another point of departure for this thesis.

Notwithstanding the above reservations, Arendt's writing on imperialism has provoked relatively little acrimony in comparison to her opinions on the Holocaust (particularly the issue of collaborators), the creation of the modern state of Israel, and the nature of power in politics (Arendt, 1963; Lee, 2011). For human geographers and scholars of international affairs, Arendt is foundational in her anticipation of global migration flows, citizenship and exclusion (Lee, 2011; Parekh, 2013), and the impasse between nationalism and cosmopolitanism in a globalising world (Benhabib, 2002). In short, the focal points of Arendt's work on imperialism – and its secondary literature – with which this thesis engages are: race-thinking and colonial administration of people considered to be 'inferior' and thus 'in need of special protection' (as quoted above); the creation and subsequent exclusion of 'superfluous' populations (Duffield, 2007); and the paradoxical origins of liberal humanitarianism and universal human rights (Cramer, 2006; Gibney, 2002).

Other concepts of imperialism are also noted in this chapter. Moving from a historically specific narrative of European imperialism towards a characteristic-based concept of empire, Jahn (2005b) and Stoler (2008) each provide alternative paradigms. Jahn writes on imperialism as a pattern of power relations and functions, which

> *'involves three key elements: a justification of interventions aimed at changing the cultural, economic, and political constitution of a target society; an argument for disregarding a lack of consent on the part of the latter; and, finally, a principled willingness to deploy the threat or use of military force to bring about the above-mentioned changes.'* (Jahn, 2005b:177).

This definition is both precise, and appropriate for the particular questions Jahn applies to the liberal canon; primarily, questions of intervention and force. For that reason, it is a useful definition for a discussion of liberal *interventionism* specifically, although less relevant to broader archetypal conceptions of liberal humanitarianism with which this thesis is concerned. The definition also suggests a one-way exercise of power, excluding the relational dimension of colonial rule, however inherently violent and violating we take it to be (Bhabha, 1984).

In contrast with Jahn's technical criteria for imperialism, Stoler examines the residues and debris and echoes of empire in a relational and discursive sense: 'Imperial formations are relations of force, harboring political forms that endure beyond the formal exclusions that legislate against equal opportunity, commensurate dignities, and equal rights' (Stoler, 2008:211). She elaborates:

> *'imperial formations are defined by racialized relations of allocations and appropriations. Unlike empires, they are processes of becoming, not fixed things. Not least they are states of deferral that mete out promissory notes that are not exceptions to their operation but constitutive of them: imperial guardianship, trusteeships, delayed autonomy, temporary intervention, conditional tutelage, military takeover in the name of humanitarian works, violent intervention in the name of human rights, and security measures in the name of peace'* (Stoler 2008:211).

Where Jahn is technical, Stoler is esoteric. Both Jahn and Stoler's definitions are useful for moving beyond imperialism as a set of chronologically-bound events to modes of political functioning. This does not directly contradict the historical specificity *Origins of Totalitarianism,* although it departs from it. Stoler's paradigm corresponds with Arendt to whatever extent 19th century European imperialism created modes of domination and subordination, and identity and administration, that persisted beyond the independence movements

of the resulting states, and were constructed by mechanisms other than state rule. In fact, Arendt herself observed that imperialism had persisted or re-emerged in American cold war politics: 'Imperialist rule, except for the purpose of name-calling, seems half-forgotten, and the chief reason why this is deplorable is that its relevance for contemporary events has become rather obvious in recent years' (Arendt 1948:1967,xxi). These varied approaches to conceptualising imperialism thus have in common a concern with the power dynamics and relations constructed by imperialism, characterising it as an exercise in force as well as ideology. Once central component of imperialism that is missing from the definitions examined so far is the role of gender and patriarchal gender relations in the origins and spread of imperialism. To link these concepts, the below section will briefly conceptualise colonialism and settler colonialism before moving into a discussion of gender.

### *Colonialism and settler colonialism*

The distinction between imperialism and colonialism in real life is not precise, and for that reason this thesis follows the example of many academics who choose to use the terms interchangeably. What 'empire' is to 'colony' is not always clear but one could say that colonialism refers to the more intimate encounters that construct, and are in part constructed by, imperialism on an international scale.[4] Empire expands internationally while colony settles locally. Several indigenous rights scholars refer to 'settler colonialism' as a description of the ongoing power relations in Canada, US, and Australia (Laidlaw, 2012; A.

[4] Geographers including Harvey (2003) and Daley (2008) apply the concept of scales to their analyses of imperial violence and neoliberal violence, which could well apply to this project as well. 'Scale' is controversial within human geography. I have decided to leave the debate on 'scales' aside in favour of an analogous concept of 'embeddedness', which will appear in the discussion on transforming gender and production roles in Chapters Four and Seven.

Smith, 2005; L. T. Smith, 1999). Additionally, Mohanty writes that 'colonization almost invariably implies a relation of structural domination, and a discursive or political suppression of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question' (1988:61), focusing on the 'discursive construction' of these subjects in addition to relations of outright coercion. Racism, bureaucracy, settler chauvinism, and the mission to civilise, contribute to the multiple layers of 'epistemic violence' as well as other forms of violence that characterise colonial encounters (Spivak, 1988).

While Arendt viewed 19th century European overseas empire as a globally totalising force (1948:pp.xxi), colonies are multisited and therefore pluralistic, holding some autonomy from the 'grand narrative' of 'universal history' even as they are transformed by it (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012). Many scholars of indigenous plurality as well as postmodernity reject the very idea of universal history (L. T. Smith, 1999). This chapter directly acknowledges the 'grand narrative' and its critiques. Some of the material presented in the following chapters will align with the grand narrative and some will not; all the same, it is useful to articulate what the grand narrative supposedly is before noting how the details support or contradict it.

Despite the detail, and the focus on relations, Stoler's definition contains no mention of gender although she applies her definition of imperial formations to the gendered social 'ruins' that she argues persist. Neither does Arendt integrate gender. Despite the careful attention paid to empire by feminist theorists (Eisenstein, 2004; Hunt, 1989; Janiewski, 2001; Stoler, 2010), and rich historical work to draw upon, the gendered dimensions of imperialism are frequently overlooked in political theory. Scholars who do examine the gender relations embedded in imperial and colonial economic and political formations

find that patriarchy, gerontocracy, and gender violence are key social operatives of imperialism and settler colonialism. This chapter's theoretical framework integrates the strengths of both feminist theorising about imperialism, and gender-neutral or gender-blind theorising on liberal imperialism. By synthesising multiple approaches, I hope to contribute an argument for the salience of gendered liberal imperialism in understanding the discursive constructions appearing around gender violence in postwar zones of liberal re/establishment.

### *Patriarchies*

Patriarchy is a controversial subject within and outside feminist theory (Bryson, 1999). It is defined here following Hunnicutt's definition of patriarchy as 'social arrangements that privilege males, where men as a group dominate women as a group, both structurally and ideologically' (Hunnicutt, 2009:558). Having both structural and ideological manifestations, the label 'patriarchal' can accurately describe a text without making an assumption about the intentions of the text's author or its position within larger power structures. The intersectionality of patriarchy with other forms of domination and subordination, such as racialisation, class, and gerontocracy, has been explored in multifaceted ways by theorists across the spectrum of feminist theory and critical race scholarship (including but not limited to Daly, 1978; Hill Collins, 2004; hooks, 2000a, 2000c; Kandiyoti, 1988; Mendieta, 2012; Millett, 1969). In intersectional theorising, the question of what form of subordination is most extensive is to some extent overriden by the view that multiple forms of oppression often enable each other, in part through the embeddedness of social, political, and economic regimes. Theories on the origin of patriarchy argue for its embeddedness in military conquest and hierarchical political formations (see for example Millett,

1969); some theories on its eventual global purview address colonialism and genocidal conquest (A. Smith, 2005), and private property and capitalist modes of production (Engels, 1884). I therefore share the intersectional and embedded view that racial and colonial dominance is integral to the definition of patriarchy, not merely additive.

Some skeptics of the notion of a transnational and ubiquitous patriarchy point to profound cultural differences in the status of women across plural geographical and cultural contexts (Bryson, 1999). This is misguided; if anything, the persistence of demonstrably patriarchal social phenomena across diverse settings is in fact evidence in support of globalised patriarchies. One can concur that patriarchy is global in scale, as many 'second-wave' radical feminists maintain (Daly, 1978; Dworkin, 1974; MacKinnon, 2006), while rejecting the supposition that patriarchy is therefore homogenous or monolithic. Rather, it varies according to other relations of social and political production. For example, the existence of patriarchal social formations in Africa, even in the 'female farming belt' and matrilineal regions, has been observed by African feminists as well as anthropologists (Amadiume, 1997; Andrade, 2002; Kandiyoti, 1988; Moran, 1990; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994).[5] Hunnicutt therefore argues for a conceptualisation of patriarchy – or patriarchies – as shifting and dynamic 'labyrinths of power dynamics' that 'must be developed together with

[5] Kandiyoti (1988), for example, distinguishes between 'classic patriarchy' in South Asia and the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan African patriarchy that is supported by polygyny but also mitigated by female farming and market autonomy. This categorisation neglects European and Euro-American patriarchy, which influenced 'customary' gender relations in those regions and the suppression of traditional female rule (Hunt, 1997; Mamdani, 1996; van Allen, 1972). While I would therefore classify different forms of patriarchy in a more historically specific and rhizomatic and layered manner, I nevertheless perceive Kandiyoti's attention to regional difference as an important contribution, especially in the late 1980s as mainstream feminist theorising faced anew its chronic pluralism problem.

other forms of hierarchy and domination in which [patriarchy] is inextricably embedded' (2009:555). To this, I add a particular emphasis on colonialism and imperialism.

Out of numerous cross-cutting intersectionalitiess, I argue that colonial conquest is particularly indispensable to a concept of patriarchy as globalised yet not monolithic, and longstanding and resilient yet not primordial, permanent, or ahistorical. The following paragraphs will review how, as embedded social constructs, colonialism and imperialism relied upon patriarchal gender roles and norms. In particular, gender-based violence and violence against women were integral to colonial and patriarchal hegemony in a number of ways ranging from the embodied to the epistemic.

Rape as a tool of conquest is argued by some to be a key factor in the ascendancy of patriarchal societies, which tend to proliferate through conquest (Millett, 1969). Rape enforces colonial power even if, or especially if, such events are considered 'unspeakable' (Bakare-Yusuf, 1997) or where they are followed by long periods of silence in the public sphere (Butalia, 1998; Das, 1997). For example, Hunt traces 'unspeakable' violence in the archives from King Leopold's Congo. She finds sexual violence in both instrumental (militarized) and recreational forms, sometimes as a means to force African men collect rubber, to punish a chief by brutalizing his family, or as a form of torture (Hunt, 2008). In the Liberian archives there are similar instances enshrouded in similar silences, particularly during the early 20th century military campaigns in the hinterlands, a topic that will reappear in Chapter Four. Sexual violence and exploitation is often lamented as an unfortunate by-product of military activity, but its strategic value in subjugating populations and humiliating the intransigent among them

suggests its utility as a method of establishing hierarchies, whether sexualised, racialised, genocidal, or colonial (Baines, 2003; Hayden, 2000; Wood, 2006).

Moving from the embodied to the discursive, Spivak (1988) famously wrote of the double erasure of the female colonial subject, a form of 'epistemic violence' that postcolonial and African feminists demonstrate persists to this day in international development and in 'white western feminism' (Amadiume, 1997; Mohanty, 1988; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994; Oyewumi, 2003). Moreover, and more specific to European imperialism, patriarchal and colonial military conquest were theorized to work in tandem with the control over women's reproductive abilities and the promotion of violent, militarized and 'hegemonic' male identities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity was vital for military conquest and came with transformations to gender roles for both the coloniser and the colonised (Burton, 1990; Hayes, 1997; Mills, 1991; Newell, 2008).

In summary, to whatever extent gender roles are embedded within productive, reproductive, and representative structures – and being careful not to extend the functionalist explanation of gender roles too far as Shaw (2002) cautions – gender-based violence of many forms became embedded within the violence of imperial conquest. Thus patriarchy and imperialism are mutually reinforcing hegemonic projects, within which sexual and gendered violence plays an integral operative role. Aside from the integration of gendered violence with colonial violence, there are also connections between gendered relationality and colonial relationality, gendered forms of collusion with colonial rule, and other less immediately or obviously violent arrangements that supported colonialism and imperialism. This will be discussed in more depth in a later section that

draws together gender, liberalism, and imperialism. Moving towards this multidimensional framework, the next section discusses alternative paradigms of imperialism.

*Alternative paradigms of imperialism and colonialism*

There are other paradigms of imperialism or colonialism that could inform this debate. Discursive approaches to imperialism, for example, form a central component of postcolonial theorising (Bhabha, 1984; Said, 1977), including postcolonial feminist and postmodern feminist perspectives (Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988). Alternately, imperialism as a primarily material and geopolitical matter attracts theorists that focus more strictly on violence, territoriality, and dispossession (Duffield, 2001, 2007; Harvey, 2003; Mbembe, 2001).

Mbembe's multifaceted description of colonialism has a common thread of spatial and territorial conquest:

> *'Colonial occupation itself was a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area…the production of boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves; the subversion of existing property arrangements; the classification of people according to different categories; resource extraction; and, finally, the manufacturing of a large reservoir of cultural imaginaries….Space was therefore the raw material of sovereignty and the violence it carried with it.'* (Mbembe, 2003:25)

The materiality of this definition puts it in common with Harvey's focus on 'accumulation by dispossession', which is argued to persist in international relations today especially in the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Duffield, 2007; Eisenstein, 2004). Mbembe's definition powerfully calls to mind the atrocities and everyday indignities of colonial rule in Africa, and is well situated to support his other observations on 'necropolitics' and postcolonial governance. However, if space is the 'raw material' of sovereignty, how do we account for

arguments around the persistence of colonial mentalities and neo-colonial international relations long after territorial claims have been restored? Related to this query, I question whether Mbembe's focus on materiality and Harvey's 'accumulation by dispossession' is too parochial, occluding a necessary broader discussion of colonialism as a continuum that integrates less obvious violations, such as mutual assimilation (Ellis, 2010; Tonkin, 2002), patriarchal collusion (van Allen, 1972), relationality (Bhabha, 1984; Mamdani, 1996), the colonisation of the mind (Fanon, 1965), and the persistence of liberal humanitarian paradigms throughout the worst periods of colonial violence (Mehta, 1999). In comparison to the 'accumulation by dispossession' model, a benefit of the Arendtian framework is that it accounts for the role of good intentions and 'absentmindedness' in the establishment of colonial rule. This creates room for theorising how the most severe atrocities under European imperialism could be overlooked, dismissed, or re-imagined by large numbers of ordinary European citizens who, it should be assumed, were not 'evil' by nature or intrinsically motivated to perpetuate suffering. The Arendtian model is in this sense more flexible than Mbembe's necropolitical one in that it can help explain both the severe and more collaborative colonial relations where they existed, and draw thematic and causal connections between these different points on the spectrum of imperial violence. While discursive and epistemic work appears throughout this thesis, there is a less extensive engagement with material or territorial definitions of empire/colony.

Despite the above concerns, I would not argue for the 'accumulation by dispossession' approach to be dismissed, but simply acknowledged as a definition that creates a platform for a particular type of discussion around military

conquest and resource extraction. The definition one adopts is crucial to the argument one takes regarding the persistence of imperialism or colonialism in contemporary international affairs, including humanitarian and development efforts. Definitions are often chosen to serve the argument to follow, and I wish to do so transparently and without establishing overly ambitious claims about what imperialism is or was, because these rich debates go well beyond this study. However, this thesis is justified in selecting a more expansive paradigm of imperialism, in part because of the rigorous theoretical and historical work that many have contributed to the scholarship; additionally, because as a grounded inquiry, this thesis will observe several points where Arendtian European imperialism is helpful for understanding 19th century Liberian politics, despite the fact that Liberia was not colonised by Europe.

To summarise this discussion of imperialism, colonialism, and patriarchy: I conceptualise imperialism following the Arendtian model, in which higher order interests are served by overseas securitisation of various kinds, governance is erected without an authentic social contract, and justified in part by discourses of difference and/or the civilising influence of the coloniser. The definition of settler colonialism is left open to the plurality of the situation, but often involves notions of settler superiority, and regulation and/or reformation of indigenous social, political, and economic life. As overlapping structures, imperial and colonial relations both constitute and are constitutive of discourses of power/knowledge, integrated with gender and especially patriarchal gender norms. This chapter introduced gender and gender violence as key embedded social dimensions, as overtly violent means by which colonial relations were produced and reinforced. This corresponded with the section's characterisation

of coloniality as a continuum of violence, including the 'unspeakable'. However, at this point I have presented little detail on how gender integrates into imperialism in more apparently benign ways. The key to bridging these divergent aspects of gendered imperial and colonial construction is by examining the liberal dimensions of imperialism.

## Liberal imperialism

The specifically liberal dimensions of imperialism have attracted critical study across disciplines. Cynicism towards postconflict liberal reconstruction has its theoretical foundations in a wider literature linking universalist liberal humanitarian ideals with their facilitation of European imperialism, going back to the time of John Stuart Mill and earlier (Jahn, 2005a, 2009; Odhiambo-Abuya, 2005; Tunick, 2006). These studies are not limited to the 19th century but often applied to perceived parallels in the contemporary era, many of which focus on liberal humanitarian engagement. Liberal imperialism is one term that captures several others pursuing similar points: Harvey (2003) discusses 'the new imperialism' in international relations; Duffield (2001, 2007) refers to 'contingent sovereignty' as well as 'liberal imperialism'; Cramer (2006) critiques the 'great post-conflict liberal makeover fantasy' and Paris (2002) inquires if postwar statebuilding is a *mission civilisatrice*. The following sections will explore this branch of thinking first in relation to 19th century colonialism and then in critiques of postconflict reconstruction since the end of the Cold War.

### *Liberal imperialism in the 19th century*

Mehta introduces his sustained examination of liberal thought as an enabler of 19th century imperialism with this summary:

> *'As a general matter, it is liberal and progressive thinkers such as Bentham, both the Mills, and Macaulay, who, notwithstanding – indeed, on account of – their reforming schemes, endorse the empire as a legitimate form of political and commercial governance; who justify and accept its largely undemocratic and nonrepresentative structure; who invoke as politically relevant categories such as history, ethnicity, civilizational hierarchies, and occasionally race and blood ties; and who fashion arguments for the empire's at least temporary necessity and foreseeable prolongation'. (Mehta, 1999, p. 2)*

In the above, Mehta identifies core aspects of liberalism that served to motivate the *mission civilisatrice* of imperial rule. Several scholars concur with Mehta's line of argumentation. For example, Duffield observes that 'the importance of moral trusteeship to liberalism…explains its frequent criticism of imperial violence and excess. However, it was also able to accept colonial rule when the responsibility of trusteeship was deemed to be humanely and hence effectively discharged' (Duffield, 2007:7). In turn, Fassin (2012:3) asks, rhetorically, if humanitarian reason is merely a convenient 'smoke screen' for exploitive activities, then why is it so particularly well-suited for that purpose? The symbiosis between liberal humanitarianism and 19th century imperialism is more than a chronological coincidence. Many argue that colonial ideas are harboured at the core of liberal thought, particularly in the universalist scope of ethics, and in obligations of 'moral trusteeship'.

The founding of Liberia and the abolitionist movement in the late 18th and early 19th centuries can be counted as initial steps towards the globalised imperialism that was to follow, as abolitionists pointed to burgeoning opportunities for legitimate trade and agriculture on the African continent as an argument against slavery (Duffield, 2007). Conversely, the 'superlative evil' of the trans-Atlantic slave trade was juxtaposed against more benign imperial trade and the spread of Eurocentric norms of enlightenment (Magaziner, 2007). This is one

sense in which liberal humanitarian ideals, in tandem with liberal economic theory, facilitated European imperialism. The roots of liberal-colonial collusion are often traced back to the philosophy of John Stuart Mill. In an assiduously detailed study, Jahn (2005a), takes issue with the claim that Mill was the first to introduce his historical perspective of evolution from 'savagery' to 'barbarism' and 'civilisation', arguing that he relied upon already existing tropes in discussing these forms of governance. It is clear, in any case, that Mill did little to resist these tropes. Although Jahn notes that Mill denounced the prospect of enforcing 'civilisation' through illiberal means (force) domestically and was generally opposed to armed intervention (Jahn, 2005b), Mill's teleological view of history nevertheless allowed for 'hierarchical' relationships between peoples to be justified by liberal principles (Jahn, 2005a:606).

Another theoretical connection to liberalism becomes evident when imperialism is understood as a residual and lingering pattern of power relations. As noted earlier, Stoler's (2008) 'promissory notes' of imperial formations, including trusteeship, intervention, and security, are all paradoxes of liberalism in their own right. Each refers to tensions between institutional authority and individual freedom. These tensions became even more sharply evident in colonies, where the 'liberal' rule of law persistently confronted the issue of difference, as well as, some argue, the invention of it (Mamdani, 1996; Ranger, 1983). If Stoler is correct in enumerating liberal paradoxes as constituents of imperial 'relations of allocations', then the connection between liberalism and imperialism can be understood as a core hypocrisy of liberal humanitarianism, rather than a superficial similarity or coincidence.[6]

[6] Paradoxes and 'pathologies' of liberalism are discussed extensively in philosophy and political science; see for example, Paris (2004) and Cramer (2006). It is not necessary for

Earlier, this chapter argued that patriarchy and conquest are mutually reinforcing structures, within which sexual violence plays an integral functional role. Aside from 'unspeakable' acts such as kidnapping, rape, and mutilation associated with military conquest, the gender violence and patriarchal consolidation of the *mission civilisatrice* unfolded in a more liberal manner as well. The liberal promotion of colonial sexual violence did not derive from sanctioning rape-as-conquest, which is clearly illiberal; nor in serving as a discursive 'alibi', a benevolent moral superstructure that disguises underlying violence – although this occurred. Rather, liberal humanitarianism appears in a more 'benign patriarchal' form in many colonial relations, in its advancement of patriarchal household and production roles, and the general promotion of a paternalist approach to administering the daily lives of subjects.

One means of justifying the 'trusteeship' of colonial rule, of legitimising the 'responsibility no people can bear for another', was in decrying the perceived or real mistreatment of indigenous women by indigenous men. Colonial trusteeship typically extended a type of paternalistic control over women and girls' bodies, which took many forms, ranging from the promotion of feminine modesty and domesticity (Leach, 2008), to interference in rituals of initiation, fertility, or marriage such as sati (the self-immolation of widows), FGC/M, polygamy, transactional sex, marital disputes, and divorce (Aderinto, 2007, 2012a, 2015; Amadiume, 1997; Ellis, 1999; Mamdani, 1996; Mani, 1986, 1998; van Allen, 1972; Zimudzi, 2004).

Colonial rule did not simply demonize custom but also invented it; many colonies saw the invention, subversion, suppression, codification or other

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this thesis to replicate the ample discussion of liberal paradoxes in general. The issue of universalist versus distinct claims to rights, however, is a common thread running through much of the data, literature, and analysis appearing in this thesis.

manipulation of tradition, along with new legal structures governing family relations and violence (Ellis, 2010; Mamdani, 1996; Ranger, 1983). While upholding the monogamous and patriarchal nuclear family as the ideal family structure, many settler colonies in in Africa disrupted and transformed family relationships with regulations that facilitated cheap or coerced labour from men in extractive industries (Morrell, 1998; West, 1997; Zimudzi, 2004). Whether this resulted from coercion or from 'mutual assimilation of elites' has sparked much debate (Ellis, 1999, 2010; Tonkin, 2002). Transforming embedded social relations was often facilitated by the collusion between colonial occupiers and male elders interested in consolidating authority relative to youth and women (Amadiume, 1997; Mamdani, 1996; van Allen, 1972). Restructuring chiefdoms in British colonies, as Mamdani phrased it, established 'a range of usually district-level Native Authorities, each armed with a whip and protected by the halo of custom' (Mamdani, 1996:49). Thus, despite the legitimising narrative of rescuing native women from the barbarism of their men, patriarchal collusion in colonies proceeded to marginalise and undermine female-led formal representation and power.

The result, for colonies under indirect rule, was the destruction of female indigenous political authority (Mamdani, 1996; van Allen, 1972). At times, this marginalisation created the conditions for resistance movements according to customary female-led mechanisms of representation; famously, the Anlu uprisings (Ritzenthaler, 1960), the intransigant warrior queen Yaa Asantewaa (McCaskie, 2007), and the Nigerian women's riots (Aderinto, 2012b; Andrade, 2002).

The difficulty in interpreting these widely-cited episodes is in determining whether disparate examples of female rebellion across colonial West Africa are 'typical' of indigenous resistance, justifiably comparative, or unique occurences (Aderinto, 2012b; Hunt, 1997). In fact, it is often the case that 'micro' case studies deviate from the 'macro' grand narrative, and these incidences deserve serious examination by researchers of gender and colonialism. Thomas, (1997) for example, argues that the furor over FGC/M during the Kenyan independence movement should not be simplistically categorised as 'resistance', since it carried generational and gendered interactions. Mani illustrates how legal and missionary texts on sati in colonial India focused on adherence to religious scriptures rather than the 'barbarism' of the practice, supporting technologies of bureaucracy rather than narratives of barbarism in colonial India (Mani, 1986). Several African historians have noted that subaltern women's 'resistance' is over-emphasised and valorised in African historiography (Aderinto, 2012b; Hunt, 1989, 1997). These examples indicate numerous deviations from the 'grand narrative' of colonial rescue of native women. Even as counterpoints, however, they hold in common the suppression of native women's various subject positions, the production of legal and social colonial subjects by the prevailing institutions, and a blunt recourse to violence where said subjects rebelled. In this sense the exception can prove the rule, and the multiplicity of 'unique' deviant experiences can aggregate into a meta-narrative of gendered colonial rule that would be familiar to any of its victims.

To summarise, the examples noted above show how ideals that fit within liberal humanitarianism in their ostensible promotion of kindness to women, often manifested as patriarchal control over women and girls' bodies. In this

multiplicity of ways, gender was at the core of both the clearly illiberal 'superlative evils' of imperialism and settler colonialism, as well as ostensibly 'benign' liberal imperialism.

Correspondingly, imperialism influenced white colonial femininity and the early Western feminist/proto-feminist movements (Midgley, 2007; Mills, 1991). Maintaining the ideology of racialised barriers between coloniser and colonised required white female settlers to broaden their horizons by living adventurously in foreign lands, while paradoxically embodying the chaste, servile ideal of Victorian womanhood. The construction of white colonial femininity and the degrading perceptions and treatment of women of colour in colonies (as well as plantations) worked symbiotically, at times creating aspirational modes of femininity for colonised populations (Moran, 1988, 1990; Willis & Krauthamer, 2013).

As Burton states, 'liberal bourgeois feminism…if not predisposed toward imperialism, [was] at least compatible with and easily fuelled by an imperial ethos' (Burton, 1990:295). More trenchantly, Spivak identifies this dynamic in her literary analysis of Bronte's 1847 *Jane Eyre*, in which the 'Othered' and disorderly wife cloistered in Mr. Rochester's attic 'must...set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction', going on to interpret this literary episode 'as an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer' (Spivak, 1985:251). The inadequacy of early mainstream feminist movements to address colonialism, classism, and racism as embedded components of patriarchy, created cleavages in the feminist and gender equality movements that

persist to this day (to cite a small selection of this rich and varied field of feminist/womanist critique: Eisenstein, 2004; Hill Collins, 2004; Nnaemeka, 2005; Oyewumi, 2003). Continuing this chapter's analysis of liberal imperialism, the following section will first comment on the overlapping distinctions between neoliberalism and liberalism, then demonstrate how critiques of liberalism are contested as colonial or not, according to competing paradigms of colonialism and imperialism.

*Liberal imperialism in the post-Cold War period.*

Theories of liberal imperialism are argued to be no less applicable today in the fields of human geography, feminist praxis, and international relations. The issue of state formation is intimately connected to the debates on liberal imperialism. This is partly because the legitimacy of governance and consent to government is a core tension within liberal theory (Cramer, 2006; Paris, 2004). Postwar 'zones of experimentation' (Duffield 2007:28) are especially conflicted with the paradoxes of liberalism, because postconflict governance builds a social contract anew rather than maintaining an already established status quo (Das, 2007).[7] As Duffield puts it, 'no one in Africa has ever voted for the current development regime: it came with the vote' (Duffield, 2007:169). Das (2007) argues on a related note that newly independent states face questions of social contract legitimacy, in more immediate, volatile ways than do well-established governments. Using the partition of India and Pakistan as a case study, she argues that postwar and newly independent states seek to legitimise their social

[7] In Liberia, a country named after freedom and founded by a charity, the American Colonization Society, this line of theorising can be particularly incisive. As Chapter Four will show, the utopic vision of the colony as a homeland for 'freed' slaves not only outpaced the often dystopic reality of colonisation, but actually enabled it.

contract by demonstrating paternal responsibility for, and patriarchal authority over, the 'sexual contract' of family life and protection of women.

Similar concerns apply to liberal universalist gender equality in development. Critiques of the neocolonial and gendered discursive construction of 'the Third World Woman' (Mohanty, 1988) and her double erasure as a colonial subject (Spivak, 1988) have been the topic of academic investigation in the postcolonial, majority world. Numerous feminist geographers critique neoliberal tendencies in humanitarian operations. Hyndman (1998, 2003, 2009), for example, critiques the leveraging of gender equality in humanitarian operations, and its elision of difference. Another geographer of the Great Lakes region, Daley (2008) argues that 'liberal peace depends on the entrenchment of neo-liberal political economic practices... focusing as they do on non-state actors: the market for economic development and personal liberation, civil society and/or external ('non-territorial') actors for humanitarian and welfare intervention', going on to observe ways in which militarism and humanitarianism are mutually reliant (35).

The above quotation's reference of non-state actors speaks to a wider feminist debate on the erosion of state sovereignty; the charge that neoliberal globalisation undermines national sovereignty appears frequently in feminist literature (Benhabib, 2002). Comparatively few theorists, however, engage with the obvious counterpoint, that is, nation-states' inherent inadequacy to promote gender equality on a global scale given the contradictions inherent to national polities enforcing universal rights (Arendt, 1948; Benhabib, 2002). While neoliberalism and/or globalisation are justifiably considered problematic for gender equality in part because of their erasure of state boundaries and state

sovereignty, one can nonetheless balance this observation with a more sustained discussion of what national sovereignty does and does not; indeed, can and can not, guarantee for gender equality.

Complexifying matters even further, distinctions between liberalism, neoliberalism, and neocolonialism are not always made clear or delineated in the same way by critical scholars. For this reason, critiques of neoliberalism can frequently inform a discussion of liberal imperialism. To clarify, this thesis is primarily concerned with liberal humanitarianism rather than neoliberalism. In contrast to the paradigms set out by many feminist geographers and anthropologists, neoliberalism is defined here in the economic sense. That is to say, neoliberalism in the post-Cold War era emerges from the Washington Consensus and post-Washington Consensus approach to economic development; this includes fiscal austerity, belief in free and unfettered market equilibrium, lack of investment in social capital, deregulation of financial institutions, and the rapid formation of free trade areas (Stiglitz, 2002). This economics-focused definition does not consistently syncronise with feminist geographers' broader discussion of what neoliberalism *represents* to society, space, and place. This thesis therefore applies critiques of neoliberalism where they are applicable to liberal humanitarianism and colonialism/imperialism.

These critiques appear frequently in literature on postconflict reconstruction. Paris, whose 2002 paper *International Peacebuilding and the Mission Civilisatrice* was one of the first high-profile examples of the critical approach to liberal peacebuilding, did not concur with many of the critiques that his work among others inspired. In a later paper, *Saving Liberal Peacebuilding,* (2010) he presents five major issues with the critical scholarship linking liberal

peacebuilding and colonialism.[8] Specifically, he charges that some writers conflate multilateral efforts through the United Nations with the 'American-led war on terror' (2010:348); that peace building is inaccurately likened to imperialism or colonialism; that 'liberal peace' is defined too broadly; that scholars cherry-pick and misrepresent empirical data and case studies; and that there is an oversimplification of complex moral issues.

It is the second charge, that the parallels with imperialism are insufficient or contradictory, that this chapter will discuss briefly and in reference to other scholars who have made a similar critique (such as Brigg, 2002). Paris identifies a *mission civilisatrice* in interventions seeking to regulate life in conflict zones, and recognises that therefore the United Nations and other humanitarian bodies cannot be simply categorised as 'innocent assistance' (Paris, 2010:349). However, he argues such missions 'have not principally been motivated by efforts to extract wealth from their host societies', and that 'those who claim that post-settlement peacebuilding serves the interests of "transnational capitalism" have yet to demonstrate that either the expectation or the desire for economic gain has driven the decision to launch any such operations' (349).

Similarly, Brigg (2002) critiques the post-development school's use of colonisation as a metaphor, responding that:

> *'Development operates through the mobilisation of interests and aspirations of Third World subjects and nation-states, in contrast to the deductive modality of colonial power. Post-development's use of the colonisation metaphor either tends to ignore or sit awkwardly with this distinction, and with the fact that development represented a liberating possibility in the early postwar period for many Third World nationalists'* (Brigg, 2002:433)

[8] The paper specifies liberal peacebuilding but the points equally apply to liberal state reconstruction.

Both Paris and Brigg distinguish between 'destructive' colonisation and the admittedly problematic yet ultimately well-intentioned actions of the UN and other players. They argue that colonialism was primarily extractive, while development agencies direct aid money to countries in need. This seems to be a very reasonable point; colonisation as an extractive, exploitative, 'accumulation by dispossession' process might be an exaggerated critique to apply to case studies such as Liberia, where the multilateral peacebuilding mission from 2003 was key in establishing a bare minimum standard of human security, with widespread support from the affected population (McGovern, 2005; Moran & Pitcher, 2004; Sawyer, 2008). At the crux of most defenses of the postconflict development *status quo* is the argument that today's interventions are basically generous in spirit while the imperialism they are compared against was basically exploitative.

Whether or not one agrees that post-Cold War interventions are essentially generous, or that they result in a flow of resources from the global North to South – and this is debated– the shortcoming of both Paris' and Briggs' arguments is they underestimate the extent of liberal humanitarian justification for 19th century imperialism. Both the colonisation metaphor and the critique of it can benefit from greater nuance. By assuming the 'deductive modality' of 'destructive' 19th century imperialism, North-South aid flows appear as a counterpoint to the charge of new imperialism. However, from an Arendtian perspective outlined earlier this chapter, there is no such contradiction.

In the Arendtian account, governments were pressed into service to safeguard capital expansion overseas. The point is that imperialism was not a blatant power grab, it was more insidious than that: 'worse than corruption was

that the incorruptible became convinced that imperialism was the only way to conduct world politics' (Arendt, 1948:132). Alongside 'superlative evils' such as King Leopold's mutilations and slavery in the Belgian Congo (Hochschild, 1998) and torture camps for Mau Mau agitators in Kenya (Anderson, 2005; Kennedy, 1992), there was also the *mission civilisatrice*, utterly convinced of its own enlightement. It is for this precise reason that liberal humanitarian objectives – pacification, civilisation, trade, combatting slavery and protecting women – proved useful in justifying colonial rule. Therefore, the argument that the United Nations and other development organisations spend money rather than seize resources does not detract from the comparison (nor does it 'prove' it) but reinforces it. For example, the point that international development acts substantively for the containment and expedient management of marginalised 'uninsured' populations, for the relative convenience of liberal institution building (Duffield, 2001, 2007), corresponds with an Arendtian narrative of colonial rule as an insurance mechanism for overseas capital expansion. It makes no claim to 'extractive' spectres of colonialism as a superlative evil.[9] Working with an Arendtian concept of imperialism, there is a stronger parallel to the post-Cold War era than Brigg or Paris acknowledge with their more restrictive definitions.

This brings the discussion to Paris' other argument, that there is no clear explanation of what would motivate the international humanitarian community to use development to facilitate transnational capital expansion. This is a valid counterpoint to the Arendtian paradigm of imperialism. Arendt does not explain precisely how the bourgeois investment class impelled changes in governance,

[9] Note that some do argue that postconflict development facilitates international investment and raw resource extraction in failed/fragile states (Doe, 2009).

although she makes a detailed case for why it was in their interest to do so. That is a shortcoming of her argument, and consequently there is no basis for comparing that issue between Arendt's history and the post-Cold War era. It is worth noting that arguments for a 'new imperialism' as a process of 'accumulation by dispossession' typically draw upon US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Eisenstein, 2004; Harvey, 2003), while more nuanced arguments are typically applied to complex humanitarian situations such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Balkans (Abramowitz, 2014; Cramer, 2006; Hyndman, 2003; Odhiambo-Abuya, 2005). Clearly, many conditions have changed since the 19th century and this chapter does not seek to persuade the reader that every feature of 19th century imperialism reappears today in humanitarian operations. However, it is unwise to hastily discard the idea of a new imperialism, and indeed liberal imperialism, based on either donor country expenditure or good intentions.

Another advantage of a broad theoretical framework of liberal imperialism is that it does not require an immutable stance on the degree of liberal-colonial collusion. Importantly, the literature reflects a range of opinions rather than a binary, with most researchers demonstrating at least passing concern over the symbiosis between liberal humanitarian ideals and imperial/colonial violence. For example, Atkinson (2008) questions whether resource extraction in postwar Liberia is neo-colonial in nature. Atkinson ultimately takes an optimistic view of the extractive sector, but internalises the critical perspective by following its typical line of questioning. Others are more dismissive of such good intentions, arguing that humanitarian treatment of war-affected populations is both infused with neo-colonialism and dismissive of

indigenous contributions to peacebuilding (Doe, 2009; Odhiambo-Abuya, 2005). These authors advance different perspectives but on the same terrain which assigns importance to the question of neo-colonialism in humanitarian operations. This illustrates that it is not necessary to resolve the rich set of debates surrounding liberal imperialism, nor fixate on one position within it, in order for liberal imperialism to be useful and relevant as a general framework for interpreting findings.

To summarise the above, a major advantage of using the analytical framework of liberal imperialism is that it highlights similarities to 19th century liberal imperialism, while also nuancing what kinds of relationships that imperialism enshrined. The comparison between old and new liberal imperialism becomes stronger the less parochial the conception of imperialism applied.

A final point is the contention that 'some of the strongest critics of liberal peacebuilding appear… to be arguing from liberal principles themselves' (Paris 2010: 339). Paris suggests that liberal imperialism overlooks certain universal rights and entitlements held by target populations, but that the recognition of these entitlements stems ultimately from liberal humanitarianism. It is true that many critiques of liberal imperialism come from a stance of liberal humanitarianism. However, this argument could also be taken as its own counterpoint. If principles of liberal humanitarianism are fundamentally bound up with the colonial project, then using them as a basis to oppose imperialism, (liberal or otherwise) does not alter the proximity of those ideals to empire or colony.

If the archetypal purity of liberal humanitarianism can exist in total separation from any hegemonic tendencies, then deploying liberal humanitarian ideals for hegemonic ends is simply, as Fassin puts it, a 'smoke screen' (Fassin, 2012). However, if liberal humanitarianism is inextricably embedded in colonial or imperial re/production, then there are serious philosophical questions, as well as urgent social ills, left unanswered by even the most considered and pluralistic liberal approaches (such as those extensively cited in this dissertation including Appiah et. al., 2007; Appiah, 1992; Nussbaum, 1999, 2000; Sen, 1999, 2009). Many state that this is indeed the case, for example, the 'critique of humanitarian reason' that charitable giving always entails hierarchies and even reinforces them (Fassin, 2012). In turn, Arendt (1948) examines the paradox of imperialism's globalised, totalising worldview, which she argues created the basis for totalitarianism as well as the concept of shared humanity necessary to resist it. Therein lies the core tension in the argument for liberal imperialism.

This dissertation does not take a fixed and permanent stance on whether liberal humanitarianism is intrinsically colonial, leaving that question for the years of future research ahead. However, I am certain that the question of liberal imperialism is a pressing one for Liberia's postwar efforts to address gender-based violence. In particular, the chronic inadequacy of liberal humanitarianism to not only 'address difference' but ideally, thrive on it, emerges as one limitation to public engagement in gender violence advocacy in the postwar era. Original data in Chapter Five will show residual colonial tropes appearing in many advocacy campaigns led by liberal institutions of the postwar decade. Furthermore, informal interviews and case studies illustrate 'fault lines' of universal versus pluralistic conceptions of human rights. These problems and

dilemmas are recurrent ones in international development, that Mamdani (1996) frames as a 'rights versus culture' bifurcation, that Hyndman (1998) frames as 'domesticating difference', that Povinelli (2001) casts as 'incommensurate', and that Abramowitz & Moran (2012) query as a 'question of culture'.

## Princess Guanya Pau and the problem of rights versus culture

> *'The liberal solution is to locate politics in civil society, and the Africanist solution is to put Africa's age-old communities at the center of African politics. One side calls for a regime that will champion rights, and the other stands in defense of culture'* (Mamdani, 1996:3)

Mamdani describes this division as the consequence of indirect rule in colonial Africa. For Abramowitz & Moran, the 'question of culture' refers to NGOs and activists characterising Liberia's traditional culture as either a rich basis of heritage for promoting gender equality, or alternately, the crux of the problem of postwar gender violence (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012). Both the positive and negative essentialised views of 'tradition' stifle a productive national conversation around addressing gender violence, especially if one agrees with the anthropologists' assessment that both liberal governance and traditional authorities provide an insufficient response for Liberian citizens facing gender violence. Although the field of anthropology has arguably moved on from primitivist depictions of 'exotic' and inscrutable societies, Goggin (2011) contends that human rights law and activism have retained essentialist fantasies of non-Western societies. My research demonstrates additional tensions created by the prevalence of 'state primacy' in advocacy campaigns, in that both informal and traditional mechanisms for addressing gender violence are either denigrated by or co-opted within the liberal institutional framework.

Moving from the content of institutionalised gender discourses to the structures that influence them, Fuest compellingly points out some emergent dilemmas in state engagement of traditional Sande and Poro authorities in peacebuilding and gender violence:

> *'Agencies with a narrow, functionalist perception of the virtues of traditional rulers may unwittingly be supporting the reconstitution of an oppressive system… the leaders of the secret societies are riding on the ticket of the international ideology that regards traditional institutions as important factors in processes of reconciliation and reintegration'* (2010:28).

As Chapter Eight will describe, this plays out in complex ways as anti-FGM activists are kidnapped, threatened, and exiled by traditional leaders in response to the 'zero tolerance' approach of donor organisations, and as the National Traditional Council appears to undergo patriarchal consolidation reminiscent of other countries' former colonial experiences. Earlier, this thesis raised the question of whether it is possible to 'disagree in solidarity' with such marginalised groups/individuals, drawing methodological lessons for interpreting individual perspectives of Liberian interviewees. All of these areas of discussion contain a strong element of 'rights' versus 'culture', a dichotomy that must be addressed regardless of the conceptual instability of both 'rights' and 'culture'.

Benhabib perfectly articulates the above dilemmas, recasting them in the transnational and hybrid realities of the twenty-first century:

> '*The so-called contradiction between human rights and national sovereignty needs to be reconceptualized today as the inherently conflictual aspects of reflexive collective identity formation in complex and increasingly multicultural and multinational democracies'* (Benhabib, 2002:560).

For women and girls facing gendered violence ranging from the structural to the sexual to the epistemic, it is not only 'identity formation' at stake, but bare survival.

This chapter opened with the spectre of J.J. Walters' Princess Guanya Pau choosing death over the inequities of her status as a native girl. Princess Guanya Pau is not only a motif but a metaphor for this dissertation's encounters with gendered liberal imperialism. As she attempts to escape forced marriage, trapped in the middle of a dangerous river as her captors close in on her, I ask, is there a better solution than suicide for the runaway princess? In the 19th century, a typical response might be that colonial 'trusteeship' would protect her by introducing 'enlightened' laws and education. J.J. Walters pressed Americans for charitable donations for just such an outcome. However appealing the humanitarian moral imperative might seem to some, international feminists today recognise that the colonial rescue mission would appear to safeguard her physical person, but at the cost of obliterating her personhood. If it is agreed that Princess Guanya Pau deserves better than the duplicitous salvation offered by liberal imperialism, what might that better solution be?

The following section will identify three arenas of response that attempt to resist the colonial/imperial aspects of liberal theory. The first is improved liberal ideals as advanced by scholars such as Appiah, (2001), Nussbaum (1999, 2000), and Sen (1999, 2009). The second, is nativist essentialism ('strategic' or otherwise), which seeks alterity from those Western/universalist structures altogether. The third proposes postmodern/poststructuralist 'freedoms' from the margins, as writers such as hooks, Spivak, and Appiah have multifariously discussed.

*Improved liberal humanitarian theory and institutions*

One response is better liberalism. Numerous scholars recognise the colonial legacy of liberal humanitarianism and advance improvements especially regarding questions of identity and difference. Nussbaum and Sen's capabilities approach is a prime example of one such response, that addresses both theoretical questions and institutional responses (Nussbaum, 1999, 2000; Sen, 1999). Sen's *Idea of Justice* goes much further into the archetypal questions of liberal humanitarian thought. Among other arguments, *Idea of Justice* makes a case for the possibilities of pluralistic manifestations of a universal 'good', illustrating this point with non-Western historical examples of human rights initiatives, such as the *Manusmrti* legal scriptures (Sen, 2009).

Regarding the non-European origins of liberal humanitarian thought, several Aboriginal Studies scholars make the less widely-known argument that European human rights frameworks were influenced by encounters with Cherokee and Iroquois representation structures, ones that were radically egalitarian – and radically inclusive of women – relative to Europe at the time (Saul, 2008; A. Smith, 2005; Wright, 1992). This perspective deserves much more exploration in mainstream academic literature. However, that eurocentric liberal ideals are less 'euro' than popularly acknowledged does not resolve the question of universalist versus difference-based concepts of rights. Nor does it resolve the aforementioned ways in which humanitarian ideals have been deployed in service of colonisation.

Without attempting to cover exhaustively the rich debates surrounding this literature on improved liberal humanitarian notions of justice and their manifestations in international development and gender equality, one obvious

response is noted here. That is the question of whether 'difference is domesticated' via such approaches (Hyndman, 1998:244). As one 'subject and object of multiculturalism' puts it: 'the real trial of liberalism... comes not when the Enlightenment subject arrives in the (post)colony and is confronted by the native woman. It comes when this woman reappears, unexpected, to dine at the Faculty club' (Tejani, 2004:337). Perhaps, Sen's presentation of non-Western possibilities of universalist justice is overly convenient, applying a liberal lens and selecting whatever examples can be seen through it, or interpreting them on exclusively liberal terms. Earlier, Fuest noted a similarly glib optimism in liberal institutions that count on 'elders' and traditional authorities to engage in peacebuilding in Liberia (2012). The charge that liberals believe 'all good things go together' comes to mind (Paris, 2004:176).

Applied to the Princess Guanya Pau quandary, improved liberal humanitarianism might take the form of a liberal institutional response that guaranteed her, and her multi-layered and shifting cultural identity and values, due representation in the power structure to which she turns for justice. The lingering question of this approach is whether it truly centres her subjectivity, capabilities, and desires within this framework, or merely offers paternalistic protection within a pre-configured sexual and social contract.

*Nativist essentialism/autochthony discourses/authenticité*

Another approach is to reject such universalising conceptions entirely and invoke locally meaningful 'collective identity formations' (Benhabib 2002). This thesis uses the term 'nativist essentialism' as a categorical label for a range of related concepts: authenticité, 'autochthony discourses' (Dunn, 2009), 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak, 1999), 'nativism' (Appiah, 2002), indigenous

renaissance, African renaissance, or what might be called in Liberian English 'country ways'. In Princess Guanya Pau's case, this might mean a number of different responses rooted in essentialised identity and belonging; from harking back to an idyllic past in which indigenous mechanisms for justice were ostensibly functioning, to defending the customary status quo such as it is, including its 'incredibly contradictory' nature (L. T. Smith, 1999:34), to transforming old systems or claiming new 'traditions' outright (Odhiambo-Abuya, 2005).

The literature in sympathy of many of these movements is graciously self-critical. Mbembe (2007:47) reminds us that 'the customs and traditions to which [nativists] claim to adhere were often invented not by the actual autochtones, but by missionaries and settlers'. Likewise, Appiah, after describing the appeal of the pre-colonial past, states that 'we need to transcend the banalities of nativism…the point to be borne in mind here is not that ideologies, like cultures, exist antagonistically, but that they *only* exist antagonistically; domination and resistance are a large part of what they are for' (Appiah, 1992:71). Several African feminists point out that women are often relegated to a subordinate position by claims of cultural sanctity (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994).

These critiques should be taken seriously for the Liberia case study, where many appeals to the wisdom of traditional ways have not had an emancipatory effect. 1980 coup leader Samuel K. Doe invoked this kind of authenticité to justify divisive and violent political strategies, with ethnic violence consequences that many consider tragic (Moran, 2006). In the postwar period too, these 'autochthonous' sites have not always been sites of belonging, but also of authority and control (Fuest, 2008, 2010). This is not to make an evaluative

statement on whether nativist essentialism is an appropriate response, but simply to note some of the inevitable concerns.

*The margins as a space of radical openness*

A third approach is to dismiss the constructivist confines of all the above, and to embrace a poststructuralist and radical epistemic freedom. Appiah identifies the possibilities of postmodern creativity to liberate the (African) subject from the confines of both 'nativism' and eurocentrism. He points out that the Yoruba statue '*Man with a Bicycle* is produced by someone who does not care that the bicycle is the white man's invention' (Appiah, 1991:357). Both Kenzo and hooks, quoted below, similarly envision an epistemic freedom for individuals and populations marginalised by colonial and structural violence.

> *'It is beneficial to think about Africa in terms of postmodernism because postmodernism clears free space at the margins of Enlightenment reason where true alterity can be sought and expressed'* (Kenzo, 2002:323)

> *'I am not trying to romantically re-inscribe the notion of that space of marginality where the oppressed live apart from their oppressors as "pure". I want to say that these margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance'* (hooks, 1989:202)

Even for those who support the stability of 'grand narratives' like patriarchy, imperialism, and colonialism, those marginalised from them or in interstitial spaces may be in a position to 'choose the margins as a space of radical openness' (hooks, 1989). Episodes of female marginalisation leading to female political autonomy in colonial West Africa could be listed in support of this possibility, or alternately as the righteous response of the aggrieved 'native' acting in a spirit of authenticité (Andrade, 2002; Okonjo, 1976; Ritzenthaler, 1960; van Allen, 1972).

The three avenues, configured here as potential 'alternate endings' to the story of Princess Guanya Pau, were introduced briefly but not explored in fuller detail. It would be a worthwhile task for a future study to present the 'alternate endings' with the richness of detail they arguably deserve; for the sake of brevity however, this chapter simply identifies them as possible resolutions to dilemmas of liberal imperialism. Later chapters will connect original findings from fieldwork to these approaches; for example, the postconflict apparatus of liberal institutions produces discourses that connect to liberal humanitarianism and its discontents (as Chapter Five will show), and traditional societies frequently use the framework of nativist essentialism to address gender violence but also to defend marital rape and FGC/M (Chapter Seven). Connecting onwards, interview data in Chapter Six will show instances where essentialised indigenous identities have been (arguably) both necessary and successful in addressing gender violence in the postwar era. Non-elite individual Liberians draw upon liberal human rights, contested 'country' pride, as well as fluid and arguably poststructuralist expressions of personal agency in their interviews. The three 'alternate endings' are therefore not always separate and distinct. Likewise, liberal institutions leverage and influence custom to advance their own agenda, traditional authorities collude with liberal institutions for various ends, and individual Monrovians draw upon international 'donor discourses', traditional 'country' pride, and settler tropes in their discussions of and engagement with gender violence.

Refocusing on the primary point, the division and mutual alienation between a 'discourse of rights' and a 'discourse of culture', as a consequence of colonial rule in West Africa and elsewhere (Mamdani, 1996), has persisted in

contemporary gender and development dilemmas. Rich theoretical engagement with the origins of liberal humanitarian theory, social contract and sexual contract, and the liberal facilitation of imperialism and settler colonialism is, I contend, a theoretical framework of primary importance for examining charitable interventions in both the 19th century and more recently. Importantly, this chapter synthesised critical approaches to gender/development and gender/colonisation with more gender-absent political theory in order to demonstrate the centrality of gender relations as an embedded social construct within imperial and colonial projects, whether they be liberal or illiberal.

An obvious question that emerges from this chapter's focus on liberal imperialism as a global phenomenon with relevance to the 'generic' colonial experience of the African continent, is how this applies to the particularities of Liberian colonisation given Liberia's specificity in colonial history. In the following chapter there are several points of engagement with Liberian historical and historiographical debates, including an argument for how Liberia's anomalies can be considered in light of the transnational trends of liberal imperialism discussed in this chapter.

# CHAPTER FOUR
# 'LIBERIA IS AN IDEA': LIBERAL IMPERIALISM, GENDER, AND LIBERIAN STATE FORMATION

## Introducing Matilda Newport

Matilda Newport Day honours a Liberan settler renowned for her pivotal role in an 1822 battle between settlers and natives in present-day Monrovia. Newport was renowned for firing a cannon at belligerent natives, rescuing the early colony from destruction. In contrast to the sturdy concrete statue in her honour in central Monrovia, the factual basis of the Matilda Newport story is flimsy and fleeting, her role in 'defending' the colony unsubstantiated by records. Primary sources from 1822 make only a passing mention of an anonymous woman participating in the conflict, and it is unclear whether firing the cannon brought any tactical advantage (American Colonization Society, 1827). Absent from any official discourse is the evidence that Newport actually destroyed the settlers' own warehouse (Wilkeson, 1839).[1] Perhaps more important than the 'facts' supporting Newport's legendary deed are the public perceptions about what, and whom, the story represents. In a memoir, Americo-Liberian writer Helene Cooper recounts her feelings of guilt and ambivalence from celebrating this divisive national holiday as a child. In the postwar era, Newport's monument still stands although the holiday was abolished in the 1980s under the military rule of Samuel K. Doe (Cooper, 2008). Like so many episodes of Liberian history, the narrative of Matilda Newport can be considered more a social fact than a canonical one, and its contemporary significance a comment on both the present and the past. As one proponent of national unification put it: 'we must

[1] 'By some accident in discharging the cannon, fire was communicated to the store house of the colony, and most of the provisions, ammunition and utensils were destroyed' (Wilkeson, 1839:7).

remember that Liberia is more than just a little country in Africa. Liberia is an idea' (Smith, 1964:26).

This chapter examines both the history and historiography of successive periods of Liberian state formation. This chapter does not relate a chronological set of events constituting 'Liberian history', but instead brings up several topics and debates necessary for understanding the substantive chapters to follow.[2] In this manner, I situate my findings within historical and historiographical debates, rather than offering a comprehensive exposition of Liberian historical events over the long term.

The chapter begins with an overview on the interconnected utopic (liberal humanitarian) and dystopic (colonial) aspects of Liberia's early settlement history led by the American Colonization Society (ACS). The section will demonstrate that the contradictions embedded in the founding mission contributed to the particular pressures placed upon, and the consequent narratives of, Americo-Liberian settler society. Consequently, it will be shown that liberal imperialism was foundational to the creation of Liberia and successive stages of state formation, and a forerunner of the 'modern' humanitarian eras to come.

While the 'grand narrative' of liberal imperialism is relevant to understanding state formation in liberia, certain dynamics particular to the Liberian case study deserve recognition. The intersections of race, ethnolinguistic membership, and gender are especially informative. In Liberia, there was neither vast geographical distance nor obvious racial distinction separating the

[2] For a comprehensive, continuous exposition of Liberian political history, which requires more than one chapter or even thesis to accomplish, readers should refer to Liebenow, (1969, 1987), Moran (2006), or Sawyer (1992).

indigenous from the colonisers. I argue that Liberia's settler population found themselves constrained between the pressures of empire and the exigencies of colony, and as such, they were both victims and perpetrators of the colonial cleavages that persist in the country today, and that continue to influence gender politics. Turning to settler-indigenous relations, this chapter takes a position on the opposing historical characterisations of 'black apartheid' versus 'mutual assimilation of elites' in Liberian colonisation. It pays due attention to the 'mutual assimilation' standpoint while emphasising the *elite*, and male elite, nature of that collusion. 'Mutual assimilation' is thus recast as 'patriarchal collusion', with particular consequences for female indigenous leadership structures and their relation to the state, which I argue was one of relative neglect and/or autonomy. The marginal, interstitial space this created for traditional female leaders allowed the more stratified and hierarchical Sande leaders to maintain their customary authority over social life, which I classify as a unique governmentality based on a 'monopoly on violence against women'.

These gendered episodes of state formation are reflected in the postwar decade, in the processes and outcomes of liberal-humanitarian gender violence narratives, and politically charged interactions over these narratives between traditional authorities, liberal governance, and the common Liberian citizen/subject. The final point this chapter contributes to Liberian historiography is conveyed in integrating interview and written data that shows how the symbolic politics of the past persist in public dialogue and expression in the current era. Altogether, this chapter builds upon the existing literature while adapting to the silences and the subalternities that continue to defy a rich, data-grounded gendered colonial history of Liberia.

## Liberal imperialism and the utopic dystopia of early Liberia

*The creation of the ACS and initial state formation*

Any researcher who ponders the potential of charitable benevolence to lead to harm should consider the schism between the utopic vision and dystopic reality of the American Colonization Society (ACS). The concept of Liberia as a homeland for 'freed' African-American slaves was developed and promoted by the ACS, which was founded in 1816 and operated as a private charity with close links to the US government (Younger, 2008). The ACS investigated the possibility of a 'homeland' in regions as disparate as Haiti and Nova Scotia, before deciding upon Cape Mesurado on the West African coast, now present-day Monrovia (American Colonization Society, 1826). The Slave Trade Act of 1819 authorised President James Monroe to provide federal financial support for the initial purchase at Providence Island, although the colony was not officially a government mandate (Younger 2000:427). In 1821, two representatives arranged the purchase of land in what is now Monrovia, from an alliance of chiefs and kings. Approximately 40 families embarked from Philedelphia accompanied by a US naval escort. They waited at Freetown while the agents confirmed the purchase with a panel of chiefs headed by 'King Peter', in a tense and possibly violent encounter that resulted in a signed contract of purchase (Alexander, 1846; Dorsey, 2000).

This first moment of Liberian history has been debated ever since. ACS records and popular fiction reiterate that the purchase was agreed upon by all parties (American Colonization Society, 1826; Azikiwe, 1932; Henries, 1971; Hodgkin, 1833; Wilkeson, 1839). Critics argue that the purchase was forced, and

that upon arrival the settlers were aggressive towards neighbouring groups (Akpan, 1973a; Garrison, 1832; E. Smith, 1833; Stuart, 1833). This story is well known to the general public in the postwar era, and one's personal stance often an indicator of the speaker's broader views on the legitimacy of the early settlement. The more critical tale was recounted, with feeling, to my host family and myself by Mr. Lamie, a tour guide at the Museum of Liberia in Monrovia, and a man of Gola lineage (personal communication, September 2012). Later accounts of land acquisition are likewise contested and continue to be debated in the postwar era (De Lynden, 1947; Holsoe, 1971). Illustrating this, a recent newspaper editorial proclaimed:

> *"How this fraudulent land grab got started? Based on...the cotton plantations of antebellum south of America, Blacks were property of slave masters. So went the great scheme...to have them remove from the United States; the first thing they thought of was to replicate the system of land ownership in the antebellum south."* (Nyanseor, 2014).[3]

Official national narratives tend not to agree with Nyanseor's perspective above, and view the creation of Liberia as an antidote to the unfreedoms of slavery, not a continuation of them. For example the names 'Liberia' and 'Monrovia' were elected unanimously at a February 1824 meeting of the ACS. The name Liberia 'denotes a settlement of persons made free', and Monrovia in honour of US President James Monroe (Alexander 1846:232). Some Liberians today refer to their country as "L.I.B., land of the free", occasionally following this title with an ironic statement such as "where nothing is free".

Supporters of the colonisation project frequently invoked justifications for the scheme based on liberal ideals. They believed it would bring enlightenment,

[3] The grammar in this statement is not in error; the style of writing is influenced by Liberian English.

industry, and aid the abolishment of the slave trade in West Africa (Azikiwe, 1932; Innes, 1833; Nisbet, 1851). One supporter wrote: 'Perhaps no colony has ever existed where so much that is calculated to render society respectable and happy, was to be found. An undoubted right to a territory of considerable extent has been secured, by fair purchase, from the native kings and chiefs.' (Alexander, 1846:6). By contrast, Rev. C. Stuart, in a public speech, denounced the project's comfortable relationship with slavers, its racist motivations, and coercive means of promoting settlement. He concluded his polemic with the words 'let us ask, what is *good* in the American Colonization Society, and what is *evil*? 1st. What is good. In its *principles, nothing*...its principles are altogether evil.' (Stuart, 1833, 22). Editorials from the early 19th century reveal not just controversy but polarisation in public debates.

The American Colonization Society garnered criticism in direct proportion to the intersectional privileges of pre-civil war US society. White men, whether abolitionists, apologists, or defenders of slavery, comprised the predominant supporters of the project. Black men, white women, and black women were in that order more dubious about the emancipatory value of the project (Dorsey 2000), although all these demographics housed support for the project in some form or another (Alexander, 1846; Lynch, 1965; Taketani, 2002; Temperley, 2000). Some suggest that the ACS received more enthusiastic support from men because of its masculinist nature, and related to this gender division in colonisationists was the gendered depiction of the African continent in terms of male conquest of the 'fertile' female body (Dorsey, 2000).

Abolitionists in the US questioned whether Liberia was truly an emancipatory project, or rather a means for white supremacists to dispose of

people they were unwilling to live alongside as equal citizens. Radical abolitionists were more likely to oppose the colony than were gradualists. As abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison charged in a high-profile 1832 debate, 'Colonizationists gather a few leaves which the tree has cast off, and vaunt of the deed: abolitionists lay the axe at once to its roots, and put their united nerve into the steel' (Garrison 1832, 57). The few speeches and pamphlets in support of the colony written by black authors dwindled even further in response to the high mortality rates of the first several years of settlement (Dorsey, 2000). Many letters in the African Repository refer to an unclassified fever afflicting the settlers. Of the eighty-eight settlers who set sail from Philadelphia in 1820, twenty-one survived to see the year 1831 (Dorsey, 2000).

Despite these hardships, settlers continued to migrate (American Colonization Society, 1852). Approximately 4500 settlers from the US arrived in Liberia between 1820 and 1843 (Dorsey, 2000:92), and by 1900, 15,000 (Akpan, 1973a:218). Of the approximately 4,500 settlers who departed from America between 1820 and 1843, fewer than half were alive by late 1843 (Dorsey 2000:92). In the 1820s, settlers were 'freeborn' (Moran, 1990; Younger, 2008), partly due to the fact that the ACS made this a requirement – and as such, offered no sanctuary to fugitives (American Colonization Society, 1826). After the American Civil War, individuals who had formerly been born or sold into slavery arrived in higher numbers. They were joined by recaptives from intercepted slave vessels, some of whom were labelled 'Igbos' or 'Congoes' according to their lands of origin. The term 'congo' eventually became common parlance for anyone of settler origin or anyone who achieved 'civilised' status, and in some contexts, a derogatory term (Cooper, 2008).

Several other colonisation societies followed in the steps of the ACS, such as the Maryland Colonisation Society, creating other settlements along the coast. In 1841, the ACS appointed its first black settler governor, Joseph Jeffrey Roberts (Akpan, 1973b). In 1847, Liberia declared its independence as a sovereign state, (with Maryland joining later in 1856). Roberts became the first President of the independent country of Liberia. Among other factors, European imperial ambitions on the African continent increased pressure on the Liberian government to extend and strengthen its authority in the hinterland in the late 19th century (Akingbade, 1994). Unlike other African colonies, Liberia had existed as a colony and then as an independent state well before the 1884 Berlin conference took place; in fact, Liberia lost much territory to both Britain and France during the 'scramble for Africa' (Akpan, 1973a).

Studies of liberal imperialism frequently focus on the British Empire and especially the British Raj (Mehta, 1999; Tunick, 2006; Watts, 2001), the late 19th century conquest of Africa (Arendt, 1948; Mamdani, 1996), theoretical origins of liberalism (Jahn, 2005a, 2005b, 2009), or indeed contemporary humanitarian and development operations (Chris Cramer, 2006; Duffield, 2001, 2007; Paris, 2004). Liberia is often overlooked or mentioned only briefly in such accounts (see for example Duffield, 2007; Mamdani, 1996), yet the liberal and colonial features of its early settlement history deserves a more detailed examination through the framework of liberal imperialism.

The discourses found in the early ACS records correspond with the early humanitarian narratives of the era. The visceral anti-slavery narratives of abolitionists, and the production of lurid and sensational advocacy materials exposing the horrors of the slave trade for the 'humanitarian spectator' (Hunt,

2008), prompted a normative shift from a marginalised issue to a mainstream concern in Europe and North America (Hochschild, 2005). It was during this era of normative adjustment that the ACS and the early settlers defined their identity and mission, and their multivariate relationships with indigenous societies. Consequently, the early ACS records contain ubiquitous statements decrying slavery and its 'evils' (American Colonization Society, 1827, 1828, 1831, 1832). By repetitively defending itself against accusations that it takes a permissive stance towards slave-owners, the ACS record illustrates the ascendancy of the anti-slavery viewpoint, whether or not one finds the official discourse of anti-slavery convincing.

The abolitionist standpoint was also convenient for justifying the colonisation of West Africa because it was argued that doing so would put an end to the supply side of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, while expanding opportunities for legitimate trade and agricultural production to take place. As Duffield notes, this counternarrative supports imperialism on the African continent. Magaziner similarly observes that 'colonial discourse defined slavery as a superlative "evil," and thus opened a space in which colonialism could operate. By pointing to the specter of slavery, colonizers earned tacit consent for their more ambiguous projects' (Magaziner 2007, 177). Therefore, in addition to the context of slavery, the first decades of Liberian settlement took place during an period of incipient global humanitarianism (Reid-Henry, 2013). It is not merely that there were morally benign justifications for an act of colonisation largely driven by racial segregationists, but that this actually promoted a permissive stance towards African colonisation by juxtaposing it against the 'superlative evils' of slavery. In

Liberia's first decades, liberal humanitarianism formed not only the superstructure of colonisation but the structure itself.

For these reasons, the case study of Liberian colonisation emerges into sharper focus under the liberal/imperial theoretical lens, a point to be expanded with reference to Arendt later on. The unique positionality this created for settlers is described below.

*Between colony and empire: pressures on Americo-Liberian settlers*

Americo-Liberian norms of 'civilisation' originate from pressures on the settlers dating back to pre-civil war United States. The ACS records provide ample material for guaging the prevailing opinions at the time. Their combination of technical and 'scientific' reports, personal reflections and memoirs, and political diatribes combine into a riveting institutional narrative. A typical example is shown in this report declaring the success of the project:

> *'An immense accession of influence and of territory has been secured; and the foundations of moral and civil liberty, and of a mild and efficient system of government and laws, are beginning to be fortified by the affections and answerable habits of a* free, obedient, and improving people'. ('Update from Liberia', African Repository, 1827:72. Emphasis added).

This update summarises the contradictory position of the settlers. As objectified representatives of the abstract notion of 'freedom' after slavery, their 'accession of influence and territory' is heralded as a positive development for Africa by spreading 'moral and civil liberty'. Yet their subordination in relation to white colonisationists, who are the presumed readers, is conveyed by the terms 'obedient' and 'improving'. In that same volume, an essay entitled 'Degraded Character of the Colored Population' depicts free people of colour in the northern US states as a threat to the public order due to their criminal

tendencies, 'ignorance', and 'vice'. Colonisation was a strategy for the prevention of these perceived vices (Sullivan, 1982). Dorsey, (2000:85) refers to this as the 'motif of miraculous transformation' by which people of colour who were irredeemably threatening to white society in America became 'enlightened American Negroes' the moment they disembarked from ships carring them 'back' to Africa.

Partly in response to these racist/racialised perceptions, an 'enlightened' liberal counternarrative emerged. Reacting to depictions of African Americans as violent, licentious, idle, and having criminal tendencies (Allen, 2004; Willis & Krauthamer, 2013), the counternarrative emphasised their potential to pacify and educate the indigenous population, and to abolish slavery and create legitimate trade (Laidlaw, 2012). Juxtaposed against the outright racism from some interest groups' support for the colony in Africa, the ostensibly enlightened narrative was itself imbued with racist and paternalistic messages towards both the settlers and the indigenous population.

Fett, in her reading of physician and journalist reports, compares the transportation of recaptives to the 'middle passage'. It is worth quoting the following lines in their entirety, both for the valuable summary of textual analyis and also the findings attained:

> *'First, journalistic coverage, although soaked in heavily racialised ethnographic commentary, offers eye-witness glimpses of conditions aboard the seized slave ships and in the camps. Second, physician diaries and medical reports, though also imbued with white assumptions about African inferiority, provide valuable accounts of daily life and death on the passage to Liberia. Taken together and read against their grain, these sources reveal both the coercive dimensions of this middle passage and the severely limited notion of liberty accorded to liberated Africans.'* (Fett 2010, 78)

Fett clarifies that Americo-Liberians and recaptives were agents of their own fortune, not passive pawns in a game of white supremacy. Corroborating

this, a study of visual representations of former slaves also speaks to their agency and aspirations (Willis & Krauthamer, 2013). Yet the structural constraints placed on their physical, political, and economic survival should not be overlooked.

These 'severely limited notions of liberty' pressured the identity formation of Americo-Liberian settler society. In the formative decades of Liberian society there was intense scrutiny upon Americo-Liberians to vindicate themselves as civilised, and a self-awareness of being considered the sole example of black self-rule on the continent (Liebenow, 1969; Olukoju, 2006). Examples of 'civilised' performance included a formal western dress code for both men and women, western schooling, and Christianity (Brown, 2008; Moran, 1988; Temperley, 2000). This impacted Americo-Liberian society directly, as well as relations with the indigenous population.

There are two general positions that scholars and everyday Liberians take on the relations between settlers and indigenous Liberians; the 'black colonialism' position (Akingbade, 1994; Akpan, 1973a; Gershoni, 1985), and the 'mutual assimilation of elites' (Ellis, 1999, 2010; Tonkin, 2002). 'Black colonialism' emphasises the political and social hierarchies established by Americo-Liberian elites and the argued lack of consent from indigenous Liberians. Alternately, 'mutual assimilation' highlights the involvement of traditional leaders in state government, the porosity of 'civilised' status, and agency on the part of indigenous individuals and groups. Indigenous people within the colonised territory were classified as 'aliens', first tacitly, and later formally. As Temperly explains:

> *'This had effectively been the view from the first but it was given official status by an Act of 1841 which provided that in the case of Africans citizenship was conditional on*

> *three 'creditable and disinterested persons' being prepared to swear that they had, over a three-year period, 'abandoned all the forms, customs and superstitions of heathenism ... and conformed to the forms, customs and habits of civilized life'.'* (Temperly 2000; 82)

Akpan (1973a, 1973b) hypothesises that it is because there was no obvious racial distinction between settlers and natives that Americo-Liberians performed European norms of clothing and style, and emphasised this mark of settler superiority. This may certainly have contributed to the degree to which fashion became politicised throughout Liberian society and politics. However, in order for settlers to embrace behaviours that distinguished themselves from natives, racially or otherwise, there had to be a prior motivation to enact that notion of superiority, and pre-established norms of what superiority meant. Therefore, this point should be interpreted in awareness of the relatively unique colonial pressure to 'vindicate' the viability of black self-governance, and black cultural 'enlightenment' itself (Sawyer, 1992).

An earlier section highlighted external, structural pressures upon on Americo-Liberian norms of 'civilisation'. In contrast, one colleague in Monrovia opined that the Americo-Liberian settlers inherently detested indigenous Liberians on the grounds that "they were the ones who sold them into slavery" (personal communication, 2009). Several authors and poets in the Critical Thinking writing collective (of which the above informant is a member) have discussed this point in recent years, as a compilation of their works demonstrate (Weah & Aidoo, 2011). These writers appear to see this as a defining feature of Americo-Liberian antagonism versus the indigenous population. However, in the archival material covered by this study, this discourse was not noticeable. To draw from another participant observation, I heard a palaverous stranger in a

crowded shared car in 2008 announce to his cabmates that "the 'congoes' were slaves, and they brought their slave mentality to this country", in a vehement tirade against the 'congoes' that culminated in a call for their extermination by certain rebel groups.

Both my erudite colleague, and the non-elite and possibly unstable man in the shared car were indicating that the consequences of the trans-Atlantic slave trade still register on the hearts and minds of today's Liberian citizen. Resolving conflicted historical views on 'country' status, and its implications for national unity, is a theme that repeatedly appears in Liberian fiction (Gay, 1973; Mastey, 2012; Taketani, 2002; Weah & Aidoo, 2011). These encounters can be interpreted not necessarily as 'proof' of the origins of settler-native antagonism, which is dubious, but rather as evidence of how the settler history lives and breathes in the collective, contested opinions of modern-day Monrovians.

Unity and reconciliation narratives have thrived as well in the wake of 'disintegration conflict' (Large, 1997) and recovery. For example, a small 'RnB' band expressed in a song both the dreams and the shortcomings of the past, and their wish to move on from the grasp of that residual history:

> *"We be going back to Christopolis/*
> *to the dreams of our forefathers/*
> *where they saw a land full of milk and honey.*
> *Liberians! It's now time to usher in a brand new/*
> *a sweet/*
> *Liberia. Are you ready? Let's do this"* (B Block Boys, 2008)

The relatively intimate matters of clothing, music, aspiration, inclusion, and alienation are not isolated within their local interactions. Rather, they connect to larger-scale processes with both temporal and geographical continuities. To whatever extent Americo-Liberian settlement proceeded

hegemonically – and this is a point of dispute – its outcomes were not simply the aggregate decisions of a group of settlers, but also of the trans-Atlantic, post-slavery, and rapidly globalising world that enabled their subjection to the social experiment that was early Liberia.

It is counterintuitive to apply a concept of imperialism based in late 19th century European overseas rule to Liberia, a country founded for 'freed' American slaves in the early 19th century, for whom the holocaust began centuries earlier than Arendt's own, with the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Arendt is applicable in that her work discusses the new world order under formation during the decades of Liberian territorial consolidation, which subsequently helps to explain the corresponding identity positions such as 'civilised', 'bush', 'educated', 'traditional', which persist in gender violence discourses today.

A caveat: numerous accounts demonstrate that for the coastal indigenous groups, there was ample pre-colonial discovery of European languages, trade, and cultural currency prior to the arrival of settlers. Few Africanists would dispute this assessment. For example, Tonkin states that 'civilisation arrived in Liberia before the settlers' as far as the ethnolinguistic groups of the southeast are concerned (Moran, 1990:41). There is evidence that some Kru and Grebo groups had developed – on their own terms – a vernacular concept of 'civilised' based on language, dress, and housing prior to the creation of Liberia (Moran, 2006; Tonkin, 2002). Correspondingly, some early colonial travel memoirs refer to the Kru (or 'Kroomen') as 'semi-civilised' due to their economic system being structured around trade, fishing, and migrant labour rather than slavery (Magaziner, 2007; Rankin, 1836). Nevertheless, for some ethnolinguistic groups to have prior interaction with concepts of 'civilisation' and 'education' is a

different matter than those concepts operating in support of cultural hierarchies and political dominance. The ability of indigenous Liberians to 'become' civilised has at times been listed as evidence of the relative inclusivity of Americo-Liberian society. Others note that it was by constructing aspirational identities into settler-native hierarchies that these hierarchies were able to persist for so long, evading communal retribution that might have taken place had these categories been more exclusive (Akpan, 1973a; Moran, 1990).

While the identity construction of 'civilised' emerged from historical conditions specific to Liberia's founding, there are similarities elsewhere. 'Civilised' resembles aspirational identies in other African colonies, such as the *evolués* of francophone African colonies and the *been-to's* of Nigeria and Ghana (Fanon, 1965). Colonial insult is hardly a Liberian specialty; what, then, is exceptional about the 'Lone Star' nation? It is not simply that Liberia was colonised by an oppressed minority population, as is the case with many colonial migrations around the world. I suggest that structural conditions trapped black settlers between colony and empire, and suppressed their discursive autonomy in realising the utopic vision of the 'land of the free', a vision that was intrinsically imperial in spirit.

For the above reasons, a close comparison to Arendtian imperialism is apparent despite the unique features of Liberian politics. If superfluous capital propelled overseas expansion in much of Africa, superfluous people propelled the colonisation of Liberia. Duffield observes this connection: 'in conditions where slavery was the norm, freed slaves had an excess of freedom; they were effectively politically superfluous' (Duffield, 2007:14). Arendt calls such populations 'human debris', contending that geographical distance as well as 'race-thinking'

facilitated the imperial divide in standards as well as the alienation of 'superfluous' populations (Arendt, 1948). In Arendt's account, imperialist expansion prompted the rise of nationalism that produced, disenfranchised, and victimised stateless populations. In Liberia, the story is told out of order: a never-enfranchised and effectively stateless population of victims produced settler colonialism, and then nationhood, in order to rise. This is not, as Mamdani warns, to 'present choice as necessity' (2001:196), but to recognise conditions of slavery and liberal empire through which enslaved African/American victims became Americo-Liberian colonisers.

*Other stages of state formation*

The above section connected the initial stage of Liberian state formation to liberal imperialism and settler colonialism; these dynamics evolved into different forms of post/colonial governance in later stages; namely, the integration of the hinterland in the early 20th century, and the Unification Policy of the middle of that century. These periods reflect different modes of colonisation that connect in respective ways to the global formations of liberal imperalism evolving at the time. The early settlement was fundamentally a project of 'liberal imperalism', one that fits into a context of, or an anticipation of, globalised humanitarianism. The early 20th century territorial consolidation campaigns in the hinterland show greater resemblance to European styles of colonial rule, namely, indirect rule or 'decentralised despotism' (Mamdani, 1996:18). In turn, President Tubman's attempts at national unification speak, I argue, to the 'domestication of difference' in the name of human rights and national coherence. These periods suggest both continuities as well as ruptures to the liberal imperialism underpinning much of Liberian state formation, leading

up to and including the postconflict decade 2003-2013. This section will briefly summarise the salient features of these periods. Then, in order to explain the settler/native relationality created by these successive periods of formation and transformation, this chapter will divert into a detailed discussion of indigenous prestige structures and traditional authority, and how it is gendered.

The consolidation of Liberian state rule over its inland regions is primarily credited to the presidency of Arthur Barclay, who served from 1904-1912.[4] This was achieved by a variety of means of indirect rule,[5] including restructuring districts and appointing chiefs, and establishing the Liberian Frontier Force (LFF) in 1908 with the stated purpose to reduce Americo-Liberian militia violence and effectively police the interior (Akingbade, 1994). The LFF itself committed acts of looting, sexual violence, and other atrocities with impunity, despite prototypical efforts at security sector reform sponsored by the US Government (Akingbade, 1994; Clegg, 1996; Pham, 2009). These campaigns provoked a wave of indigenous resistance, the gendered subalternities of which echo like an empty cavern to the researcher who attempts to include audible silences. Several unsuccessful rebellions broke out in the following two decades, including among the Kissi, Grebo, Kru, Gola, and Kpelle peoples (Akpan, 1973a; Massing, 1980).

[4] Akingbade (1994) suggests this actually began in 1898 with President Coleman.
[5] These accounts of 'decentralised despotism' recur in gendered dimensions of European colonial relations in Africa. This 'typical narrative' highlights a pattern of direct or indirect interference in gender roles through social and political restructuring. As Chapter Three detailed, this includes: patriarchal collusion with male elders and chiefs, suppressing female leadership structures, augmenting legal systems both through the superimposition of western 'liberal' court systems and through the invention of tradition in 'customary law', bringing male subjects into a wage-labour economy. Via the above mechanisms, patriarchy and imperialism are embedded and mutually reinforcing social-political-discursive structures.

It was not by military force alone that subordinated the hinterland. The restructuring of chiefdoms and the use of trade networks to undermine locally-consolidated indigenous power bases was instrumental (Griffiths, 2009; Holsoe, 1974; Wylie, 1969). The longstanding impact of this will be examined in greater detail in a later section. However, these military and political losses, and the widespread resentment towards the 1916 introduction of a Hut Tax, festered in living memory for indigenous Liberians and was a factor in President Tubman's post-WWII movement to reform settler dominance and promote national coherence.

In 1945 under President William Tubman, a constitutional amendment permitted most indigenous men the right to vote (Akpan, 1973a). Following this in 1946 was female suffrage, and in 1947, three elected representatives from each of the hinterland provinces. Tubman also created the National Executive Council of all Chiefs and Elders, which had its first meeting in 1945. In speeches, he acknowledged abuses (R. Smith, 1964; Utas, 2003). In return, the Americo-Liberian president was made 'Grand Master of the Ancient Poro Society' (R. Smith, 1964:49).

While some heralded this as a form of national reconciliation, (R. Smith, 1964), others argue that unification was not the conciliatory initiative often credited Tubman, but an extension of colonial rule by means other than force, which was becoming untenable anyways (Brown, 1982). Several sources describe both the hinterland campaigns and the unification strategy in terms of a graduate erosion of indigenous sovereignty for all ethnic groups (Akingbade, 1994; Davis, 1975; Ellis, 1999; Holsoe, 1974; Massing, 1980; Wylie, 1969). However, by most accounts this was a complex and multifaceted set of relations,

presenting both opportunities and constraints for indigenous sovereignty in Liberia. Furthermore, a consequence of indirect rule was that aside from extractive purposes, the Liberian government maintained a weak presence in the hinterland and delivered only scarce services to remote rural areas over the long durée (Stanley, 2004).

In order to understand the impact that the hinterland campaigns had on the intersecting gendered and indigenous politics, and in order to qualify this chapter's stance on the 'black colonialism' versus 'mutual assimilation' perspectives on Liberian history, this chapter must first divert into an explanation of traditional mechanisms of authority and representation. This will begin with an examination of how 19th century colonial discourses perceived indigenous African women, and then respond with an exposition of gendered power and prestige in the Mano River Region.

## Gender, resistance, and autonomous space

### *Discursive constructions of indigenous women in colonial discourse*

Recalling Chapter Three, academic narratives on colonialism and gender often follow a familiar script, in which the argued ill-treatment of native women by native men is leveraged in favour of 'enlightened' colonial intervention in the social, political, and economic structures of the indigenous society by the occupying powers. Contemporary feminist scholars analyse this narrative of racial and cultural superiority as both a cause and consequence of epistemic dimensions of colonialism.

One of the features of colonialism in Liberia that diverges from the 'generic' narratives of colonialism is the perceptions of indigenous women. To

become 'civilised', as Moran (1988) outlines it, was less a matter of rescue and more a matter of aspiration – for settlers as well as natives, and for men as well as women. Certainly, orientalising tropes of Africa abound in the early ACS records and other texts of the time. However, the women of Africa were not prominently depicted as downtrodden, oppressed at the hands of native custom, or objects of any particularly gendered pity. Rather, as Dorsey contends, Africa itself was iconic of 'the African woman'. In the ACS geographical imaginary, the continent was gendered as a desirable and mysterious fertile female body; 'Africk's sable breast' (L.H. Sigourney (1830), quoted in Taketani, (2002:484)); to be possessed by the masculinist colonial project.

Based on my own readings of the ACS archive, I concur with others' framing of slavery as a 'superlative evil' against which colonial benevolence could be favourably justaposed (Duffield, 2007; Laidlaw, 2012; Magaziner, 2007). Conveniently for colonial discourse, several indigenous ethnolinguistic groups in West Africa could be castigated for their participation in the supply-side of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Reinforcing this, the anti-slavery justification for colonisation was expedient for colonisationists who wished to position themselves as abolitionists. To extend this point established in an earlier section, I argue that such a discourse on slavery was effective enough, and invoked repetitively enough, that it made redundant the ubiquitous imperial discourse of native men's perceived ill-treatment of women. Slavery is by far the most frequent 'horror' referred to in early ACS documents. This liberal imperialist discourse was not necessarily subtextual, but often stated outright, for instance in a pamphlet entitled *A Historical Examination of the State of Society in Western Africa, as formed by Paganism and Muhammedanism, Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Piracy, and of the*

*Remedial Influence of Colonization and Missions* (Beecham, 1842). In the long list of tendencies requiring 'remedial influence', the ill-treatment of indigenous women appears not once, but slavery is counted twice. I suggest that the utility of slavery as a spectre of greater evil is why the plight of native women *vis á vis* native men does not appear prominently in the primary or secondary sources covered by this study.

Though the trans-Atlantic slave trade was thoroughly gendered and affected gender roles in West Africa and the Atlantic region (Ferme, 2001; Shaw, 2002), abolitionist literature from that era does not elaborate upon the social impact of gender violence in the slave trade and on plantations. Jacobs' (2014) plantation memoir, for example, reflects upon traumatic instances of gendered abuse but without a larger, structural discussion of gender and race that later appears in black feminist scholarship in the 20th century.[6] Sexual violence was an atrocity rather than an analytic for abolitionist literature.

Likewise, calls for education often included settlers as well as natives, and both boy and girl children as objects of sympathy (Beecham, 1842). Traveling pastor and 'colored evangelist' Mrs. Amanda Smith lamented that by 1883, there was still no high school for girls in the colony (A. Smith, 1893). The late 19th century saw more publications around promoting education, discouraging polygamy, and ordeals in the Sande and Poro 'devil bush' (Johnston, 1906). Other concerns include 'saucywood',[7] marriage practices, and a general superciliousness towards non-Christian belief systems (Laidlaw, 2012; Taketani, 2002). In this sense, the early records do not convey gender-based violence or

[6] Or, even the late 19th century if we pay due regard to the early intersectional activism of Ida B. Wells and Sojourner Truth.
[7] A form of trial by ordeal involving drinking the poisonous tea of sassywood bark, also known as 'saucywood' 'sassy-water' or 'sass-wood'.

gender inequality with the same tone of colonial imperative as discourses in other colonies around FGC/M in Kenya (Thomas, 1997), or *sati* in the British Raj (Mani, 1986; Spivak, 1988). Where these narratives appear, the examples unearthed by my archival readings seem to cluster around the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in correspondance to the rise of colonial 'concern' for native women at the height of European imperialism (for example, in travelogues by Johnston, 1906; A. Smith, 1893; Walters, 1891).

The reality on the ground was far more complicated than a travelogue could capture. As one missionary wrote in her 1896 memoir of living among the coastal Kru, 'the women exert great influence over the men…every town has its head woman…woman is not the downtrodden creature in Liberia that she is in India and many other heathen lands' (McAllister, 1896). This statement takes the 'white woman's burden' (Burton, 1990) perception of 'downtrodden' women in 'heathen' lands as the basis for comparison, indicating the prevalence of that gendered colonial narrative. Yet in doing so, it contradicts the very dominant narrative it invokes as a comparison, by indicating the customary capabilities held by some indigenous women. Unlike the missionary Agnes McAllister, the travelling pastor Mrs. Smith found women's status in West Africa to be closely analogous to India:

> *'The poor women of Africa, like those of India, have a hard time. As a rule, they have all the hard work to do. They have to cut and carry all the wood, carry all the water on their heads, and plant all the rice. The men and boys cut and burn the bush, with the help of the women; but sowing the rice, and planting the casava, the women have to do'* (A. Smith, 1893:389)

In remarkable prosody with later women-in-development narratives of African women as 'beasts of burden' (Mupotsa, 2011; Oyewumi, 2003), Mrs.

Smith 'misreads the landscape' (Fairhead & Leach, 1996) of the West African female farming belt and the set of power relations embedded therein.

*Regional variations in indigenous dual-sex representation*

While cognizant of the 'ethnographic present – which is to say, the past' (Appiah, 1992:108) that presumes indigenous societies to be permanent and unchanged over time, this section is informed by both historical and ethnographic studies. Noting the heterogeneity of Liberia's ethnolinguistic groups,[8] it is useful to distinguish between the 'acephalous' Southeastern groups such as the Kru and Grebo, whose close interactions with the settlers was constant from the initial settlement (Davis, 1975; Moran, 1990; Tonkin, 2002), and the more stratified inland groups such as the Gola and Kpelle who maintained relative distance until the hinterland campaigns and chiefdom restructuring under President Arthur Barclay (Akingbade, 1994; Holsoe, 1971, 1974; Pham, 2009). In addition to the authority held by chiefs and elders, 'secret societies' operate throughout the country but predominantly in the northern and central regions.

Acephalous groups in the southeastern region include the Grebo, the Kru, and the Krahn. Much anthropological work on the Kru along the south coast of Liberia focuses on the traditional mobilisation of sea-going laborers and the kinship and political relations arising from those production methods (Davis, 1975; Tonkin, 1980, 2004). The Kru had closer and earlier interactions with the

[8] By popular classification, Liberia has sixteen ethnolinguistic groups, which are commonly referred to as 'tribes' in Liberian English. These are, the Vai, Kpelle, Kissi, Mandingo, Mende, Krahn, Kru, Grebo, Loma, Gola, Gio, Mano, Bassa, Gbandi, Bella. This should be taken with the caveat that ethnolinguistic taxonomy is not an exact science, and that transformations to indigenous labelling have occurred, such as the reification of the 'Krahn' identity under Samuel K. Doe's leadership in the 1980s.

ACS settlers as well as other foreigners due to their geographical proximity and coastal trading (Davis, 1975), like the Grebo and Vai. Southeastern Liberia has garnered much anthropological attention to Grebo modes of gender and representation. Moran (1989) applies Okonjo's (1976) description of Igbo society's dual-sex representation to the Grebo, showing how formal traditional institutions included a women's parallel council with authority over women's matters. The head of women's council, the '*blo nyene*', which translates roughly as 'whole earth woman', (Moran 2006:42) customarily held the authority to veto violent conflict at the local level. I concur with Moran's emphasis that this was not a matriarchal, nor even equitable, system, but that it nevertheless created formal opportunities for women to represent their interests: 'These institutions do not challenge the basis for their subordination, and even serve to reinforce it, while at the same time, they give individuals and groups an opportunity to make claims which must be heard' (2006:36). Dual-sex representation enables collective action in support of women's interests, for example by conducting walk-outs which rely on women's ability to protest collectively. The separate but mutually reliant agricultural production roles for men and women give these protests leverage against male-led decision-making bodies (Moran, 1988). Collective action in this sense is based both on the close link between gender and interdependent agricultural/market production roles, but also on the relatively horizontal prestige structure of the society (Moran, 1989). For 'country' women with market influence, the adoption of aspirational 'civilised' womanhood brought conflicting impacts to their status, notably by increasing their household dependence on male earners (Moran, 1988).

Inland and Northern groups with a higher level of social stratification include the Gola, Kpelle, Kissi, Mende, Mandingo, and Loma. Here, generally speaking, labour is less oriented around interdependent dual-sex roles at the household level, but more hierarchically determined at the social level; the 'wealth in people' and its multiple bonds of belonging and obligation being key factors in the eyes of many ethnographers both prior to armed conflict and as a defining feature of armed conflict (Brown, 1982; Ferme, 2001; Hoffman, 2011; Richards, 1996, 2005). In addition to 'tribes', sodalities referred to as 'secret societies' regulate social life in much of Liberia. The most prominent are the *Poro* (male) and *Sande* (female) secret societies who primarily occupy the Northeast and share many characteristics with Sierra Leonean *bundu* or *bondo* societies. These authority structures are technically separate from chiefly and state authority, though they often overlap and have been instrumental in determining election outcomes (Bauer, 2009; Fuest, 2010).

*Sande governmentality: a 'monopoly on violence against women'*

The emergence of secret societies was fundamentally influenced by the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Shaw, 2002). In areas where trust and truth were founded upon group membership, the role of shared ordeals in creating bonds of loyalty, transmitting information, and reifying traditional authority became crucial mechanisms of social reproduction and survival (Shaw, 2002). Their role as embodied communities of secretive knowledge confers both authority on practical matters of survival, and metaphysical powers to heal and harm (Leeson & Coyne, 2012; Pajibo, 2008). Crucially, their role in educating youth through protracted periods of 'bush school', in initiating boys and girls into adulthood, and their authority in administering marriages and marital disputes, is influential

in defining their conflicted relationship with the Liberian state, and for that matter the Liberian public, regarding gender violence in the postwar era. Although they are associated with 'rural', 'remote', and 'hinterland' regions (including in most of this study's interviews), and their territorial claims are based from the 'country', Poro and Sande secret societies extend well beyond. In fact, Little (1962) argued that rural prestige structures extend into urban populations especially, if and when individuals are forced to rely more heavily on their networks as alienated newcomers to urban centres.

Moran (2006) looks beyond what she takes to be an ethnographic overfocus on Sande and Poro secrecy and occultism, in scholarship that in the mid-twentieth century offered such nuanced insights as 'secret societies have long captured the imagination of observers of exotic cultures' (Gibbs, 1962:341), and 'it is only during the last fifteen years that western-type civilization has penetrated to this region' (Harrington, 1975:1).[9] Indeed, the very ability of colonial travellers and anthropologists to publish these exotic findings illustrates the openness of certain secrets when it served the interests of zoes to collaborate (Harrington, 1975; Johnston, 1906). In contrast to exoticised and essentialised views on the Poro and Sande, Moran contends that traditional leaders including the Poro and Sande are political actors in their own right, capable of negotiation, adaptation, and accountability, but have not been recognised as such in liberal democratic statebuilding (Moran, 2006).

Numerous academics as well as non-academic 'insider'-situated writers have called attention to the state-like governmentality of Liberia's secret societies, although most focus exclusively on case studies of Poro activity:

[9] Gibbs refers to the Kpelle and Harrington refers, incorrectly, to the Mano.

> '*It may be argued that, since all power is indeed morally ambiguous in the sense that it can be used for good or evil purposes, secret societies like the Poro play a crucial role in expressing this fact while maintaining a monopoly of acts of lethal violence. A system of socially legitimated control of violence is, after all, essential to order'* (Ellis, 1995:194)

Little (1948) similarly makes a comparison between secret society's authority and its state-like functions, again focusing exclusively on the Poro.

Where do women, and female authorities, fit into this characterisation of secret societies as guarantors of the social contract? Like the dual-sex representation structures of the 'acephalous' Southeastern groups, the status of women under stratified and secretive societies is debated. In general, West African female political power appealed to Western feminist anthropologists who were marginalised by patriarchy in their home countries (Aderinto, 2012; Hunt, 1997), and Sande has commanded this kind of attention (Abrahams, 2011; Fuest, 2010). Yet, concern has mounted in the postwar period over Sande authorities' central involvement in FGC/M, in physically abusing women during labour and delivery (Azango, 2012; Bledsoe, 1976), and in opposing the criminalisation of marital rape (National Traditional Council of Liberia, 2012; Sarkar, 2013).

Bledsoe carefully describes how Sande leaders collude with Poro leaders and other male elites to control lower-status women (Bledsoe, 1984). Several anthropologists and feminists focus instead on the key role of female zoes in determining election outcomes (Fuest, 2008; Sawyer, 2008), providing state-like authority to punish offenders, and their role in defending women's interests and raising girls into women with vital survival abilities (Abrahams, 2011; Ferme, 2001). Reinforcing the case for elite cooperation:

> *'Poro leaders are ritually the "husbands" of their female agnates who, as "obedient wives," train all the women in correct deportment as wives and mothers...In this sense the Poro leaders and the leaders of Sande represent an ideal family in which all members are agnates, symbolically married to one another against all normative prescriptions for the good of the collective'* (D'Azevedo, 1962:514).

D'Azevedo describes Poro and Sande collusion in terms of a patriarchal nuclear family; in doing so, he intentionally or non-intentionally references the social contract/sexual contract approach to gender relations as they are embedded within broader political dynamics. Bledsoe (1984) notes that in addition to male and female elites maintaining control over non-elites, much of the education provided to teen girls in 'bush school' serves to reinforce their reliance on Sande elders. The below passage conveys this sense of ambivalence about female empowerment under the 'traditional' gender regime of in rural Kpelle territory:

> *'Wives produce subsistence goods and collect male clients who work in exchange for a woman's sexual and domestic services. In such arrangements, a man with many wives loans their services to wifeless men in exchange for labor and patronage. Therefore, marriage and the exchange of women form the core of political and economic strategies"* (Bledsoe, 1976:377)

The above assigns important connections to how economic life, marriage, and gender roles and identities are integrated. The article discusses in detail the role of zoes in maintaining this balance, including their power to protect interests of members by acting as arbiters of family matters such as maltreatment. As a critical aside, the description of non-elite women is completely objectifying; even descriptions of their wishes and choices are framed within a narrow functionalist framework that accords them 'spouses' and 'filial support' but not relationships with family members. I am not suggesting that research on coercive marriage or labour arrangements should be framed exclusively in feminist normative concern, nor to militate against the idea that those institutions may sanction socially constructed notions of well-being that are unfamiliar to me as an outsider. My critique is rather an observation of the

futility of 'value-neutral' ethnographic methodology since neutrality itself asserts value claims. Regardless of the perceived value of cultural relativism in overcoming ethnocentrism, the positionality of the girls and women 'ethno-graphed' above is totally absent from the account of their lives. So too is either their consent or resistance, or possibility of their consent or resistance, obliterated.

Rather than dwelling on normative evaluation of coercive practices, or a normative evaluation of certain ethnographic gazes upon them, the key point of the above paragraphs is to move towards a theoretical argument: that zoes embody a unique governmentality towards their membership by holding a monopoly on violence against women. This is anomalous compared to liberal (or proto-liberal) governmentality, which holds a 'monopoly on violence' for a given population, but under which women are typically relegated to the private sphere, with private violence occurring outside the purview of the state (MacKinnon, 1987, 2006). Where violence against women does enter the public sphere, often after sustained lobbying by feminists, it is normally framed as a perversion to be addressed by existing liberal institutions (Das, 1996). While zoes have the customary authority to beat and mutilate adolescent girls, to physically abuse women giving birth, to arrange marriages, and to enforce sexual submission towards husbands, they also have the ability to protect against extreme acts of domestic violence, to teach initiates how to charm and/or poison abusive spouses, to punish rapists, to enforce financial restitution to victims, and to facilitate mental and physical recovery. Several studies have argued that Sande and Poro societies hold state-like functions especially in regions where the liberal state provides scarce services; pursuing this further, I argue that Sande

governmentality itself meets several criteria of state authority, and that its 'monopoly on violence' is unique in its enshrinement of violence against women and girls.

### *'Mutual assimilation of elites' as patriarchal collusion*

To continue this discussion of Sande and Poro governmentality, this section will highlight the contradictions, unusual alliances, and unintended consequences of interactions between liberal and traditional governance in the settlement, consolidation, and unification periods.

Abramowitz (manuscript in production) argues that the arrival of missionary schools fundamentally changed the nature of authority by providing previously non-existent alternatives to Sande and Poro society membership. The ubiquitous assertion that the Liberian war 'weakened' traditional authority should be carefully balanced with an observation that some Liberians have been 'voting with their feet' for generations. As early as 1862, Crummel (1862) proposed integration for 'runaway boys' from the 'interior' (145), whom he perceived to be fugitives from 'Sassy-wood Ordeal' (47). Steeped in ethnocentrism, the text nevertheless may convey genuine occurrences of aggrieved 'boys' seeking alternatives to their prestige structures of origin.

Thus there was a paradoxical confluence between the Poro as seat of 'native' power, and chiefs' deployment of Poro authority (including metaphysical abilities) that strengthened indirect rule in counties (Ellis, 2001).

This chapter relies heavily on *Mask of Anarchy* and other works by Ellis because his historical framework of state-Poro collaboration informed a crucial component of this dissertation's argument about how these relations and their

continuities extend into postwar gender concerns. The book demonstrates the existence of long-term institutional engagement between Poro societies and several different stages of Liberian governance (Gifford, 2000). Yet, *Mask of Anarchy* has been critiqued by Africanists (Mkandawire, 2002; Moran, 2006) for what they view as an overly stylised and sensationalist representation of African 'tribal' tropes in its focus on the 'spiritual dimensions of the Liberian war'. These critiques focus primarily on the civil war era, and seem to be motivated in part by the critics' larger frustrations with racist depictions of 'wild' combatants inspired by Kaplan's (1994) 'the coming anarchy'.

I do not share these critiques of Ellis's work, though I agree that there is a widespread problem of such stereotypes appearing in scholarship (for example, in: Cain, 1999; Galy, 1998; Harrington, 1975). Mkandewire's attention to discourse and representation is well placed, but ultimately a normative critique that does not offer substantive empirical counterpoints from the Liberian context. *Mask of Anarchy* has been castigated for giving spiritual matters primacy in Liberian politics. Contrariwise, I concur with Ellis (2003) that the book refrains from making exaggerated claims about the role of occultism, and suggest instead that the research simply explores the metaphysical aspects of Liberian politics, which scholars with long term engagement in the country typically confront.

Despite the above defense of the book, I do hold serious reservations. My concerns with the book depart from established debates by turning the focus to gender. Despite offering possibly the most rigorous and comprehensive text on indigenous-settler relations, *Mask of Anarchy's* neglect of gender is a serious omission. Importantly, the problem with insufficiently addressing either women

or gender is not merely a matter of missing content. It can affect the form of the argument itself. In the case of much 20th century scholarship on indigenous political relations in Liberia, this includes accounts of Grebo wars that examine only male actors despite evidence that female leaders approve or veto wars, and discussions of Poro that do not acknowledge their collusion and/or competition with Sande leaders (Griffiths, 2009; Holsoe, 1974; Wylie, 1969). In fairness, it could be the case that many of these androcentric studies were constrained by lack of source material on indigenous female perspectives, as is my own work. However, the silence of indigenous women and of gender as an analytic in such historical studies is more than just an unavoidable omission, because numerous ethnographies indicate that these hierarchies are gendered (Bledsoe, 1976, 1984; Ferme, 2001; Moran, 1990; Shaw, 2002), and numerous histories of the subaltern indicate that silences are audible (Bakare-Yusuf, 1997; Butalia, 1998; Das, 1997, 2007). As such, I maintain that these omissions become an argumentation flaw where the 'mutual assimilation of elites' fails to present its obvious gendered dimension, the mutual assimilation of *male* elites based in tradition with *male* elites based in the liberal/colonial state.

In light of gendered history and ethnography, I argue the 'mutual assimilation of elites' theory should be reframed as 'patriarchal collusion', that is, (mostly) male traditional or neo-traditional elders striking bargains for political and social dominance. This was often, but not always (Hoffer, 1972), at the expense of customary rights held by indigenous women, or, the possibility of those customary rights flourishing in a more balanced way. In particular, the silence around interactions between *Sande* society and the Government of Liberia forms the basis for the upcoming analysis of postwar interactions. If the 'mutual

assimilation of elites' standpoint is interpreted in recognition that it was primarily male indigenous elites co-assimilating with male liberal state elites, there are key implications for understanding gender violence in the twenty-first century. Namely, there is a nearly two hundred year precedent of state engagement with male *Poro* society that does not exist, or does not exist to the same extent with the Sande or other female traditional leaders.

**Conclusion**

This chapter marshalled both original and secondary data to demonstrate how the 'unique' history of Liberia settler gender norms was intricately connected to the incipient rise of liberal humanitarianism associated with globalised, patriarchal, imperialism. Upcoming chapters will build further upon this foundation of unique, yet globally embedded social history. These chapters demonstrate that liberal postconflict state-building and management of gender relations, and gender violence in particular, invoke patterns of management and control, patriarchal consolidation, collusion with native elites, conflict with recalcitrant native elites, and Western patriarchal norms of domesticity that are typical of 19th century liberal imperialism. The effects of these two pivotal eras on gender norms and 'civilised' and 'bush' identity positions has been well covered in Liberian history and ethnography; the impact on gender violence specifically has gone relatively unexplored.

The subalternity of indigenous and female voices from this period, and lost archival material creates dilemmas in exploring these topics (Osborne, 2009). Aknowledging and paying attention to archival silences also became a core part of the analysis. This enabled me to identify novel patterns in colonial discourse,

such as the absence of the 'downtrodden woman' trope in early colonial literature until the approach and rise of indirect rule. Crucially, this chapter interpreted the invisibility of indigenous female political/social structures in Liberian historiography as partially due to lack of institutional engagement between them and the single-sex male governance of most of the country's past. The 'mutual assimilation of elites' hypothesis was recharacterised as a 'patriarchal collusion' under whose authority ordinary Liberians were, and continue to be, subsumed.

Post-conflict development makes questions of social contract, and the gendered social contract (Das, 1997; Pateman, 1988) more visible due to the social and political dynamism of 'reconstructing' rule of law. The 'Americo-Liberian' dominant narrative has shifted drastically over time, and the imagination of shared history has changed character, especially in response to national policy changes. Liberia was founded by a charity and nearly two centuries later, charities still contribute to core state functions. The next chapter will show how echoes of this history present themselves in gender violence advocacy during the most recent period of liberal institutional construction, the postwar decade 2003-2013.

# CHAPTER FIVE
# INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSES: STATE PRIMACY AND THE POSTWAR *MISSION CIVILISATRICE*

## Introduction

What are the most prominent institutional discourses on gender violence in Liberia's postwar decade? What underlying significance can be read into these dominant narratives, and can they be better understood in the context of Liberia's settlement history? To approach this question, this chapter applies a critical discourse analysis to the 'propagender' database of GBV advocacy materials, as evidence of trends in liberal institutional engagement with the Liberian public. It triangulates and contextualises these findings with participant observation and approximately 50 interviews with staff of GBV Taskforce agencies. The core argument is that liberal institutions in postwar Liberia use advocacy against gender violence to foreground the role of state institutions and to consolidate state authority over the lives of citizens. Four interrelated discursive patterns in 'propagender' comprise a prominent discourse of 'state primacy': use of the imperative mood, framing the choice to report as an obligation, presenting an idealised vision of state services as an established reality, and discouraging traditional and community-based practices unless they are subsumed under liberal state authority. Adding to the colonial overtones of such discursive trends is a patriarchal subtext which infantilises and/or instrumentalises girls and women as such and as survivors of gender violence. I interpret these findings in reference to debates on postconflict liberal reconstruction and the *mission civilisatrice*, informed by parallel situations in which a new or fragile state takes on a paternalistic administration of vulnerable bodies in

order to assert its challenged legitimacy. In Liberia this contested social contract exerting pressure on gendered social relations (the sexual contract) has important antecedents in its initial liberal-imperial state formation in the nineteeth century, and broader conditions of liberal imperialism on a global scale.

In applying a critical discourse analysis to texts and some practices by the GBV Taskforce, it is important to note that some staff I interviewed have experienced or witnessed GBV in their own lives, and/or face vicarious trauma in their exposure to the violence they work against. Case studies within this chapter might suggest to some readers a trend of institutional incompetence. However, in addition to the academic framework I offer for interpreting the data, the case studies should also be considered in light of the extraordinary personal and logistical challenges that national and expatriate staff face in Liberia. My hope is that any professionals who recognise their work in my critique will interpret this in its intended ethos of truth-seeking and strengthening the GBV response. With that caveat in mind, the following section outlines the textual production of awareness materials in the GBV Taskforce, followed by subsequent chapter sections which focus on the texts themselves.

### Textual production of 'propagender'

In critical discourse analysis, texts are characterised as the central product surrounded by four key background elements: the interactive process of production, the conditions within which the authors operate, the process of a reader's interpretation, and the wider conditions of textual interpretation (Fairclough, 1989). As Chapter One explained, 'propagender' are visual advocacy materials created by

GBV Taskforce member organisations that mention some form of gender-based violence. Taking 'propagender' as the core texts in this chapter requires that they be situated within the interactions and conditions of discursive production.

Officially, all gender violence awareness materials are developed and approved under the scrutiny of the GBV Taskforce; however, the extent of the Taskforce's control over message production is unclear. According to some, "Everything. Everything that has to do with GBV goes through the Taskforce", whose members will chastise or "might even condemn" producers that do not follow Taskforce guidance (Interview, Ayo Scott, UNMIL Gender Office, September 2012). There is not one focal staff person or committee assigned to this, but materials are "vetted by the task-force collectively" (Interview, Madhumita Sarkar, SGBV Joint Program, April 2012). From participant observation, this appears to be a largely informal procedure, as simple as circulating an email with a proposed poster design. A collection of staff from key member organisations reported that there is no formal process regulating what messages should be disseminated by Taskforce member organisations. Some commented that such a conversation could be beneficial in the future (Meeting, GBV Taskforce Annual Retreat, September 2012). These reports suggest that individual GBV Taskforce member agencies are the primary sites for determining content of awareness materials.

Even within one organisation, the creation of 'propagender' can be complex and can challenge assumptions about 'local' and 'international' discourse production. Some large international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) such as the American Refugee Committee (ARC) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) consistently collaborated with their target communities in

developing advocacy materials, resulting in context-specific messages. Correspondingly, some materials that were locally produced by national NGOs such as ANPPCAN or WOLPNET[1] directly repeated larger-scale messages such as, in WOLPNET's case, repetition of international human rights statements. The UN Peacekeeping Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), employs a full-time cartoonist in the Public Information Office (PIO), Samson Zogbaye, who creates posters that convey messages in Liberian English. The content is determined by a committee but drawn up in Zogbaye's inimitable style, leaving the precise authorship of those messages ambiguous (Interviews, Eden Tefere, UNMIL PIO, September 2012; Samson Zogbaye, UNMIL PIO, October 2012).

Moving on from interactions surrounding textual production in the GBV Taskforce, textual interpretation carries an equally rich and heterogenous set of interactions. The 'social deployment of objects' (Ferme, 2001:17) can refresh texts with socially contingent meanings. For instance, a 'stop rape' bracelet stored in a locker at the UNMIL Public Information Office does not have the same discursive effect, nor implied agenthood, as that same bracelet displayed on the arm of a professional working woman or a young male community organizer. Many 'propagender' items are designed with this interactivity in mind. For similar reasons, Moran & Abramowitz characterise the production of gender violence discourse as 'not unidirectional' but rather; 'bidirectional, or "dialogic"' (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012: 139). This resonates with my own fieldwork observations, though I extend this assessment beyond 'bidirectional' to multidirectional.

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[1] Two national NGOs: respectively, the African Network for the Prevention and Protection of Child Abuse and Neglect, and Women of Liberia Peace Network.

Another more ambiguous element of the conditions of textual interpretation is the question of how visual media campaigns actually influence public perceptions and behavior. In response, it should firstly be recalled that the 'propagender' archive in this thesis is examined as evidence of dominant narratives among GBV Taskforce members, and not the sole basis for any claims about how these campaigns impact public opinion. Secondly, the evidence for the efficacy of visual advertising is mixed.

Recent meta-studies suggest that media campaigns alone are an ineffective medium for behavior change (Jewkes et. al., 2014; Michau et.al., 2014). While these studies make an important contribution to the field of gender violence in public health, they simultaneously demonstrate a host of questions left unexplored. In a collection of studies compiled for a 'principles for effective programming' summary, Michau et. al. (2014:2) do not have sufficiently detailed sources to distinguish between the efficacy of the medium or the message of the interventions. An additional methodological problem is inherent in evaluating modes of visual communication that are ordinarily diffuse in nature, reaching as broad a population as possible. Diffuse messaging could mean that the media's effect on public perceptions might not be detectable at the level of 'community intervention' control trials. Future research could expand upon qualitative findings of successful social marketing, and engage across disciplines with marketing and commerce to gain from that demonstrate the power of suggestion, and/or pursue a deeper examination of visual culture and normative change (Rose, 2001; Saisselin & Barthes, 1957). Despite these concerns, the findings of Michau et al. do seem to correspond with informal perspectives gathered by my research. In the qualitative research I conducted, a small number of interviewees did report a change in

perception and behavior in response to seeing certain advertisements, but this was a minority well out of proportion to the ubiquity of 'propagender' in postwar Monrovia.

As an agent of textual interpretation, I first encountered the 'propagender' advocacy materials as they appeared on the streets of Monrovia, and then later examined them holistically as a 'propagender' database, and individually as key examples. Both these encounters left the impression of a visible prioritisation of gender violence as a postwar social concern, and the dedication of various institutions in addressing it through public engagement. There is also a noticeable degree of institutional vanity reflected in this process. The following section will argue that 'propagender' uses public concern over gender violence as a means to assert the authority and legitimacy of the state in regulating citizens' lives, over and above its official purpose to discourage violence.

### A 'privileged discourse' of state primacy

> *'A woman's body can be thought of as the site of a double inscription: of sexual violence, and of institutionalized therapies to treat the affected body... Legal testimony, medical examinations, and the provision of therapy for 'women victims of violence' are all constitutive of power relations which tend to create institutionalized subjects'* (Hyndman, 1998:253)

Corresponding with the above quote on the creation of 'institutionalised subjects' through medical and psychosocial service provision, several Mano River Region anthropologists critique certain negative epistemic consequences of humanitarian engagement with populations under strife (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012; Abramowitz, 2014; Ferme, 2013). Key among these critiques are Abramowitz

& Moran's (2012) problematisation of the universality of anti-GBV frameworks and the lack of 'vernacularisation' of international human rights concepts in interactions with low-resource and indigenous populations. I note two particularly important points within the authors' rich and multifaceted analysis of gender violence initiatives in Liberia. The first is the emphasis placed on reporting cases of gender violence to the police. As the authors remark regarding their participant observation of anti-GBV community fora:

> *'The NGOs appear to be urging women to embrace their identity as Liberian citizens—that is, autonomous, bounded, rights-bearing individuals—at a moment when everyone understands that the state is still too fragile and resource poor to guarantee those rights'* (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012:36).

They identify this as a 'privileged' discourse and emphasise the role of NGOs in promoting it, in a fashion similar to the 'authority talk' of many international institutions (Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2012). This chapter section shall build upon the notion of a 'privileged' discourse although I emphasise the fluid 'liberal institutional' public engagement rather than NGOs specifically. Other researchers similarly note the emphasis placed on reporting (Carvalho & Schia, 2011), although this particular observation has not formed part of a sustained analysis of postwar institutional flux. The second point is what Moran and Abramowitz term the 'problem of culture', which refers to NGOs characterising Liberia's traditional culture as either a rich basis of heritage for promoting gender equality, or alternately, the central 'problem' generating gender violence. Both of these essentialised views of 'tradition' stifle a productive national conversation around addressing gender violence, especially if one agrees with their assessment that both state and traditional authorities provide an insufficient response for Liberian citizens facing gender violence. This chapter

section contributes to this emergent literature by presenting a more systematic overview of liberal institutional advocacy.

Generally, my overview strongly corroborates existing research that GBV initiatives overestimate the capacity of the postwar state. Out of the 180 items in the 'propagender' database, almost half mention a state service and four-fifths of these mention or depict some aspect of the law, such as a picture of a man behind bars, a scene of a police officer arresting an offender, or words such as 'crime', 'law', or 'jail'. The prominence of these messages forms a dominant 'privileged' discourse in liberal institutional communication with the general public. There are four key means by which 'propagender' express a dominant discourse of liberal institutional primacy or 'state primacy', which the following sections outline below and then elaborate using examples.

Firstly, 'propagender' gives commands to survivors and their families more frequently than information. Sixty-four per cent of all items use at least one command. This increases to 76% for materials with any depiction or mention of a state service, and 79% if it is a legal service. There is also a connection between materials about rape and the use of the imperative mood. Three quarters of the materials about rape contain at least one command, and this rises to 90% if a state service is featured, or if the rape is against a child. In contrast, 'propagender' with positive or neutral representations of tradition did not contain any commands, while 71% of items with negative representations of tradition contained at least one command. This suggests an association between antagonism towards Liberia's indigenous institutions, and the assertion of state authority over both individuals and non-state groups.

In indicating the association between depictions of state institutions and the imperative mood, I do not assume that an authoritative tone is an inherently negative or counterproductive means of communicating. Nevertheless, some uses of the imperative mood are clearly more imperious than others. For example, a series of billboards by Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MoHSW), which state 'seek free treatment now' convey information to survivors that treatment is free and can be found at a particular location. This statement gives the impression of an invitation rather than an exhortation, even when combined with the urgency of the next sentence: 'rape needs hospital care fast to prevent big sicknessses'. The poster also gives information about survivors' privacy and contains some de-stigmatising messages.



Ch. 5, Figure 1: Rape needs hospital care fast. A poster by MSF and MoHSW, estimated 2012 or earlier.

This inviting tone is typical of propagender featuring a health service. By contrast, propagender containing legal services are more likely to admonish the reader: 'Stop it! Say it! Report it!'.

Only thirteen percent of propagender with legal services offer any kind of specific information to survivors, usually a hotline number or advice where they can seek a specialised service, while over half of the health-related propagender offered information, mostly identifying free clinics for rape survivors. Of the 37 examples of propagender that contain a command, but do not refer to the state, the majority are simple statements such as 'Stop Rape' or 'Stop Violence Against Women'. The command is usually directed at the offender, whereas state-referencing items often deliver an imperative to the parent or the victim. Such commands construct a paternalistic, authoritative relation with their readers and presumed subjects, one that varies according to whether the materials refer to the healing role of the clinic or the law's monopoly on force.

Secondly, 'propagender' frame a survivor's choice to report as an obligation. Statements such as 'Stop it! Say it! Report it!' pressure survivors to report to the police, and to not 'compromise' cases by keeping silent or negotiating them with families, communities, or traditional authorities. This contradicts standard guidelines on providing non-directive and emotionally supportive communication to victims/survivors (Campbell, 2002; International Rescue Committee, 2008; Keesbury & Askew, 2010). Briefly, there are many reasons why someone might choose not to report. In Liberia reasons include desire for privacy, avoidance of stigmatisation, hesitance to punish the offender, and lack of trust in the police and courts (Medie, 2013). Materials that address survivors in a controlling and

paternalistic manner, contain violent 'triggering' images, or demand participation in prosecution rather than offering services to empower victims in seeking prosecution, do so at the expense of survivor well-being.

Another common concern that discourages reporting is the disbelief many survivors face, from hospital and legal staff in addition to their communities (Campbell, 2002). Survivors frequently feel a loss of control over their lives and feelings of self-blame. Publicly advising underage rape victims to 'SCREAM, SCREAM, SCREAM' (as in one poster featured in the following section), rather than raising awareness about why silence does not guarantee consent, reinforces the denial of their experiences. From a best practice perspective as outlined by international standards such as *Guidelines for GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Settings* (IASC, 2005), service provision would be better framed as a government's obligation to support survivors, rather than a survivor's obligation to support the government.

Thirdly, and related to the above point, 'propagender' constructs an image of reliable state services that does not reflect the ongoing challenge of reforming those institutions. This relates to the 'privileged' discourse identified by Abramowitz and Moran (2012), which promotes the state as 'fully functioning' when it is manifestly not. Minimising sexual exploitation committed by the staff of government and humanitarian agencies has been a major challenge in security sector reform (Save the Children-UK, 2006; UNHCR & Save the Children-UK, 2002). To address these chronic concerns, the Government of Liberia, UNMIL, and other agencies have implemented internal reforms such as zero-tolerance training to prevent sexual abuse by staff (Henry, 2007; Murphy, 2006; Nduka-Agwu, 2009). Security sector reform integrates both gender equality and gender violence issues,

for example by actively recruiting female police and military personnel (Pruitt, 2013), creating the Woman and Children Protection Section (WACPS) of the Liberian National Police (LNP) to respond to gender-based crime, and reforming the Rape Law of Liberia (Kaufmann, 2011; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006). Medical and psycho-social support for survivors of gender violence have also been strengthened, especially in Monrovia (Tayler-Smith et al., 2012). Nevertheless, even where concientious and dedicated staff effect changes to legal and psycho-social state institutions, the logistical challenges they face are extreme. This point is thoroughly covered in the above-referenced academic and NGO research on security sector reform and peacebuilding: to give just one example from my field work, a high-ranking officer in the Liberian National Police reported that she routinely used her own funds to provide underage crime suspects with food during their detention. These challenges are simply not mentioned in the depiction of state services in 'propagender', as further examples in this chapter will make clear.

Fourthly, 'propagender' discourages or co-opts traditional and community-based activities. In the 'propagender' collection, all portrayals of traditional and community-based activities fall into two categories: negative representations, which comprise 77% of all tradition-referencing items; and neutral/positive representations which appear only in conjunction with state mechanisms.[2] The positive and neutral representations of community/traditional mechanisms overlap with the dominant message to 'Report it!' found in other materials, while the

[2] The exception was an American Refugee Committee (ARC) poster featuring a community network. Other ARC materials feature both state and traditional/community mechanisms for addressing GBV, including ARC's own mediation services.

negative representations of traditional resolution mechanisms and practices evoke a more longstanding history of native-settler tension.

Approximately half of the items with negative portrayals of tradition address 'harmful traditional practices' such as FGC/M, forced marriage, and child marriage. To give a typical example, a poster produced by Christian Children's Fund, USAID and the Ministry of Gender and Development (MoGD) commands, 'Stop Early Marriage! Do Not Give Your Small Girl To A Man For Marriage'. It depicts two smiling parents handing their frowning 'small girl' to an older man, also smiling, with typical trade items on the table including cash, kola nuts, a bottle of alcohol, and a *lappa* cloth.




Ch. 5, Figure 2: 'Stop Early Marriage', a poster produced by Christian Children's Fund Liberia, MoGD, and USAID/OFDA.

The other half of the negative portrayals of tradition explicitly oppose indigenous or community-based mechanisms for addressing violence, which are sometimes referred to as 'compromising' or 'settling the family way'. One poster

created by ANPPCAN states 'rape is no joking and family palava, report it to the police'.




Ch. 5, Figure 3: 'Rape is no joking and family palava, report it to the police', a poster by ANPPCAN and UNIFEM.

Such a message constructs a binary opposition between state and community responses, and labels 'family palava' as tantamount to 'joking' about rape. I concur with Ferme's (2013) unpacking of the notion of 'community' as an 'archetype of humanitarian discourse', a discourse that glosses over intra-community conflicts and reproduces concepts of 'communities' in a manner that is often more expedient for donors than helpful for recipients. However, countering this I did observe community-level mechanisms operate even in the face of numerous challenges, and therefore find the classification useful at times. Whether or not formal liberal justice is pursued, families and communities still have to process known GBV incidents in their social milieu, and gossip and stigmatisation profoundly affect survivors' quality of life (Betancourt, Agnew-Blais, Gilman, Williams, & Ellis, 2010; Tayler-Smith et al., 2012). From personal conversations, interviews, and my own day-to-day

encounters with police, it is apparent that some citizens treat the police station as a 'palava hut'. Several arguments that took place in 'Hotel Africa' neighbourhood, which I witnessed while living there in 2012, involved a call to the nearby police station, even if they did not result in a charge or an ongoing legal procedure. Individuals or groups bring their grievances to the station publicly and bystanders can join in, with the police sometimes acting informally as arbiters. These incidents undermine the binary of court versus community proceedings that most 'propagender' materials convey.

'Propagender' condone traditional and community-based means of responding to GBV only when those mechanisms are subsumed within liberal institutional authority. A photo caption in an article by former US President Jimmy Carter about traditional and liberal justice exemplifies the ideal role of traditional leaders: 'Opposite: A village elder *learns about her new rights* from members of the Carter Center-sponsored Modia Drama Club' (italics added) (Carter, 2008).[3] Such a message invites the critique of 'the great post-conflict makeover fantasy', of 'liberal states benignly providing basic services and public goods often justified by the claim that a country emerging from war is a "blank slate"' (Cramer, 2006: 255). The elder in the photograph, who may have led collective women's strikes, (Moran, 1989) influenced election outcomes (Fuest, 2008), or presided over a traditional law system

[3] The described photo is not from the 'propagender' collection but from a report on a Carter Centre Access to Justice project, in a piece by Jimmy Carter in Harvard International Review, 2008. The article itself makes a number of nuanced points about the roles of traditional leaders; however, the photo caption reveals a distillation of the essential message of liberal state primacy.

(Bledsoe, 1984), is reduced to a *tabula rasa* upon which international human rights actors inscribe her 'new rights'.

In contrast to the liberal institutional representations, a 2011 survey of traditional trauma healing mechanisms in rural Liberia shows that traditional elders (*zoes*) are often the first point of contact for sexual assault and severe domestic violence, especially in remote areas. *Zoes* respond to violence against women by advocating, mediating, and in some cases imposing punishment or fines; they also provide medical attention and community support, and refer select cases to NGOs and government (Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, 2011). Leeson & Coyne (2012) argue that *zoes* deter crime in part because they are more accessible than the liberal state in rural areas.

This is not to argue that elders provide an egalitarian or even adequate approach to violence. Several researchers agree that community-based mechanisms are insufficient; Fuest (2010) provides a particularly detailed problematisation of the 'inclusion' of *Sande* elders in postwar peacebuilding, and Abramowitz & Moran (2012) argue that Liberians facing gender violence are failed by both traditional and liberal institutions. The positionality of traditional authorities is complex and heterogeneous, varying according to ethnic group and the effects of war. Chapter Eight will expand on this positionality in greater detail especially regarding the issue of FGC/M. The key point for this chapter's problematisation of state primacy is that recognising the frontline role of traditional justice mechanisms does not require an uncritical endorsement of these processes, but rather an appreciation of the reasons why one might choose to bring a case to an elder, or 'settle' informally between families. From a survivor-oriented best practices perspective, institutions should

ideally support survivor/victim agency. Institutions working in survivors' interests should address the constraints under which sub-optimal choices are made rather than stigmatise survivors. The existing programmes that do support survivors in this way are undermined by dominant messages of state primacy. Following this, if one agrees that the state should provide formal mechanisms for the deterrence and punishment of gender violence – and leaving aside rich debates on precisely what those mechanisms should be – it is reasonable to critique the institutional vanity, paternalism towards citizens, and hypocrisy where it appears in the state formation process. Such a critique is particularly salient in a settler state with nearly two centuries of colonial alienation (or inclusive co-optation) of indigenous peoples.

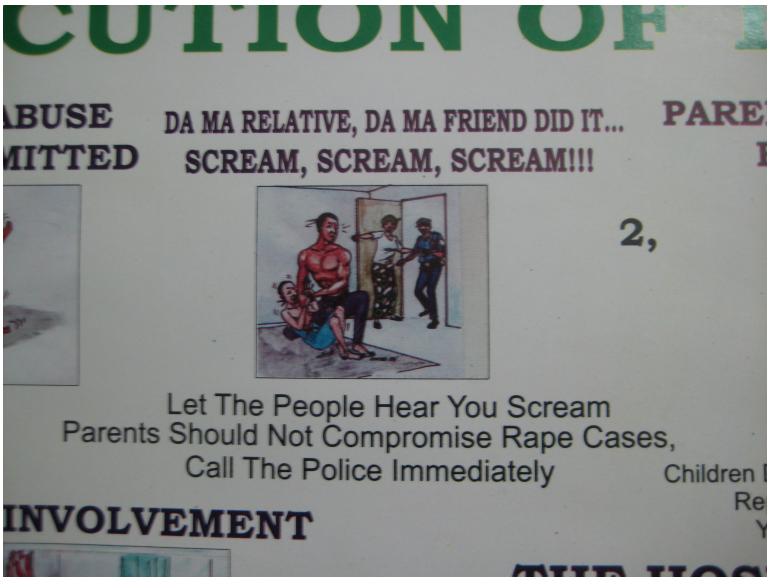
In addition to the presence of these four characteristics, it is crucially their correlations that express state primacy. Different aspects of the state are connected to different narrative patterns. For example, out of the 17% of propagender materials that mention sexual exploitation, 8% refer to the law, and 8% to a health service, and a far higher proportion, 56%, mention the education system.[4] The above section noted that 'propagender' items featuring a health service used the imperative tone in a softer manner than 'propagender' items featuring the police or courts. By contrast, 'propagender' items featuring rape, and especially child rape, are more likely to mention the law and use the imperative mood. These four characteristics operate intertextually, with some problematic tendencies heightened when police and courts are depicted in the visual materials. As such the state-promoting privileged discourse is dominant, but not uniform. The confluence of

[4] The materials portray education primarily as a means of preventing sexual exploitation, although one poster condemns teachers' sexual exploitation of students.

problematic messages of state primacy show that the heterogeneity of examples in the 'propagender' database support, rather than diminish, the argument for a privileged discourse of state primacy.

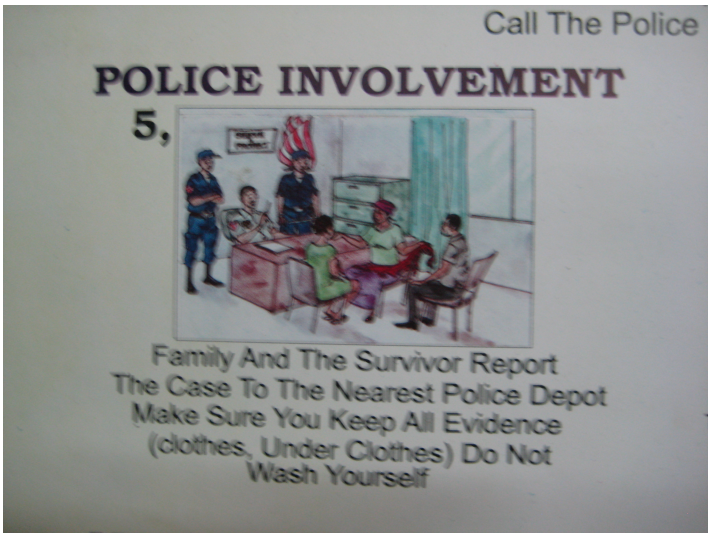
Having articulated the interrelated four messages that together form a discourse of state primacy, the following section will elaborate upon two examples of materials that reflect all four messages. The first example is a poster/billboard created in 2009 by the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL), and funded by the Danish government and UNFPA, which outlines eighteen 'stages and procedures for prosecution of rape cases'. The degree of detail and use of legal terminology might indicate that the content is intended to educate professionals whose work relates to GBV prosecution. Despite these features, its use of illustrations, Liberian English, its direct addressing of rape survivors and their families, and the fact that at least one billboard was displayed in the lower income neighbourhood of Douala, suggests that it is intended for the general population.

Stage One displays three graphic illustrations of sexual violence, two of which are labeled 'GANG RAPE' and 'WHEN RAPE/ABUSE IS BEING COMMITTED'. The third shows a large man attacking a younger girl, with the heading 'DA MA RELATIVE, DA MA FRIEND DID IT...SCREAM, SCREAM, SCREAM!!!', and the caption, 'Let The People Hear You Scream/Parents Should Not Compromise Rape Cases/Call The Police Immediately'. The background of the illustration shows a woman pointing at the abuser as a male police officer walks through the door to arrest him.




Ch 5, Figure 4: 'Let The People Hear You Scream', a detail from AFELL's 2009 Stages of Rape Prosecution calendar.

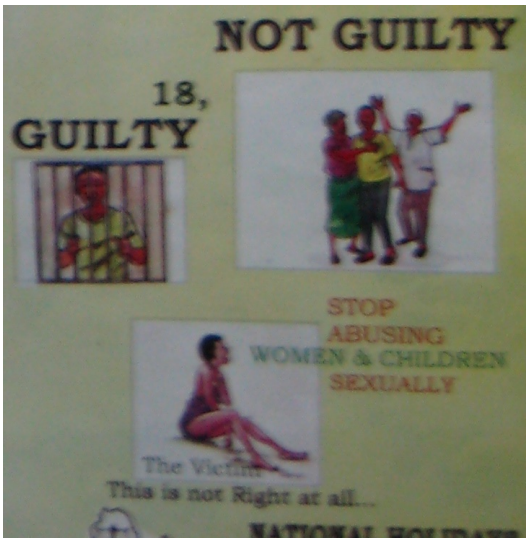
Stage Two delivers a similar message, as does Stage Three, which shows a police officer intervening in a scene of sexual abuse at home. It is similarly captioned 'Parents Should Not Compromise Rape Cases, Call The Police Immediately'. The proceeding Stage Four, 'REPORT IMMEDIATELY', instructs survivors to 'Inform Your Family Or Close Relatives Immediately Do Not Take Bath (taking Bath Can Destroy Evidence)'. The next step, 'POLICE INVOLVEMENT', also emphasizes that survivors must report rape immediately and before washing.




Ch. 5, Figure 5: 'Police Involvement', another detail from the AFELL Stages of Rape Prosecution calendar.

AFELL recommends the survivor visit a hospital only after these initial stages are complete. The caption instructs, 'The Police Will Give You A Form And Send You To A Recognized Hospital For Treatment. Make sure to tell the Doctor Everything that Happened so He/She can prepare A Medical Report for the Police'.

The remaining twelve stages detail the legal procedures that rape cases are meant to follow, the final stages depicting both possible verdicts of guilty or not guilty, and then concluding with a picture of an unclothed, crying woman and a plea to stop sexually abusing women and girls. There are seven images of violence in total.




Ch. 5, Figure 6: 'This is not Right at all...', another detail from the AFELL Stages of Rape Prosecution Poster.

The poster commands the survivor to report immediately in six different places, and contains other instructions that either use the imperative mood or directive phrasing such as 'parents *should*'. By contrast, it presents every example of legal action as a statement of fact such as 'police *will*', with the exception of one 'should' statement applying to the transfer of the case to a Circuit Court: 'This should happen within 72 hours after the Arrest'. This conveys the impression that police and courts are already providing the services outlined by the poster, and that behaviour change on survivors' part is the crucial step for successful rape prosecution in Liberia.

The ideal portrayal of prosecutorial services is inaccurate, as AFELL lawyers must be well aware. The organisation has been an outspoken advocate for legal reform and victim rights in postwar Liberia. Lois Bruthus, the President of AFELL in 2007, wrote for *Forced Migration Review* (FMR): 'there is a general conspiracy of silence/denial by the community or even the affected family. Customs and traditions often take precedence over Liberia's formal legal system' (Bruthus 2007:22). In the

same article, Bruthus reports that only four rape convictions had been made (not stating in what time period but possibly since the end of the war or the 2006 Rape Law reform) and notes the extreme logistical and institutional challenges the Liberian government has faced in providing formal justice.

In contrast to the intensive detail of what survivors should do at each stage of prosecution, the poster omits information on services that facilitate survivors' navigation of these stages. There is no reference to the Woman and Children Protection Section (WACPS) of the Liberian National Police, a unit set up in 2006 to provide specialised support. The poster directs survivors, inaccurately, to visit the police before the hospital. A WACPS officer at Caldwell station informed me that survivors can in fact visit the hospital before reporting, and have the option to wait and decide whether or not to report using evidence collected by specially trained doctors at certain hospitals (personal communication, July 2008; Tayler-Smith et al., (2012) corroborate this with data from 2009). Thus, both the statements and the silences of the *Stages of Rape Prosecution* billboard emphasise victims' purported obligations towards the legal system rather than their options.

Despite the emphasis on the obligation to report, the billboard conveys the impression that rape prosecution is a daunting, possibly fruitless task for the survivor and her family. It outlines a daunting eighteen-stage process, beginning with gang rape and finishing with a 'NOT GUILTY' verdict accompanied by a picture of the accused celebrating with his family. If AFELL's intent is to encourage victims in negotiating their way towards formal justice, then this approach seems counter-productive. It seems contradictory that the creators of this poster emphasise the difficulties of prosecution while also exhorting survivors to report. One possible

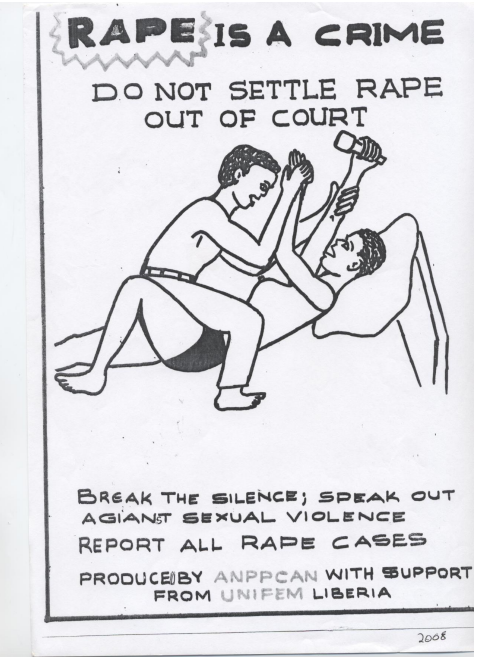
explanation is that AFELL members intended to emphasise the rigour of the rape conviction process in Liberia, to counter the widespread perception that convictions are made capriciously, at the whim of police, judges, and those who report. The message of the 'stages of rape prosecution' poster may be unintentionally discouraging to survivors in its attempt to legitimise the legal process. Nevertheless, this does not explain why police and court processes are prioritised, to the neglect of medical services that also contribute key evidence for eventual prosecution.

A second example comes from a collection of materials from the African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN), a Nairobi-based non-governmental organisation with a national chapter in Monrovia. ANPPCAN staff generously offered their time and resources to this study, participating in individual and group interviews in 2009 and 2012, and sharing communication materials that had been created and distributed from their head office. I also observed ANPPCAN members interacting with other staff at GBV Taskforce meetings and retreats. Since 2007 the organisation has implemented various stages of the Woman Friendly Policing Project, a capacity building initiative funded by UNIFEM (now UN Women), that trains police officers to handle GBV cases with sensitivity. As implementing partners for the Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (SEA) project, ANPPCAN also facilitates school workshops (Interview, Ruby Folly, ANPPCAN GBV Coordinator. August 2012).

In 2007, ANPPCAN members collaborated with donors and the Taskforce on a series of posters, which were inexpensively produced with photocopiers and distributed to their partners and trainees (Interviews, ANPPCAN staff, August 2009; April 2012). Some had simple anti-GBV statements such as 'Red Card to GBV' and

others had more complex messages; six mentioned the police specifically. In block capitals, five of these posters declare:

• 'DO NOT SETTLE RAPE CASES THE FAMILY WAY, GO STRAIGHT TO THE POLICE!'
• 'RAPE IS A CRIME: DO NOT SETTLE RAPE OUT OF COURT'
• 'Rape is no joking and family palava, report it to the police'
• 'REPORT ALL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN TO THE POLICE'; this is repeated on the fifth poster.




Ch 5, Figure 7: One anti-GBV poster from ANPPCAN exhorting survivors to report rape cases.

Disrupting this pattern, the sixth poster addresses officers directly: 'POLICE MAN, DO NOT ASK FOR CHOPPING [bribe] OR ASK TO DO SOMETHING [sexual favour], BEFORE YOU HELP THE WOMEN'. This fifth heading is accompanied by two illustrations: the first shows an officer demanding a bribe from a woman wearing a *lappa* cloth, and in the second, groping the woman's breast.




Ch 5, Figure 8: Another poster from the same series by ANPPCAN asking police officers to refrain from demanding bribes and sexual favours from women bringing complaints to the police.

This last poster demonstrates a schism between internal reform or capacity building of state services, and external representation to the public, especially when the tone of such campaigns is imperative and the approach non-participatory. This applies regardless of whether ANPPCAN disseminated the opposing messages together or whether they advertised one message to the police and one to the general public. The contradiction is inherent in the fact that the posters command survivors to report to a state institution that other posters acknowledge as predatory towards survivors.

Viewing both examples together, the AFELL and ANPPCAN 'propagender' materials contain all four of the communication patterns that support a discourse of 'state primacy'. Their positionality as reformers of the same state services they advertise is significant. AFELL's focus on legal intervention could well result from their membership base of lawyers and role in advancing legal reform, although

recognising that positionality does not resolve other contradictions within their advocacy piece. ANPPCAN is a child's rights organisation whose primary involvement with the state is reforming police officers to become more 'friendly' towards citizens. Other organisations that do not directly support state services also produce materials that contribute to the state primacy discourse. The following section will briefly explore why this might be the case.

**State primacy discourse as 'common sense'**

There are many valid approaches one might follow in hypothesising why the discourse of state primacy exists in materials that ostensibly seek to stop gender violence and promote gender equality. A Foucauldian analysis of 'biopower' and technologies of surveillance and discipline, for instance, is a framework that post-development scholars have applied to similar power dynamics in international development (Brigg, 2002; Rahnema, 1997). Alternately, policy specialists might advance an institutional or network-based analysis that focuses on the internal dynamics or micro-politics of aid (Olsen & Scharffscher, 2004). My analysis turns to a structure/agency continuum in discourse production (Culler, 1983). The authors of the texts do not necessarily intentionally seek to reproduce the colonial/imperial or patriarchal power dynamics that appear, but rather these structures provide background framing.

Framing enables action, as Autesserre (2012) argues in her anaysis of the strategic framing used in international media representations of rape in Eastern Congo. She connects the simplicity of a frame with its political usefulness in

generating a proposed solution that audiences find appealing. Similarly, producers of 'propagender' might find an appealing simplicity in framing the persistence of gender violence in Liberia as a matter of inadequate reporting. Some professionals support the 'Stop it! Say it! Report it!' messages because they believe the legal response is a key deterrent for perpetrators. As Allen Lincoln from UN Women put it, "there was a complete breakdown of law...now, law and order is not fully restored to the country...[we are] trying to re-establish authority...by rebuilding institutions" (Interview, April 2012, Monrovia). These points are reasonable but they not explain the nature of 'propagender' advocacy in 're-establishing authority' over *survivors* and their choices in order to 'restore' rule of law.

In contrast to the urgency with which the 'report it!' discourse is often communicated in visual materials, most professionals did not speak passionately about reporting GBV to the police. In interviews and meetings, the importance of reporting appeared as an unspoken or briefly referenced assumption, something that was 'common sense' even when combined with an acute awareness of the state's lack of capacity. I asked one professional who primarily worked in advocacy why her agency and others emphasised going to the police. She replied, "because most ones are not reported", and seemed puzzled that I would ask a question with such an obvious answer (Interview, October 2012, Monrovia).

This 'common sense' approach recalls the principle of critical discourse analysis that 'a dominant discourse is subject to a process of naturalization, in which it appears to lose its connection with particular ideologies and interests and becomes the common-sense practice of the institution' (Fairclough, 1989:107). What 'ideologies and interests' might underlie this common-sense practice? I suggest that

the dominant discourse of state primacy exists in anti-violence advocacy, primarily because of a longstanding schema of liberal-imperial administration of Africans and their traditional leaders, a related patriarchal schema of controlling African women and girls' bodies, and because it is difficult for narrative agents to avoid these schemata in their discourse production. Like John Seeley's quip about the British Empire, the colonial tendencies in GBV advocacy result more from a 'fit of absentmindedness' rather than an overt political committment to reproducing those power dynamics. Such discursive patterns can appear regardless of whether the individual agents of discourse stand anything to gain from perpetuating such a power dynamic.

**Bureaucratic logic and 'institutionalised subjects'**

Thus far, this chapter has problematised the words and images produced by liberal institutions, and at this stage it is important to clarify that the power dynamics they elicit go beyond mere aesthetics. Images in the 'propagender' database are a proxy for less tangible processes and approaches; the promotion of a discourse of state primacy at the expense of best practices for survivor support is also embedded in liberal institutional approaches to information management. For example, in 2009 a high-level GBV Secretariat professional showed me a draft plan for coded ID cards for survivors presenting at police, hospital, or non-governmental organisations for help. Each card was to have a unique code signifying the county, year, type of GBV, and an individual survivor number. The staff person explained that this was to correct the problem of double-counting, in which a survivor visits two services

and each service reports one case, resulting in the monthly compilation report counting two cases when only one has occurred (Interview, MoGD, August 2009).

At the time, I assumed that higher-level professionals would discard this plan before it could reach the implementation stage. It did not seem thinkable that any agency would send a victim of domestic violence home with a bright red GBV card to explain to an abusive and controlling partner. Child sexual abuse survivors would be unlikely to welcome their schoolmates' curiosity towards the card. The obvious implementation challenges posed by logistical constraints and survivors' wish for privacy also undermines any justification that the cards would improve monitoring.

My prediction that the plan would be abandoned was incorrect. Three years later, that same professional handed me a GBV card which had been in national circulation since 2011. The staffperson explained that they were "not widely" used because some frontline staff did not understand how to implement them correctly (Interview, MoGD, April 2012). Likewise, at the Annual GBV Taskforce Retreat in October 2012, another high-ranking staff member framed the evasiveness of implementing partners to use the cards as a matter of *their* lack of capacity, to be addressed with more thorough training.

The GBV card example is intended to highlight a problematic trend in GBV Taskforce members' engagement with citizens, not to assess the totality of their work. There are certainly examples of institutions working with survivors respectfully; nevertheless, the GBV card is an important story in the narrative of liberal institutional action against gender violence that this chapter highlights. That an attempt at information management at the expense of privacy was launched at the national level – and despite access to GBV Information Management System

experts who should have been able to provide better solutions – makes the GBV card more than a singular incident but rather indicative of a wider problem in Liberia, and in other contexts of bureaucratic administration of 'vulnerable' bodies objectified as such. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2010), for example, traces an 'official discourse' characterising Sahrawi refugees as 'ideal' in ways that are expedient for humanitarian agencies but that do not consistently integrate Sahrawi self-authorship. Hyndman (1998) observes similar power dynamics in Somali refugee camps, as her quote earlier this chapter on the 'double inscription' of survivors' bodies made clear. In turn, Shepherd critiques the 'violent reproduction of the international' discursively constituted by discourses of gender violence in development/security contexts (Shepherd, 2008:34).

The 'institutionalised subjects' discursively constructed by bureaucratic administration are also reminiscent of colonial citizens or subjects; as Chapter Three maintained, information management contributed to an epistemic dimension of colonial rule. This is a point of comparison with the GBV Taskforce's approach to information management in postwar Liberia. One could identify 'colonial' or 'imperial' power dynamics without necessarily looking to the past, if one accepts arguments that these power relations persist today. Including examples from the past, however, can be a way of exploring current social problems as 'debris' or as a form of memory (Stoler, 2008). The above section on representations of traditional resolution mechanisms advanced some parallels with a colonial *mission civilisatrice* towards indigenous peoples. Applying this bureaucratic logic of managing subjects and their customs to colonial forms of patriarchy, Leach (2008) explores a case study of a mission school for girls in 19th century Sierra Leone. She documents the school's

function in 'domesticating' girls and preparing them for a civilised life as dependents in male-headed monogamous households. Liberal-informed ideals about what is 'good for girls' supported both patriarchy and colonialism. In the following section, some select examples from the 'propagender' database will illustrate a connection to this patriarchal colonial tendency.

**Patriarchal 'girls power'**

Patriarchal messages are often integrated with the subtext of state primacy and colonial *mission civilisatrice,* an embeddedness that Chapter Three discussed extensively. This chapter previously noted that 'propagender' portrays schools as a bulwark against GBV, especially sexual exploitation. In the Mano River Region, sexual exploitation and abuse encompasses a wide range of activity and agency, from young women taking pride in attracting a rich 'friend' who buys them desirable gifts, to coercive encounters where an offender offers necessities for basic survival, extorting sexual favours from victims with little option to refuse (Coulter, 2009; Marks, 2012; Utas, 2003, 2005). Some Monrovians aptly label this 'cash violence', as Chapter Six will relate.

One example addressing transactional sex is worth examining in detail because it richly combines themes of patriarchal morality and liberal gender equality, invoking both traditional and modern prestige symbols. Produced by the Government of Liberia (GoL), UNDP and USAID in 2007/2008, and re-produced in 2011/2012 with the headline 'GIRLS POWER PROJECT', it compares the present and future situation of two teenage girls. One is a schoolgirl named Musu

and the other an unnamed teenager engaging in transactional sex. The unnamed teenager, dressed scandalously by local standards in a short skirt and midriff-baring top, and whose face has perhaps been lightened with cosmetic cream, chides her friend: 'Musu, where are you going when there are so many 'NEW OPEN' [drinking spots] in town? Don't waste your time in school when you can make money for yourself overnight'. Musu, wearing a modest school uniform and lacking the jewellery of her friend, replies, ''New Open' can not help you or me, if we learn well; we will be able to support ourselves'. Adjacent to these speech balloons is a block of text, 'For a brighter future. The knowledge you gain, the better your future will be. We have the right to say no to early marriage and sexual exploitation'.

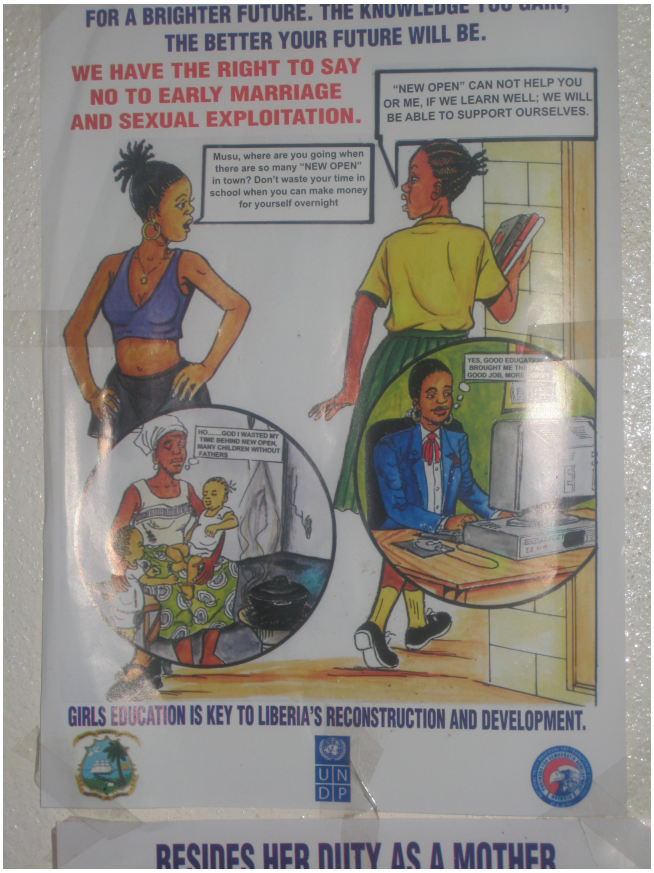



Figure 9: A poster illustrating the supposed consequences of transactional sex versus education and modest clothing.

Two circular panels illustrate the consequences of these choices. The unnamed girl is now clad in a humble *lappa*, and holds two children as she laments to herself 'Ho...God I wasted my time behind New Open, many children without fathers'. The children are pale-skinned, which implies they were fathered by expatriates. Her jewellery has diminished and her hair is tied up in a cloth. Musu wears a western-style business suit, large earrings and neatly plaited hair and sits at a desk with a computer. 'Yes', she congratulates herself, 'good education brought me this far. Good job, more money'.

The poster combines traditional and modern norms of prestige, leveraging both patriarchy and gender equality to promote education and discourage prostitution. The use of plaited natural hair to demonstrate the girls' success invokes traditional values around weaving, (of textiles, baskets, fishing nets, and hair) as an expression of belonging, and unkempt hair as a sign of mental illness or social deviance (Ferme, 2001). Adult Musu does not go so far as to wear a wig or hair weave (also known as a 'forehead'), a consumer good that some interviewees associate with 'big time girls' who are perceived to have lax sexual morals, as Chapter Six will elaborate. As a successful modern woman, she uses a computer and earns her own income. Still, her *kwii* (civilised) credentials are rooted safely in the past; her Western clothes are modest (Moran, 1990).

By contrast, Musu's friend has failed utterly. She wears a *lappa* in the manner of a 'country' woman but has not attained success by 'country' standards. The 'children without fathers' were not born into an approved social structure. Their 'illegitimacy' resulting from their mother's promiscuity is visibly marked by their pale faces. Both Musu and her friend participate in a cash economy but only one of

them has succeeded, by adhering to virginal feminine conduct in pursuing her aspirations. The bottom caption summarises the lesson encapsulated in the teens' divergent lives: 'Girls education is key to Liberia's reconstruction and development'. This implies that immodest sexual practices betray national interests, in addition to whatever personal consequences might result.

Although the poster uses the inclusive phrasing 'we have the right', and could be considered 'empowering' for this reason and others, it frames sexual exploitation as a question of morals and sexual purity rather than female sovereignty over one's own body. The cautionary tale also perpetuates a virgin-whore dichotomy and treats education as a panacea for preventing sexual exploitation, ignoring the extent of sexual abuse in Liberia's schools and the prevalence of 'sugar daddies' as financiers of young women's school fees (Atwood et al., 2011). Like the AFELL and ANPPCAN posters deconstructed earlier, the GoL/USAID/UNDP poster calls upon girls and women to modify their behaviour and subscribe to state services, but does not give information that might help them to do so.

The poster's combination of traditional and modern tropes fits with the paradoxes of identify formation and re-formation in modern Liberia. The apparent contradiction of invoking the symbolic politics of both 'civilised' and 'country' prestige systems is an accurate reflection of the competing norms of civilisation that many Liberians embody in their lives and contend as narrative agents. Similarly, the presence of patriarchal messages in an ostensibly egalitarian 'girl power' campaign is in keeping with institutional action against gender violence in postwar Liberia. The 'girls power' poster therefore reiterates a key point in this thesis, regarding the persistence or renewal of patriarchal governance norms in the postconflict project.

**Social contract, sexual contract in postwar, postcolonial reconstruction**

> *'To victims of racism the vocabulary of rights rang hollow, a lullaby for perpetuating racial privilege. Their demands were formulated in the language of nationalism and social justice. The result was a breach between the discourse on rights and the one on justice, with the language of rights appearing as a fig leaf over privilege and power appearing as the guarantor of social justice and redress.' (Mamdani 1996:21)*

Mamdani's above characterisation of the consequences of colonial administration in Africa bears a resemblance to critiques of more recent liberal state administrations, and their international apparatus of humanitarian agencies, in conflict-affected regions. Following this analysis of postconflict reconstruction, one might surmise that the 'language of rights' around gender violence in Liberia appears as a 'fig leaf' over less benign expressions of power and privilege. Indeed, the examples in this chapter suggest a *mission civilisatrice* persisting within dilemmas of liberal humanitarian engagement. If this chapter's interpretation of institutional messaging around gender violence is valid, it is impossible to maintain the liberal 'fantasy' as described by Cramer (2008) that such campaigns are purely benign. The performativity of peacekeeping and peacebuilding, as noted by Higate & Henry (2009), constructs ideological development paradigms that are sharply gendered in their encounters with Liberian women. Notwithstanding these compelling critiques, the good intentions of 'propagender's' creators and the humanitarian imperative of their content seems to defy a purely critical interpretation focusing on hegemony and reification of colonial relationality. These two seemingly contradictory interpretations correspond with the inherent contradiction of liberal humanitarianism as an enabler of colonial and imperialist technologies of rule.

Liberal imperialism helps explain both the humanitarian intentions behind state primacy messages in 'propagender' and their colonial and paternalistic overtones.

The applicability of liberal imperialism in this case study is integrally gendered, and gender mainstreaming within emergency and postconflict settings provokes its own critical insights. Many argue that not enough has been accomplished or that reforms have not been sufficiently robust (Barrow, 2010; Eriksson-Baaz & Stern, 2013; Handrahan, 2004; Koen, 2006). In Liberia, Basini (2013) charges that gender mainstreaming in postconflict disarmament has alienated the very women it seeks to 'protect', while various other scholars have interrogated or reframed claims of progress in Liberia's postwar gender equality movement (Anderson et. al., 2011; Bauer, 2009; Fuest, 2008, 2010; Kaufmann, 2011; Moran, 2012). The sexual politics of gender violence seem to intensify the symbolic politics of postconflict liberal state reconstruction. The female body personifies national narratives across numerous contexts (Baines, 2003) and no less so in Liberia's case where the iconography of the powerful 'Iron Lady' president, and the violated girl-child, are equally emblematic of the country's state of affairs.

Depictions of rape, especially child rape, were associated with other manifestations of the state primacy discourse such as the imperative tone and importance of reporting. What is it about rape, specifically, that is useful in constructing a narrative of state legitimisation? An instructive example appears from a markedly different context; Butalia, writing about the forcible 'rescue' and re-settlement of women kidnapped during Partition, hypothesises that the coercive actions of the Indian and Pakistani governments resulted from the newly independent institutions taking on the responsibilities of a family patriarch (Butalia,

1998). The state-as-patriarch symbolically replaced the original family patriarchs whose failure to protect 'their' women from abuse was an intended consequence of their enemies' strategy of sexual humiliation in the first place:

> *'As the central patriarch, the state now provided coercive backing for restoring and reinforcing patriarchy within the family. For the post-colonial, deeply contested, fragile and vulnerable state, this was an exercise in restoring its legitimacy which, I would suggest, depended very much on recovering what had been lost...prestige, honour, and property'.* (Butalia, in Lentin, 1997:106)

While Butalia wrote about a vastly different situation of state formation and postwar recovery from (a vastly different context of) sectoral violence, her statement above could well have been written about the state primacy discourse in Liberia today. The 'rescuing' of victims took place within a patriarchal framework where rape, and male-sanctioned protection from rape, enforced ownership and control of female bodies and sexuality (Brownmiller, 1975). Das builds upon the theoretical richness of the above framework by invoking examples of disintegration conflict from South Asia, Africa, and Europe (Das, 2007, 2008), ultimately reinforcing the embeddedness of the social contract and the sexual contract in contexts of extreme violence, and concluding that a 'return to normalcy draws heavily upon ideas of honor and shame at both familial and national levels' (Das, 2008:291).

In Liberia, the assertion of state management processes at the expense of survivor well-being, the paternalism of some advocacy approaches, and the fact that these tendencies appear more often in relation to rape, (and in different ways in relation to other forms of GBV) corresponds with these compelling analyses. Recalling Chapter Three's defense of the concept of patriarchy as both structural and ideological (Hunnicutt, 2009), it seems that ideological changes to gender and

indigeneity have not consistently kept pace with structural changes in Liberian governance over the long term, from a 'single-sex liberal' male state, to one that is emblematic of gender equality in postwar reconstruction (Moran, 1988, 2012); from a civilising mission whose collaboration with indigenous peoples was elitist and clandestine at best, toward an increasingly 'inclusive' mode of liberal governance fraught with contradictions (Fuest, 2010). Additionally, the existence of a diversity of traditional leadership structures external to the liberal state in Liberia poses inherent challenges to building national narratives of unity and subjection to liberal governance in the postwar era. Clearly, 'difference is domesticated' (Hyndman, 1998:244) to some extent within 'propagender' materials that undermine traditional and informal mechanisms for responding to gender violence, or alternately, integrate traditional leadership as a matter of inclusive co-optation (or even merely the optics of inclusivity).

The 'contingent sovereignty' of Liberian governance since 2003 ceasefire contributes to a pervasive sense of inadequacy at the institutional level, and an ambient desire to 'vindicate' the fragile postwar state by asserting its capacity to govern its most violated citizens. The colonising approach to knowing and controlling the vulnerable bodies of citizens also voices, by denial, the vulnerabilities of broken or nascent state institutions. The sense of vulnerability and vindication does not necessarily manifest in political terms as a set of competing interests, but rather is reproduced ideologically through tacitly framing issues according to certain unexamined assumptions about what (or whom) the postwar liberal state is meant to represent. This may help explain why the 'state primacy' discourse is prevalent in GBV advocacy created by liberal institutions in postwar Liberia. Ultimately, while it

is worthwhile to seek an explanation for why the state primacy discourse exists in gender violence advocacy, doing so should not detract from an equally worthwhile exposition of what it does. The state primacy discourse is a relational one that discursively constructs citizens and subjects by positioning them in relation to the idealised postconflict liberal state.

## Conclusion

Liberian-American novelist and blogger Elma Shaw wrote 'I wanted to cry. I wanted to leap for joy', in January 2008 when the Sirleaf administration amended the words displayed on the Temple of Justice in Monrovia from 'Let Justice Be Done To All Men', to 'Let Justice Be Done to *All*' (Shaw, 2008). In contrast to this symbolic act of restorative justice, the aforementioned monument in honour of Matilda Newport, a settler who supposedly fired a cannon to defend the colony against belligerent natives in 1822 (Cooper, 2008), still stands and has even been refurbished. These physical monuments are manifestations of both normative change and residual colonialism in postconflict, postcolonial Liberia. Likewise, the parade of words and images that liberal institutions propagate to contest gender violence convey messages about ideal gender and citizen-state relations. 'Propagender' items do so explicitly in their content but more importantly they convey subtextual messages and meaningful silences. This chapter unveils new empirical data that articulates the content of 'awareness' messages that liberal institutions promote to citizens, documenting these advocacy efforts in a more systematic manner compared to other studies. My analysis of this data contributes to feminist geography by highlighting elements of liberal imperialism in gender

violence awareness, as an arena of contestation of postconflict development norms. The case studies in this chapter focused especially on dominant narratives that primarily originated from GBV Taskforce institutions. This demonstrated how debates regarding postconflict liberal imperialism, as well as the literature on gender equality in emergency and development settings, are relevant for understanding gender violence discourses in postwar Liberia.

The historical precedent of liberal imperialism in the founding of Liberia suggests that the contradictions appearing in humanitarian engagement with gender issues are longstanding and residual. In the nineteenth century, the colony's political development was influenced by the pressure to vindicate black self-rule according to liberal imperial definitions of 'civilisation' (Brown, 2008; Sawyer, 1992; Sullivan, 1982). The criteria for 'civilisation' were themselves in flux throughout the 19th century as the trans-Atlantic slave trade was gradually replaced with liberal economic trade and globalised imperialism, the condemnation of the former justifying the expansion of the latter (Duffield, 2007). In their struggle to establish a viable colony and later maintain territorial gains, Americo-Liberians and the ACS sought charitable financial support, military assistance, and clientelist sponsorship from Europe and the USA (Ellis, 1999; Pham, 2009).

Despite their stated best intentions, international institutions and NGOs often replicate hegemonic colonial and patriarchal subtexts in their materials. However, it is not simply the case, as post-development scholars often make it out to be, that Western institutions impose 'top-down' norms upon a largely resistant public that responds using the 'weapons of the weak' (Rahnema, 1997; Scott, 1985), or essentialised 'local' conceptions of human rights and goods. It would be similarly

erroneous to conclude, at least without further inspection, that 'universal rights' and 'local culture' are inherently incompatible, or that either of those conceptualisations are perfectly reliable to begin with. The fluidity of discourse production defies 'grand narratives' and simplistic binaries of Western/Other, even as it constructs 'institutionalised subjects' (Hyndman, 1998) whose authorship is constricted as well as amplified by humanitarian archetypes (Fassin, 2012; Ferme, 2013). The Liberian public's normative engagement with the issues set out in this chapter is a vital part of including perspectives 'from below' and thus situating the activities and outcomces of liberal institutions within social practise. The following chapter will therefore examine public discourses emerging from participant observation and conversations with 'everyday' Liberians in Greater Monrovia.

# CHAPTER SIX
# INFORMAL DISCOURSES: 'CIVILISATION' AND 'CASH VIOLENCE'

## Introduction

What are the most prominent informal discourses around gender violence in postwar Liberia? This chapter presents and interprets a selection of the most prominent informal public discourses on gender violence in postwar Liberia, as expressed in conversations with non-elite adult Liberians living in Greater Monrovia. The response draws upon written notes from seventy semi-structured interviews with adult Liberians as well as participant observation as a guest of three different neighbourhoods in Greater Monrovia; Caldwell, Red Hill Field, and Hotel Africa. The topics that this chapter focuses on were selected from two factors: one, topics that interviewees spent a great deal of time discussing, and two, topics that were prominent in informal conversations but did not appear to be co-produced alongside institutional discourses; in other words, discourses that primarily arise from conversations outside formal liberal institutions. Out of diverse and contested viewpoints, certain common themes emerge. This data will demonstrate how interviewees instrumentalised the topic of gender violence to comment more broadly upon power dynamics in society, and how interviewees' self-representation strategies re-construct Liberian colonial tropes of 'civilised' and 'educated', at times also reformulating these tropes.

To accomplish this distillation of diverse public opinions, the chapter begins by describing an array of definitions that Liberians offered for the term 'gender-based violence', from narrow responses focusing exclusively on the rape of children,

to broader conceptualisations that were grounded in values of respect, care, or freedom. Interviewees leveraged the topic of gender violence in a variety of ways, sometimes by instrumentalising or subverting privileged donor discourses for their own ends, and generally using these tropes to represent themselves as positive actors. The most prominent topics emerging from these interviews include dress code, 'cash violence', and occult practices. Obtaining information in response to my initial research questions raised further questions in relation to the symbolic politics interviewees invoked. Why did colonial language such as 'civilised', and 'educated' appear so frequently in these discussions? Why did so many interviewees introduce the topic of dress code, and occult practices, when asked for their perspectives on causes of sexual assault?

To explain this, I relate interviewee viewpoints to corresponding residual issues in Liberia's social history, and to studies on beliefs and attitudes on gender violence in Liberia and elsewhere. For example, the widely-held opinion that female attire provokes rape connects to a specific history of dress code and identity in Liberia, but it also resembles a victim-blaming discourse that studies have identified across disparate geographical regions and timeframes (Bohner et. al., 2005; Hayes et. al., 2013; Jewkes et. al., 2014). Findings help explain inconsistencies in surveys of public opinion in Liberia, and support feminist theorising that globalised gender violence narratives, both 'feminist' and 'patriarchal', can merge with locally specific meanings (Hunnicutt, 2009; Kandiyoti, 1988). Another motif in interviews was the association of gender violence with symbols of Western consumer culture, such as blue jeans, cash, and films, as well as essentialised norms of 'tradition' and 'culture'. A third narrative alleged that rape against children was primarily due to occult

beliefs surrounding sacrifice for the gain of wealth and power. All of these discursive trends convey both culturally/contextually specific norms as well as points of convergence with globalised feminist explanations of gender violence and its supporting gendered ideologies. I conclude that this selectiveness in discursively constructing the power dynamics of past and present represents a marginalised 'authorship' over public narratives of identity, but does not reach the poststructuralist liberation from these narratives that postcolonial and feminist philosophers such as Kenzo (2002), Appiah (1991, 2001), and hooks (hooks, 1989) identify as an avenue for epistemic liberation. Informal discursive patterns also suggest core dilemmas of consent to social contract and sexual contract in the postwar liberal state and its large network of donors. To commence, the following section addresses the diversity of viewpoints on how respondents felt that gender violence should be defined.

**Barbarism or civilisation: defining gender violence, self and others**

As Chapter Two stated, the purpose of the interviews was not to determine one monolithic 'Liberian viewpoint' but rather to get a cross-cutting perspective on the competing and shifting narratives surrounding gender violence. The wide range of definitions offered for gender-based violence support the assessment that a stable and widely shared normative approach does not exist, and may be forming in the dynamic postwar period. For the same reason, the uniformity of some responses becomes all the more significant given the diversity of perspectives and lived experiences.

Approximately half of interviewees, who we asked prior to the interview 'have you heard the term gender-based violence', claimed they had. At the beginning of the interview they were asked to define the term in their own understanding. The range of responses was striking. For some, gender-based violence simply meant rape committed against children. More respondents mentioned a variety of issues including rape, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage. Some interviewees offered more broad-based definitions that included unequal treatment, verbal abuse, transactional sex, and lack of financial support as forms of violence.[1] Most specified that GBV was a matter of male maltreatment of women and girls; a few included both sexes as perpetrators; and a small minority of men were primarily concerned about women sexually abusing men and boys, or hectoring men for financial support. Those respondents who gave broad-based explanations frequently included words like 'right' and 'will', calling upon notions of personal capabilities,[2] or ethics of care and respect in their conceptual framing. Below are some examples:

> *"Some of the violence may not be an action ... father silence the role the woman want to play ... you are not to speak ... it's a violation of the woman's right"* (Samson K., youth leader. Interview, October 2013)

> *"Maybe it's about the wife and the children, how they are maltreated ... some fathers don't consider the woman, that she has the right. To cherish her, in poverty and in wealth"* (Mrs. Rose M., toy shop owner. Interview, April 2012)

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[1] The issues of financial support and family roles were prominent topics brought up by interviewees, and will be discussed in Chapter Seven with respect to 'positive masculinities' and dual-sex production and representation systems.
[2] I use this term specifically referring to Sen and Nussbaum's work on capabilities. See Nussbaum's *Women and Human Development* (Nussbaum, 2000).

> *"Like to say … you are in the home, anything the man say should be the final, or, if the man wants something to do with you [meaning sex] it will be by force."* (Mariama B., chop stand and movie theatre manager. Interview, September 2012)

Definitions tended not to be technical or in list form, but descriptive, pointedly value-laden, and often voiced in a personal tone. This occasionally gave my research partners and me the impression that the interviewee was relating, in the abstract, their own experience.[3] Without our prompting, many individuals volunteered personal stories of their own involvement in a community response to a GBV incident, or of witnessing violence in their family or personal network. Gender violence in its many forms was a matter of complex social significance, as well as personal importance to interviewees.

As the examples throughout this chapter will show, many respondents used their opinions about gender violence to position themselves in positive roles, as a family provider, a community leader, a tradition-respecting person, a good mother, father, or friend. This idealised (not to say inaccurate) self-representation conveyed implicit or explicit statements about what the interviewee believed the dominant standard of 'correct' behaviour was. Related to this, the methodology chapter noted the ways in which my presence as a foreigner could have elicited certain responses, and my impression that my presence had a polarising effect on responses. Some male interviewees were curiously earnest in speaking against male abuse of women, eager to represent themselves as upstanding men, but others seemed to see the conversation as a valuable opportunity to tell an 'American' like me what they

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[3] No one directly self-identified as a survivor of rape or another severe form of GBV, and we made it clear before interviewing that we were not soliciting that information.

wished outsiders knew about 'African culture', and their critiques of the institutional approaches to gender equality in Liberia. On more than one occasion, my initial impression that a male interviewee was exaggerating his opposition to gender violence for the benefit of my research teammate and myself gave way to a more sober recognition of his convictions, especially if he disclosed his emotional torment in witnessing a sister, mother, or friend experience gender violence.

Historically meaningful language appeared in responses. Citing tradition, 'natives', culture, and uneducated people as enablers of gender violence was a recurring theme in interviews. Bennett, a young information technology student, opened the interview by identifying sexual abuse and domestic violence as a major problem, because "most of the Liberians are natives ... we got to spread the message to them verbally" (Interview, September 2012). Clarifying what he meant by 'native', he elaborated:

> *"I mean ... they're not well-educated when it comes to terms like gender-based violence. [We need] to go up there in the rural areas ... they got like five wives, six wives, in the interior ... I see it as a gender-based violence ... [It is] a tradition, he got his wife, he died, his brother got to take his wife ... I don't think it's really necessary".*

The invocation of colonial language is fascinating because of the contradictions it so often voices. For example, it is unsurprising that a young theology student calls upon Christian morals to oppose domestic violence, and recommends that GBV awareness campaigns should "take the gospel to the people" more thoroughly (Clarence L.W. Interview, April 2012). In contrast, it is more counter-intuitive that a young hip-hop artist who writes socially progressive songs would make similar comments, arguing that sexual assault is caused by untraveled

people who "don't know the difference between barbarism and justice, or barbarism and civilisation", for whom rape "is like a grassroot tradition" because "in ancient days, they take women as cattle" (Soloblii. Interview, April 2012).

Soloblii's use of archaic and colonial language seemed like a rupture in his otherwise progressive beliefs, which generally dignified his fellow Africans. An example is his song *Asantewaa,* in praise of African women's hard work. Asantewaa is the name of an Asante queen famous for leading a rebellion against British colonisation in 1900 (McCaskie, 2007). It is colloquially used in West Africa to praise or criticise a woman with leadership abilities; in Soloblii's song, it had positive connotations. He mentioned another song he wrote for women who engage in transactional sex, which he said carried the message that they were not to blame. Soloblii's 'homeboy cosmopolitan' style, future aspirations, and many travels, which included forced migration, are in keeping with the way he associated rape with a certain negative perception of tradition, provincialism, and the past (Diawara & Kolbowski, 1998; Utas, 2003). Perhaps his solidarity with his African sisters quite naturally lead him to reject social systems that he perceived to treat them "as cattle". Nevertheless, his classification of rural and 'traditional' peoples as barbaric left an anomalous lack of regard for the struggles of those who have not 'traveled'.

In another manifestation of colonial tropes, participants self-defined as civilised or educated via their representations of gender violence. Francis B., a mechanic who described himself as a "pure British man" because of his name and English style schooling in Sierra Leone, announced "you can ask me, 'have you beaten on your wife?'... I don't do it, to no woman ... I'm educated". He later reiterated, "educated people don't beat on their wife". Although he related his own

educated status to school attendance, he explained that "there are [educated] people who don't go to school ... going to school doesn't mean you are educated. They don't reason" (Interview, October 2012). Similarly, an adult woman who chose the pseudonym 'Old Lady', explained that when couples fight publicly, "start talking all sort of thing, and the man get vexed, and put the woman outside the house ... they are not civilised".

> *"Civilized is different different ... some people can just talk ... anything they feel like talking ... Some people, they learn [at school]. But at the end of the day they not civilized. Some people don't learn but still they are civilized. They will greet you well ... the way they laugh with you, welcome you"*

To her, uncivilized means "Something like cursing, rudeness, you know", and that she considers herself "a civilised woman [and] a country woman" ('Old Lady'. Interview, September 2012). Her emphasis on self-control and disciplined speech is a core value in Liberia's indigenous groups that has been documented in the anthropology literature and corroborated in several interviews (Abrahams, 2011; Ellis, 1999; Shaw, 2002). 'Old Lady' likely derived her personal values of self-control from her "background from in the bush", as she termed it, yet she applies this value as a mark of civilisation. Others have noted the fluidity of civilised status, wherein women can move from one category to the other, and back again, by a change of lifestyle or dress; men, once civilised, stay civilised (Moran, 2006). However, for a woman to be both civilised and 'country' at the same time appears to be a novel possibility in postwar Liberia, one that 'Old Lady' has seized on her own accord.

As Chapter Four explained, the accessibility of 'civilised' status reinforced settler dominance in the 19th and early 20th centuries by creating an aspirational element to the Americo-Liberian prestige structure; blurring obvious boundaries

between 'us' and 'them' concealed inequalities (Brown, 2008; Moran, 2006). The superiority of Americo-Liberian 'civilisation' has been long discredited, as Americo-Liberian writers themselves have reflected (see, for example, Cooper, 2008). To whatever extent the grand narrative of 'Americo-Liberian civilisation' was stable in the first place – and this has been questioned by anthropologists (Moran, 1988; Tonkin, 1992, 2002) – the 'ruins' seem to persist (Stoler, 2008). Today, the accessibility of the elitist echelon has been turned against it; interviewees do not simply aspire to be 'educated' and 'civilised', but adapt these identifications to their own personal values, which themselves appear to be transforming in response to protracted conflict and changes to elite networks of patronage (Hoffman, 2011).

The above section outlined how interviewees self-defined according to value-laden historical tropes of 'education', 'civilisation', and 'barbarism' in reference to their personal definitions of gender violence. The following section illustrates these themes in more depth, by showing how interviewees used gender violence discourses to express their views of society in Liberia and beyond.

## Fashion, films, and 'forehead' as causes of gender violence

### *'Dress code'*

The vast majority of interviewees indicated women's attire as a major cause of rape in Liberia, with comments like:

> *"The women are the cause ... when you dress like decent woman, man will call you good, [if not] men will jump on you".* (Patience D., bar manager. Interview, September 2012)

> *"We should stop nakeding ourselves on the street … we girls can be the cause of raping … other people don't like to put clothes on their girls … seven, eight years old child naked … that alone can make men to rape you"* (Joan, Student. Interview, September 2012)

Men and women alike held this viewpoint, including several women who were wearing clothing that could be considered immodest such as jeans, tank tops, or a carelessly-tied lappa. Complaints specifically focused on 'short short' skirts, and 'tight jeans', especially if they revealed the midriff or worse yet, thong underwear emerging from the 'junction'. The ubiquity of statements like these suggests a well-established norm, but the vehemence with which interviewees delivered them gave a sense of contestation.

Indecency was not simply a function of what body parts a woman exposed, but involved a certain 'big time girl' aesthetic that included jeans, jewellery, artificial hair weaves and other items 'from outside', in a similar vein as the depictions of urban women in Monrovia newspaper cartoons in the 1980s (Moran, 2006). "Big time girls" wear "no country plait" in their hair, specified Korpo N. (Interview, September 2012). Several interviewees told some version of a cautionary tale in which a mentally ill man publically raped, or attempted to rape, a young woman dressed this way.

Interviewees' assertions to do with dress code were situated both geographically and temporally. While they strongly associated female modesty with the prewar past, and the stability or stratification of rural life, they classified the disapproved clothing and behaviour as recent cultural invasions from outside. Many respondents called for a return to 'traditional' clothing, which they explained meant long skirts and modest shirts. That the traditional women's attire for certain ethnic

groups is a short skirt and no top whatsoever was not part of this representation of 'tradition', even as visual evidence of that history persists in statues and murals in Monrovia.

Only one interviewee acknowledged this, a Museum of Liberia historian named Lamie who throughout our conversation expressed pride in his indigenous identity.[4] Lamie took a negative view of female modesty, not in everyday fashion but during ceremonies. He lamented that "even the dress code of the graduates is done with modernity", as Sande bush initiates had recently started wearing rice bags instead of grass skirts, and sometimes wore leggings underneath or had artificial hair weaves. "More than one hundred years ago ... in fact they exposed their breast. So you could see the natural beauty of the woman". He felt that modesty was on the rise "because of modernity ... the community now is exposing, you have music, you have video club. So the western culture is infiltrating".[5] Lamie's description of 'western culture' as an invasive and corrupting influence resonates with other

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[4] Specifically, Lamie belongs to the Gola ethnolinguistic group, and his comments indicated a pan-indigenous positionality in opposition to Americo-Liberian settlers, and Western arrogance.

[5] Several interviewees used the term 'modern' to make normative distinctions. What is 'modernity'? Piot 'seeks to unsettle the orientalising binarism – and conceit – that associates Europe with 'modernity' and Africa with 'tradition' (1999:1). I concur with Piot that the concept of modernity is a eurocentric vanity, a point that connects to a general critique of 'centrism' from Jean and John Comaroff, who passionately argue for a concept of the postcolonial margins as 'frontier space', running ahead of rather than qualitatively distinct from 'the centre' (J. L. Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006, 2012). For the purpose of understanding narratives influenced by West African 'village cosmopolitanism', and centuries of globalised episodes of conflict and coerced labour (Hoffman, 2011; Piot, 1999; Shaw, 2002), modernity is an out-of-date concept. As such the reader will note that this chapter repeats the language interviewees used, but does not launch into a sustained and exhaustive exposition of 'modernity' and its discontents.

interviewees' comments, but he applied it to a different and more specific scenario of Sande graduation ceremonies.

Fittingly, the only male interviewee who rejected the connection between clothing and rape was a tailor named Sekou: "You as a man should be able to control your sexual emotion ... only because she wearing something something, you should be able to respect woman all along". This viewpoint was not founded upon approval for immodest attire; Sekou firmly opposed the "dress code" of "borrowed culture":

> *"You know, we had our culture. But when the war came, like the breed that born in 1990, that went out there, like Ghana, Nigeria ... they show them movies ... borrowed culture. That borrowed culture have carried our society in a different direction ... children that live in Bududurum camp [in Ghana], they dress any way they feel like dressing ... they brought it back here ..."*

In contrast to Soloblii's claims to prestige based on having 'traveled' and gained education, Sekou saw mobility as a threat to the formerly "decent" and "stable society" of the mid-twentieth century, and wanted to bring back the past in the form of "new old days" for Liberia.

It is unsurprising that violence against women and girls should be framed in reference to social concerns, especially in contexts of colonisation, upheaval, forced migration, armed conflict, and identity-based tensions. The treatment of women's and girls' bodies as powerful symbols of identity formation is ubiquitous within and outside Liberia (see, for example: Baines, 2003; Enloe, 1983; Moran, 2006; Turshen, 1998). Specific to Liberia, there is a longstanding history of politicising fashion, with both historical specificity and resemblance to larger-scale transnational tropes of women's behaviour and dress.

As Chapter Four related, a Western style of dress was a crucial indicator of civilised status, especially since the racialisation of settler status in other colonies did not as visibly apply to black Liberian settlers (Brown, 2008; Olukoju, 2006). Publicly criticising urban women has a more recent history in Monrovia as well. Mary Moran's (2006) analysis of newspaper cartoons in Monrovia in the 1980s included a discussion of regional tropes of scandalously dressed and 'loose' urban African women. She acknowledges that the stereotype appears in other African cities, but suggests that cartoonists in 1980s Liberia applied it as a veiled criticism of 1980 coup leader Samuel K. Doe, whose 'pretensions to civilised status' could be compared to that of a materialistic young woman (1491). The argument is interesting, but the existence of the 'immodest urban woman' trope long after the Doe regime and outside Liberia highlights its relevance beyond that particular context. Furthermore, Doe's pretensions to 'country' elitism were arguably more ostentatious and hypocritical than his 'civilised' facade, as he meddled in secret society affairs, cultivated a mystique of occult protection, and orchestrated the persecution of Gio and Mano ethnolinguistic groups throughout the 1980s (Ellis, 1995; Utas, 2006). In order for the 'immodest woman' trope to be leveraged against Doe, it had to already occupy a place in the shared perceptions of Liberian newsreaders.

In the postwar era, Chris Coulter observes that jeans and tank-tops can be a statement of defiance by ex-combatants and other socially marginalized women in Sierra Leone (Coulter, 2009). This, as well as the aspirational element of 'big time girl' attire, may explain why some make the fashion choices they do, but the answer to why the 'dress code' issue is so incendiary in the first place more plausibly arises from the history of dress as a marker of social status. In post-war Liberia,

interviewees appropriated the standards of modesty that had originated from Christian missionaries and Western aspiration in the colonial era, against current influences from 'outside'. The call for modesty was framed not as an antidote to indigenous immorality, as it had been during colonisation, but to the perceived rootlessness and sexual excess of the West, or 'outside'. Although many interviewees stated that the 'dress code' problem had started since the war, Moran shows that similar criticisms abounded well before the outbreak of conflict. This highlights the persistence of the past in current discourses, and the renegotiation of how that past is remembered and instrumentalised.

*'Those rude shows'*

Not all respondents specified the West in their critiques. Some generalised all other countries as 'outside' and others constructed 'foreignness' according to their own convenience. Auntie Marie F. denounced recent developments in Indian and Nigerian films: "you know the African movie stars they naked these days". After explaining that female immodesty provoked men to rape, she specifically criticised the "different colour forehead", that movies promoted, by which she meant "[hair] weaves ... different different colours ... you see everything just zig-zag ... African movie, I don't like them that much" (Interview, October 2012). 'Miatta MacDonald' similarly stated, "some of the children say it's from the Western world. What they see on television, on movies, they just want to do the same thing". When asked to specify which films, she said, "so many movies ... African movies" (Interview, October 2012). Both the 'Western world' and 'African movies' were included as outside influences.

The individuals quoted above mentioned movies as a cause of unwanted behaviour, which they linked to rape and sexual exploitation. Their statements voice an interesting contradiction towards African movies. As a vector of moral decay, the Nigerian film industry was framed as a foreign import, an external threat to Liberian decency whether 'civilised' or 'country'. Conversely, as an exposer of occult practices, it was sometimes cited as an authoritative insider's perspective on local witchcraft practices. A statement from 'Ms. Lorax', a bottled drink distributer, illustrates this contradiction. In her interview she criticised both African and European movies as external bad influences causing rape-provoking behaviours. Yet, speaking about a large cotton tree within her own neighbourhood, she explained that witches "own the tree ... that where they can perform at night ... because I watch a movie, African movie, the demonic lived in a tree ... where they had a meeting" (Interview, October 2012). In 2009, some of my acquaintances insisted that the blood rituals depicted in the Nigerian film *Widow's Cult* were true to life events they had heard of in Liberia.

This insider-outsider contradiction recalls Paul Richards' argument in *Fighting for the Rainforest* that disaffected youth and combatants in the Mano River conflict personally identified with American movies, especially *Rambo: First Blood*. Contradicting the widespread belief that rebel groups used *First Blood* primarily as a brainwashing tool to impel youth to commit violence, he notes the experiences that combatant youth had in common with the character John Rambo, such as rainforest expertise, and exploitation and marginalisation from society. The film offered 'a political analysis about the wider society's neglect of the creative potential of the

young', that resonated with combatants (1996:114).[6] If American war veteran John Rambo can be an 'insider', and Nigerian films can convey 'outside' or 'inside' perspectives depending on whether they feature scantily-clad actresses or bewitched trees, then the entire notion of 'outside' becomes arbitrary. This observation is corroborated by the following section on 'cash violence'.

*'Cash violence'*

The criticism of immodest dress overlaps with similarly frequent mentions of sexual exploitation or transactional sex, which one young trader named Prince aptly termed 'cash violence': "Looking at the poverty it's like cash violence. Maybe the person don't want that person but he have money in his pocket". Prince reiterated that he considered this a form of violence, and a "big problem" in Liberia. 'Old Lady' gave a succinct description of sexual exploitation in her community: "Because they big man, they can do anything" (Interview, September 2012). Both the act of paying for sex and the motivations of receiving money for sex were frowned upon in many comments:

> *"Gender based violence is sometimes when men take advantage of girls ... fifteen to seventeen years and because that man have money he pursuing ... use cash violence on her to use her ... but [she] didn't do it with [her] free mind".* (Toe E. Interview, September 2012)

> *"Laziness of our girls. Nowadays they just want material things ... for little or nothing men take them and abuse them ... not looking at where you come from ... During those days our people were not exposed to so much riches ... you have your cassava farm and you are satisfied".* (Adult man, trader. Personal interview, August 2009)

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[6] My teenage host brother, an artist and former member of the Liberian Dance Troupe from Bududurum Refugee Camp, offered another perspective while watching the film: 'I like John Rambo. But not as my role model' (Unpublished Facebook comment, February 23, 2013).

A businesswoman named Theresa complained, "the prostitution rate too high ... the people are in need of trousers. And [prostitutes say] I don't got money ... is it because I want jean trouser? I want to be like my other friend" (Interview, September 2012). When asked if she thought people engaged in prostitution for food or for non-survival reasons, she clarified "some people do it for material things...you got ten dollar you won't think about buying food, you buy jean trousers". A young man named Amos reiterated this, while adding the postconflict dimension: "For this our country...we just came from war...all our little sisters and brothers...they follow money". He worried about the lifestyles of young women: "a woman who never planned her foundation...you should be focused, not just passing around doing man business...[for] five dollar to buy jeans" (Amos K. Interview, September 2012). As in the 'dress code' issue, cash and certain commercial items such as blue jeans were seen as motivating or enabling violence.

Interviewees were selective about what 'outside' influences they considered to be negative and under what circumstances. When Amos K. criticised girls who 'follow money' and sell their bodies 'to buy jeans', he also pointed out that such women should 'be focused' and 'plan their foundation'. Even Sekou M., the tailor who disliked 'borrowed culture', appreciated the houses and banking system of 'borrowed culture', and felt he had benefited from the philosophy of male non-violence towards women, an idea that was not part of his upbringing. Auntie Marie F., who disliked Indian and Nigerian films, was not against modern media as a technology; she previously worked for a documentary film company in Liberia and expressed a desire to make more films. Similarly nuanced in her viewpoints was Amie, an elder who also named movies as a bad influence, yet assisted in managing

a movie theatre in her house. During our interview, a Bollywood romance about the opportunities and moral risks of urban migration, *Pappu Can't Dance Saala*, played in the background. Amie did not say whether or not *Pappu Can't Dance* was a bad influence; perhaps she felt it was other theatres promoting "those rude shows, the sexual shows" she disliked, or perhaps the Indian film had enough midriff-baring to earn her disapproval (Amie. Interview, September 2012).

Hoffman (2003) contends that fighters who destroyed the vestiges of modern life in Monrovia in the early 1990s (electricity, toilets, western-style houses) were doing so not out of opposition to modern technology but out of anger over their exclusion from it. The conflicting comments regarding money and movies may suggest that the speakers' critique is not so much against 'modern ways' itself but rather, concern towards cultural influences over which interviewees felt they had no control. This could be a reformulated type of 'native-settler' resentment, or it could also, more broadly, be an expression of alienation directed towards new forms of social exclusion generated by contemporary prestige structures of wealth and 'position', superimposed upon the prestige structure of violence during wartime, and 'civilization' in the decades before that.

If the critiques underlying these perceptions of gender violence are those of social, economic, or political exclusion, then non-elite Liberians construct their own classifications, just as they have the residual colonial categories of 'civilised' and 'country'. In this manner, movies can come 'from outside' even if they are from as nearby as Ghana, while Christian missionary sartorial conventions can be claimed as 'traditional' to suit the objectives of the speaker. Interviewees such as Soloblii who have 'gone outside' as refugees can leverage this to claim 'educated' status according

to locally-situated standards of prestige, or they can be criticised for indulging in 'borrowed culture' by equally locally-situated and historically specific standards. Such selective delineations of insider/outsider suggest that researchers of gendered social justice would be wise to avoid facile binaries of local/global and traditional/modern, and move instead towards a recognition of multiple, layered, and shifting identity constructions (Benhabib, 2002).

Recalling Chapter Three's discussion of epistemic agency under constraint, numerous postcolonial and anti-racist theorists envision a type of postmodern epistemic freedom for individuals and populations marginalised by colonial and structural violence (Appiah, 1991; hooks, 1989; Kenzo, 2002). Monrovians articulate their values by picking and choosing the positive aspects of 'modern' things. They articulate the negative aspects of both 'modernity' and 'tradition' in part by connecting them with gender violence. Their voices are subalterned – as outlined by Spivak (1988) – and marginalised – as described by hooks (1989). They do not speak in unison, but, in the findings this chapter has highlighted, the discursive conflict often takes place on the same terrain. In their selective approach to the vestiges of modernity, interviewees undermine the idea that 'modernity' and 'tradition' are stable and distinct classifications; they assert the 'ex-centricity' (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012:127) of their lived experiences. However, unlike Appiah's *Yoruba Man With a Bicycle* (1992), 'who does not care' about the colonial origin of his bicycle, interviewees do not seem to have attained a postmodern or poststructuralist freedom from the hierarchies of the past; they merely exercise personal agency in instrumentalising, reclaiming, and redefining privileged discourses.

So far, this chapter presented a selection of the most prominent findings from the semi-structured interviews, and highlighted the existence of historically value-laden terms and concepts that many interviewees promoted. Another trend that may already be apparent to the reader is the victim-blaming that appears in many comments. The next section will briefly compare and contrast interview data with other studies on victim-blaming and 'rape myth acceptance' (RMA). It will contend that although rape myth acceptance is prevalent in postwar Liberia, there are some noticeable silences that suggest that victim-blaming functions in a historically specific way, even as it draws upon globalised narratives of victim-blaming.

**Victim-blaming or voicing memory?**

Burt's (1980) classic survey method of measuring rape myth acceptance has been both critiqued (Maxwell & Scott, 2013) and adapted over time and in cross-cultural contexts.[7] These globally widespread myths include the viewpoint that men cannot control their urges to attack women and girls, and that women and girls can protect themselves by modifying their appearance and behaviour so as not to 'provoke' male sexual desire. Interviewee responses strongly resonated with these

[7] A selection of RMA-based studies from around the world include: Bohner, Jarvis, Eyssel, & Siebler, 2005; Egan & Wilson, 2011; Henderson, 1992; Jankowski, Johnson, & Damron, 2011; Kalichman et al., 2005; Lee, Kim, & Lim, 2009; Puiseau & Roessel, 2013; Wood, 2005. RMA has also been adapted and expanded into other surveys linking gender perceptions with behaviour such as the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (Slegh et. al., 2014).

two beliefs, and in that sense could be interpreted as a globalised patriarchal narrative of sexual violence.

Recalling its discussion in this dissertations's theoretical framework, patriarchy as an ideological and structural phenomenon can be internationally widespread while also heterogeneous in the way it manifests in diverse social structures and belief systems (Hunnicutt, 2009; Kandiyoti, 1988). This helps to explain some aspects of the 'dress code' commentary that speak to historically particular 'Liberian' experiences rather than typical rape myth acceptance beliefs. While interviewees frequently asserted that 'half-naked' women and girls provoked men to rape, their specific complaints about clothing were not always focused on nudity; a 'zig-zag' hair weave, for example, was considered immodest only because of its perceived association with certain values. Generally, interviewees seemed to instrumentalise the issue of rape to make a point about dress code, rather than instrumentalising established norms of modesty to convey a point about rape. When discussing sexual exploitation, many interviewees viewed dress code as not just a cause, but also a negative consequence of 'cash violence', which suggests the dislike of certain fashions is independent from their supposed connection to gender violence. Reinforcing this, dress was an issue that many seemed to have strong opinions about regardless of its perceived connection to sexual violence, and complaints about fashion were occasionally extended to men's attire as well.

In addition to the issue of dress, rape myth acceptance also includes perceptions that women say 'no' when they mean 'yes', that they can fight off a rapist if they truly do not want sex, and that they make false allegations (Burt, 1980; Henderson 1992). The UNMIL 'Research on Prevalence and Attitudes to Rape in

Liberia' survey from 2008 posed a series of statements like these that elicited agreement from urban and rural respondents around the country (UNMIL, 2008: Appendix I). In contrast to this survey data, the above statements rarely came up in interviews led by my teammates and me.

There are several possible explanations for the differences in results between the two studies: there could be an urban-rural difference in perceptions, or, phrasing a question positively as the UNMIL survey does could increase the percentage of people who agree compared to phrasing it negatively. However, the most crucial methodological difference that would explain these results is that in my study, interviewees had more control over their answers because my team's questions were open-ended, and encouraged interviewees to choose topics they felt were important. The responses compared to UNMIL's are different but not directly contradictory. It is interesting that out of the list of eighteen beliefs on the attitudes section of the UNMIL survey, the statement 'women contribute to rape by wearing revealing clothes' was one that a very high percentage of respondents agreed to (86% of men and 82% of women), whereas relatively few agreed to the similarly victim-blaming statement that 'women contribute to rape by being alone in a deserted place' (47% of men and 48% of women). The *relative* importance of dress code assigned by UNMIL respondents corresponds with my findings, and is in keeping with the historical and social meanings my analysis highlights.

The above paragraphs identified some points of departure with standard RMA beliefs despite the clear relevance of RMA methodology to explaining interviewee's viewpoints. Furthermore, an RMA-related scale of 'just world beliefs', which gauges the respondent's level of denial towards horrific and unjust

occurrences, and has been a factor in rape myth acceptance (Hayes et al., 2013), would be of questionable application to the Liberian context given the 'collective trauma' resulting from countenancing atrocities within living memory (Abramowitz, 2005). The imperfect fit with RMA beliefs calls for locally relevant explanations to be included through qualitative and grounded research. The discourse on women's dress code, like the Liberian '*lappa*-suit' it references, is cut from a transnational and cosmopolitan fabric, imprinted with regional symbols, and tailored to fit the individual.

Moving from the prominent narrative of dress code to the equally prominent narrative of witchcraft and child rape, the next section will discuss another issue that frequently emerged in interviews, the perception that child rape is linked to occult practices.

**Witchcraft, wealth, and child rape as institutional dilemmas**

After dress code, the second most common response to the question 'what is the cause of 'raping cases' in Liberia today' was that child rape is a ritual practice most often done to confer 'wealth' or 'position' on the rapist. The below paragraphs will first examine the exceptionalism with which child rape was treated, and then move towards an analysis of how this contributes to occult discourses in the regional literature, and how recognising these tropes could contribute to a more sophisticated response to sexual violence from gender and development initiatives.

Some interviewees spoke of child rape in qualitatively different terms than rape against adult or teenage women whose sexual maturity normalises, for some,

the idea that sexual violence could be committed against them. "Isn't that woman you looking for?" said a community leader named Nina regarding the rape of an infant. Some people consider that rape is not 'real rape' if it happens to an older girl or adult woman, another victim-blaming narrative (Interview, July 2009). Certainly the dress code discourse above has shown that some interviewees sexualised pre-pubescent children as provocateurs of sexual violence; nevertheless, many others found child rape to be transgressive in a way that was not equally applicable to older girls.

In literature on sexual violence in contexts of humanitarian concern, one explanation for the exceptionalism assigned to child rape versus teen or adult rape is the distancing effect this narrative creates:

> *'The treatment of child rape as a crime of extremes, in terms of both the age of the victims and the physical injuries caused, tends to conceal the fact that sexual violence is a routine phenomenon, both in frequency and in practices. The focus on the most horrific incidents has a paradoxically reassuring effect. The men who perpetrate these barbaric acts of pedophilia would be dangerous psychopaths, against whom society must be protected. There would be a sort of externality of evil'.* (Fassin, 2012: 171)

This point is nuanced and insightful, yet it is worth remembering that for interviewees in Monrovia, the 'dangerous psychopaths' were next door neighbours who often continued to live in the community, and so evil was not in these cases 'externalised' to a safe distance. The perception some people held that all or most high positions in government and commerce were a result of child sacrifice and child rape perhaps suggests a banality of evil rather than an externality of evil. Despite these reservations, Fassin's analysis is informative by examining the innuendoes of such narratives and the barriers they create between guilt and innocence. Fassin furthermore points out that in South Africa and international

media, lurid stories of obscene acts by black men invoke racialised tropes of fear and exoticism (Fassin, 2012). While I agree with this characterisation of how international journalism tends to gaze upon Africa, racist tropes in the Liberian context are markedly different than post-apartheid South Africa; unsurprising given the political differences underpinning the deployment of such tropes. In Liberia, where interlocuters represented child rape as a spectacle of evil, this was often balanced with a kind of resignation over the 'new normalcy' of such acts (Abramowitz, 2014), as evidenced by the 'common sense' advice that children should dress modestly and obey their parents to avoid rape. Consequently, while child rape was considered a superlative evil relative to the rape of a teen or adult, some interviewees nevertheless spoke of it as a current and ubiquitous reality. Where allegations of child rape served to draw a line between wider societal guilt and innocence, as in Fassin's above point, it was often along lines of wealth and political power, and via perceived links to witchcraft.

The exceptionalism with which some interviewees treated child rape reinforced its perceived association with occult rituals. People did not always specify whether the child was a boy or a girl, but all the specific examples were girl children.

> *"Some people got different different thing they can rape the child too. You go to a medicine man, they say you must virginize someone ... to get position".*(Charlotte. Interview, October 2012)

> *"Juju, the rituals ... it was a Fula man. He did it to a little girl ... right next door. We didn't know, because he covered her mouth. So, the blood, he drained it in a cup, and big juju he went to go make with that blood".* (Nina. Interview, February 2013)

> *"They go to medicine people. Black medicine. The medicine man will go and tell you ... you got to lay down with small girl before you succeed at what you're doing. When you lay down with small girl, the purpose you go for, you wind up rich. People say they want to be rich. [It's] common in the cities ... they do it for positions. Some people want to be big government workers".* (James M. Personal interview, January 2013)

The above examples are typical quotes on child rape linking the crime to occult practices and especially for the purpose of gaining wealth and power.[8] To interpret such comments requires that they be situated within their sometimes ambiguous metaphysical contexts. While the issue of witchcraft came up frequently, it was often discussed tacitly and referenced in vague and varied language: 'witchcraft', 'medicine people', 'juju', 'that society man', 'the devil', 'African science', or sometimes just 'so so and so person'. The distinctions between Poro/Sande leaders, traditional healers, and witchcraft were similarly unclear and varied by individual positionality. For example, a landlady named Charlotte explained that witchcraft practitioners and medicine men were not the same thing, but that they worked in cooperation and that both had the power to kill. She also said that "medicine man and this society man they the same", referring to Poro and Sande leaders, who "can protect you [because] they got some things in there, they

[8] Given the thematic similarilties, one might speculate that there is a connection between ritual child/infant rape in Liberia and incidents of child/infant rape in South Africa that ostensibly result from the belief that it cures HIV. This apparent connection is misleading. In Liberia, not one interviewee spoke of a connection between child rape and HIV. In South Africa, Rachel Jewkes and others have cast doubt on the theory that HIV beliefs cause men to rape, noting the low rate of sero-conversion in child victims, and the tendency of the media to exoticise and sensationalise black South Africans who commit violence (Jewkes et. al., 2002). Other scholars may find similarities worth investigating, but I choose to focus instead on more prominent aspects of the interview data that emphasise witchcraft and wealth. In doing so I take heed of Jewkes' reminder that child and infant rape occur around the world and are by no means an 'African' phenomenon. While there may be locally specific causes for child rape based in belief systems, these form part of a broader feminist analysis that would explain why rape against children and adults occurs around the world and in connection to gendered and racialised power differentials – an approach that has also figured prominently in the South African studies (Richter, 2003).

will not explain it to you" (Interview, October 2012). Her explanation left uncertain the distinction between witchcraft, medicine, and secret society.

Another element of ambiguity was the place of juju within broader metaphysical or religious belief systems. Interviewees' frequent and specific focus on blood in ritual child rape was consistent with other motifs of traditional practice in the region, including pre-war accounts of 'heartmen' taking organs or body parts from someone (Cooper, 2008; Shaw, 1997). Such categorisations would vary by positionality. For example, some of my Christian acquaintances believe that Muslims normally practice juju, as evidenced by animals being killed during traditional Muslim gatherings and a strong perceived association between blood and witchcraft. Despite Ferme's (2001) discussion of the uneasy integration of Islam and Poro/Sande traditional beliefs for some ethnic groups, it is possible that these informants were leveraging witchcraft beliefs to express their general disregard for Muslims, and that their Muslim acquaintances would likely find this perspective insulting to say the least. Other scholars' more sustained attempts to clarify terms and meanings have been similarly inconclusive (Ellis, 1999).

Academic attempts to understand the occult contain inherent limitations, as academics seek reason and transparency while the power of the occult derives from defying both (Geschiere, 2006). The temptation to impose a linear logical explanation and its resulting sense of closure is strong, but it would be unfaithful to the mercurial nature and diversity of metaphysical beliefs in Liberia. Loose ends, fragmented explanations, and unknowns are unavoidable. Despite the inherent difficulties in identifying and explaining esoteric beliefs, and the risk of exoticising those who hold them, addressing this topic is necessary; firstly, because of the

importance assigned to the discourse of ritual child rape by interviewees, and additionally, because of the implications for a better-informed GBV response and the institutions that enshrine it. The below paragraphs therefore examine this discourse in more detail, in reference to existing research on occult practices in the Mano River Region and Sub-Saharan Africa. To this literature, my research contributes new information linking public perceptions of witchcraft and sexual violence.

Scholars have extensively examined rituals involving human sacrifice in the region, but witchcraft and rape seems to be either a recent phenomenon, or one that is not yet covered in academic literature. Ritual torture and cannibalism by war leaders and combatants is well documented, as are past governments' links to occult and secretive groups most notably the Freemasons and Poro (Brabazon, 2010; Ellis, 1999, 2001; Hoffman, 2011; Utas, 2006). *Avoiding* sexual contact with women is a well-known means of protection, along with other forms of abstinence, as Hoffman (2011) and Keen (2005) have included in their discussion of the *kamajor's* defense tactics in Sierra Leone. Relevent themes in this regional literature which this chapter identifies as important concepts include: the accumulative versus levelling nature of witchcraft and the 'commercialisation of the occult' in postcolonial settings (Geschiere, 1997:200); the paradoxes of liberal state governance of esoteric processes (Geschiere, 2006); the discourse of cannibalism as a means of criticising the powerful (Shaw, 1997, 2002; van de Grijspaarde et. al., 2012); and the heightening of these themes in postcolonial contexts of state and commercial excess, and during times of change (Geschiere, 1997; Mbembe, 2001; Piot, 1999). These themes will be dealt with in turn.

In my fieldwork interviews and encounters, the vague and mercurial definitions of what African science is and who exactly can harness its power contrasted with unambiguous statements about the rewards: riches and political power. Many people were emphatic that all government workers, or at least all men among them, did this. As Solomon K. put it, "That's the work of the devil ... supposed to give the devil blood ... [then] if he apply for any job, he will get" (Interview, October 2012).

Likewise, in a private conversation in September 2012, I asked Bosslady if she aspired to be a political leader. She categorically rejected this idea on the grounds that all political candidates and 'big people' practice juju, though not necessarily child rape. Even her favourite leader, President Sirleaf, was allegedly "into that". Peace activist Lehmah Gbowee was the lone star whose success resulted from God observing her good work and "raising her up". Ironically, given Bosslady's eagerness to condemn African-American musicians as devotees of the goat-like devil Baphomet,[9] she reported that her own achievements had made her the target of unfounded witchcraft suspicions, as well as occult attacks motivated by jealousy. The rumours merely annoyed her, but she was genuinely worried about the possibility of a juju curse on her good fortunes, and regularly fasted and prayed to protect herself spiritually from such an attack.

What do witchcraft suspicions directed towards government workers mean when that government is integrally concerned with the establishment of such basic humanitarian entitlements as rights, security, and health? The dichotomy between

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[9] The incident of our debate about Baphomet and Beyoncé was recounted in Chapter Two.

'traditional' beliefs in witchcraft and 'modern' state and commercial formations, and the common assumption that the rise of one would necessitate the fall of the other, has been disproven by the major research in this area (Geschiere, 1997; Piot, 1999; Shaw, 2002). An interdisciplinary study in Mende-speaking areas of the Gola Forest examined witchcraft perceptions in times of institutional flux (van de Grijspaarde et. al., 2012).[10] The paper is notably useful in terms of its proximity to Liberia, its thoroughness, and the fact that it took place well into the postwar period unlike numerous pre-war studies. It distinguishes between two Mende terms for occult practices: '*boni* and *hona* are rendered (in English) as "cannibalism" and "witchcraft"' (van de Grijspaarde et. al., 2012:29), with '*boni*/cannibalism' often involving the sacrifice of a child.

> *'For groups around the Gola Forest,* boni *is a perversion of the leadership found in power associations. The* bonibla *are seen as 'big people' who turn on their subjects to boost waning chiefly powers. The arrow of blame points upwards. By contrast, witches (*hona bla*) belong to the ordinary people – the peasant classes – and they may not even know the damage their powers can cause. The arrow of blame points laterally, towards peers, or perhaps downwards towards serfs and clients'* (van de Grijspaarde et. al., 2012:29).

Naturally, this does not resolve entirely the questions of terminology that come up in my interview data, because it represents only one facet of occult perceptions within one of many ethnolinguistic groups. Nevertheless, the distinction between witchcraft of the elite and witchcraft of the disaffected seems to illuminate

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[10] In their analysis this refers to transitions from agrarian to commercial production, but other forms of transition may also apply. Other factors might include Liberia's postcolonial condition, extensive corruption, increased commercial activity, and increase in officially-sanctioned raw resource extraction since the end of the war (MacAulay, 2010). Which of these dimensions is key and how they interact could be an interesting question for future research.

some of the subtextual political critiques in interviewees' statements, as the discussion below will highlight.

Geschiere's observation that witchcraft embodies a tension between accumulative and levelling powers has been applied beyond his primary field location of the Cameroonian grasslands (J. L. Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006; Geschiere, 1997; Shaw, 1997, 2002). In a postcolonial context of state spectacle and commercial excess, the accumulative tendencies of occult power are heightened (Geschiere, 1997; Mbembe, 2001; Piot, 1999). Regardless of whether one considers Liberia to be a postcolony of the same nature as Cameroon or other countries, the interviewees' emphasis on the accumulative purpose of ritual child rape is striking. Ferme points out that 'wealth gained from extractive means arouses suspicion in areas where you work for your food – it's like getting something for nothing, and can be associated with witchcraft' (2001:184). Piot observed similar dynamics in Kabre society: 'there is a striking similarity between the economy of the witch and that of the capitalist: both involve the conversion of persons into things ... both represent an inversion of the logic and aims of gift exchange' (1999:68). Sonny T.'s explanation corroborates this: "The power that they have is something that is not normal ... the master that they are seeking, requires it" (Interview, February 2013). In Bosslady's comments discussed above, the 'arrow of blame' pointed laterally towards those who envied her, but more substantially to those higher on the political and economic hierarchy who she suspected of more extreme forms of sacrifice. In a zero-sum game of wealth/power acquisition, there is an intuitive internal logic to the idea that 'protection' can be gained from abstinence, secrecy, or prayer, each of which creates a type of barrier, while accumulation requires bloodshed; that is, taking something

powerful away from the victim and using it for one's own gain. This idea of taking something away converges with a feminist analysis of sexual violence as an expression of power (Hunnicutt, 2009), as opposed to simply a violent expression of normatively understood sexual desire (Das, 1996).

Regarding the accumulative nature of juju in the postcolony, interviewees' comments suggest an apparent contradiction when it came to money. Wealth and materialism were linked with gender violence at all levels of society: people of modest means sell their bodies for blue jeans, mobile phones, and the like; big men 'can do anything' by using their cash to commit violence, and the very ambitious can 'get position' by obtaining the blood of a 'virginized' child. From the least powerful to the most powerful members of society, cash is integral to violence. Yet, some of the same interviewees who made this connection also identified income as an important preventative and restorative step in providing alternatives to sexual exploitation and rehabilitating criminals. The apparent contradiction in the way interviewees spoke about money may originate from a differentiation between 'normal' income earned by hard work, and unnatural gains that fall outside the intuitive connection between work and income.

Likewise, as Chapter Two argued, the occult and seemingly 'irrational' beliefs around Baphomet worship were astute in identifying the 'otherworldliness' of extreme affluence. This is not to reduce those beliefs to their rationalised function, as Geschiere (2006) warns against, but to look at how an underlying logic may amplify certain discourses. In Sierra Leone, prevalent Temne beliefs about the 'Place of Witches' connect similarly to unnatural wealth:

> *'A prosperous city where skyscrapers adjoin houses of gold and diamonds; where Mercedes-Benzes are driven down fine roads; where street vendors roast "beefsticks" (kebabs) of human meat; where boutiques sell stylish "witch gowns" ... where electronics stores sell tape recorders and televisions ...'* (Shaw 1997:857).

Shaw states that it is not clear how those perceptions might have changed over time, as her research with the Temne took place before the outbreak of armed conflict in Sierra Leone. Nonetheless, there are notable thematic similarities between her captivating description of the 'Place of Witches' and some interviewees' suspicions toward material goods, wealth, fashion, and movies.

In addition to his observation of heightened accumulative tendencies, Geschiere (1997) also notes the 'commercialisation of the occult' in postcolonial settings, with the result that distance between elites and non-elites is perceived to widen as a function of their differential access to occult power. Interviewee Solomon K. corroborated this by explaining that not just anyone could go to a medicine man and arrange for wealth and position, but that one needed a certain standing in order to start that process. However, this was not a point that came across strongly in other conversations. Rather than expressing a disparity of access to occult power, interviewees identified a difference in the moral depths to which someone is willing to sink in order to obtain the rewards of juju. The 'arrow of blame' pointed upwards in terms of political power and financial wealth, but it also pointed down, towards moral bankruptcy. As in the Temne conception of 'witch cities', 'its incompatibility with moral personhood and community is registered ... in its tropes of perverted and predatory consumption' (Shaw, 1997, 857). The ambivalence towards power and the non-binarised conception of good and evil that the literature observes across the region (Ellis, 1999; Geschiere, 1997; Shaw, 2002) may well form part of an ambient

system of values in Liberia, but this ambivalence is not prominent in interviewees' statements about ritual child rape, which serve only to condemn.

In contrast with the prevalence of witchcraft and child rape in private conversations and interviews in the informal sphere, institutional initiatives from the GBV Taskforce and other government bodies have been tacit in terms of public advocacy. One UNMIL/Zogbaye cartoon poster from 2013 mentions juju only in passing. In another instance, at a One Billion Rising rally against violence against women in February 2013, 'hip-ko' artist Takun J publically addressed the issue, although it was unclear whether he spoke independently as a lyricist or rather from prompting from the GBV Taskforce or rally organisers. The discourse of child rape and occult sacrifice is, in short, noticeably more prominent in the informal sphere than liberal institutions' public messages.

Witchcraft and state formation have an intimate relationship both inside and outside of the continent (Daly, 1978; Geschiere, 1997). Geschiere problematises the role of the state in intervening in witchcraft matters, as the mystique of witchcraft does not naturally subject itself to rubrics of legalistic logic. Liberal states can thus find themselves emasculated by being unable to intervene in citizens' occult activities. Where this point may apply to Liberia is in incidents appearing regularly in human rights reports, of trial by sassywood ordeal[11] (Leeson & Coyne, 2012; Tonkin, 2000), the murder of someone deemed to be a witch, or a man arrested for ritual child rape. These types of incidents are not broadcast in liberal institutions' advocacy materials, but are recurring issues in child protection and other security

[11] Sassywood is a type of poisonous wood brewed into a drink, which suspects are made to drink to establish their guilt or innocence.

sector activities (see for example: UNMIL Human Rights and Protection Section, 2006, 2009).

The above examples certainly speak to a certain tension of 'rationalist' liberal state governance over the esoteric, but are not the paradox that scholars have identified in other countries. From the human rights perspective in Liberia, forcing someone to drink sassywood poison is illegal because it is classified as a form of torture, which is illegal. Raping a child for ritual purposes is illegal because rape is illegal, regardless of the esoterism of the offender's intentions. Neither the mystical element of these two crimes, nor their underlying dilemmas of difference in a context of humanitarian universality, are core concerns for the governing bodies addressing them. The primary problem that juju poses for Liberian governance is not whether the state is capable to intervene in occult practices. Rather, the Liberian government and its international apparatus of support should take note of the prevalent perception that anyone with state or commercial power is an agent of ritual bloodlust. The former merely questions the extent of state power, but the latter questions the state's very legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens.

The discourse of ritual child rape integrates into the postwar liberal state's conundrums of social contract and sexual contract in a unique manner. Whether or not these perceptions are accurate is an interesting tangential question, though it is beside the key point. Interviewees' perceptions could potentially be interpreted as a critique 'from below' of postwar liberal imperialism through its institutions, though that conclusion should be balanced with the numerous other contexts to which sacrifice allegations apply in Liberia. Changes to Liberian governance during the years of postwar liberal reconstruction could be the kind of institutional flux that

amplifies suspicions of witchcraft. Or, this could be a continuation of longstanding public distrust towards a rarely and barely accountable state. In either case, the relevance of the discourse of ritual child rape to organisations working to address gender violence is multifaceted, implicating the occurrence of sexual violence, differences in the interpreted significance of violent acts, and tensions in the perceived positionality of both liberal and traditional institutions in addressing violence.

To summarise the discursive pattern my research identifies: interviewees' linking of witchcraft, child rape, and wealth/power creates a semiotic triangle that complexifies the values signified by each of these terms. Child rape and ill-gotten gains reflect upon witchcraft by eliciting its accumulative rather than levelling nature. Child rape and witchcraft incriminate the modes of commercial and political success in Liberia today. Wealth and power gained via witchcraft reflect upon the issue of child rape by characterising it as a theft of power, which converges with a feminist analysis of rape. These layered and mutually reflective meanings are constructed in noticeable contrast to the prevailing official discourses on sexual violence and child sexual abuse. The contrast is evident in the prevalence of the witchcraft/child rape discourse in informal circles versus public engagement by liberal institutions. Furthermore, the contrast is sharpened in this case by the critique of power that public discourses on child rape convey.

## Conclusion

This chapter on informal discourses highlighted some of the most prominent themes that interviewees brought up in response to open-ended questions about how they define and perceive gender-based violence. While expecting to find analytical agency, my research teammates and I were greeted with historical agency as well, as interviewees included the symbolic politics of what I initially took to be the 'past' in their language and framing of gender violence. 'Civilisation', 'barbarism', and 'educated' are terms from Liberia's past but produce, and are produced by, social realities today. The liberal imperialism of old that fuelled Liberian settler 'civilisation' is referenced by interviewee's self-representational strategies, even as they challenge such identifications. Moreover, discourses around gender violence, fashion, wealth, and witchcraft voice a lack of trust towards the 'institutional flux' and power relations of the leaders of postwar liberal reconstruction. I hesitate to interpret interviewee statements as a specific critique of postwar liberal humanitarian governance, due to the long history of 'occultism' in Liberian politics; nevertheless, the fact that the postwar government is not exempt from such suspicions speaks to the recurring question of social contract legitimacy in liberal theory.

My findings are both an affirmation and a challenge to the 'rape myth acceptance' branch of global health research and its foundation in a feminist analysis of gender violence, especially sexual violence. The results demonstrate that public perceptions on gender violence should not be reduced to their limited representation in survey methodologies, although quantitative studies on beliefs and attitudes

provide useful points of reference for analysing qualitative data. Survey-based methods and RMA-based methodologies are an excellent means of measuring particular beliefs but their findings are inherently limited to the beliefs they seek to measure. Open-ended conversations on gender violence encourage participants to influence the course of the discussion, which elicits a variety of contending perspectives rather than a homogenous percentage of support for particular statements. To studies on beliefs and attitudes on gender violence in Liberia, my findings contribute not only the points I have developed in reference to Liberian history, but also the more fundamental point that the postcolonial dimension is indispensable to an analysis of gender violence perceptions in the postwar decade. In a discursive milieu where both westernization and traditional culture can be blamed, sometimes by the same interviewee, for causing gender violence, the contradictions in such narratives elicit the contradictions of the postwar, postcolonial Liberian condition.

Building upon the most prominent institutional discourses explored in Chapter Five and the most prominent informal discourses in this chapter, the following two substantive chapters turn to gender violence discourses that are co-produced by cooperation and conflict between liberal institutions, everyday citizens and traditional authorities. An example of relatively harmonious interactions is found in gender violence programmes and advocacy materials that focus on male head of household obligations, within an evolving context of 'traditional' gendered household responsibilities. How this creates paradoxes for stopping gender violence within a postwar, postcolonial context will be shown in the following chapter.

# CHAPTER SEVEN
# POSITIVE MASCULINITIES OR BENIGN PATRIARCHY? POSTWAR TRANSFORMATIONS TO GENDER ROLES

**Female father, male wife.**

In 2002, a women's rights activist donned a false beard and dressed as a man in order to attend a male-led community meeting in the informal settlement of West Point, Monrovia. There she introduced herself and spoke at length about men's role in stopping violence against women, and their obligations to maintain peaceful households. The disguise was convincing, fooling even her own husband, who came home later that day and told her of 'a man' who spoke at the meeting (interview, November 2012). From her description, the activist intended this as an advocacy strategy rather than an expression of gender identity. Others were more performative in queering gender boundaries. Emma, the charismatic and devout young woman mentioned in Chapter Two, swaggered man-like through her neighbourhood dressed in a wool cap, masculine trousers, and trainers instead of her usual wax print ensemble, one night in 2012. She greeted her neighbours in a deep voice and shared in their laughter; the joke was based on gender boundaries but the telling it proved their porosity. More seriously, an androgynous traffic cop was pointed out to me by Bosslady, who found her appearance amusing and reported that the woman had been dressing 'like a man' for several years (personal communication, October 2012). Even if others mocked her, the woman was committed to her androgyny. Yet another woman, named Charlotte, narrated how an adolescent girl from her neighbourhood accused Charlotte's teenage son of impregnating her. The boy denied paternity, and moreover did not have the financial resources to contribute to an infant's expenses. The boy's mother decided to announce

herself as the father of the child, saying 'that me you pregnant for', and she contributed expenses as a man would be expected to do (anonymous interview, January 2013). Whether this is on the similar cultural wavelength as the role of 'female husbands' in Nigeria (Amadiume, 1987), or whether it was simply her own turn of phrase, is not entirely clear. Of course, although she took on the role of 'baby father', she did so both as an act of maternal protection for her son, and female solidarity with a pregnant teen who had no source of income.

Many scholars of gender in Africa observe that gender identities and roles are fluid, with 'female husbands', women warriors (Amadiume, 1997), and beliefs in the essential androgyny of men and women (Gruenbaum, 2001; Walker, 1993). In Liberia, gender identities can be rigid and enforced in some respects, such as violence against gay men (anonymous interviews, July 2008 and April 2012). Countering this, the above examples demonstrate that the existence of essentialist male and female gender archetypes in Liberia can at times be subverted by an individual's circumstances and choices. Even those who believe in separate and essentialised gender identities, the question of gender roles, responsibilities, and performance in the postwar era seemed to be undergoing a stage of public – and private – renegotiation. In particular, gendered obligations of men within the family were in a stage of normative contestation during the times of this project's fieldwork.

This chapter examines these shifting and evolving dynamics, specifically, the confluence of donor and popular interests that led to the inclusion of male financial 'abandonment' as a gender violence issue, and their familial responsibilities as advocated by liberal institutions, religious institutions, and individuals. In particular, the issue of unequal division of family assets and men's

financial child support obligations was included as a gender violence issue by organisations like American Refugee Committee (ARC), in response to communications from partner community-based organisations. Far from reflecting 'incommensurate' values, interactions seem to proceed harmoniously within GBV Taskforce alliances. Some Christian and Muslim religious leaders collaborated with the GBV Taskforce on the production of anti-violence advocacy materials that place men as household heads. Likewise, 'big men' use their status to coordinate advocacy against GBV, while independent of the donor scene, some non-elite male interviewees expressed pride in 'settling' domestic violence cases in their neighbourhoods peaceably. All of these various groups contribute to the identity construction of the benign patriarch in postwar Liberia.

While the chapter addresses masculinities, it is less concerned with articulating postwar masculinities and more focused on how these transformations fit in a relational sense into transforming postwar gender relations and violence. The renegotiations of gendered household roles are embedded in economic production patterns and political representation systems which are themselves in flux, though, as Shaw notes, gender roles are more than a deterministic function of production systems (2002:189). Interviews with adult men suggest a correlation between supporting male head-of-household responsibilities and holding chauvinistic views of women's abilities, views which are causally linked to intimate partner violence (Jewkes et. al., 2014; Michau et. al., 2014). The advocacy materials demonstrate a tension between promoting 'positive masculinities' and inventing or buttressing male authority. Some organisations like International Rescue Committee (IRC) have identified and addressed this dilemma by being more pointedly egalitarian and emancipatory in

their interactions with men. There are both donor-driven discourses around men's role in stopping gender violence and locally-generated renegotiations of masculinities and femininities.

The lesson these interactions carry for wider questions of gender advocacy in postconflict settings is primarily that the ideology of liberal gender equality as an antidote to gender violence rooted in traditionalism, which appears in many programmes (as Chapter Five demonstrated) is a weak and unstable framework for the Liberian case. The 'rights versus tradition' binary is not merely blurred but actually, I would argue, invalidated by the examples of 'traditional' activism against violence, and competing perspectives on what 'traditional' gender relations at the houseold level are. Feminist anti-violence advocacy appears in traditional and neotraditional forms of collective action, religious communities, INGOs, initiatives led by powerful men, and bystander interventions by marginalised actors; equally, none of these arenas holds a general advantage over the other in promoting egalitarian gender norms.

## The creation of a GBV discourse on men's financial obligations

### *GBV Taskforce messages evolve from 'emergency' to 'development'*

Donor discourses on masculinities and violence in Liberia have evolved both in coordination with global trends in humanitarian and development programming, and with the changes from emergency to development stages in Liberia. International organisations in the 2003-2013 decade demonstrated rising interest in including men and boys in anti-gender violence programmes, both for instrumental reasons, and also in response to calls to address needs of male victims and survivors of GBV (see, for example: Linos, 2009; Onyango &

Hampanda, 2011; Solangon & Patel, 2012). For NGOs working in Liberia, this coincided with an evolution from 'emergency' programming to longer-term public engagement and community mobilisation.

Chapter Five noted the change in tone and content of visual materials from 2003-2013. This section builds upon those findings by examining in depth the depiction of men and male roles in 'propagender' and programming. In general, privileged donor discourses moved from messages that graphically depicted male predation, to instrumentalist representations of male role models who exhort other men to stop committing violence, to 'positive masculinities' in which men were shown fulfilling the ideal roles of postwar gender transformation as the donors and their informants would have it. Correspondingly, the medium of communication in visual materials shifted from top-down forms of media with unidirectional and imperative communication, to media that 'engaged' the viewer or invited him into the subject position of a non-violent man.

This is not to imply that a state of emergency must always necessitate rapid, non-collaborative public engagement, and visually graphic advertisements. Ibrahim Leno, a programme director at American Refugee Committee, furnished examples of visual advocacy originating from the Liberia-Sierra Leone border region that reflected both urgent 'Zero Tolerance!' messages and also positive and collaborative 'Men can help too' statements. These were formulated in consultation with rural refugee and IDP camp populations during the transitional government era, 2003-2005. Ibrahim also, with delight, showed me a picture he had taken of a man carrying firewood and walking with young children, alongside his wife, in the forest. The ARC showed exceptionally collaborative community engagement across its initiatives compared to other

NGOs of similar scale in this study, and so its early adoption of these collaborative strategies is atypical of the liberal institutional zeitgeist. The following examples are more representative.

A 2008 poster by a coalition of GBV Taskforce members instructs 'STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS' along with four illustrations of male abuse.




Figure 1, Ch 7. Four examples of gender violence depicted in one poster.

The poster is typical of the 'state primacy discourse' discussed in Chapter Five, while also showing signs of an evolving institutional commitment extending beyond rape to other forms of violence. Its message, like many others from this period, includes family 'abandonment' as a form of gender violence, and commands the man to 'protect' his wife and children. It also uses a broad-based conception of abuse by including 'humiliation' as gendered violence.

At a 2007 Anti-Rape concert, T-shirts announcing 'Real Men Don't Rape' were distributed and continue to circulate years later. This strategy of

public engagement is theorised to be effective with men because of its invocation of machismo, but for the same reason attracts some criticism for its reification of potentially destructive masculine identities (Jewkes et al., 2014). Regardless of criticisms that might apply to the 'Real Men Don't Rape' T-shirts, they were nevertheless interactive and to some extent subject-centred in comparison to billboards and posters, by virtue of being a clothing item. A men's faith-based organisation, Servants of All People, re-produced the shirts in 2013, one of which is seen below worn by SOAP founding member T. Nelson Williams.




Figure 2, Ch. 7. Real Man Don't Rape t-shirt produced by Servants of All People.

The text is shifted to the back of the shirt in Liberian English: 'REAL MAN DON'T RAPE', and the SOAP logo is prominently displayed on the front. This illustrates how the distinction between 'official', 'privileged' and 'institutional' discourse production, and 'informal', 'vernacular' or 'grassroots' discourse production is not always clear.

While ARC and other organisations' materials showed positive male role models throughout the decade, a wave of positive male role models appeared

between 2010 to 2013. In 2009, fresh new professionally-photographed billboards from UNMIL Public Information Office (PIA) conveyed a new spirit of optimism with statements like 'let's change our minds and attitudes', and 'Stop Rape: she could be your mother'.




Figure 3, Ch. 7., 'Stop Rape: she could be your mother'. A 2009 billboard near Douala Market.

Note how this instrumentalises both the male subject as a 'positive deviant' who appellates rapists in his call for non-violence, and simultaneously instrumentalises female rape survivors by expressing their worthiness in terms of their maternal relationship to men, rather than as an inherent human entitlement. The decision to instrumentalise gender identities may have been a pragmatic or strategic one; nevertheless it exemplifies critical questions about instrumentalising gender in development discourses (Hyndman, 2009; Narayanaswamy, 2014; Wilson, 2011)

A paragon of male virtue as drawn by the IRC and their participatory communities in 2009 declares 'I have decided to stop violence against women,

how about you?'. This inviting tone reflects the increasing prevalence of participatory communication from 2009-2013. Promotion of male head-of-household responsibilities, and the increasing visibility of faith-based community organisations, characterise these later postwar years. Another poster by Irish Aid depicts this kind of new relationship ideal. The headline declares 'MEN WERE NOT BORN CRUEL,/THEY CAN BE LOVING'.

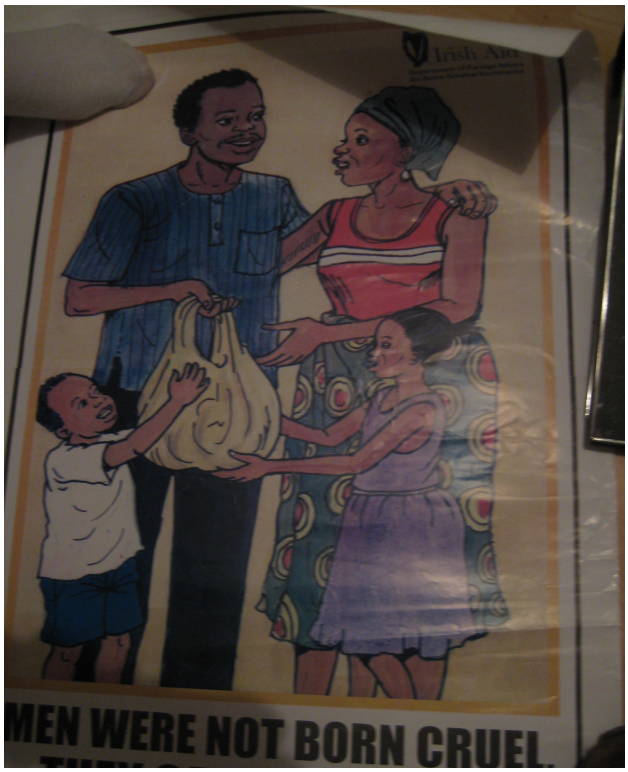


Figure 4, Ch. 7, 'Men were not born cruel'.

The illustration shows a smiling man standing with his *lappa*-clothed wife and two children, who are looking upwards towards him. He has one arm around his wife and the other holding a bag, which the two children and wife reach towards. The visual positioning of the wife and children below the father/husband and the fact that he is providing food/goods to them makes a clear statement about his role as benevolent patriarch; his wife wearing the *lappa* could be an indicator of lower socieoeconomic status or it could well be a way of

harnessing nostalgia for 'tradition' as a way of promoting this harmonious depiction of nuclear family life.

Similarly, a section on 'Family abandonment & child support', from an ARC brochure on family law shows an illustration of a *lappa*-clothed woman with three children standing unhappily by her doorway as a man walks out of it. The text reads:

> *'"Family abandonment" mean for man to born by woman and leave her with deh children without helping to take care of dem. Mediation can help bring man and woman back together. Or, it can help plan for deh man to pay "child support". Da is money to help his children". (ARC, 2007)*

Another ARC poster, with the heading '"abandonment"' reads, "Leaving your family by themselves is gender-based violence."

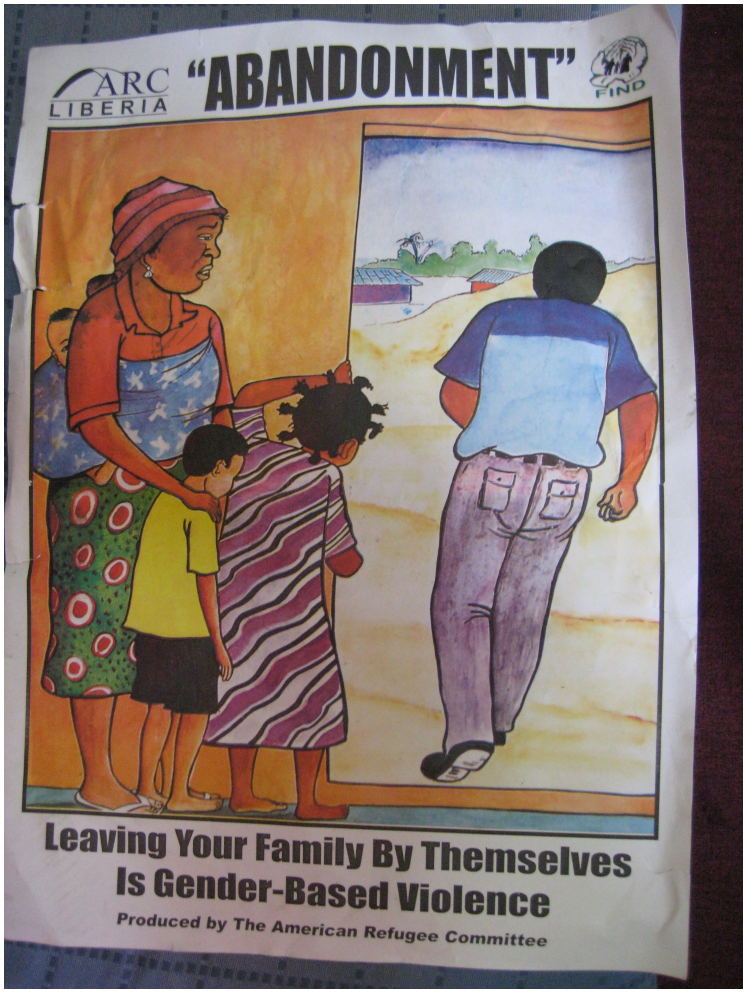



Figure 5, Ch.7. An ARC-produced poster on 'abandonment'.

The ARC materials were developed using a meticulous process of collaboration and review by community partners, most often under projects headed by Mano River Region staff.

The African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect, (ANPPCAN) produces a similar message in a 2008 poster, which shows a woman, once again wearing the lappa, sitting next to her suitcases as her husband orders her away.

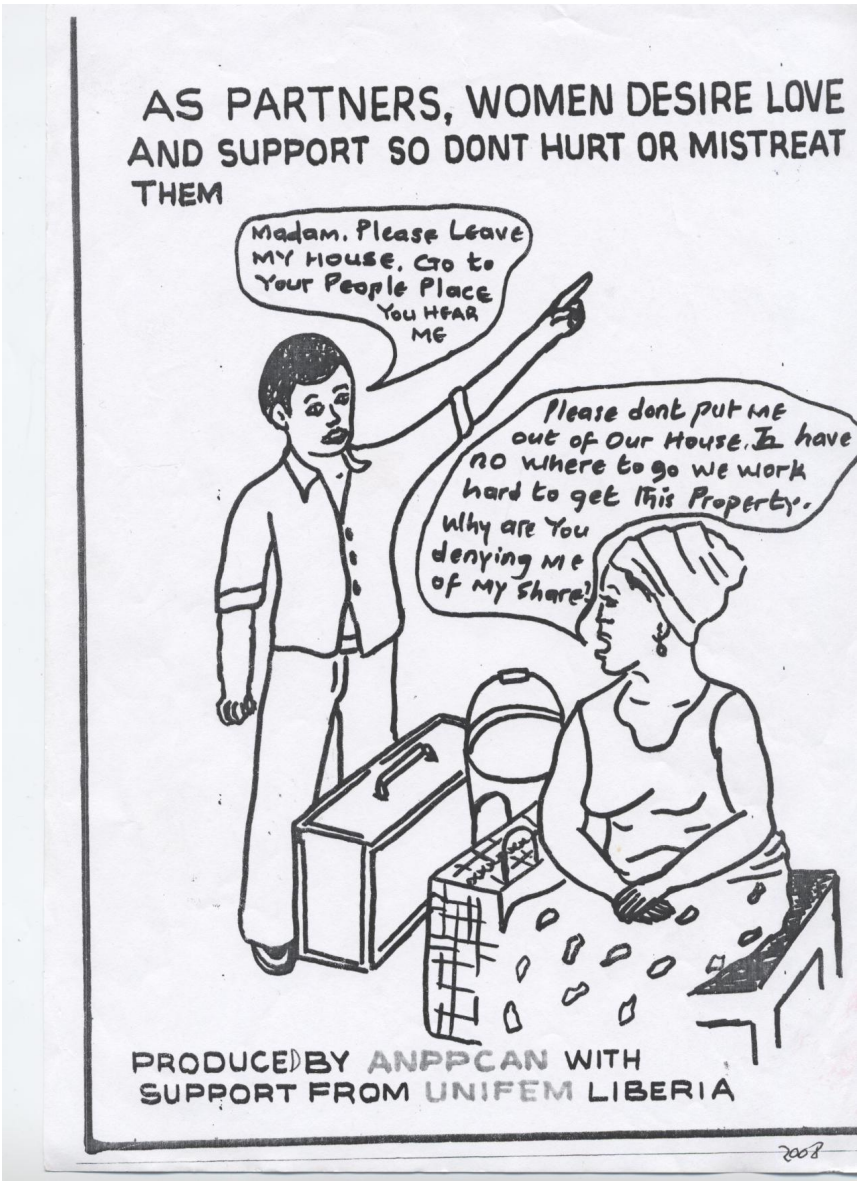



Figure 6, Ch. 7. A 2008 poster by ANPPCAN on divorce rights.

The husband's speech reads: 'Madam. Please Leave MY House. Go to Your People Place [meaning, your family or town of origin]/You HEAR ME'. The wife responds, 'Please don't put me out of Our House. I have no where to go we work hard to get this Property. Why are You denying me of my Share?' The heading reads, 'AS PARTNERS, WOMEN DESIRE LOVE AND SUPPORT SO DONT [sic] HURT OR MISTREAT THEM'. In a variation on other materials that stress men's provisions to the family, this poster reminds the viewer of a woman's economic contributions and the property rights perceived to derive from her 'hard work'.

The early adoption of the 'abandonment is GBV' message by the ARC suggests that desires of community groups played a key role in putting this issue on the gender violence agenda. This is also corroborated by numerous interviews with both men and women, who included male and female responsibilities as a central issue of gender violence in the postwar era. The below section will continue this explanation of how the 'male duties' discourse was co-produced by donor organisations, grassroots organisations, and faith-based communities.

*'Big men' and faith-based organisations engaging with gender violence.*

When I first met T. Nelson Williams in 2009, he exuded the confidence of a successful businessman and the charisma of a community leader. At our interview he presented his gold-embossed business card, and insisted on paying the bill at his chosen interview location: the upscale Royal Hotel Restaurant. Williams and his colleague explained that they founded Servants of All People in response to the prevalence of sexual and domestic violence after the war. They engaged congregations and communities in encouraging men to oppose gender violence.

Since that time, SOAP appears to have become a *cause celebre* for GBV Taskforce member organisations. It enshrines three traits that became highly desirable, and arguably commodified as such, for Liberia's postwar donor apparatus: community-based organising and participatory methods, positive male role models, and faith-based engagement around ending gender violence.[1] Donor interests aside, the activities of SOAP are demonstrably motivated by local leadership. Its membership of financially solvent male community leaders speaks to a level of autonomy *vis-à-vis* donors that more marginalised and penniless groups (like the groups that hosted me) would be less likely to have. Paradoxically, it also positions the organisation to benefit from donor engagement, rather than being marginalised from donors as some community-based organisations claim to be (Chapter Eight). Four years later, Mr. Williams and I spoke again at the 2013 One Billion Rising march and rally at Samuel K. Doe Stadium. He permitted me to photograph him, smiling widely and wearing the SOAP 'real man don't rape' t-shirt and 'victory' Christian baseball cap.

Beyond these idealised 'humanitarian archetypes' (Ferme, 2013) of communities of faith against violence, religious discourses are mobilised in many different ways for and against gender violence. Amie explained that her local mosque preached that women must always submit to their husband's sexual desires. She was vocally opposed to this (Amie S., interview, November 2012). A 2009 interviewee declared pointedly that 'the bible says don't spare the rod'

[1] Faith-based organisations have gathered increased interest from donor organisations and scholars working on gender-based violence, especially in low-resource and conflict-affected settings (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011). A Joint-Learning Initiative on faith-based communities has since 2013 worked to consolidate research and action around gender violence. Liberia had seen long-term involvement of large Christian charities, but local players gained ground after 2010 as emergency proceeded into postconflict and then development.

when 'disciplining' a wife or child. In another township, an Imam professed to be engaged in stopping gender-based violence, and participated in several anti-rape initiatives in his community while also providing pastoral guidance and religious leadership as per his duties. The township commissioner, a woman with close connections to President Sirleaf, shared a story in conversation with myself and the Imam in 2009. A man in the community beat his partner, after earlier that day threatening to punish her if her mobile phone rang late at night. The township commissioner found this despicable, partly because she observed it was unreasonable to expect someone to control the timing of other people's calls. The Imam, however, took the side of the husband, explaining that the woman "did not bend herself to his will" as a dutiful wife should. Though their working relationship was amicable, the Imam and commissioner clearly disagreed on how best to address gender violence in the township.

Many individuals and congregations explicitly oppose gender violence as a matter of faith, as quotes from Chapter Six will have made clear. In late 2012, the GBV Taskforce member organisation Christians and Muslims United Against GBV produced a series of posters addressing family violence, which were placed around town and specially featured at a GBV Taskforce meeting (following page).




Figure 7, Ch. 7: Two 2012 posters by Christians & Muslims United Against GBV.

As the posters above demonstrates, the materials placed an emphasis on male financial contributions, and also convey a paternalistic flavour that classifies women along with children as dependents on male financial headship. Nevertheless, they also promoted peaceful male family identities, and positive messages for their target audiences. While the postures of the family in one poster is closely similar to the 'men are not born cruel' poster, the picture of the husband and wife sitting together conveys both equality and affection. This positivity as well as a suggestion of *authenticité* is reinforced by the vibrant colours of the family's clothes.

In a similar manner to this multi-layered faith-based engagement, one faith-based NGO leader announced at a GBV Taskforce meeting that his congregation was opposed to the genital cutting occuring during Sande 'bush school' initiation. He based this on the grounds that it is a 'blood covenant', which he explained is forbidden in his denomination of Christianity. Religious

sanctioning rather than girls' experiences of harm was the primary message of his stated opposition to the practice, and the terminology he chose connected to wider Christian debates on intepreting Old Testament passages on Abrahamic sacrifice. This is not to suppose that his rejection of the 'blood covenant' is merely an imported idea. As Chapter Six discussed, blood has strong regionally-rooted significance, linked to power, predation, and ill-gotten gain. Relating this religious leader's comment is to illustrate the multiple layers of social, political, and religious belief that, like patriarchy and its resistance, uphold tropes that can be both globalised and locally specific. Leveraging the prohibition of 'blood covenant' towards forbidding FGM/C could be interpreted, as one Joint Learning Initiative member puts it, as 'the potential of faith-based organising to counter harmful traditional practices' (personal communication, JLI meeting, London, June 2013). Alternately, it could be interpreted as an unnecessarily antagonistic critique of indigenous practise coming from well outside the communities of meaning shared by the affected population.

These examples relate to an emergent literature on faith-based humanitarianism that has garnered increased attention in recent years, as well as more well-established research on religion (especially pentacostalism) in Africa. This literature is not covered exhaustively in this thesis nor given the centrality that scholars of faith-based humanitarianism might choose to assign it (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011, 2014). Rather, including the roles of faith-based actors is necessary to demonstrate how various interest groups, and their regionally-specific and/or globally-widespread normative orientations co-produce gender norms in the postwar era. The following section on individuals and groups acting outside of institutional processes will reinforce this point, that where gender

equality specifically directed towards improving the status and capabilities of women is promoted in postwar Liberia, it happens pluralistically and not strictly in accordance with liberal universalist conventions.

## Informal dialogues on male household responsibilities

*Women and reconfigurations of collective action*

Two community facilitators and documentary film directors with the American Refugee Committee (ARC) described a community meeting conducted as a part of their program. One suggestion, from women in a co-ed group, was that whenever a case of domestic violence occurred, all women in the village should gather around the offender's house and bang their pots and pans to publicly humiliate the violent party (Interview, August 2009). Another interviewee described how a mass of women organized to hold Liberia's court system accountable for the 2007 rape and murder of a teenage girl by her caretakers, which the courts had initially ruled a suicide. The women protested by sitting outside the courthouse, staging public demonstrations, and insisting on an autopsy which provided evidence needed for the eventual conviction. They also examined the backgrounds of jurors, finding that some were related to the accused (Interview, activist, July 2009). This kind of advocacy strategy resembles the regional politics of 'sitting on a man' (van Allen, 1972) more than it does 'new' human rights paradigms that some organisations claim to be founding.

Some ethnic groups such as the Grebo have longstanding dual-sex essentialist prestige structures in which farming and market women have traditionally been responsible for their children's expenses, and maintained autonomy on that basis (Moran, 1989, 1990, 2012). Yet, female interviewees as

well as community-partnership NGOs indicate widespread female interest in male financial contributions to childcare expenses, as well as divorce and inheritance rights. As Miatta MacDonald opined:

> *"The men nowadays, they don't understand, they don't act as a father [and] go home to the little ones...they are not home...to talk to their children...most men are in the clubs with other children, not at home with their children"* (Interview, Miatta MacDonald, November 2012).

Numerous female interviewees related stories or questions about obtaining more support from male partners, especially if a child was involved. This was not always out of dire material necessity, but also the emotional importance placed on reciprocity in relationships. For example, Bosslady reported to me that her financial success (in addition to her radiant beauty) attracted many would-be suitors who were eager to partner with a woman who did not 'need' money. While Bosslady was proud of her financial independence, she interpreted this attitude as opportunistic and not befitting the role of a supportive, respectful lover or partner. For a development and gender violence research and policy arena that is often concerned with life-and-death matters, these personal perspectives often go unacknowledged.

Some male interviewees expressed dissatisfaction over what they viewed as unreasonable expectations from women in their lives, especially if this was combined with public humiliation over their failure to provide. Some went so far as to classify this humiliation as a form of gender violence. A young trader who was highly involved in his family, named Amos K., explained "I have a newborn baby about six months, the mother, she know I don't have job...when she wants something from me, she don't ask me, she go in the street and hijack [accost] me. As a peaceful citizen, you should be living in your country without fear...of woman" (Interview, Sept 2012)

Two young adult unmarried men, one a pastor and the other a social worker, shared similar sentiments that wives should not be "sitting at home" and identified women's commercial activity as a desirable outcome of women's empowerment (personal communication, July 2008). One older man, a real estate broker from Monrovia, stated that today's women (whom he believes become pregnant "blindly, like in the West"), leverage their pregnancies to control and benefit from men's income, "She will use the child to harass the man…she want to use the child to get money from this man" (interview, August 2009). On a different but related note, a former hotel worker who was unemployed at the time of the interview, shared a similar narrative in a different tone. He explained that "everything were on me" when he was married "long ago." When his wife started earning an income, "peace begin to come in my home" because "she was being productive." He stated that men "don't want you to ask for money" and will "create a scene" if they have none to give, possibly leading to domestic violence. He concluded that "women can get their right naturally" by contributing to household expenses (interview, August 2009). The unemployed hotel worker had lived most of his life in the Southeast, which suggests a connection between his opinions on female income earning and the history of female-headed households in that region. The history of women's presence in farming and market activities may explain why some interviewees who vehemently opposed some forms of gender equality were not noticeably threatened by women's earning power. Rather, they upheld female economic independence and female responsibility for childrens' expenses, arguing that it alleviates pressure on men's household responsibilities and promotes family harmony.

An older man, T. Emmanuel, complained that a wife could "carry the man to the Gender Ministry" over child support issues. Offering more detail than a hypothetical scenario would warrant, he described how a woman would "start yelling, 'every day we eat dry rice' [and] talk to you in the kind of way that she not supposed to talk to you", in front of other people. He argued that the government should create "workships to educate the women, to learn how to respect their husbands". On a contrary note, he also commented that "maybe sometime the woman have the money, and she don't want to respect you because of the small money she have" (Interview, September 2012). Mr. Emmanuel was thus calling upon both women's financial dependence and independence as a source of distress to the family, and men in particular.

Men's and women's experiences of patriarchal violence should be balanced against the above interviewees' 'peaceful' vision of obedient, undemanding wives, lest one be tempted to conclude that families would be conflict-free if the liberal humanitarian apparatus did a better job of facilitating male 'headship' (Neumann, 2009; van Klinken, 2011). As Chapter Two explained, some male interviewees, whose sincerity I initially questioned, reported stories of witnessing abuse committed against their sisters or mothers. One of these men went 'into exile' as a child when his mother ran away from a violent home (anonymous interview, September 2012). Likewise, Sarta D. reported that her job as a trash collector enabled her to support her children in the informal settlement in which they lived, when support from their father was unreliable. Her definition of gender violence conveyed both financial and physical dimensions:

> *"The man not doing anything for you, the woman go to struggle [to work]. Then in the night he want to force me [to have sex], then at daybreak, I run to the human right [the*

*WACPS]. Most of the time if the man not supporting the child, most of the time, they can go there, they will send him to court"* (Interview, Sept 2012).

When asked how one would handle the situation before the creation of the WACPS, she answered bluntly, "before? We not used to handle it, it would just be grieving your heart". Amie corroborated this: "normal day, woman you have no right...woman married to man you don't like...no voice, no power...you suffer to get property, when the man die, that property not for you" (Interview, September 2012). One of the West Point Women also spoke vehemently about the days before widespread gender law reform: "Before, women not own property...you the woman, you property for someone" (Interview, October 2012).

Moran (2012) encountered a similar discourse of 'woman as property' in her postwar ethnography of transforming female prestige structures. She interprets it as part of a novel, donor-led discourse of international feminism that previously did not appear in Liberian women's labelling of their experiences. The interpretation is persuasive; however, I am not convinced that comments like Sarta's are purely the result of institutional dominance. This is because the women and men who made comments like 'they take the woman to be a slave' did not display other signs of allegiance to the donor agenda. While my findings resonate with Moran & Abramowitz's (2012) point that institutional and 'privileged' GBV language is replicated in vernacular discourses, we should pay careful attention to the way in which marginalised agents choose to replicate certain texts and how they enrich the significance of these texts in the process.[2]

[2] Furthermore, there may be a historical precedent to the 'woman as property' discourse: Ferme, (2001) wrote that in early twentieth-century Sierra Leone, Mende wives applied for divorce under the grounds that their marital obligations classified them as slaves.

In the evolving GBV discourse in Liberia it is common for people to speak out against spousal abuse and marital rape. Many interviewees, both male and female, spoke with great conviction against those acts. That so-called traditional family relations did not previously include a perception that marital rape was violent did not make any less painful the experiences of women facing it. Liberian anti-violence advocates who had grown up in violent households spoke of their intense emotional confusion and even "hatred" toward abusive fathers, long before encountering the concept that such behavior was normatively unacceptable. Others, like the tailor interviewed in Chapter Six, stated that they were unhappy as abusers, and embraced the 'reservoir of refinery' that promoted healthy relationships and personal pride in their choices. Even as liberal institutional concepts of gender equality were 'new' to some individuals, the trauma they alleviated was longstanding. This suggests that these contestations are not simply the product of institutional assertions, but the result of a dynamic and transforming postwar and postcolonial society.

*A range of men rewrite the narrative*

Non-combatant young men in Liberia lack visibility in an international development consensus that overfocuses on combatants (Ferme, 2013; Moran, 2012). Statements such as 'a whole generation of young men has been raised during the war without any idea of "how to get a date without a gun"' (Carter, 2008:14), have been held up in the donor imaginary as a reason for the high rate of gender violence, but not explained its prevalence in non-combatant men, the vast majority. Where ruptures to African social life are problematised by some researchers, African social life itself is the problem for others. A study on Liberian gender violence as a function of 'belief systems' asserted that 'men with

*more traditional* and *rigid* and *misogynistic* gender-role attitudes are more likely to practice intimate partner violence' (M. Allen & Devitt, 2012:3517. italics added), conflating the three adjectives into one monolithic category of barbarism. Correspondingly, a tendency towards explaining gender violence as a postwar 'backlash' to women's status gains, and/or the inevitable actions of 'disaffected' men, has similarly come to view conflict-affected men exclusively through the only questions it asks of them. Jaji (2009) critiques the backlash literature, pointing out men's agency in negotiating their shifting roles and relations.[3]

More promisingly, phenomena in the social sciences are frequently framed as causes or effects of constructed masculinities (see, for example, Bowker, 1988) and taxonomies of masculine identity have been theorised to coordinate with men's varied, intersectional experiences.[4] An investigation of men's gendered conditioning, and their role in perpetuating and/or challenging it, provides the context necessary for understanding both the occurrence of gender violence committed by men, and their advocacy against it. Increasingly sophisticated quantitative studies provide empirical evidence for the importance of decolonising masculinity in order to reduce gender violence, such as those recently published in the 2014 special issue of The Lancet (Ellsberg et al., 2014; Jewkes et al., 2014; Michau et al., 2014)

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[3] In a 2012 publication I examined this phenomenon in more depth, concluding that 'at their best, backlash theories contextualize male violence within changing economic and social conditions. At their worst, backlash theories deny men agency, presume a zero-sum conception of gender relations, trivialise women's independence, and promote stereotypes of violent African men that ignore their contributions to promoting peace' (Thornhill, 2012). While I would revise some aspects of this peer-reviewed paper in the light of several more years' academic experience, I maintain the general stance that postwar masculinities are best analysed when respect and dignity for women is taken as the departure point, as in for example the IMAGES methodology (see Slegh, Barker, & Levtov, 2014).

[4] Connell (1995) for example, separates masculinities into four categories: hegemonic, complicitous, marginalized, and subordinated.

This point is especially applicable to refugee populations undergoing flux in many areas of life; in this study and in others, some men welcomed increased earnings from their spouse and increased time spent with family (Gardner, 2004:104). Moran's (2012) research on non-combatant men in Liberia found that mothers' authority was listed by men as a key reason for eschewing militarised violence, and my own research encountered numerous men, even 'disaffected' and underemployed ones, who supported various forms of women's empowerment.

Andrew Z. was an aspiring community leader who sought to provide business and employment opportunities for young women in the neighbourhood, who had no source of income other than 'boyfriending' and 'sugar daddies'.[5] He did not prosyletise or ground his concerns in the language of chastity the way some institutional examples from Chapter Five did. He merely felt appalled at insufficient opportunities for teenage women. Furthermore, he was proud of his non-violence towards women and children, and his choice to financially contribute to household expenses, including children fathered by his wife's previous partners. Andrew Z. was explicitly supportive of the ideal of paternal 'love and care' that many Liberians would agree are high priorities for women. Yet he hesitated to assign women equal status, believing that "women as a whole they are weak-minded people", and classifying them as dependents along with children (Interview, Sept 2012).

Amos K., despite his dislike of being 'hijacked' over child support, placed great importance on his duty to support children. Amos K believed strongly in advocating for 'civilised' behavior for Kru men and women in his community,

[5] Andrew Z lived 'near Red Light Market', an area described in more detail in a later section.

and in supporting women's demands for peaceful treatment and financial support. Yet like Andrew Z. he based some of these principles in language that was quite literally infantilising to women:

> *"You know how the women look like? The women look like a baby. The man should always be like a kindergarten teacher...[women] causing noise, all of those things, playing on you...you have to stay calm. That's what make you a man"* (Interview, Sept 2012).

He spoke at length about the various materials and items it was necessary for him to provide, reiterating "it's my responsibility to feed my child, it's my responsibility to school my child". When asked about non-financial contributions such as changing diapers and bathing infants, he affirmed that "all of those things, I responsible for that. I responsible to buy soap…". But when my teammate and I clarified that we meant chores, he quickly responded "no no, the mother do that". These interviews seem to suggest that men's financial support for women and their children, and non-violence towards them, are sometimes bound up in notions of male superiority. While male paternalism seems to follow that pattern in many interviews, other men rewrite the narrative in yet more egalitarian and peaceful ways.

Many Liberian men envision their lives well beyond the archetypes of the 'deadbeat dad' or the 'benign patriarch', both of which are classic racialised tropes that dehumanise African and African American men (Fassin, 2012; hooks, 2004). A social worker and returned refugee named Prince Flowers placed a great deal of significance upon fatherhood when we worked together in 2008. He spoke of his desire to have children and his contention that Father's Day should not celebrate 'baby daddies' but only men who committed to their families through marriage. Women's empowerment was also a topic that fascinated him as a community leader, and in contrast to some of his own experiences growing

up. Upon emigrating to Canada, he found certain ideas confronted by living overseas. Flowers was delighted when his fiancée, another Liberian expatriate, gave birth to a baby girl who they named Princess. He explained to me that he would feed Princess, bathe her, and change her diapers, and that in his perspective this would not have happened had he stayed in Liberia.

Countering Prince's opinion on 'African' versus 'Canadian' male roles is the example of Samson K. in New Kru Town. The youth leader spoke about his Kru heritage with both fondness and occasional opprobrium. For Samson, men's obligation to support children was not a Western structure superimposed upon a dual-sex indigenous mode of production, but a truly African custom: "in Africa, men actually sponsor the homes compared to the ladies. I don't think it's in your Western world". Yet, he also lampooned the 'interior' men of the countryside for being unsupportive, as well as having pretensions to 'civilisation': "Can you imagine, in the interior side...wife will have baby [and] cooking [and] breastfeeding [and] fire...while the man still relaxing in bed. The woman will be having the bundle [carrying load on her head], the man will just be holding [cutlass], and [the woman has] a baby on the back". After a long, hard day of work, Samson described, the woman would still be peforming chores while the "quote-on-quote civilized man sitting and talking", as he listens to the radio. I asked him to clarify, "why do you say the man is 'quote-on-quote civilised'? Because of the radio?". Samson answered "If you have a radio on that side [rural area], you a civilised man". He imitated a certain humorous way of sitting with his legs crossed, eliciting laughter from myself and research teammate Fatu Harding. "When you see the war leaders discussing, they sitting how they supposed to sit, they are civilised, right?".

Samson's lighthearted, but not facetious, critique of gender imbalances swept together a number of identity constructions. He drew a parallel between the hypocrisy of Liberia's war leaders and the behaviour of certain selfish men, both sitting 'civilised' with their legs crossed while others toil for them. He classified supportive fatherhood as inherently 'African', a trait he perceived to be deficient in Western culture.

Samson did not merely critique others, he also described his own shifting mentality towards household roles, inspired partially by a gender workshop he attended several years past. "When I started going to the workshop, I came to see that as a form of violence...like for me, I can go for my own water". His brother-in-law "shares almost half the responsibility with my sister", waking up early to do the same chores as his wife. "Even this morning, he was working again. I left him cooking." Samson and his brother-in-law endured occasional teasing from other men for their actions, but nevertheless they retained their reputations as well-respected community leaders. This I saw in action as Samson mobilised two dozen male community leaders (including his elders) to hold a forum on gender violence, which my research team facilitated at their request (the 'productive palaver' of Chapter Two). Like many other interviewees, Samson's statements and their symbolic politics were multifaceted in a way that collapses the platitudinous binary of 'local culture' versus 'Western rights'.

## A spectrum of pluralistic advocacy efforts and lessons ongoing

*The IRC changes its strategy on involving men*

Engaging men and boys in stopping gender violence and promoting gender equality was a rising trend for good reason, but as interviewees at the

IRC explained, was far from a panacea in Liberia. At an international level as well as in-country, the IRC was strongly in favour of male engagement, but encountered challenges in implementation. A programme manager related that many men in partnership were unable to engage on a respectful and egalitarian basis with women. One women's centre that IRC sponsored in a rural area found itself now primarily administered by men, whom the women now had to ask permission to hold activities at the centre (Interview, April 2012). A feminist analysis of sexual violence would find troubling the increased dependency of women; a meta-study of advocacy and community mobilisation found that engaging men is not effective unless women's empowerment is also rigorously promoted (Jewkes et al., 2014). However, responding to local conceptualisations of gender is also a best practice in anti-violence advocacy.

In response to these challenges, in 2011 the IRC launched a series of egalitarian working groups for men that reportedly resulted in dramatic decreases in family violence for the participants and their communities. It was designed in consultation with partner community groups and under the leadership of expert expatriate staff from East Africa. The methodological approach invited men to treat each other as equals regardless of status, and to share their experiences in weekly meetings. Careful facilitation encouraged the men to self-examine their values, behavior, and goals in life, and includes discussions around conflict resolution and contributing to housework and childcare.

This methodology generated much interest from other organisations who sought to launch similar groups, and as such, the IRC staff were hesitant to over-share the details of the working groups. As one staff person put it, 'If the UN gets

ahold of this programme it will die' due to her perception that UN agencies lack the grassroots engagement of the IRC (Interview, April 2012). The IRC working groups illustrate a rapidly evolving humanitarian and development strategy of engaging men, and, equally importantly, engaging difference, without subsuming either under the conceits of liberal universalism (Hyndman, 1998).

Several other organisations attempted to mobilise change around idealised male responsibilities, while attempting to avoid promoting patriarchal nuclear family structures. This was primarily accomplished by encouraging men to share childcare and housework responsibilities, not merely transfer resources to dependent 'womenandchildren' (Enloe, 2000). A series of posters by the NRC entitled 'Men At Work', showed men caring for children, cooking food, and doing laundry.[6] For some male interviewees, like Samson K., performing household chores was the superlative method of gender egalitarianism. That paradigm, however, appears to be in a minority both among Monrovian men and international organisations.

*Bystander intervention and mediation near Redlight Market*

While the above was an example of a successful project, this section examines how a failure to stop sexual violence impacted a neighbourhood in Monrovia. In this location, the pattern of 2012 and 2013 interviews reveal a postwar environment of neighbours and families struggling, sometimes heroically, to shoulder the burden of gender-based violence in their area. In this neighbourhood not far from Redlight Market, my teammates and I noticed a higher than usual rate of refusal to interview, and evasiveness on the part of individuals who agreed to interview. It was the only instance in which a request

[6] These posters are not part of the 'propagender' database because they do not explicitly address a form of GBV.

to discuss gender-based violence was met with a hard stare and a terse "No." from a young woman. Yet those who showed a sincere desire to interview with us were among the most informative, candid, and opinionated interviewees we met in the entire study.

One young woman named Abigail informed us over the course of our lengthy conversation in September 2012 that an egregious case of family violence had left the neighbourhood reeling. A father had repeatedly raped his five-year old daughter and after several such attacks the mother began to suspect. "It was hurting her [the mother], she knew it, but people said she was lying" because community members believed "that his only child, he can't do thing like that". The husband punished her as well: "arrogant man, that kind of way, he beat his wife for asking".

After the girl's first hospitalisation, the wife confronted the man: "first time it was just among the family...she called her parents and the man's parents…when the man beat her, she called the police, but then the family came around, begging...he and the police they been friends", so no arrest was made. "After that, he continued doing it", but was eventually caught in the act by watchful neighbours and is now in jail. As for the girl, "everything is damaged, spinal cord, I think she will be in wheelchair...some people say she lie to get money...[but] the girl was smelling because the man damaged [her]".[7] The mother "fell, she went insane". The little girl, even from a feminist perspective that assigns dignity rather than damage to the survivor, will live with her trauma for the rest of her life. During these physically and mentally devastating rapes, she was protected neither by the government, nor the 'community', nor even the

[7] Abigail may be referring to a fistula or an infection caused by the rapes.

maternal love argued to form the core of social relations in much of West Africa (Amadiume, 1997).

In the aftermath, neighbours were left bewildered and with strong feelings of guilt that they should have intervened earlier. It also destroyed nascent bonds of trust that had grown after years of war: "People felt bad! People won't leave their children with their own father...I don't trust anybody". Other interviewees did not mention that case specifically, but brought up different instances that had personally impacted their lives. Every man we interviewed in this area shared stories of intervening in family violence cases. The case of the five-year old rape victim may explain why people we approached were more likely to evade a discussion, and why those who wanted to talk were eager to share stories of personal intervention.[8]

Solomon, a young man originally from Buchanan, related "I feel that it is wrong, a man beating his woman. I seen a case where the man beat his wife and broke her teeth, she had to go to hospital. Myself I have a sister, and anybody treat my sister like that I feel bad". Solomon and a group of "boys" overheard the abuse and broke into the house, confronting the man and assisting the woman to the hospital. "The man was vexed saying I should forget about it", but Solomon refused to withdraw, insisting that "maybe mistakenly, she dies, we in the community we ask, so you have to have a peacemaker".

> *"The people are living happily together now...[at the time] the woman was so vexed she had to inform the police about it. They [a group of men and women] carried him to the police station to investigate...the man gave his own reason...[saying that] the woman don't respect him, don't respect him, talk to him any kind of way. [The police] knew he was wrong. Since it involved man and woman business, they got woman and child protection [WACPS]...they said the only way they will not hold him is if he pay the hospital bill, all…there was no corruption…they talk everything and it was OK...the woman went home"* (Interview, October 2012).

[8] This was the case whether I was accompanied by a male or female research teammate.

The involvement of the WACPS officers in mediating the situation is not anomalous. Many interviewees related interactions with police officers in which the police station served as a 'palaver hut' more than a zone of strict legal protocol. Not all district stations were described as chronically corrupt by interviewees; this varied by neighbourhood. As Solomon K's narration demonstrates, men engage informally as independent actors, formally via non-state conflict resolution mechanisms, in coordination with women's groups, and at times in communication with state policies and approaches. However, it was not men alone who took action in stopping gender violence, and this is a key point for scholars of 'positive masculinities' seeking effective models of community mobilisation and change.

*'The Coconut Seller' teaches a lesson in norm entrepreneurship*

As a final example, a short fictional story by Samuel Dweh brings such a scene of gender role contestation to the page. A disagreement emerges when a group of adult learners at a night-time literacy class find their lesson disrupted by noisy children accompanying their mothers to the lesson:

> *"It is easy for the pa to be here but not the ma" a woman in the far corner said with frustration clear in her voice.*
> *"Which means it's difficult for mother to acquire an education," the teacher said.*
> *"We sell all day and then we come to school. Why the man can't take care of the children this one time?" a woman called out.*
> *"That it Oh, my sister," another female student said...*
> *"Who will look after the children?" a man sitting in the back asked.*
> *"We born them together so we all..."*
> *"Ok student, okay," the teacher called out. Let's discuss this in a rational way. Acquiring an education is everybody's right in our country's constitution and the United Nations' Charter for Human Rights. This means that women in this building have the right to go to school, like the men who turned them into mothers. All women selling cold water, ground peas, used clothes, coconut, mango, you name it, must go to school"...*
> *"Damn right, teacher!" Chen-kpei exclaimed. She quickly put her hand over her mouth, looking around sheepishly.*
> *The class burst into laughter.*
> *"She cus dey teacher!...you woman are fussy, ya. You know you can't say that to*

*man"...*
*"Silence!" the teacher intervened..."I will be angry only if the student who used that word fails to read and drops out of school. I will be damn angry!" He smiled...*
*The class screamed with laughter, slapping each other on the back.*
(Dweh, 2011:60)

The vignette's inclusion of multiple perceptions and subjectivities lends it a liveliness that evokes many public 'palavers' on gender roles I was able to witness. Here, we see intersecting identities of 'educated' and 'country', as well as male and female oppositions, brought together. The teacher's authority is reinforced by his ability to command 'silence!' and to stand as the arbiter of a 'rational' discussion, and the students show deference to his educated status. Yet, these bounderies are also transgressed when the timid Chen-kpei cannot contain her praise for equal education, and the teacher ultimately supports her classroom zeal even if it means his authoritative speech is interrupted with salty language. Women's education is defended first from the most underprivileged student sitting in the back row, followed by the 'coconut sellers' and 'ground pea sellers' (that is, lower-status market women) calling upon men to assist them with childcare as they study. Their financial independence (even as ground pea sellers) means they do not wish for men's money so much as men's time and respect in order to attend school, their collectiveness as women implied with terms like 'we', 'sister', and 'together'. Their claims are then reinforced by the teacher's invocation of Liberian law, international law, and a normative claim to equal entitlements for all Liberians. Ultimately, despite the multiple perspectives and even acrimony appearing in this classroom discussion, the adult learners are united by their common educational goals; the story concludes with them laughing and 'slapping each other on the back'.

While Dweh's written narrative brings to life a scene of normative negotiation of women's rights, the piece itself is also a form of advocacy

promoting his own perspective by means of popular fiction and Liberian literary expression. Moving from fiction to fieldwork, I encountered a similar tenor of discussion in the Healthy Communities Brighter Futures women's organisation, when several women at a 2009 health workshop stood up to vocalise their opposition to marital rape, and their words were met with applause and approving laughter.

**Conclusion**

Two UNDP/MoGD billboards documented in 2012 give two similar but crucially distinct messages. The first reads, 'Stop domestic violence. Protect women and children' with two photographs, one of a father beating his family and in the other, standing as the head of a harmonious nuclear family. The second iteration of this poster declares 'Don't hurt women. Respect them'. The pictures were adapted to fit this changed message: the man is seen shaking his wife's hand implying equal partnership. The children and women are no longer visually and textually assigned to the same category. Whether these two billboards were produced simultaneously as part of the same series, or whether the one was replaced by the other after a critic pointed out its problematic subtext of female dependence, is not clear.

In Liberia, many women welcome increased financial support from partners and have pushed for its inclusion on the gender violence agenda. For adult men, interviews suggest a correlation between voicing head-of-household aspirations, and holding sexist views of women's capabilities. Male financial support to partners and children contains a 'vernacular' understanding of gender violence that formed a natural alliance with the 'protection' and

'womenandchildren' (Enloe, 2000) framework that is ubiquitous in gender and development discourses. Yet it also posed new potentials for customary household arrangements where women normally pay for child expenses. This chapter included examples of what Jewkes et al., (2014) might term 'positive deviants'. The 'positive deviants' included men who were committed to profound personal and social transformation for gender equality, as well as international organisations who demonstrated accountability, willingness to confront mistakes, and genuine repoire with partner communities. Their examples are multifaceted and instructive, but should not be taken as 'typical' examples of a harmonius, linear, gendered social transformation in postwar Liberia. On the contrary, the frequency with which both patriarchal and colonial messages appear in gender violence advocacy should be taken under consideration for researchers and programme leaders. Both the archetypes of the 'disaffected threatened male' and the 'supportive male ally' that populate much literature on masculinities in development, are insufficient in framing the experiences and perspectives of Liberia's contested male roles and norms.

The parallels with a broadly understood, 'generic' notion of colonial engagement would include: failure to recognise or engage with traditional female leadership, intervention in the legal and social spheres, and the promotion of patriarchal male headship and nuclear family structures while simultaneously claiming 'protection' and 'trusteeship' of native women. It would be overly simplistic to argue that those characteristics perfectly describe donor-led transformations to gender roles, but the examples in this chapter demonstrate clear points of comparison. Large donor-led campaigns repeatedly fall short of recognising indigenous and/or informal modes of change or possibilities for

gender equality, relegating such activity to the status of 'participant' or 'target community' (Ferme, 2013).

Like the patriarchal and colonial discourses that appear in state-oriented 'propagender' advocacy material in Chapter Five, these are not necessarily being intentionally chosen by conscious interest groups seeking a patriarchal or colonial outcome. Rather, many agents find themselves passively or semi-passively inhabiting these power structures and discursive configurations out of default, 'common sense' (Chapter Five), and mimetic echoing. This reinforces the dissertation's earlier finding that patriarchal ideas can appear even in women's empowerment initiatives. Furthermore, these paternalistic obligations can seem benign at the outset but should be carefully considered in light of male beliefs and attitudes towards women as an ideological gender construct underpinning much gender-based violence (Jewkes et. al., 2014; Michau et. al., 2014). A neglect of feminist decolonial methodologies and feminist contributions to explaining violence enabled the creation of programmes that implicitly or explicitly support male authority, where men are included at all. This study suggests that anti-violence programmes would do well to treat this particular advocacy technique with care and precision, and benefit from a deeper, more transformative conversation around masculinities and root causes of sexual violence (Thornhill, 2012).

None of this is to argue that such configurations are pre-determined and immune to resistance. Some programmes have resolved this dilemma by being more pointedly egalitarian and emancipatory in their approach. Many men spoke of their transformations from violent or violence-condoning relationships to more healthy, respectful, and egalitarian modes of family and community life.

The observations made in this chapter have implications for the wider trend of 'positive masculinities' and engaging men and boys in development/emergency settings (Barker & Ricardo, 2005; Connell, 2005; Slegh et. al., 2014). This conveys lessons for the broader context of public engagement on SGBV in Liberia, and the 'rights versus culture' faultline argued to appear in many gender equality programmes. There are also regional parallels with other colonial administrations' codification and consolidation of patriarchy in the household and state (Mamdani, 1996; van Allen, 1972). Regarding the thesis' core themes of liberal imperialism and gender relations as a form of memory, this chapter does not connect immediately to these central arguments but it offers insights on subtle forms of patriarchal resurgence which will thematically connect to Chapter Eight's examination of conflicts over FGC/M.

# CHAPTER EIGHT
# CONTESTED COLLUSIONS: LIBERAL AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES ADDRESS FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING

This chapter will explore the interactions between liberal institutions, informal actors, and Sande and Poro authorities over traditional harmful practices, particularly FGC/M. It will survey the changing nature of debates surrounding harmful traditional practices in the postwar decade, over the furor surrounding FGC/M since 2010, and the formalisation of the National Traditional Council (NTCL) that claims to administer all 'traditional' affairs. Data includes previously undocumented incidents, as well as new approaches to already documented cases, to demonstrate the limitations of 'culturally sensitive' anti-FGC/M programming, and contend that 'contested collusions' as well as Fuest's 'contested inclusions' are occurring between traditional hierarchies and the liberal state.[1] The first sections of the chapter will relate how liberal institutions and loosely coordinated civil society groups responded to a series of events involving clashes and unlikely coalitions with traditional authorities. The political participation of women, recognition of indigenous leadership including female leadership, and stopping gender-based violence are three worthy goals that have been highlights of Liberia's postconflict project. This thesis demonstrates that these goals are not always mutually supporting. At times, they come into direct conflict. The incident involving Ruth Berry Peal, which was introduced as a 'subaltern story' in the introduction to this dissertation, shall be revisited below.

[1] This chapter draws all examples from central and northern Liberia, and does not entertain a specific discussion of Kru and Grebo 'acephalous' traditional structures or the successive transformations caused by 'civilisation' and armed conflict.

**"If you follow this case, see what will happen to you"**

A 42-year-old Grebo woman named Ruth Berry Peal was living in her husband's region of Bomi County, where she lived as an ethnic minority. In January 2010, a local leader insulted her 'torn lappa', to which Ruth reportedly responded that her husband liked it that way. Informants explained that her comment was interpreted as an insult towards Gola women in general. Later that day, Sande elders accosted her at her house and kidnapped her and her young boy and girl. They held her against her will in the 'bush', where they immediately subjected her to FGM, and kept her for one month of initiation rites (Interviews, West Point Women, 2012-2013). [2]

They did not subject her daughter to excision, on the grounds that the girl was sick at the time (interviews, WPW, 2012-2013). This is a telling detail of the ambiguity between FGC/M as an initiation and fertility rite, and its use as a punishment for disobedience. It suggests that the zoes' choice to use initiation as a punishment carried with it some obligation of care, or at least limitation to intentional harm. This corroborates with other informants' reports that Gola zoes face consequences if a girl dies under their instruction (anonymous interviewee, October 2012).

Select human rights staff became involved in the case immediately. The Ministry of Gender and Development had a GBV county contact who had been

[2] Interviews with West Point Women for Health & Development Organisation staff, other individuals, and newspaper coverage were triangulated to construct this account of Ruth Berry Peal's kidnapping, leaving out any details that seemed overly personal in nature. The activists informed me that Peal would certainly grant me an interview, but I felt that would be needlessly burdensome to her since she had already told her story to several human rights staff and journalists. Campbell (2002) notes that survivors can be re-traumatised when asked to tell their stories repeatedly. Instead I asked the West Point Women to pass on a small gift and note of moral support, which was apparently well received. I also promised the women I would keep them informed of any publications that mentioned their NGO.

initiated to the society, and thus was able to enter the Sande bush as an insider in order to perform her duty as a government employee to observe Ruth's health. As a representative of liberal institutional human rights law, she was obliged to monitor Ruth's condition and report back to the Ministry of Gender. However it was only as a member of the Sande society that she was permitted entry to the 'sacred grove' where Ruth was held.

A representative from Westpoint Women found out about Ruth's case from a "human rights man" while at a workshop in Tubmansburg, Bomi County. Visiting Ruth after her release was a bitter experience: "Everybody was crying the way we saw her. Everybody was shedding a tear for her". They learned that Ruth had taken the Sande members to court at the county level, with discouraging results:

> *"When she carried her case to court, the jury said this case here if you follow this case, see what will happen to you. The judge, everybody was traditional. So what justice we got there? Nothing....She wanted to take a step, but when she went to the court, she said she will get no justice there...it made her whole heart spoil again"* (Interviews, WPW, 2012-2013)

The West Point Women and other organisations pressed for the case to be transferred to Monrovia, and protested publicly outside the Temple of Justice during the proceedings. The extent to which Liberian activists fear reprisal should not be understated. They report that traditional leaders "tried us all way to make us weak", demonstrating outside the Temple of Justice with "all sort of things...with calabash, with cow tail", to intimidate opponents. Despite their apprehensions, the West Point Women were inspired by Ruth's determination: "She told us that she want to make case...even if they kill me...it made us brave more". They also took care of Ruth's material needs during this time. Eventually, the leaders were convicted by the Monrovian court and sent to

prison. The case did not resolve but in fact escalated confrontations around FGC/M that year; the international donor community swiftly responded with funding, and high-visibility 'advocacy' based initially upon the zero-tolerance model. This then gave way to more 'sensitive' advocacy strategies, which (I shall argue) were barely more compatible with prevailing public norms than 'zero tolerance' was. Informal activities taking place outside the GoL and the GBV Taskforce reveal a different set of constraints and opportunities for promoting women and girls' informed consent to undergo FGC.

## From grassroots to zinc fences: a variety of responses to FGC/M

### *GBV Taskforce avoidance*

Ruth Berry Peal was instrumental in prompting state and donors into confronting the 'bush school' issue. In the flourishing of GBV awareness campaigns after the 2003 ceasefire, there was scarce mention of FGC/M, although other 'harmful traditional practices' such as early marriage were discouraged (Chapter Five). In a country with an estimated 60% rate of FGC/M, and a state committed to ending violence against women, this was an audible silence (Carvalho & Schia, 2011). Although Carvalho & Schia imply that the neglect of FGC/M was an oversight by the MoGD, I argue this is more likely due to recalcitrance on the part of national staff who were well aware of the high level of controversy that would ensue.

Supporting this hypothesis, one professional who is a key national figure in grassroots dialogue explained to me that he had declined specific requests to undertake anti-FGC/M advocacy, on the grounds that he feared retaliation from the Sande society:

> *"I told her it is very, very secrecy here. I know it, my two sisters went to it...[people could] get to me. [A Montserrado government worker] talked on it and now everyone is against her. She was, like, hunted. Other women have escaped from here. They won't come to you like, police, but they will come to you with African science"* (anonymous interview, October 2012).

In contrast to these dire warnings, our subsequent personal communications revealed that he actually admired the schools and viewed girls' initiation as a cultural event to be celebrated. This example suggests that for some Liberian anti-violence staff, lack of engagement on the FGC/M issue is at times due to tacitly supporting the practice, and at other times, wishing to avoid the consequences of speaking out. Programmes that appear to be generic in inspiration (as discussed below), and duly and cursorily implemented, may well reflect the unspoken motivations of their respective staff. Conversely, programmes that seek a genuine diplomatic engagement with FGC/M-practicing communities and their leaders, are less well-known than the zero-tolerance approaches that seek high visibility. This means that silence surrounding the issue can be both a sign of quiet but determined opposition, or tacit support.

For the above reasons, liberal institutions had long been aware that FGC/M was an important issue, but it was Ruth and the community-based protesters who cornered the government into addressing the issue formally. The zero-tolerance and 'culturally sensitive' advocacy initiatives that followed the court case reflect a mode of engagement that is typical of international feminist approaches to FGC/M in other countries.

### *Activist women's 'participation'*

In the flourishing of donor interest in FGC/M, some of the activist women who had fought to bring Ruth Berry Peal's case to Monrovia were

subsequently recruited as 'participants' for sensitisation campaigns run by larger NGOs, and photos of their 'participation' added to brochures as evidence of the NGO's ability to connect with the grassroots (interviews, WPW, 2012-2013). The same women reported that they were not able to benefit from increased funding towards FGC/M advocacy because of their low level of 'education'. While several organisations can be credited for supporting Peal's case, the West Point Women felt that larger institutions have not given them credit for their leadership. One staff member explained that, "because of the [difficult] community we find ourself in, I like to share...we open up, we give them information, and we, we got nothing to benefit. And the moment you get to Gender Ministry, the first thing they will send you West Point". She claimed that "Most of the big big NGOs over there, they started from us", yet West Point Women is excluded from obtaining funding for implementation. Her colleague continued:

> *"If you put your head on the chopping board for certain thing, at least other people should appreciate what you do...We were the first women that ever carried an FGM case to court...We have been working but others have been benefiting...We the only women that really brave to stand and talk about FGM...When we used to go to Ministry of Justice, the traditional people would go and put fear in us...[but] anything they bring, we only want justice...I challenge anyone from Gender Ministry to go and talk about FGM. I challenge them"* (Interview, WPW, October 2012).

A third woman added "Every donor coming up [talks about] West Point, West Point, West Point. What is the support you are giving West Point? Yeah man! We tired!". The women felt that the Liberian proverb 'monkey work, baboon chop' fit their experience of initiating leadership but gathering little reward.

I argue that this genre of non-elite activism faces a perverse set of opportunities and constraints in relation to female hierarchies of prestige. These

hierarchies operate within traditional prestige, as female and dual-sex representative systems pose both opportunities and threats to lower-status indigenous women. Additionally, there are hierarchies within 'gender and development' as a global network, where cosmopolitan modes of gender equality activism are complicit with white colonial and imperial power structures (although that is not to suggest that all transnational feminist activism is necessarily complicit with imperialism, liberal or not). Non-elite activists are therefore constrained between the secrecy that prevents the frank discussion of excision in their communities, and the scrutiny of pornographic representations of African women's violated bodies for the 'humanitarian spectator' (Hunt, 2008; Nnaemeka, 2005; Oyewumi, 2003) that correspondingly calls for all forms of resistance to be visible. Materially, they are constrained both by threats of retribution from the 'discourse of culture' and lack of substantive support and solidarity from the gender and development 'discourse on rights'. These hierarchies will be relevent later this chapter in explaining some of the elite-based negotiations to how 'sacred groves' are managed. First, the following section gives a more detailed overview of the 'propagender' and other forms of advocacy initiated by GBV Taskforce members.

### *GBV Taskforce 'zero tolerance'*

Initially following the court case, there was a flourishing of high visibility 'zero tolerance' campaigning. Much of this was accompanied by messaging that conveyed a tone of hostility towards indigenous, rural, or customary means of social organisation. To give one example, an ANPPCAN poster declares 'our old ways of doing bad things to girls and young women will not carry women and girls anywhere'.




Figure 1, Ch. 8. An ANPPCAN poster declares 'Our old ways...will not carry Liberia anywhere'.

The posters show initiates in traditional white cloths, alongside two other scenes of child marriage and child labour. Although the word 'our' conveys a sense of subject-centred agency, the poster does not include any positive contributions that 'old ways' might offer.[3] Additionally, the poster signifies contemporary indigenous practices as 'old ways' rooted in the past, a trope that is typical of colonial perceptions of indigenous peoples across geographical contexts (King, 2005; Saul, 2008).

A gentler message, by an unknown agency, announced: 'GRADE SCHOOL CHOOSE I NOT SANDE BUSH'.

[3] This resonates with other such gender violence messages discussed in Chapter Five, which also discussed ANPPCAN's general compliance with donor priorities.




Figure 2., Ch 8. A locally-printed shirt from 2012 or earlier recommends 'grade school' over 'Sande bush' school.

This was written on a t-shirt, worn with bold insouciance by a food-seller in West point, nearby the site where an urban ‘bush’ had once operated (as explained later this chapter). The illustration on the shirt was a simply-drawn rosebush, with one stem in flower and the other stem cut off and covered in thorns. In a purely verbal textual interpretation, the message suggests an exclusive choice between the two types of 'schooling' available to girls. Many parents send their daughters to high school as well as 'bush school', especially since bush school is no longer the multi-year programme it once was, and it is now timed to occur during school holidays. However, when combined with the image on the shirt, it becomes ambiguous whether the text is primarily concerned with schooling and personal development, or physical harm to girls' genitalia. The 'flowering' branch could symbolise the 'flourishing' of girls' empowerment, and it also likely conveys an analogy of the physical consequences of initiation, which Dorkenoo (1994) referred to as 'cutting the rose'.

Two other anti-FGM t-shirts appeared in the 'propagender' collection, one with a simple zero-tolerance message: 'from awareness to action/STOP/female genital mutilation (FGM)/SAY NO TO female genital mutilation (FGM)'. Another, less adversarial in tone but still giving a command: 'FGM HAS BAD SIDE FOR MEN & WOMEN. STOP! DON'T FORCE YOUR GIRL INTO IT' (as pictured below)

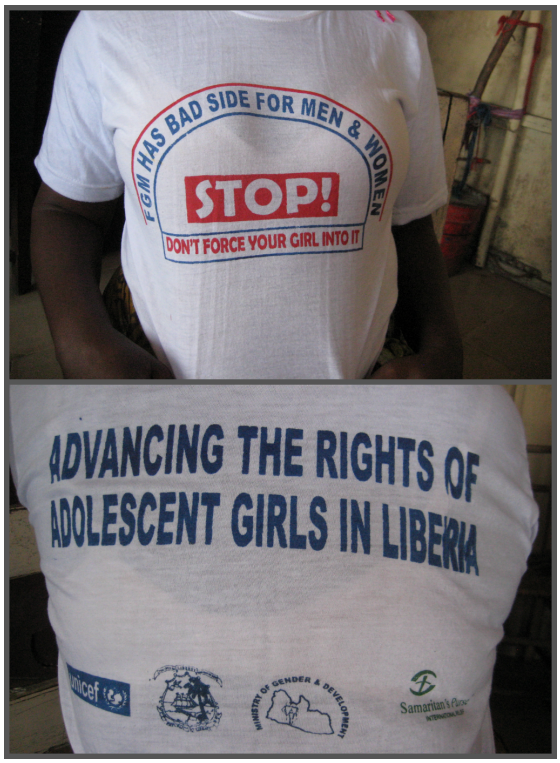



Figure 3, Ch. 8. An anti-FGM t-shirt recommends that parents should not force their daughters into initiation.

It may be a coincidence that of these shirts, the two that I encountered actually being worn around West Point were less antagonistic in their messaging, noting a 'bad side' and an end to 'force' in initiations rather than categorically calling for it to 'stop'. Alternately, this could reflect that the one message is viewed as more acceptable than the other. This would be consistent with the viewpoints of some interviewees such as the West Point Women who did not

wish for 'bush school' to be abolished entirely, but for it to proceed with informed consent.

'Zero tolerance' seemed to deepen the rift between the Government of Liberia, humanitarian apparatus, and certain traditional authorities who responded with increasing militancy. On February 6th 2012, the international day for 'zero tolerance', a GBV Taskforce member noted that,

> *"When you go into communities, they still hold their traditional values...we had a major issue in Gbarpolu. It was FGM day, and we invited zoes...and the keynote speaker was a pastor...and she said something that she was not supposed to say, and they wanted to initiate her. [This led to a] closed-door discussion between Ministry of Health, Ministry of Gender, Interior Affairs, and the zoes...They had a list of things to be paid, to allow her to go away...a sheep, a tin of oil, two bags of rice"* – (Interview, MoHSW, September 3 2012).

There were other incidences of public denouncement followed by intimidation. The same professional described an incident with a group of facilitators in Monrovia, claiming that "the authority have extended here because the traditional council have their head office in Monrovia".[4] The exile of journalist Mae Azango, who wrote an exposé on initiation, is the most high-profile of these incidents (Azango, 2012; Global Journalist, 2014; Moore, 2012).

'Zero tolerance' is not purely a donor imposition; there is deeply felt support for this model by many Liberians and across the West African context (Dorkenoo, 1994; Walker, 1993). However, Liberians promoting zero tolerance did so with both brazen insubordination and nuance. Individuals I interviewed who believed themselves to be at high risk of punishment (including metaphysical "African science" punishment such as blindness or disease) were

[4] This thesis presents data that does not correspond with the staff person's assessment that the NTCL has brought traditional authority into Monrovia. Firstly because there is evidence that their authority reached urban areas independently of the NTCL and secondly because there is mixed evidence for whether the NTCL's edicts on traditional practices actually impact their occurrence.

also in favour of modifying rather than eradicating the practice, and saw value in traditional education in general. The West Point Women's opposition to excision is wholehearted, visceral, and for some members based on painful personal experience. Despite their defiance, they were among the strongest proponents of the value of traditional education. Staff described to me their admiration for the perfect, intricately-woven baskets that country women were traditionally trained to make; they admired the 'country cloth' and actively promoted artisanal work within the organisation. They viewed it as a tragedy that this educational component had eroded over the years into just 'singing and dancing'. Some even admired the scarification and tattoos that some initiates went through, as long as it was voluntary. For these activists, it was entirely a question of informed consent and not a value-laden judgment of the ordeals themselves. Others were more wholly critical of Sande society in general, as the 2013 Demographic and Health Survey indicates (in a later section). Contrary to the donor model, Liberians whose 'tolerance' was closest to 'zero' were also the most accommodating of the cultural value of initiation in their proposed solutions.

*Cultural sensitivity and its limitations*

A common theme in the NGO and scholarly literature discusses the advantages of 'culturally sensitive' approaches in contrast to the zero-tolerance model (28 Too Many, 2014; Lupick, 2012). In addition to high-visibility zero-tolerance campaigns, there were also attempts at collaborative strategies that reflect the well-established trend in international organisations towards grassroots empowerment. My findings suggest that even the 'collaborative' and culturally sensitive models for ending FGC/M do not capture the range of action nor the depth of passion of those already working informally, outside of donor

mandates. This is not to categorically critique 'culturally sensitive' approaches that have been welcome and successful in many settings. Given the diversity in practice across affected countries, it is more useful to examine where and why different strategies are effective, rather than contending that one anti-FGM strategy is wholly more effective than another. Research to this end has become more sophisticated over time, as shown by UNICEF's recent quantitative studies (UNICEF, 2013).

In surveying interview notes and visual data holistically, certain tendencies in the GBV Taskforce strategy became apparent. One of the tensions I perceived in the institutional scramble to visibly oppose FGC/M was how generic many initiatives were (suggesting lack of context-specific engagement), while at the same time not cognizant of lessons learned from other countries (suggesting lack of comparative engagement). This was true both of the zero tolerance and the collaborative approaches.

To give an example, among the several staff I interviewed who worked professionally at the agenda-setting level on discouraging FGC/M, no one had heard of Tostan, or mentioned other programmes outside Liberia. This surprised me, as Tostan is one of the best-known examples of community mobilisation in West Africa, and runs programmes as nearby as Sierra Leone (Mgbako et. al., 2010). Other high profile examples did not appear in our interviews. By contrast, staff would typically make international comparisons with other forms of gender violence, in interviews and at meetings. One explanation for the lack of familiarity with other African anti-FGC/M initiatives among staff, is that large numbers of people were already employed in stopping gender violence in general at the time that FGC/M became a high-profile issue. This meant that

programmes claiming to address FGC/M were staffed primarily by existing experts in child protection, sexual assault and domestic violence rather than those with a strong comparative perspective on FGC/M specifically. Extending this staffing issue to nationals, many Liberian professionals may not have perceived an advantage in investigating strategies in other countries, since many are considered experts by default on their home country.

Combined with this avoidance of international engagement was a series of generic initiatives. For example, national staff at one Oxfam-sponsored programme copied and pasted text from the AU Women's Protocol into their banner for gender equality. As a more mainstream example, several programmes were launched that were ostensibly meant to foster respectful dialogue with zoes and to provide livelihood alternatives. The Minister of Gender, Julia Duncan-Cassell was quoted as saying: 'because we're saying this is bad, you should stop it, we want to empower you with tie-dying, soap-making' (Azango, 2012). The programme trained zoes in crafts such as sewing in order for them to make an income without cutting girls (Sarkar, 2013). In light of policy literature surrounding culturally-respectful advocacy techniques, providing income alternatives to zoes would seem like a best practice (UNICEF, 2013). The limitations of this strategy, however, become clear when the specific functions of Sande society are taken into account and compared to other practices across the continent.

As a heterogeneous phenomenon, FGC/M embeds into different social and economic structures. In Wolof-speaking regions of Senegal, excision is considered a pre-requisite for marriage in a region where women and girls normally marry outside their village of birth. The implication for human rights

facilitators was that change was difficult to accomplish on the individual level, and was greatly facilitated if inter-marrying villages came to a collective decision. The well-known Tostan ('breakthrough') Community Empowerment Program hosted inter-village conversations in order for villages to collectively stop excision. This resulted in several thousand villages coming to a consensus on stopping excision, with the total today standing at 7200 communities (Barro, 2009; Diop, 2004). However, excision has not reduced drastically across entire districts where Tostan operates (UNICEF, 2013). Therefore, while this model of change has garnered praise from gender activists around the world, recent research shows that its success is not widely replicable.

It is no paradox that the Tostan model should be both an explosive success in certain regions of Senegal and not replicable outside the village-specific conditions it addresses. This is precisely what one should expect from a subject-centred approach that addresses the embeddedness of the practice. Similar region-specific success stories have emerged including alternate livelihoods for cutters, enforcing a minimum age that ensures girls are old enough to run away from initiations if they are being coerced, and promoting initiation rites that include all the educational contributions but leave out the excision itself, such as *ntaanira na mugambo* or 'circumcision with words' in Kenya (Nyangweso, 2007). Finally, programmes that are effective partly because of inter-personal collaboration at the village level are often difficult to 'scale' for precisely the reasons that make the pilot successful. This was a concern surrounding the replicability of IRC anti-violence programming as well, as Chapter Seven explained. Despite evidence showing that the Tostan model is not the panacea that their early success suggested to some, the philosophy of

community empowerment created dialogue around respect and women's health that might otherwise face an avoidant or hostile reception in rural West Africa.

While livelihoods training has been recommended as a 'culturally respectful' way to eradicate FGC/M in much policy literature, in Liberia the repetition of generic programming is likely to encounter obstacles related to the specific position of Sande authorities. The responsibilities of a zoe extend far beyond initiating girls, and the rewards go well beyond financial compensation. Zoes influence marriage, childbirth, initiation and education, marital disputes, and as Chapter Four argued, they hold a state-like ability to regulate social and political life, discipline, and punishment. And, importantly, zoes are recognised as such in the perceptions of large numbers of indigenous Liberians (Leeson & Coyne, 2012; Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, 2011). Regardless of whatever normative concerns one might hold regarding the status of non-elite women and girls in Sande society, ample evidence suggests that the zoes uphold a social contract that arguably no nation state has fully realised: a monopoly on violence against women and girls, at least prior to the Liberian war (Chapter Four).

By many accounts, the war cost zoes much of their financial security, social authority, and *de facto* territorial sovereignty (Fuest, 2010). Many of the documented instances of Sande-led violence committed since the war suggest a certain desperation, financial or otherwise; the use of hostages to demand cash or food items may be evidence for this. All the same, it seems implausible that low-status tailoring work would be an appealing replacement for high-status social tasks based on authority and sacred knowledge. While sewing and tie-dying classes might appeal to zoes who have already lost their traditional livelihoods, or

to the small number of zoes who already wish to stop practicing excision, it is naïve to suppose that tailoring is a viable alternative for high-ranking authority figures still making a living from the status quo.

Basini (2013) critiques the gendered underpinnings of programmes that offer livelihoods training to African women based on domestic labour like sewing and beading, even if formal discrimination has not occurred. Feminists have read in other contexts this critique of wholesome, 'ethnic' women creating arts and crafts as a means to succeed within commercial economic systems (Mies, 1981). This chapter does not wish to exaggerate its critique of MoGD's engagement on FGC/M. One strength of the programme is that it fostered a conversation between human rights professionals and traditional leaders outside the formal processes involving the National Traditional Council of Liberia. Several Liberian ministry staff at the MoGD and MoHSW commented on the importance of establishing initial discussions and building diplomatic relations with zoes. The Ministry of Health's report on traditional trauma healing mechanisms was another example of such an effort (Abrahams, 2011), and there have been numerous other initiatives in cooperation with the NTCL, as will be elaborated in a later section (Sarkar, 2013).

An underlying factor to the above politics and paradoxes is the residual 'country' versus 'civilised' political cleavage, which was earlier argued to persist beyond group interests of individualised 'country people' or 'civilised people'. Liberia's specific symbolic politics seem to have parallels elsewhere. For instance in Kenya, FGC/M was a divisive independence issue in part because colonial efforts to abolish the practice were founded on perceived cultural superiority and paternalism (Kenyatta, 1965). In colonial Kenya, initiation rituals and female

circumcision became a major issue for independence leaders, with some teenage agitants organising to 'circumcise' themselves in defiance of bans (Thomas, 1997). Their actions were not simplistically a matter of 'colonial resistance', as Thomas highlights the intergenerational and prestige issues that also emerged in female youth rebellion. Returning the topic of colonial rebellion back to Liberia, however, FGC/M did not become politically divisive, at least not publically so, until the postwar period. If the 'late arrival' of public contestations of excision with roots in native/settler divisions is unique to Liberia, then all the same, the current situation resonates with other African countries' experiences with gendered colonialism and defiance.

In Liberia, as of late 2014, there is still no law or minimum age for bush school, and no programme working on an alternative rites ceremony (28 Too Many, 2014). The 'values-based' NGO 28 Too Many notes that some bundu initiations in Sierra Leone were able 'to retain tradition without cutting the girls' (60).[5] The report advised that 'within a ceremony as symbolically rich as the initiation into the Sande society is, there is room to remove the harmful aspect of FGM while leaving the teaching aspects intact' (2014: 60).

One of the unforeseen challenges that I anticipate this 'harm reduction' approach will face, comes from agencies assuming that like elsewhere, practitioners will embrace the idea of providing valuable educational and spiritual guidance without the harm of cutting. Excision may not be so simply

[5] This dissertation's research on Poro and Sande's historical relations with the state did not extend to the Bundu society of Sierra Leone, at least not enough to make a robust comparison possible at this stage. As the historical background to this thesis discussed, similarities should be expected, since the two countries share parallel and intricately connected histories, yet key differences may also be influential in differing postwar outcomes. Given particular influences on settler-indigenous relations in the founding of Liberia that Chapter Four recognised, I would expect at least minor differences with the Sierra Leone case when it comes to state-indigenous relations and gender violence.

extricated from social practice, at least not on a large scale. The 'symbolic richness' of Sande bush school exists alongside its social, political, and economic utility, for which the endurance of suffering is a central component (Bledsoe, 1984; Tonkin, 2000). Ordeals generate bonds of trust between participants, and are intended to foster obedience and to prepare the initiate for future hardships (Ferme, 2001; Shaw, 2002). As Tonkin commented, bush school is meant to be harsh; it is meant to prepare youth to endure the difficulties of life in rural Liberia (personal communication, 2014). Ordeals also inculcate obedience, another core value (Bledsoe, 1984). The success of Kenya's 'circumcision through words' may not be replicable in a cultural context where physical harm, and the shared bond of surviving it, is key to establishing secrecy, belonging, and social order. I anticipate that the value placed on ordeal and obedience will prove inconvenient for liberal actors who wish to 'add and stir' cultural sensitivity into preordained liberal human rights paradigms.

The secrecy of the practice is another feature that prevents an open conversation about harm reduction. Addressing secrecy will require more than a superficial understanding of 'taboo' and 'stigma' (two words that appear in ever more racist patterns by news outlets and NGOs writing about indigenous peoples) to a structural understanding of why secrecy is important. As the historical background chapter explained, secrecy held strategic importance for forest groups evading kidnap by slave-hunters, and required iron-clad bonds of trust between members (Shaw, 2002). It also reified the authority of elders and their perceived ability to both heal and harm (Ellis, 1999). This means that traditionally, girls are neither informed in advance of what occurs in bush school,

nor permitted to speak of it afterwards (Interview, Miss Yellowdress. November 2013; Interviews, WPW, 2012-2013).

Some secrets are more openly known than others. I questioned the true obscurity of excision, and found conflicting accounts. Lamie, the aforementioned Museum of Liberia guide, was convinced that its secrecy persisted throughout the settlement era, even as settler men continued to have illicit or official marriages with indigenous women (interview, Lamie, April 2012). The earliest specific documentation in Liberia that this study encountered was in Johnston's (1906) travelogue, which openly stated that 'excision of the clitoris' was occurring 'at the woman's bush school' (1034).

These conflicting accounts raise as many questions as they answer. It is possible that prior to the Liberian war, knowledge existed but was simply limited by a number of factors including low literacy and poor access to written texts, fear of reprisal, and even disbelief. Two interviewees in West Point reported that as non-initiated young girls, they had seen for themselves that their initiated friends were 'different'. One interviewee simply reasoned that her friend had been born that way; the other, after being told by her girlfriend that it happened in the 'bush school', refused to believe it. She thought her friend was staging a prank, and thought this up until moments before the zoes forcibly mutilated her during her own initiation (interview, Miss Yellowdress, November 2012; interview, anonymous, February 2013).[6] The particularities of the above

[6] The anonymous interviewee stated that when the zoes commanded a group of girls to take off their underpants, she realised what was happening and began to scream to warn the other girls. She was then separated from the group and asked who told her about the excision. At this time, she understood well enough the consequences of revealing initiation practises to non-initiates, and so to protect her friend, she told the leaders that the information had come to her in a dream. They accepted this explanation, and then proceeded to cut off her clitoris.

examples arise from the specificity of the Liberian context. Whereas in Kenya, 'circumcision through words' is a popular advocacy technique because 'circumcision' is openly known and even boasted (Thomas, 1997), in the Liberian context, the harsh penalties for open discussion make this public conversation highly sensitive, and the history of repression of indigenous worth makes it highly charged. Relatedly, Liberian activists can anticipate a ratcheting effect on public knowledge of FGC/M in the 21st century, meaning that once the 'secrets' well and truly become visible in public discourse, it will be unlikely that they can be suppressed again.

To summarise the above, I argue that the Liberian anti-FGM movement faces specific challenges related to the secrecy of initiation rites, the cleavages between traditionalism and 'civilisation', the importance placed on suffering in bush school, and the reality that traditional authorities are more available and functional than state bodies in much of the hinterland. An additional oversight in GBV programming is in the lack of discussion around evidence that FGC/M has already seen significant generational change, prior to donor involvement (as described below). Whether this is due to the effects of war, the accompanying urbanisation, or individuals 'voting with their feet' over generations, is not clear. Investigating the reasons for this change will be crucial to constructing programmes that support Liberians in pursuing their preferred resolutions to the bush school question.

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In repeating this survivor's story, the word 'mutilation' is more appropriate for her stated experience than is the more neutral term 'cutting' that appears elsewhere in this chapter. While FGC/M nomenclature is famously controversial (UNAIDS et al., 2008), we should remember that the ability to discuss it on any terms is a marker of privilege for transnational feminists, a luxury that some of our research 'informants' might have reason to envy.

Notwithstanding the above concerns, high-ranking and well-resourced human rights personnel seem to be making headway in building diplomatic connections to Sande elites. As one GoL staff commented, zoes who are categorically unwilling to discuss the eradication of FGC/M are sometimes open to having a discussion specifically about 'health' (interview, October 2012), particularly since they customarily face consequences if a girl dies under their instruction. Thus the value of Government-led programmes is apparent less in its enshrinement of generic anti-FGM initiatives, and more in its high-level communications with high-ranking zoes, whether publicised or not.

The Liberia case study demonstrates that 'community mobilisation' is one facet of a robust engagement strategy. Consequently, the post-war liberal apparatus of humanitarian organisations and state structures would need to examine both the content and the structure of their public engagement strategy in order to create a robust anti-gender violence programme. Without engaging whole institutions, establishing relational and, perhaps, restitutional links between liberal and customary institutions, both the 'zero tolerance' and 'culturally sensitive' approaches are severely constrained. Fuest trenchantly argues that the Sande authorities are 'riding on the ticket' of international human rights paradigms that wrongly (in the paper's perspective) perceive them as a bulwark against women's human rights abuses. She calls this 'contested inclusions' (Fuest, 2010). Building upon Fuest's insights, the examples across this chapter will show that there are also 'contested collusions' that include relationship-building, strategic alliances, and negotiation between liberal and traditional institutions in addition to inevitable conflicts. Before pursuing that

point, this chapter will first outline public negotiations of initiation practises in order to more fully understand the impact of armed conflict on Sande authority.

### *Evasion and collective mobilisation in urban 'groves'*

Informal and non-elite resistance to bush school has not consistently aligned with dominant international human rights paradigms. However, this is not necessarily because their respective world views are untranslatable. Informal resistance does exist and includes evasion by the uninitiated, insubordination from the already initiated, occasional collective protests and riots, and individuals willing to risk death and dismemberment to vocally oppose forced FGM.

The 2013 National Demographic and Health Survey of Liberia revealed a strong income divide in popular opposition to Sande society. Lower-income respondents were more likely to belong to Sande, and were more likely to agree to the statement that 'Sande society should stop'. The richer respondents were less likely to be initiated members, but significantly more supportive of Sande (28 Too Many, 2014:54).

This data could be interpreted in different ways. Firstly, the survey's wording creates ambiguities. Because of secrecy it was not possible for the national survey to ask if female genital cutting should stop, and so they adopted the more general question of whether Sande itself should 'stop or continue' (LISGIS et. al., 2014). Overall, 39% of initiated members of Sande societies stated that they believed it should stop (LISGIS et. al., 2014:275) This means that those who state that the Sande societies should 'stop' might believe this solely because of their dislike of FGC/M, or alternately, they (or some of them)

might oppose the traditional authority structures for other reasons than, or in addition to, the cutting.

Secondly, the responses themselves convey possibilities. It is plausible that well-off women would have a greater range of capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000) and thus be less likely to rely on Sande membership, choosing to join only if they already felt strongly in favour. They might have greater geographic as well as social mobility, while the poorest women may be more reliant on Sande membership as a survival strategy. Alternately, the better-off women might be more favourable towards Sande because they financially benefit from it, in part from contributions from the wider base of poor subordinates. The demographic survey data supports Bledsoe's (1984) account of Sande society as a pyramid-style hierarchy rather than a base of female solidarity. Finally, the DHS demonstrated significant generational divides in initiation, though whether this was due to armed conflict or other factors is unclear.

The case study of the 'West Point bush' (among other bush schools that operated in Monrovia) highlights how the Liberian war affected traditional 'bush school' education. The information for this case is gathered from a collection of interviews in West Point neighbourhood, and for confidentiality reasons I decided not to name interviewees. Residents, former residents, and one key informant who chose the pseudonym Miss Yellowdress, triangulate this research. Gathering data on these sensitive events was extremely difficult and many residents approached by our team avoided discussion of the West Point 'bush' and conflicts surrounding it. My interview teammate (Mary Duncan Dahn) and I would carefully attempt to bring up the subject but would never press an interviewee for information. Making this task even more difficult was informants'

disagreement over the dates of key events. All who gave dates concurred that at some point during the Liberian War, the 'bush schools' that previously operated in remote and sacred forest areas started to shift to urban locations. Miss Yellowdress, an adult who grew up in West Point in the 1990s, did not hear about any urban bush schools prior to the war. She explained:

> *"I don't have the main reason but I think one, because at that time, there were many displaced people who were in West Point, displaced people that left from up in the interior, from Cape Mount and other counties, that were interested in this FGM. So those people they were actually plenty in West Point at the time. Then maybe because of the war also, so a lot of women's [societies], in the interior were not functioning, so that how they brought the movements in."* (Interview, Miss Yellowdress, November 2013).

The West Point Women concurred that as early as 1991, families from the neighbourhood were taking their girls to a 'bush' in the nearby neighbourhood of Clara Town. Later in the 1990s, a bush school was set up in West Point itself. The 'bush' thus shifted from a rural forested area to a crowded informal settlement in the centre of Monrovia, unmarked by signs but reportedly fenced with thatch and zinc siding. "They built something around...they beating drums, singing, so you will not hear the child crying" (Interviews, WPW, October 2012). As an adolescent in these years, Miss Yellowdress recalls strict controls set by parents to prevent their children from wandering into the unmarked 'secret grove'.

> *"Parents are taking serious precaution [at that time]. Parents who are not part of those things, they are taking precautions. They were talking to their children, because the school I attended in West Point, in that school, the Grebo the Kru children are many, and most of the time, somebody will tell you that 'oh, [Miss Yellowdress], you shouldn't go around that area oh, before they grab girls and pull them inside there oh'. So actually, all the children living in West Point, who are not part of that tradition, our parents were very strong, and they are always guarding us not to go look around those areas. And I'm not the only child whose parents were saying that to. Some of, like, the Kru children around, Grebo children around in the community, in the neighbourhood, every one of us our parents had talked to us to not go around the bush. But, I don't really think our parents even knew what they were doing in the society. The*

> *parents, our parents who were not part of the, of the tradition, they did not know that that was what they were doing there."*
>
> *"Where the Sande bush was, it was right in the heart of the community...if you are lucky and they don't do it, they will ask you for money and all sorts of things...if you are not lucky and you don't have the money...they will cut you"* (interview, Miss Yellowdress, November 2012).

Similarly, in a different area of Monrovia, a human rights worker similarly reported to me that at certain times of the year, she would hide her daughters indoors so that they could not be captured and initiated (anonymous interview, August 2009). The West Point bush reportedly garnered support primarily from Bassa and Mende residents (interviews, WPW, October 2012). At a year that could not exactly be determined but sometime in the mid-1990s, a West Point father found out that someone had taken his daughter to the Clara Town bush without his permission. He responded by mobilising his networks to confront the elders in Clara Town: "The man sharpened his cutlass. They calling all the people to Clara Town. The Kru and Grebo are fighting them...the girls there that they initiated that morning, they couldn't walk. So they took their own and put her in a wheelbarrow" (interviews, WPW October 2012).

The examples of collective confrontation that interviewees discussed were all between Sande leaders and people from 'tribes' who do not practice FGC/M. In turn, opponents of the practice from within Sande society tended to speak out on an individual basis, such as Mae Azango (Azango, 2012). When asked, informants were confident that the conflicts did not lead to wider instances of ethnic violence between Kru/Grebo and Vai/Bassa/Mende residents, but only sporadic incidents involving the leaders specifically. The final such incident culminated in a group of Kru and Grebo 'youths' accosting the zinc secret grove in West point and 'tearing down the bush' (interviews, WPW October 2012). In

the multi-ethnic West Point settlement, it seemed that collective action typical of Southeastern groups was confronting hierarchies of obedience, silence, and respect of the Sande and Poro.

These numerous examples show how non-elite Liberians have variously addressed Sande bush initiation during the ruptures of forced migration, urban migration, armed conflict, and postwar reconstruction. Proponents of initiation improvised new ways to make it accessible to urbanising populations, including setting up 'sacred groves' in the middle of Monrovia. Sande leaders whose authority had been undermined by war, deaths of elders, and loss of territory and income, escalated their pre-established 'monopoly on violence against women' into forcible (yet, at times, desperate) attempts to command resources and respect from their respective populations. Liberians who disliked the bush schools met their efforts with evasion and avoidance, bargaining (such as paying a fee to return a kidnapped daughter unharmed), protests, open defiance, and even collective action including the eventual destruction of an urban 'bush'. As the Sirleaf administration became more settled and established in the postwar decade, and violence against women a more prominent political issue than in any precedent in Liberia, citizens looked to the state to settle grievances with customary leaders. In the wake of major disputes such as the Ruth Berry Peal case and the kidnapping of a pastor on the 2012 Day of Zero Tolerance, the Government of Liberia and its international support network of donors worked swiftly to manage the situation. The below section will discuss some of the ongoing transformations to state and traditional institutions working together, as they address gender violence and FGC/M in particular.

**Nation and 'country': liberal statebuilding and indigenous rules**

The first necessary point of information is that the postwar Government of Liberia, and traditional authorities, are not bounded and separate entities, just as the identity constructions of 'congo' and 'country' no longer comprise distinct populations. This has led to events such as the GBV Focal Person monitoring a captive's human rights situation in her capacity as a fellow initiate, and GBV Taskforce member staff adopting wildly different positions on how to address girls' traditional rights within women's hierarchies. The Ministry of Internal Affairs is known as a ministry with a particularly high number of 'society people' holding senior posts, and even President Sirleaf took great pains to broadcast her Gola lineage and wear ornate, perfectly-crafted 'lappa suits' during her presidential campaign (Johnson-Sirleaf, 2009).

More formally, the Council of Chiefs and Elders originally established under President Tubman's reform strategy (Chapter Four), was promoted to the status of a national governing body, the National Traditional Council of Liberia (All Africa, 2012; New Liberian, 2009). The NTCL has been heralded in the media as a progressive triumph for indigenous rights and for its engagement with issues of gender violence. As the head of the council, Chief Zanzan Karwor, announced in 2012 that: 'we the Chiefs and Elders have consulted on all the issues and concerns relating to gender development and traditional practices in Liberia and the need to adjust some of them' (NTCL, 2012).

However, several events suggest that the National Traditional Council of Liberia has institutionalised a shift of power from female-led indigenous leadership structures to male arenas of authority. The head of the council is male and while I was unable to obtain an official and complete list of all Chiefs and

Elders, the vast majority of public announcements (such as in the press releases from Ministry of Internal Affairs) are made by men and partial lists show a majority male gender breakdown (Liberia Constitution Review Committee, 2014).

The National Traditional Council has formally engaged with gender equality reforms while also remaining in favour of marital rape and ambivalent towards the FGC/M controversy. In a 2009 resolution, Chief Zanzan Karwor summarised a series of consultations with traditional leaders in several counties. The resolution assented that civil law reforms regarding female divorce and inheritance rights should extend to traditional marriages. It also conditionally agreed to Liberia's rape legislation reforms but specified 'the Rape Law should not apply to…the matrimonial bed' (NTCL, 2009). Chief Karwer did not address FGC/M specifically. However, his resolution called upon the Ministry of Interior Affairs to consult with Sande and Poro leaders to organise 'bush schools' in coordination with the regular school calendar.

It is unclear how the authority conferred on the NCTL by the Government of Liberia extends into remote areas of the country. As several opinion pieces and county-based edicts make clear, there is some resentment towards situating the council in Monrovia (Gbala, 2013). One NTCL resolution in 2012 announced that all traditional healers were unauthorised until they approached the council in Monrovia to become formally assessed and 'licensed' (Johnny, 2012). It is unclear what actual effect these measures had on Sande or other traditional activities. Multiple informants told me they had witnessed initiation ceremonies during the time that 'bush school' was ostensibly suspended. Given the decentralised and pluralistic nature of Liberia's diverse

traditional authorities, it would seem implausible to effectively regulate the licenses of healers from the NTC headquarters in Monrovia. In fact, Tonkin interprets this plethora of legislation as indicative of lack of control (personal communication, 2014), much in the same way that Chapter Five observed that the state primacy narrative of citizens' obligation to the state was evidence of state fragility.

Connecting these arenas of state and traditional emasculation even further, one could argue that the NTCL sits at the nexus of both. For example, there are several published proceedings of a Liberia-Cote D'Ivoire cross-border conference in October 2012, attended by 150 traditional elders. The UN publication UN FOCUS represented this event with a flattering narrative of collaboration between liberal institutions and traditional authorities for 'a historic peace meeting' (Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2013). Perhaps driving home this liberal instrumentalisation of customary authority, a photo of Chief Zanzan Karwor was captioned, without referring to his name or position as the head of NCTL, as 'a Liberian tribal elder offers cola nut to a group of Ivorian tribal elders' (Carmichael, 2013:4).

Small-time newspapers published on elders' widespread resentment towards receiving orders from the Government of Liberia and the international community, with one elder criticising the NTCL for being Monrovia based, as well as pointing out that political leaders, not elders, had been the source of conflict in the Liberia-Cote D'Ivoire border region (Gbala, 2013).

In 2012 a series of conciliatory announcements were made to clarify the sacred grove activities, as well as successive 'temporary closures' of Sande initiations. During the same year, the NTCL sanctioned the shifting of the 'seat'

from the Sande to the Poro, which normally happens every few years. However, this was followed by a particularly antagonistic year between human rights officials and traditional authorities, during which elders in Grand Gedeh ordered a woman to be gang-raped by twelve men, and a police officer was kidnapped by Poro members.

> *'in early April 2014 in Grand Cape Mount, officials reported that a woman was ordered gang-raped and the 12 men where later arrested and are in prison in Robertsport, Grand Cape County, awaiting trial. Further, in Wiama Town in Gbarpolu County, a Police Officer was forcibly taken and initiated into the Poro Society. Efforts to secure the officer's release were initially hampered by a demand for ransom payment of LD$25,000.00 [approximately $420 USD] by the group that allegedly committed this criminal act. With the strong intervention of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Council of Chiefs and Elders, the officer was however later released'. (Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2014a)*

The above is one of several initiatives that constrained or discouraged Sande 'bush schools' from proceeding, all of which encountered in my research came after the Ruth Berry Peal crisis. The same announcement also reaffirmed its call for zoes to abide by the restrictions on sacred grove activities NTCL, which suggests that these contestations are far from resolved (Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2014a). During the 2014 ebola crisis, the NTCL once again suspended 'Poro and Sande activities' (Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2014b).

These examples and others suggest to me that between NTCL high command, large INGOs such as the Carter Centre, and the Government of Liberia and particularly Ministry of Internal Affairs, there seems to be a coherent narrative of traditional leadership subsumed within liberal institutional reconstruction, accompanied by human rights reform including gender equality. Beneath these high-ranking narrative agents, lower-ranking chiefs and elders are far more confrontative and the narratives less consistent.

For example, in another collective NTCL proceeding, several recommendations were made for the aim of strengthening the influence of

traditional leadership. Recommendations included changing the Liberian Dollar to be on par with the US dollar, that 'there should be law enacted by the national legislature to enforce the dress-code of female in the Republic of Liberia', and that 'anybody found discussing our secret society on the radio, that person should be punished by the Zoes of that land' (NTCL, 2013).

These recommendations were not replicated with high visibility by UN FOCUS or the Carter Center. They were however published in full and without editing 'from above' on the NTCL Facebook page (Liberia Constitution Review Committee, 2014). Both the content of the recommendations and the means of broadcasting it show the distance between liberal institutions' perception of indigenous sovereignty as an 'archetype of humanitarian discourse' (Ferme, 2013) and the inexpedient reality.

*Mutual assimilation of female elites?*

The postwar decade saw a confluence of pressures leading to rapid, ongoing changes to female indigenous sovereignty. The female-inclusive and famously gender-sensitive state coincided with a renewed wave of international interest in stopping violence against women and girls, and engaging a certain essentialised archetype of 'indigenous women' (Fuest, 2008, 2010) and 'communities' (Ferme, 2013) in doing so. These events have a backstory. Chapter Four contended that the mutual assimilation of elites was in fact a form of patriarchal collusion between male customary elites and the male state.[7]

[7] This continued through several eras of Liberian politics. For example n 2013, the NTCL confirmed that former president Charles Taylor had been officially disbarred from his spiritual position as 'Dahkpannah', that is, the head of all the male Poro societies (Carter, 2013; Ellis, 1999). Taylor held this title during his presidency. Prior to this, successive Liberian presidents including Tubman and Doe had been appointed (Utas, 2006).

Consequently, this lack of engagement kept zoes strong and autonomous, kept FGC/M outside of public policy debates, and at the same time evaded the inevitability of this issue being confronted in the public eye.

I argue here that this lack of institutional memory between female traditional leaders and the female-inclusive Liberian state, combined with rising international concern for girls' rights in conflict-affected settings, led to particularly divisive politics surrounding female genital cutting and mutilation between 2010 and 2013. Where the 'fragile', 'emasculated' liberal state most needed to assert its legitimacy, was also where the most hierarchical forms of female indigenous rule sought to foster obedience and dependence. Thus the battle between 'rights talk' and 'culture talk' (Mamdani, 2000) as in so many other contexts, was fought on the terrain of girls' bodies and women's intimate lives.

Violence and conflict can be productive as well as repressive (Foucault, 1977), and the situation at the time of fieldwork was far from static. While 2010-2013 was marked by tense confrontations, these tensions produced a dynamic period of renegotiation between leaders. Notwithstanding the above controversies and even tragedies, traditional leaders of both sexes are demonstrably interested in NGO 'clientelism'; interested in consolidating gains to formal indigenous sovereignty within state governance, despite the inherent tensions and unusual alliances this creates. The GBV Taskforce and Joint Programme has for example developed an ever stronger liaison with Mama Tormah, the head of the Liberian zoes on the National Traditional Council of Liberia. In 2012, she went on record to recommend that bush school be reserved for girls over the age of eighteen: 'People should join the Sande of their own free

will, but underage children – no one should carry them anywhere' (quoted in Azango, 2012).

> *'The Ministry in collaboration with the Ministry of Internal Affairs held a two days conference from 7-8 June 2013 with traditional female Zoes from 10 counties...at the Traditional Women Village in Brewerville. The Conference brought together over 43 female Zoes and traditional women Leaders from across the country with the objective of educating them on the causes and effects of GBV and the need to reform the...School System. The resolution reached was; Sande School will operate only during vacations, only licensed practitioners can operate Sande schools, and all Sande schools will be far away from regular school'* (Sarkar, 2013:14)

Correspondingly, high-ranking SGBV personnel took pains to soften what had for much of the postwar period been an adversarial discourse towards tradition, where 'dialogue...is the primary medium that is being used...in identifying the *positive factors of culture* which is then used in addressing SGBV' (Sarkar, 2013:13. Italics added).

## Conclusion

Male-led structures such as the Poro appear to be integrating with relative ease into the transformed postwar Government of Liberia, just as adroitly as they negotiated their standing with Tubman, Doe, and Taylor. This is illustrated by the National Traditional Council's plasticity in dealing with conflicting priorities, such as balancing legal reform with harmful traditional practices that many refuse to relinquish. While interests compete, and while many male traditional leaders disregard or criticise NTCL orders, male elites have all the same shown preparedness and responsivity in engaging the latest reincarnation of the Liberian liberal state. Simultaneously, this institutional engagement seems to have been accompanied by a shift of power towards men in customary leadership. Given the long history of collaboration between male

customary authority and the state, it is unsurprising that this level of dialogue and diplomacy between elites should persist.

Abramowitz & Moran (2012) argue that both traditional institutions and post-war donor-oriented governance are failing Liberian citizens. My research builds upon this observation by demonstrating how defensively both these institutions act in asserting their sovereignty over non-elite Liberian citizens. While the 'liberal makeover fantasy' manifested in state-oriented gender violence campaigns, some traditional societies responded to the erosion of customary power with a heightened level of authoritarianism towards acts they consider transgressive. The concern for critical researchers is not merely that these institutions fail to ensure a dignified life for non-elite Liberians, but that they demand allegiance while doing so.

My research, including aspects of it that gather conclusions from silences, suggests that the lack of a longstanding, collaborative, formal history between Sande leaders and the Liberian government is partly to blame for the conflicts and antagonism specifically over gender issues: who has the responsibility to define and punish sexual violence, whether or not bush school is legitimate, and how marital relations are socially and legally sanctioned. These matters are not just 'woman business' as some call it, but core issues within social contract, and sexual contract, governance and legitimacy (Das, 2007; Pateman, 1988). The 'mutual assimilation of elites' argued to exist historically between Poro and state may emerge again in Sande-donor relations, if there is a continued evolution towards collaboration rather than reciprocal antagonism. The 'contested inclusions' observed by Fuest are more complex, divisive, and dynamic than her initial observations reveal. It is not just 'contested inclusions' but also 'contested

collusions' in which liberal state mechanisms enforce and leverage traditional authority, and through which individual members act with precarious allegiance to both structures. Many individuals and groups have withstood admirably the lack of trust in their leaders, and each other. Ordinary Liberians are 'trying', as one might say in Liberian English, under this regime of conflicting, gendered modes of leadership.

CHAPTER NINE
CONCLUSION




Figure 1, Ch. 9. A detail from a 2009 billboard by IRC and Irish Aid.

## Introduction

This dissertation began with three 'subaltern stories' and pursued the connections between them across theoretical, methodological, historical and historiographical, and data-driven chapters. My research drew upon the tradition of interdisciplinary and grounded research, by utilising literature from relevant yet neglected areas and synthesising these disparate sources into a focused analysis of gender, institutional transformation, and social memory. The resulting multidisciplinary and multilinear research contributes primarily to feminist geography focusing on sexual and gender-based violence and related questions of discourse and difference in conflict-affected settings. The core contribution identifies a recurring theme of liberal imperialism within gender violence initiatives in postwar Liberia, and consequently argues how the origins and evolution of gendered liberal imperialism can help explain why certain gender violence narratives are politicised the way they are today. Addressing both discursive and relational dimensions of

gender violence advocacy leads to a better understanding of the individual and institutional conflicts surrounding gender violence, including sexual assault, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, marital rape, forced marriage and female genital cutting or mutilation. Specific contributions are summarised below.

**Connecting multilinear narratives**

Drawing together multiple directions of inquiry led to deeper insights into questions of gender in relation to development, discourse, and difference. Responding to queries in the visual methods and interview data was a relatively straightforward and grounded process of investigation and reflection. The appearance of colonial language in Monrovians' discussions of gender violence, for example, integrates seamlessly with Liberia's nationalised narratives of settler and native social constructions, and the contradictions embedded within aspirations to 'country' and 'civilised'. The female body and female-centred sociality as an object of colonial conquest (whether 'liberal' or illiberal) and as a symbol of resistance across colonial contexts presents a strong link to informal discussions of gendered violence against women and girls in Liberia. As the research process gathered more context from the longstanding impacts of Liberian settler colonialism and state and social contract formation, it accumulated more referents for interpreting interviewees' commentary on gender violence. That these discussions with Monrovians should reflect a certain diversity, fluidity, and dynamism of opinion is consistent with their timing within a postwar era of gendered social transformation and normative contestation.

This thesis likewise resolved apparently paradoxical liberal institutional discourses, in particular through the theoretical framework of liberal imperialism, and with recognition of the limitations of agency within structure. Initially, it was a source of confusion to me why 'propagender' advocated so consistently for the centrality of state processes as a response to all forms of gendered abuse, where and when those state agencies were demonstrably unfit for purpose. The appearance of patriarchal and colonial tropes within materials that ostensibly set out to empower women and girls through community-sensitive development processes was likewise conflicted. From the perspective of the harshest critics of postwar reconstruction and the general state of international affairs, this is no contradiction at all, but consistent with international development as a hegemonic enterprise (Duffield, 2007; Harvey, 2003). However, one finding that confounded a strictly critical reading of postconflict gender violence awareness was the fact that numerous staff in member organisations of the GBV Taskforce were themselves critical of problems in GBV messaging, and attempted to advocate for more survivor-oriented, egalitarian, and multi-directional communications. The theoretical lens of liberal imperialism was useful for characterising these institutional tendencies; rather than relegating liberal universalist ideals into one category of benevolence, and imperialism/colonialism into a separate category of hegemony and 'superlative evil', liberal imperialism captures a core synthesis of liberal universalism and imperialism/colonialism.

Dilemmas of liberal universalist approaches to difference were embedded not only in GBV Taskforce antagonism towards traditional and non-formal mechanisms for addressing gender violence; they also manifested in the instrumentalisation of the traditional sphere for the advancement and legitimisation of the postwar state, in the

essentialisation (whether pejorative or flattering) of indigenous cultures especially where female elders could be represented as cooperants, and also in the avoidance of publically addressing sensitive topics, such as FGC/M before the Ruth Berry Peal controversy precipitated widespread public and institutional debate from 2010-2013.

In many of these encounters, liberal institutional hegemony over the lives and bodies of citizens, particularly female citizens, speaks to the emasculation of the postwar state. However, this state formation process in the Liberian context was not merely a postwar occurrence, but the most recent recurrence of several stages of state establishment and reformation in Liberia. The historical framework engaged with and built upon debates about Liberian settlement, arguing that the 'mutual assimilation of elites' can be reconfigured as 'patriarchal collusion', and how that left Sande female leaders relatively unhindered in retaining a 'monopoly on violence against women'. The lengthy history of native/settler political interactions in Liberia, which include tensions, resentment, cleavages but also alliances, mutual reinforcement, and cultural exchange, was shown to influence postwar discourses of gender violence at several points. Monrovians brought up these historical issues themselves in both overt and implicit statements about 'educated', 'civilised', and 'African' approaches to perpetuating or stopping gender violence.

To summarise this analytical process, building an explanation for Chapter Five's institutional discourses and Chapter Six's informal ones required exploring the themes and tropes that emerged from the interview and visual data. Accomplishing this drew upon widespread and thorough reading, moving between secondary sources and original data to support or undermine hypotheses.

Institutional discourses provided an insight on institutional relations (under conditions of liberal imperialism), and informal discourses highlighted interviewees' use of gender violence as a public issue to express wider political perspectives, which often originated from settler colonialism and its aftermath. All these discursive trends demonstrated agency within constructivist constraints. Thus, there was a simplicity to the investigation of discourses that primarily arose from GBV Taskforce member organisations, or that primarily appeared in the informal sphere; each of these areas could have been undertaken as a separate project and their respective findings and analysis would have likely followed a similar course. While the chapters shared a theoretical and historical orientation, each could have been researched and written up separately.

In contrast, Chapters Seven and Eight, which address interactions between these spheres, could not have been created in alienation from other findings in the dissertation. This is because there were several apparent paradoxes and unresolved questions that became less contradictory once they were integrated together into this dissertation. Specifically, three questions confronted me as I sought to contextualise gender violence discourses within long-term colonial history: firstly, why was it consistently difficult to find source material on interactions between Sande societies and the early Liberian state, with most historical work on traditional leaders focusing on Poro societies? Secondly, if it was accurate to note patriarchal consolidation within many gender violence initiatives and in some related activities of the National Traditional Council, why was this happening in a postwar administration where gender equality was a high priority, and in a country with a long and robust history of female indigenous leadership? Thirdly, why were the conflicts over FGC/M so

vehement and adversarial between certain Sande leaders and the postwar state? The latter was especially puzzling since both traditional female authorities and the Sirleaf administration are to an extent mutually reliant in national politics and both are key actors in responding to gender violence.

There are numerous explanations that could be advanced for each of these questions individually, which is initially how I attempted to resolve them. However, in viewing all three as a collection of questions, a valid explanation appeared. The lack of available sources on Sande-state interactions, which I initially attributed to male bias on the part of historians, could alternately be interpreted as evidence that there were truly less formal interactions between female indigenous institutions and the male-led early Liberian state. If Sande authority persisted outside state rule, and outside formal colonial reconfiguration, as an 'autonomous space' (Mamdani, 1996), while Poro societies developed institutional ties to liberal governance structures and close links to most male Liberian presidents, then the postwar interactions can be viewed as a continuation of these complex and interdependent relations. The conflicts over FGC/M and the relative ease with which patriarchal consolidation occurred in the postwar decade could reflect the lack of institutional memory between female traditional authorities and (newly) female-inclusive state governance with strong donor ties to international human rights institutions. Furthermore, these liberal and traditional authority structures are embedded in economic production and social life. In the postwar era, the inclusion of male financial obligations to the households as a gender violence issue reveals continued transformations of embedded gender roles. To summarise, both the 'contested inclusions' (Fuest, 2010) and 'contested collusions' this dissertation observes are continuations of this

institutional dynamism. These findings apply to several different scholarly debates that engage key issues in gender violence, gender and development, and feminist geography.

## Thematic contributions

### *Qualitative versus quantitative*

Both quantitative and qualitative studies contribute to a flourishing global health literature on sexual and gender-based violence, and so the quantitative versus qualitative methods debate is not particularly divisive within that field. A key issue, however, is what type of qualitative data should be most informative for a stronger research and empowerment agenda. The enthusiasm with which interviewees joined us in conversation was indicative of how infrequently Liberians are solicited for their analytical viewpoints on the violence affecting them. My work demonstrates how longer-term participant observation and semi-structured, interviewee-led conversations inform and add value to quantitative, survey-based research on gender violence perceptions. Relatedly, it shows the importance of historical continuities in 'emergency' research settings that can often overly focus on social upheaval and rupturing.

For example, historicising the discourse on 'dress code' as a perceived cause of rape explained its prevalence in contrast to other 'Rape Myth Acceptance' statements (UNMIL). Gender violence survey methods have become increasingly sophisticated and rigorous in the past decade. Qualitative research such as my own helps set the agenda for, as well as expand and refine this necessary quantitative

work. Treating non-elite interviewees as analytical agents and maximising their topic preferences during semi-structured interviews gave a less numerically precise but more authentic impression of their top priority issues, perceptions, and strategies for mitigating violence. It also created flexibility for informants' positionality as victims/survivors, offenders, bystanders, and advocates, bringing the data closer to the reality that an individual can embody all of those classifications (as quantitative methodologies have also increasingly sought to do in recent years). The implication is that 'urgent' survey-based frameworks can better account for historical and political context, and that this is necessary not only because the historian or political scientist tends to assigns importance to these fields, but because it can potentially capture a closer picture of attitudes and behaviours that are causally linked to gender violence. In a general sense my dissertation signifies that continuities as well as ruptures are foundational to social interactions in emergency and development settings. Moreover, this context can be accomplished in part by putting research participants into more authoritative roles in determining what should be counted and how.

*Structure versus agency*

This dissertation assigns primacy to a subject-centred analysis of violence and ultimately wishes to support individuals and non-privileged groups in addressing gender violence of all kinds in their lives – violence ranging from the structural to the interpersonal to the discursive. Working alongside community-based organisations and remarkable individuals was a challenging and rewarding component of my research methods and ethics. The question of how these 'field'

relationships might advance further is an interesting one, related to researchers' 'obligations' (Hutchinson, 2011), but also the joy and 'serendipity' in forming partnerships during research (Miller et. al., 1998). The dissertation also commented on the limitations to agency; these include, the limitations to poststructuralist epistemic freedom posed by discursive conventions, the limitations to individual speech acts or other texts within a context of institutional dominance, and finally the limitations of 'authentic' engagement for 'local communities' and other 'archetypes of humanitarian discourse' (Ferme, 2013). Dominant institutions themselves were examined within their own set of influences and constraints, which was important in constructing a balanced and considered critical outlook on liberal institutions, government 'elites', and traditional authorities. The critique of liberal institutions (and postwar liberal governmentality in particular) was driven by the dilemmas identified in liberal engagement.

*Liberalism with/against imperialism*

This dissertation contributes to the debate over liberal imperialism in postconflict reconstruction. Specifically, it does so by suggesting a clarification of terms that, if valid, has implications for recognising when and how liberal imperialism appears in post-Cold War humanitarian interventions. Arendt's Origins of Totalitarianism was traced in detail to this end. The conflation of 19th century imperialism with its worst excesses and the corresponding conflation of post-Cold War imperialism with essentially 'generous' motivations was critiqued. This distinction appears in debates on liberal postwar peacebuilding and orients scholars' views of how essentially 'good' or 'bad' such interventions can be deemed. On the

other side of the spectrum, critical approaches sometimes fall into the trap of deploying 'imperialism' as a polemical term that incriminates by association all related projects (Doe, 2009; Odhiambo-Abuya, 2005). Defenders of liberal postconflict projects use this same spectre of 'destructive' imperialism as a regrettable past event against which modern interventions can be juxtaposed as an improvement (Brigg, 2002; Paris, 2010). Invoking selective definitions of imperialism or colonialism stalls this debate further.

Complexifying our understanding of imperialism actually simplifies the matter. An Arendtian concept of imperialism, and one that explicitly takes into account its symbiosis with liberal humanitarianism, can help analysts today to perceive where and how humanitarian projects become hegemonic; it can help them recognise how certain sets of relations or 'allocations' (Stoler, 2008) persist or recur over time. This does not in any way require taking an apologist stance towards empire. Extending beyond a strictly material conception of 'destructive' imperialism defined as 'accumulation by dispossession', can help scholars recognise the more insidious ways that imperialist modes of functioning appear even where, and especially where, 'good intentions' exist in gender and development. With due attention to discourse and the persistence of memory, scholars can better understand why agents frame their experiences within schema of imperialism, settler colonialism, or patriarchy. In this dissertation, it explains why a 'girls power' poster might have a patriarchal subtext, or a 'community engagement' programme might convey paternalism and settler superiority especially towards indigenous groups. The reason that the European 'generic' (Mamdani, 1996) colonial experience is important to keep in mind, when considering Liberia's 'uniqueness', is because the

Liberian government is implementing governance structures that resemble some theorists' interpretation of European gendered colonial rule in Africa. Co-opting indigenous authority structures and working with pluralistic legal models on liberal institutional terms, or alternately, depicting those groups in a negative light as inherently abusive to women. Asserting paternalistic trusteeship over women's bodies in the form of intrusive gender-violence programmes, bureaucratising victims, and discursively constructing the legitimacy of the current governance by leveraging violated female bodies.

This thesis demonstrated that the gendered nature of liberal humanitarianism, imperialism, and colonialism was relevant in 19th century liberal imperialism, and remains relevant today in understanding gender violence debates. The findings on state primacy in gender violence campaigns, and conflicts and collusion over FGC/M demonstrate the salience of feminist work on the 'sexual contract' to understanding liberal humanitarianism and residual colonialism in postwar reconstruction efforts Both universalist human rights literature and relativist (or contexualist) anthropological accounts at times construct an exclusionary binary opposition between 'local culture' and 'imposed, Western norms' of human rights. This divide is particularly evident in literature debating 'harmful traditional practices'. Academic approaches that theorise gender equality as an implicitly Western and universalist liberal project in duologic opposition to traditional, non-Western, and 'collective' concepts of rights, are ill-equipped to deal with the above complexities. Both sides of this 'rites versus rights' binary are unprepared, whether from a 'nativist reflex' (Mbembe, 2007:54) or individual rights perspective. Liberal humanitarianism has always faced serious questions of engaging difference and

justifying colonialism and imperialism. Liberal international feminist movements are similarly burdened with the 'colonial debris' (Hunt) of a longstanding liberal imperialism; a 'white woman's burden'

*Rights and culture*

Underlining the above disciplinary-bound and interdisciplinary debates is a wider and more fundamental stalemate of supposed 'rights' versus 'culture' –supports the collapse of the false binary between rights and culture. The actions of numerous individuals acting independently or in consensus-based action groups, offer humble yet profound examples that larger organisations working in gender violence would be wise to recognise more fully. These individuals and groups drew upon their every capability, however constrained those capabilities were, to advocate for gender equality and peaceful, supportive masculinities; to intervene to stop domestic violence incidents in the neighbourhood; to protest for the correct investigation of an abused and murdered teenage girl; to demand legal restitution for Ruth Berry Peal, and in doing so, equally uphold the value of indigenous modes of education; to seek lessons in the aftermath of the aggravated sexual assault of a child near Red Light Market; and to perform songs assuring women that transactional sex was a mark of survival and not shame. Interviewees strengthened their discursive agency by using powerful tropes in favour of their perspectives, referencing colonial terminology and/or international human rights language disseminated by donor-led initiatives. Their words and deeds construct a narrative that is not yet dominant in gender equality discourses that conflate liberal/modern/equal/international into one category and traditional/abusive/local into another, placing both on a false linear

temporality that situates liberal gender norms as both a chronological and moral progression. Instead, Monrovians demonstrate historical continuities, layered and shifting allegiances to state, tradition, and self, and hybrid and cosmopolitan identities, which is not to say their subject positions are uniformly hybrid or cosmopolitan.

Scaling these intimate and intricately detailed research findings into the wider global context of gender equality suggests a generalisable point for gender and development. Transnational feminisms, which typically embrace pluralism, hybridity, and intersectionality, connect more accurately with Monrovians' own assertions of human dignity, than do liberal human rights institutions in their current form that seek to 'domesticate difference' (Hyndman, 1998) wherever it threatens the archetypal purity of liberal universalism. The 'contested collusions', as I term it, between female indigenous authorities and the gender equitable postwar liberal state is evidence that deep disagreement between institutions can be productive as well as destructive for the advancement of rights for subalterned people and groups.

Pluralism, this dissertation carefully clarified, was not merely a matter of subordinating 'difference' under a liberal framework, or viewing difference through a liberal lens, but rather in recognising the multisited and multifaceted bases of engagement for stopping gendered violence. Conversely, 'difference' was not put on a pedestal, but acknowledged as having its own set of contradictions and shortcomings. In gender and development dialogues that persistently fall on one side or another of this false binary, my proposed technique of 'disagreement in solidarity'

supports a more sober, yet also more balanced, reckoning of the imperialism of liberalism and the 'banalities' of nativism (Appiah, 1992).

**Applicability and further questions**

The detailed and multifaceted fieldwork data will be useful for years to come, in part because it captures gender violence discourses from a particular stage of Liberian postwar development. The archive of 'propagender' awareness-raising visual materials produced by GBV Taskforce member organisations is a valuable compendium of visual data. It can be used for future comparative work on changing gender discourses in Liberia, or compared against other archives such as the John Hopkins Public Health database mentioned in Chapter One.

Interview data is also valuable, with the FGC/M protests, hostage-taking, and collective direct action on urban 'bush schools' providing information that is both highly sensitive and anomalous when compared to other FGC/M practicing countries. The lesson that applies in all contexts of forced FGC/M, however, is that 'cultural sensitivity' is an inadequate heuristic for genuine engagement, and that the embeddedness of the practice (not just the 'beliefs' surrounding it) is key to a well-designed solution. I have furthermore attempted to address FGC/M as fundamentally a question of consent, rather than fundamentally a question of harm. This carries a reminder that supporting girls' rights through transnational and cosmopolitan feminist means should emphasise capabilities over specific prescriptions for empowerment.

The historicisation of prominent gender violence narratives has explanatory potential for future studies. This could apply to other African postconflict zones, or more broadly, any setting where universalist gender equality claims are bound up with the popular experience of colonial grievance. However, given the attention paid to specific elements of Liberian state formation that appear in gender violence discourses in Monrovia, serious comparative work would need to be undertaken in order to assess what is generalisable to other countries and regions. While much of my argument and empirical material was highly specific to Liberian gender and post/colonial politics, and identifies differences even in comparison to Sierra Leone, it nevertheless brought up thematic issues of memory, colonial impact on gender relations, and liberal universalism grappling with 'difference' that contribute to a more global feminist conversation. The relevance of South Asian scholarship such as Das (1996, 1997, 2007), Butalia (1998), and Mani's (1986, 1987, 1998) works on gender violence and colonisation, implies that the globalised discourses addressed in this thesis appear, rhizomatically, in other settings and time frames.

The emergent and exploratory nature of this study is both a strength and a vulnerability. Some of the neglected areas and missing information at the start of my field visits have been ameliorated as time went on. This is a positive sign for a more multifaceted and evidence-based approach to gender violence in Liberia. In particular, feminist anthropological contributions from Abramowitz (2014), Moran (2006, 2012), Ferme (2013), and Fuest (2008, 2010) have addressed serious omissions in gender research in the postwar era, as do the masculinities dimensions of Hoffman's (2011) ethnography of violence. This thesis has joined that conversation

on gender, violence, indigenous leadership, and representation at several points in all the substantive chapters.

The inferences I drew from 'audible silences' such as the role of sexual violence in precipitating wars with the Liberian Frontier Force, and the lack of institutional collaboration between Sande society and the Government of Liberia, are vulnerable to contradiction from future research or findings. As this literature evolves, it would be useful to see more careful disaggregation by region and ethnolinguistic group. Future studies on the history of Liberian politics would benefit from greater precision on ethnolinguistic differences and the heterogeneity of their colonial encounters, especially if this can be accomplished without falsely atomising ethnolinguistic groups as stable, separate categories.

I expect future scholarship (including forthcoming works that authors have informed me they are working on) to uncover fresh evidence that may either corroborate or provoke a revision to my argument. Nevertheless, having made the best use of available material within the scope of this dissertation, I believe that my insights on 'audible silence' are instructive, or at least relevant, for other researchers in Liberian studies.

### *Liberian 'lone star' exceptionalism: justified?*

What are the geographical and temporal continuities of gendered colonial politics in Liberia? The question of Liberia's historical exceptionalism poses a difficult balance in interpreting this thesis's findings. The answer impacts the applicability of this study to other settings. Historically and culturally specific phenomena deserve to be contextualised in their situated perspective, yet larger-

scale issues of colonialism, imperialism, and humanitarianism suggest the possibility of parallels, or resonances, in other African colonies, colonies outside Africa, or other countries affected by conflict and made the objects of liberal humanitarian concern.

The frequency of comparisons to Sierra Leone mitigate what is otherwise a largely exceptionalist literature on Liberian history (Clapham, 1976; Stanley, 2004). Some justifiably consider the two countries to be one case study, especially in scholarship of their civil wars (Hoffman, 2011; Keen, 2005; Pham, 2006). For the colonial period, Everill writes: 'expansionist rivalries between the colonies of Sierra Leone and Liberia may have contributed substantially to a growth of imperial ambition in both organisations' (2011:136). In recognizing the parallel and intertwining histories of Liberia and Sierra Leone, this thesis draws attention to two crucial differences. Firstly, Liberia was initially colonised under the auspices of a charitable organisation, not a state. The first settlement in Monrovia was a land purchase between the American Colonization Society and a forum of African kings and chiefs. This point is relevant to this dissertation's theoretical framework of liberal imperialism; the American Colonisation Society embodies the link between humanitarian ideals, self-proclaimed charitable activity, and colonisation of the African continent in the most direct and literal manner. The founding of Sierra Leone is fascinating in its own right, and certainly could be considered an example of liberal imperialism, but ultimately a product of government policy rather than independent charitable activity.

Secondly, and importantly, the legal and political context under which the ACS was founded was different than that of Sierra Leone. Britain established Sierra

Leone earlier, and populated it primarily with 'poor blacks' living in urban centres, and some survivors of slavery from the Caribbean and Nova Scotia, such as the 'Maroons' (Hochschild, 2005; Moran, 1990). At the time of Liberia's founding, slave plantations still operated in the United States, while the capture and transportation of slaves had been outlawed elsewhere. The trans-Atlantic shipment of captives diminished steadily under predation by British marine vessels following legislative change, which restricted supply, and increasing numbers of slaves in the US were escaping or becoming 'emancipated' while commodity prices were simultaneously changing (Hochschild, 2005; Younger, 2008). Thus, white slavers grew uncertain about the future of their economic structures and additionally, about the prospect of being outnumbered by a large population of emancipated black Americans. These conditions created differing incentive structures for the proponents of slavery, resulting in differing reasons to support the colonisation of Sierra Leone and Liberia. Consequently, the humanitarian motives driving the creation of Liberia were more intimately connected to the everyday social experiences of plantation slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Without wishing to divert into an exhaustive comparison, I suggest that these two differences; state/charity and differential positions regarding the abolition of slavery, are key points with cascading consequences for the symbolic politics of the respective countries. While both colonies claimed to end slavery, Liberia cut more closely to the bone of white supremacist insecurities, and black survival, due to its ties to the US.

If the above distinctions are true, then it is reasonable to anticipate that discourses of 'civilisation' and 'country' would be exacerbated in Liberia compared to Sierra Leone and other colonies. While the identity construction of 'civilised'

emerged from historical conditions unique to Liberia's founding, the similarities elsewhere make it an interesting comparative case.

**Princess Guanya Pau: waving, not drowning**



Figure 2, Ch. 9. Research teammates Edna and Fatu gaze upon the ruins of Hotel Africa's poolside plaza.

The theoretical framework of this dissertation asked, what would be a better outcome than 'colonial rescue' for Guanya Pau, an imperiled young woman whose claim to self-sovereignty fell afoul of 'traditional culture'? It explored three avenues based on improved liberalism, autochthony or strategic essentialism, and poststructuralist emancipation. I will not force a sense of resolution by suggesting that this dissertation has resolved the above analogy, or even, that my work as an

outsider is well-positioned to do so. However, this final section revisits the story in light of the past several chapters' contributions in order to remind the reader of cross-cutting issues of agency, author/ity, and what can be powerfully claimed or reclaimed through narrative.

In a trans-Atlantic folk tale known in both Liberia and the US, Brer Rabbit (or Brother Rabbit) finds himself stuck to a 'tar baby', a trap set by Master Fox. He cannot move his arms, legs, or face, as he countenances his imminent death in a pot of boiling soup. Brer Rabbit begs Master Fox to spare him at least one indignity, and cook him right away instead of torturing him by throwing him in the briar patch, which he fears worst of all. His pitiful pleas only inspire the sadistic Master Fox to throw him, alongside the 'tar baby', into the largest patch of thorns available. Brer Rabbit then escapes. He uses the briars to scratch off the tar, and runs away singing 'I was born and raised in a briar patch'.

In 2009, my host partner Edna Hutchinson and I each told our versions of 'Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby', by coincidence, during a round of story-telling. Later that month, another close friend told me a 'war story' from her teen years, in which a rebel soldier approached her at gunpoint and demanded to be directed to a location across town. As she escorted him, he commented that he liked her and wished for her to be his 'wife'. My friend knew exactly what he had in mind. The soldier first had a task to complete, and instructed her to wait for him to return. "Do you know what I did?" she asked me, continuing, "I smiled, and said 'OK!' And then, I *ran*" (personal communication, July 2009).

In listening to the personal stories of interviewees and friends, I felt a constant wish for their words to follow a similar trajectory, resulting always in safety,

freedom, and even laughter. In fact, many of the things my friends chose to tell me were more easily 'speakable' in this way, sometimes with the 'unspeakable' elements going unacknowledged in a very obvious way (with 'wife' as shorthand for rape, for example, or an interviewee describing his bystander intervention in detail, but only briefly mentioning other abuses he witnessed). The levity with which friends imparted their experiences belied the real terror and helplessness they must have felt at the time; though, in the recounting, they subordinated those fears to their resilience and good humour. Likewise, the Brer Rabbit tales are said to be popular re-imaginings of the violence of plantation slavery (Scott, 1985), an escape fantasy enmeshed with 'trickster' figures from West African oral legends such as Anansi the spider.

The lesson, I suggest, is not only in the content of the story, but also in the act of telling it. My point in invoking the Brer Rabbit folktale and my friend's analogous one is not to suppose that profoundly victimised individuals experience life as a continuous expression of plucky 'agency', as some feminist texts frame it, nor to rhetorically gloss over victimcy in order to bring a sheen of positivity to an inherently depressing reality. In studying gender violence, these stories rarely finish well. Silence, for some, is the preferred text. However, the ability to name one's own experiences, and to command one's own narrative, offers a sort of restitutional potential, especially where epistemic violence was instrumental in enabling harm in the first place (King, 2005).

Changing the discourse is a necessary but insufficient step towards changing more material conditions. My research teammates and hosts continue to pursue their vision of a peaceful, prosperous society. The emancipatory and decolonising

ideals motivating this study are larger ambitions than any one doctoral thesis can fulfill. Within my own privileges and limitations of agency, my objective is that the publications resulting from this research will inspire a cross-disciplinary academic conversation around the gender norms, historical eras, humanitarian ideals, and colonial echoes to which this study assigns importance. Such a conversation has already proved useful in the anthropological response to the ebola crisis in Liberia (Thornhill, 2014). My ambition for public engagement is that in addition to adding content and analysis to humanitarian perspectives on African women, that it contributes to shaping the lens through which African women are gazed upon in humanitarian discourse. Conversely, this endeavor will be successful only when the cosmopolitan views of Liberian women and men are definitive of the discourses about them, rather than humanitarian discourses being definitive of their conditions. I hope that ordinary; that is, extraordinary, Liberians will access, appreciate, and discuss my work. Above all, my highest hope for the meta-narrative of the violated and colonised 'African woman' is that her avatar, Princess Guanya Pau, will reincarnate as a clever Anansi figure or a swift-footed Brer Rabbit: always outwitting her captors, and always at the centre of her own story.

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# APPENDIX ON SAFETY AND ETHICS

> *'What do ethnographers working in such turbulent places really "owe" the subjects of their studies? Is it "the gift"-á la Marcel Mauss - of intellectual honesty? The gift of political neutrality? Foresight? Advocacy? Protection? Resources? Powerlessness? These are the questions that, I suspect, haunt many of us working long-term in "unstable places" '*
> (Hutchinson, 2011).

Researching under what Graham Harvey (2003) terms 'guesthood' circumstances, the distinction between data and personal experiences was often ambiguous. In many cases this ambiguity could be 'serendipitous' (Miller, Nelson, & Moore, 1998), for example when casual discussions or community events provided valuable contextual information for better understanding interviewee responses. In some cases it raised questions regarding what information could be shared, what could be anonymised, and what must be kept confidential. Often this 'serendipity' was a positive experience, but not always.

One unexpected challenge occurred upon arrival to my fourth fieldwork visit in August 2012, when I learned that two men had recently raped an acquaintance of mine. The situation seemed to change every day and it was uncertain what response, if any, her network of contacts would expect from me. Many people knew me as a 'student of GBV', and some acquaintances assumed this incident would become part of my research. I responded to such comments by clarifying that the survivor's confidentiality is paramount, and that anything that happened with the woman's case was a personal matter to be kept separate from my research (hence recording this in an appendix). That was relatively straightforward, but less so was the expectation that as an educated woman, I would assist my Liberian friends in helping the victim move the case through

court. While I wished to be useful and to support and advocate for the survivor as I would equally for a Canadian or British woman, I felt confused by the unpredictability of the situation and the prospect of subsequent research dilemmas as the expected prosecution went ahead.

As a part of managing these expectations, I informed my supervisors and they communicated with the Geography department. The administrative response was quite robust. The department raised concerns about the security of my living conditions, the possibility of the rapists targeting me, and about my safety and the representation of Oxford University if I were to be involved in a potential court case. Both my supervisors' own experiences working in difficult settings prepared them to give qualified and supportive advice, for which I was and am grateful. Dr. Patricia Daley and I agreed that the situation was unlikely to elevate my risk of rape, she communicated this to the department, and we established a contingency plan involving daily contact for several weeks. As Pottier, Hammond, & Cramer (2011) note, researchers commonly allow their well-being to erode when they are immersed in a difficult environment and living with hosts whose day to day experience of danger is different from the guest's. Despite some of my misgivings with the way certain issues were prioritised or communicated, I am grateful for the university's rigorous safety standards.

It would be comforting to place this case and others like it within a familiar narrative trajectory that ends with a sense of resolution gained from lessons learned, but this would be inauthentic. Without going into confidential details, the survivor's situation is far from resolved. There was never a court case, which

simplified my own safety and ethics challenges but did nothing to restore any sense of security, respect, or care to the survivor.

Sometimes I wonder how things could have been different. If the men had not raped my acquaintance, she would nonetheless have faced formidable troubles elsewhere in her life, which overflows with unnecessary and meaningless suffering. I perceive the incident of gang-rape and the victim's other sorrows to be systemic in nature, not merely several bad events that coincided on one young woman's body. The difficulties she faces are not anomalous in the context of widespread violence affecting Liberian women, violence ranging from the structural to the intimate. Therefore I believe that, if the men had chosen to respect themselves and the woman, there would have been little change to the emotional consequences of fieldwork overall and the sense of unfulfilled, or unfulfillable, obligation to make a difference.

This lingering sense of dissatisfaction, for me, reinforces the lesson that individual researchers' engagement with ethics goes well beyond the requirements set out by formal regulations (Cerulli, 2011; Hugman, Pittaway, & Bartolomei, 2011; Sikweyiya & Jewkes, 2011). Reframing this important point in a positive light, it is a joy and a privilege to conduct social inquiry in a manner that could potentially make a positive difference. Hard lessons have led me to understand that self-care is an integral part of the researcher's pursuit of this principle (Campbell, 2002; Sexual Violence Research Initiative, 2015; Theidon, 2014). So is living with the fact that these fieldwork 'events', however tempting to relegate to the 'there and then' (Hyndman, 2001), cannot be resolved by any researcher until their underlying structural injustices have been eradicated.

# APPENDIX II

## LIST OF FIGURES


Chapter One:

1. An illustration from a UNICEF brochure collected in August 2009 but created using billboard artwork from earlier, likely around the time the Rape Law passed in 2006.

Chapter Two:

1.Map of locations in Greater Monrovia

2. An example of 'propagender'; an anti-rape silicon bracelet advocating for police involvement, 2012

3. A street-side advocacy piece by the American Refugee Committee, from 2008 or earlier. Text in speech balloon reads: 'My Friend, take your hands from on me!!!'.

4. An anti-SGBV poster by Women of Liberia Peace Network

5. A composite image shown in *The Wicked Music Industry*. Right: A drawing of 'Baphomet', originally from *Dogme et rituel de la Haute Magie* (Lévi, 1861). Left: celebrity performer Rihanna supposedly revealing her Illuminati connections by taking the form of the 'Sabbatic Goat' in a music video.

Chapter Five:

1. Rape needs hospital care fast. A poster by MSF and MoHSW, estimated 2012 or earlier.

2. Stop Early Marriage', a poster produced by Christian Children's Fund Liberia, MoGD, and USAID/OFDA.

3. 'Rape is no joking and family palava, report it to the police', a poster by ANPPCAN and UNIFEM

4. 'Let The People Hear You Scream', a detail from AFELL's 2009 Stages of Rape Prosecution calendar.

5.'Police Involvement', another detail from the AFELL Stages of Rape Prosecution calendar.

6. This is not Right at all...', another detail from the AFELL Stages of Rape Prosecution Poster.

7. One anti-GBV poster from ANPPCAN exhorting survivors to report rape cases.

8. Another poster from the same series by ANPPCAN asking police officers to refrain from demanding bribes and sexual favours from women bringing complaints to the police.

9. A poster illustrating the supposed consequences of transactional sex versus education and modest clothing.

Chapter Seven:

1. Four examples of gender violence depicted in one poster.

2. Real Man Don't Rape t-shirt produced by Servants of All People.

3. 'Stop Rape: she could be your mother'. A 2009 billboard near Douala Market.

4. 'Men were not born cruel'.
5. An ARC-produced poster on 'abandonment'.
6. A 2008 poster by ANPPCAN on divorce rights.
7. Two 2012 posters by Christians & Muslims United Against GBV.

Chapter Eight:
1. An ANPPCAN poster declares 'Our old ways...will not carry Liberia anywhere'.
2. A locally-printed shirt from 2012 or earlier recommends 'grade school' over 'Sande bush' school.
3. An anti-FGM t-shirt recommends that parents should not force their daughters into initiation.

Chapter Nine:
1. A detail from a 2009 billboard by IRC and Irish Aid.
2. Research teammates Edna and Fatu gaze upon the ruins of Hotel Africa's poolside plaza.