

**ETHNIC MOBILISATION AND
THE LIBERIAN CIVIL WAR (1989-2003)**

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To God be the glory

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between ethnicity and violent group mobilisation in Liberia's civil war (1989-2003). It focuses on Gio, Mano and Mandingo mobilisation to investigate how and why internal dynamics about moral norms and expectations motivated leadership calls for violence and ethnic support.

Much of the existing literature interprets popular involvement in violent group mobilisation on the Upper Guinea Coast as a youth rebellion against gerontocracy. I argue that such an approach is incomplete in the Liberian case, and does not account for questions of ethnic mobilisation and the participation of groups such as the Gio, Mano and Mandingo. At the onset of hostilities, civilians in Liberia were not primarily mobilised to fight based on their age, but rather as members of ethnic communities whose membership included different age groups. I explore constructivist approaches to ethnicity to analyse mobilisation for war as the collective 'self-defence' of ethnic groups *qua* moral communities.

In the prelude to the outbreak of civil war, inter-ethnic inequalities of access to the state and economic resources became reconfigured. Ethnic groups—as moral communities—experienced external 'victimisation' and a sense of internal dissolution, or threatened dissolution. In particular, the understanding of internal reciprocal relations between patrons and clients within ethnic groups was undermined. Internal arguments about morality, personal responsibility, social accountability/justice, increased the pressure on excluded elites and thus incentivised them to pursue violent political strategies. Mobilisation took on an ethnic form mainly because individuals believed that they were fighting to protect the moral communities that generate esteem and ground understandings of good citizenship.

Therefore, ethnic participation in the Liberian countryside differed from the model peasant rebellion that seeks to overthrow the feudal elites. Rather than a revolution of the social order, individuals regarded themselves as protecting an extant ethnic order that provided rights and distributed resources. Even though some individuals fought for political power and resources, and external actors facilitated group organisation through the provision of logistical support, the violence was also an expression of bottom-up moral community crisis and an attempt by politico-military elites to keep their reputation and enforce unity.

Map of Liberia



Map No. 3775 Rev. 6 UNITED NATIONS
January 2004

Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Cartographic Section

List of Acronyms

ACS	American Colonization Society
AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
ALCOP	All Liberia Coalition Party
APFA	All Peoples Freedom Alliance
ASAP	All Student Allied Party
CDC	Congress for Democratic Change
COMASL	Concerned Mandingo Society of Liberia
COTOL	Coalition for Transformation of Liberia
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DDRR	Demobilization, Disarmament, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Cease-fire Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FELMAUSA	Federation of Liberian Mandingo Association of the United States of America
ICGL	International Contact Group for Liberia
INPFL	Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia
JPC	Justice and Peace Commission
LPC	Liberia Peace Council
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
MOJA	Movement for Justice in Africa
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NMC	National Mandingo Caucus

NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NPP	National Patriotic Party
NTGL	National Transitional Government of Liberia
PAL	Progressive Alliance of Liberia
PPP	Progressive People's Party
PRC	Peoples Redemption Council
SSR	Security Sector Reform
SUP	Student Unification Party
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TWP	True Whig Party
PRODEM	Progressive Democratic Party
ULIMO	United Liberian Movement for Democracy in Liberia
ULIMO-K	United Liberian Movement for Democracy in Liberia under Alhaji Kromah
ULIMO-J	United Liberian Movement for Democracy in Liberia under Roosevelt Johnson
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
US	United States
UP	Unity Party

Introduction

Research problem and case study

By the early 1990s, long-standing hopes that civic nationalism would come to supplant ethnic division in independent Africa had failed to materialise.¹ The political mobilisation of ethnicity proliferated in various parts of the continent as ethnic identities came to be bound up in civil wars in Liberia, Congo, and Somalia.² Ethnic politics was also implicated in the Rwandan genocide, with up to one million ethnic Tutsis massacred by Hutu groups over a period of 100 days. This trend continued into the 21st century, particularly in the context of democratic transitions. In Kenya, multi-party politics between 1992 and 2007 became so polarised along ethnic lines that voting patterns followed ethnic affiliations, culminating in violent, fragile transitions. Contested election results sparked much-publicised, post-election crises between ethnic groups in Nigeria, Kenya and Ivory Coast—with the latter two countries previously appearing to be stable democracies. These developments prompted some observers to conclude that ethnicity is “by far the most potent force for political mobilisation” on the continent.³

The apparent resilience of ethnicity in Africa has attracted a high level of journalistic coverage. Reportage in the world press, however, lacks nuance, with most accounts reinforcing the popular stereotype that differences between cultural groups are the direct source of ‘ethnic conflict’ in Africa. Robert Kaplan expressed the high point of this thinking when he famously predicted of a ‘coming anarchy’, soon to confront Western civilisation.⁴ The hypothesis that ethnic diversity causes political conflict is difficult to maintain. Over 90 percent of countries in the world are multi-ethnic and “in most places the lived experience of

¹ Young, 1993.

² I use ‘civil war’, ‘violent political conflict’, ‘rebellion’, and ‘revolution’ interchangeably to refer to warfare between rebel movements and regular and irregular state forces.

³ Salih, 1998, p. 7.

⁴ See Kaplan, February 1994.

cultural pluralism [have been] civil, often harmonious”.⁵ If ethnic diversity were a sufficient condition for political conflict, then violence between ethnic groups would be a common occurrence around the world. But this is not the case.⁶ Suggesting that a multiplicity of cultures is the source of violence detracts attention from the important underlying dynamics that demand further investigation and explanation.⁷

Ethnic difference and preference for a particular ethnic identity can exist without leading to antagonistic outcomes. The mere consciousness of ethnic identity does not make ethnicity susceptible to violent group mobilisation. For instance, since multi-party elections were re-introduced in Ghana in 1992, voting patterns have broadly followed ethnic lines, despite ethnicity not being the central focus of political campaigns.⁸ While academic literature tends to downplay ethnicity in Ghanaian politics, there is evidence to suggest that ethnicity has been mobilised without turning into violent conflict.⁹ As Martin Doornbos perceptively put it: “ethnicity does not explain anything, it needs to be explained”.¹⁰ It is not intrinsically hostile, or an inherent driver of conflict.

The impact of ethnicity on political mobilisation for armed conflict constitutes a complex and fascinating research topic in the study of political life in Africa. Case studies of political violence in Eastern and Southern Africa have generated much academic debate about the relationship between ethnicity and war.¹¹ However, studies of violent conflict on the Upper Guinea Coast—where the discipline of anthropology predominates—have tended to overlook the role ethnicity plays in causing and sustaining violent group mobilisation.¹²

⁵ Young & United Nations Research Institute for Social Development., 1999, p. 2.

⁶ James D. Fearon & Laitin, 2003.

⁷ Alexander, Ranger, & McGregor, 2000.

⁸ For example, ethnic voting appeared in the tendency for the Akan and the Mole-Dagbani not to vote for the Ewe: Stewart, 2009, p. 27.

⁹ See for example: Langer 2009b.

¹⁰ Doornbos, 1998, p. 19.,

¹¹ See for example studies on Zimbabwe, Kenya, Burundi and Rwanda: Alexander et al., 2000; John Lonsdale, 1992; Lynch, 2007a; Uvin, 1999.

¹² An important exception is the work of the Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity at Oxford University. See for example: Mustapha, 2006.

Christian Højbjerg, an anthropologist, has noted that this absence of ethnicity is somewhat paradoxical. Instead of studies of ethnicity, discussions of semiotics, ideas of rational choice, and the role of social institutions, and class tensions predominate.¹³

One account for this development is that academics have sought to correct and challenge misleading journalistic coverage on ethnicity by highlighting the importance of alternative factors. A further reason for the relative absence of ethnicity is that contemporary academics sought to distance themselves from the much criticised culturalist metanarratives that became popular in the 1990s, when political scientists tried to account for the impact of cultural identity in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War.¹⁴ With broad global audiences in mind writers such as Samuel Huntington and Mary Kaldor predicted a resurgence of ethnic identity¹⁵ and instrumentalisation thereof.¹⁶

Prominent Africanists mounted several critiques against these accounts, charging that they paid scanty attention to the complexities of social and cultural context.¹⁷ These academic critics go to great lengths to distance themselves from the idea that cultural identity could be a cause of violence. However, as Højbjerg warns, overlooking the function of ethnicity in collective mobilisation for violence risks throwing out the baby with the bath water.¹⁸ Ethnicity forms an important part of political reality and mobilisation for violence in Africa and it needs to be studied and understood as such.

This thesis addresses the impact of ethnicity on collective mobilisation for the Liberian civil war of 1989-2003.¹⁹ For a period of 14 years, Liberia was involved in a two-part civil war that left an estimated 250,000 people dead and approximately 90 percent of

¹³ Højbjerg, 2009, p. 1.

¹⁴ See for example: Chabal & Daloz, 1999; Ellis, 1999; Huntington, 1996; Kaldor, 1999.

¹⁵ Huntington, 1996.

¹⁶ Kaldor, 1999.

¹⁷ See for example: Christopher Cramer, 2006; Richards, 1996.

¹⁸ Højbjerg, 2009, p. 2.

¹⁹ Detailed historical background to the war is provided in subsequent chapters.

the population displaced from their homes.²⁰ The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) initiated several peace accords that were broken by warring factions. The war eventually ended on 18th August 2003.²¹ Political mobilisation and patterns of support appeared to follow ethnic lines. The key question of this study is: What role did ethnicity play in the outbreak of the Liberian civil war and why?

Liberian politics is frequently portrayed as having a unique ‘ethnic situation’. It not only consists of indigenous ethnic groups, but also features a historically contentious relationship between these groups—which comprise the majority (approximately 95 percent)—and a minority group (approximately 5 percent), that arrived as Americo-Liberian Settlers and founded the Republic in 1847.²² On closer examination however, Liberian politics has a similar ‘ethnic logic’ as other African countries. Liberia is characterized by the politics of patronage where ethnic elites serve as agents for the transfer of material and immaterial benefits from the state. Ethnicity plays an important role in regulating and facilitating this transfer. The salience of ethnicity in Liberian politics is well documented in the historical literature about the antecedents of the civil war.²³ While the existing historiography of Liberia locates the roots of the war within elite rivalry at the state level, it tends to overlook the role ethnicity played as a basis for collective mobilisation for the war. Armed group organisation for the war followed ethnic affiliations between ordinary civilians and elite leaderships. Both state and non-state armed movements were represented as ethnic alliances under the leadership of ethnic elites.

The National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) movement that started the first part of the civil war intentionally mobilised Gio and Mano ethnic communities to fight in the rebellion in the 1990s. Civil war broke out on 24 December 1989 when the NPFL crossed

²⁰ ICRC, 2009, p. 1.

²¹ Detailed description of the war is provided in subsequent chapters.

²² See for example: E. E. Osaghae, 1996 Chapter 1. The presence of settlers in different forms has also occurred elsewhere in Africa, notably Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

²³ An example is: E. E. Osaghae, 1996.

into Nimba County, Liberia from Ivory Coast with over 100 insurgents. Charles Taylor led the insurgency; he announced on BBC radio that the war was a continuation of a failed coup attempt in 1985. The NPFL successfully mobilised 1000s of Gio and Mano men and women in Nimba for collective action.²⁴ They opposed people from the Mandingo and Krahn communities for allegedly supporting the regime. The NPFL, and a splinter Independent-NPFL that was led by Prince Y. Johnson, overwhelmed the Krahn-dominated Armed Forces of Liberia within six months of the rebellion. In August 1990, the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) intervened on the side of the AFL to prevent the rebel factions from capturing Monrovia.²⁵ The INPFL captured and murdered Doe in September 1990. However, the removal of Doe and subsequent establishment of the Interim Government of National Unity in Monrovia, following a peace agreement in November 1990, did not bring the war to an end. Instead, the NPFL gained control over the majority of the Liberian countryside.

In a similar fashion as the NPFL, the largest counter-rebellion, the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), which was formed from the remnants of the disintegrated Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) in 1991 to oppose the NPFL, vocally appealed for support from Krahn and Mandingo ethnic communities. In September 1991, ULIMO launched attacks from eastern Sierra Leone against NPFL-controlled territory with Krahn and Mandingo support. ULIMO split into Krahn and Mandingo factions, known in 1994 as ULIMO-J and ULIMO-K respectively. Fighting continued and the war became characterized by an assortment of diverse rebel and counter-rebel factions and state security forces with a multitude of acronyms and outfits. These also drew support from particular ethnic communities. For instance, the Liberia Peace Council (LPC) that emerged in 1993 as a faction in the NPFL war primarily mobilised support among the Grebo.

²⁴ Berkeley, 2001, p. 48.

²⁵ For more on the international actors that played a role in the war see for example: Aboagye & Bah, 2005; A. Adebajo, 2002.

The first part of the war ended after 6th April 1996 with a peace accord that stipulated the formation of a transitional government and elections.²⁶ Many armed groups transformed into political groups to compete for elections in May 1997. On 19 July 1997 Taylor was elected as President of Liberia. Many Mandingo and Krahn now felt marginalised under Taylor.²⁷ In 1999, fighting broke out again to oppose Taylor's rule. The Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) movement that initiated the second part of the civil war also tried to mobilise support from the Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups. Meanwhile the Government Forces that resisted LURD relied on continued support from Gio and Mano, as well as Loma support, until cessation of hostilities in 2003. A splinter faction of LURD called the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) also emerged from Ivory Coast with Krahn support. By July 2003 LURD and MODEL were attacking Monrovia and demanding the resignation of Taylor. Taylor relinquished power and went into exile in Nigeria on 11 August 2003. The war ended on 18th August 2003 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the government and rebel factions.²⁸ Elections were held in 2005 to usher in the incumbent administration of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. On the basis of mobilisation patterns and post-war narratives of my informants about the war, ethnicity held political relevance in the outbreak and continuance of the fighting.²⁹

Despite these easily accessible facts, much of the extant mainstream accounts of the Liberian war avoid or downplay the role of ethnicity. When they do consider ethnicity, many analysts interpret ethnic participation at the start of the war as an impulsive response to violent oppression by the regime of Samuel Doe. They do not interpret ethnicity as a

²⁶ For a detailed chronology of events in the first part of the war see for example: Ellis, 1999.

²⁷ For more on the 1997 election see: D. Harris, 1999.

²⁸ For a detailed chronology of events in the second part of the war see: Levitt, 2005.

²⁹ Detailed descriptions of relevant aspects of the war will be provided in subsequent chapters.

conflict-ridden political identity with internal tension that can lead to violence.³⁰ Eghosa Osaghae has shown how class formation made ethnic politics problematic in Liberia's political history, but he limits the issue to class relations between the Settler elite and the indigenous masses, without accounting for the internal moral issues encountered by indigenous communities with both ethnic and class identities.³¹ It is important to consider the relationship between indigenous ethnicity and unequal social relations within ethnic groups because, as John Lonsdale perceptively put it, class formation "is a process that can be intellectually grasped and (morally judged) only by reference to some former moral economy that ... once governed the politics of known reputation".³² Emerging indigenous elites and the poor in Liberia all want to remain respected members of particular ethnically organised communities.³³

Apart from the few scholars who seek to explain the connection between ethnicity and the war, ethnic mobilisation is largely attributed to "interethnic enmity",³⁴ which elites manipulated for their own purposes.³⁵ Reducing ethnic participation to enmity raises the danger of implying that such conflicts are merely about hatred of 'others'. Ethnic animosity certainly became a factor in the course of the war. However, in terms of motivating collective action this is a misleading account. A focus on consequences shows that regional identities and antagonisms are exacerbated by violent conflict.³⁶ But, there is a need to distinguish drivers of conflict from their consequences; otherwise we risk overlooking the 'real issues' that brought them about in the first place.

The dearth of analysis on questions of ethnic mobilisation and participation is in part due to over-emphasis and reliance on top-down elite accounts of the war. This approach

³⁰ See for example: Ellis, 1995, 1999; Levitt, 2005; Outram, 1997.

³¹ E. E. Osaghae, 1996.

³² John Lonsdale, 1994, p. 19.

³³ John Lonsdale, 1994, p. 20.

³⁴ Højbjerg, 2010, p. 275.

³⁵ See for example: Ellis, 1999; Outram, 1997, p. 165.

³⁶ See for example: Højbjerg, 2009, 2010.

contributes to the dominant view that elite competition for power and resources was the significant factor that drove violence. Within this view ethnicity is treated as a tool of elite manipulation in their own struggle for power and resources. This has led many analysts to suggest that armed groups exploited civilians for the parochial aims of elites, which ordinary people did not share. William Reno, for instance, has described the war as warlord politics in which elites pursued power and resources.³⁷ Similarly, Amos Sawyer has argued that the NPFL introduced a “gang-style ideology” in the stead of a “proper” political ideology right from the beginning. On his account predatory leadership encouraged fighters to “capture what you can” and “keep what you capture”.³⁸ The incentive to loot, Sawyer argues, gave the movement cohesion and helped to create personal loyalty to the leadership, particularly amongst child combatants. The predation of elites is a recurring theme in scholarly work on the Liberian Civil War.

To regard the mobilisation of civilians only in terms of the way in which elites and their armies preyed on ordinary civilians is to overlook circumstances where civilians peacefully collaborated with elites to make collective action possible. My research reveals that ordinary people were not so easily manipulated. Accounts that incorporate ‘bottom-up’ perspectives are more successful in accounting for the involvement of ordinary people in the war and contribute to balancing the dominant elite narrative. Ethnicity resonated with grassroots in Liberia because it had some perks beyond the benefits it carried for elites.³⁹

The limited analysis on questions of ethnicity is also due to many scholars focusing on the category of ‘youth’ and distancing themselves from analysing ethnicity. Many of the existing analyses of grassroots involvement in the war have tended to emphasise—and generated very important insights into—‘youth’.⁴⁰ This includes work that has attributed

³⁷ Reno, 1998.

³⁸ See: Sawyer, 2005, p. 25.

³⁹ A good example is: Lynch, 2011.

⁴⁰ See for example: Munive, July 2011. Mats Utas, 2003.

much of the fighting to economically excluded, unemployed and idle youths,⁴¹ who are seen to be undisciplined and prone to criminal behaviour.⁴² Youths are an important category in any social order, and especially in one in which 60 percent of the estimated population is below the age of 25.⁴³ Yet, analysts do not persuasively demonstrate that youths did indeed mobilise as a self-conscious group to challenge their marginalisation in Liberian society.⁴⁴ Civilians were not recruited to fight mainly on the basis of being young, but rather as members of ethnic communities. ‘Youth’ has become a trope for explaining violent conflict on the Upper Guinea Coast.⁴⁵ Emphasis on the role of generational conflict in motivating young people to fight has obscured other motives. The Liberian case is often compared with regional experiences where youth mobilisation pre-dominates. In these accounts young people are treated as individual agents trying to ‘navigate terrains of war’ to their advantage.⁴⁶ It helps to bear in mind that organised groups were the actors in the Liberian Civil War.

As a starting point, there are important differences between root causes of conflict in Liberia and that of other countries in the region, where war might have been driven by youths. This should caution us from readily assuming broad similarities between all of them. There may be some similarities, but these differences outweigh them, and the pervasiveness of patterns of ethnic mobilisation is one of the most prominent. I suggest we look to the larger arena of ethnicity in which citizenship is typically located. Many narrower communities of reputation—such as gender and generation—interact in this arena.⁴⁷ As subsequent chapters will show, ethnicity is and has been the wider community of esteem for

⁴¹ See for example: UNOWA, 2005.

⁴² See for example: Abdullah, 1998.

⁴³ This is based on 2008 census data: http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/Population_by_County.pdf and more recent estimates: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/li.html>: (last accessed 12th May 2013).

⁴⁴ See for example: Chauveau & Richards, 2008; Mats Utas, 2003.

⁴⁵ See for example: Mats Utas, 2003.

⁴⁶ Vigh, 2006.

⁴⁷ John Lonsdale, 1992, p. 352.

many “persons from every stage of life and every socioeconomic level” in Liberia.⁴⁸ Historically, ethnicity has been the strongest yardstick for measuring the moral agency of communities from different socio-economic backgrounds in the Liberian state.⁴⁹ These moral communities pre-date the Liberian state and have been the locus of civic discourse for much of the state’s political history.

Next we must ask how and why such communities, and their accompanying histories and cultural ‘traditions’, mobilised people of different ages, wealth and status. While ethnicity may not have been significant at all times, in situations where generational issues surpassed ethnic concerns—such as when youths challenged their elders for their ancestral patrimony—young people understood that ethnic norms, values and institutions were essential to their intended actions. Considering the broader ethnic identities of youthful combatants illuminates the moral claims that youths tried to make on their ethnic elders. Focusing on the youth perspective alone does not shed adequate light on this important part of the conflict. It is through accounting for ethnicity that we arrive at a more full and rounded understanding.

What constitutes an ethnic group is often hard to pin down, as the extant literature demonstrates. A rather broad definition has been proposed by Abner Cohen that, “an ethnic group is a collectivity of people who share some patterns of normative behaviour, or culture, and who form a part of a large population, interacting within the framework of a common social system like the state.”⁵⁰ Cohen suggests that London stockbrokers can be labelled as an ethnic group, but are not considered to be one because of their elite status.⁵¹ But rather than the absence of a “lower status” it is because London stockbrokers “lack a conscious

⁴⁸ Bates, 1983b, p. 154.

⁴⁹ See John Lonsdale, 1994, p. 20.

⁵⁰ Cohen, 1974, p. 92.

⁵¹ Cohen, 1974, p. 101.

notion of being ‘a people’ and associated narrative of shared kinship” that they are not considered an ethnic group.⁵²

Anthony Smith has proposed a narrower, and more commonly applied, definition. For him an ethnic group is based on the existence of both shared objective elements and a subjective element of solidarity. Smith argues that an ethnic community has a collective name; a common myth of descent; a shared history or memories; a shared culture (this includes language, religion, historical experience); an association with a specific territory; and a subjective sense of solidarity and identity distinctive from other groups.⁵³ An important factor that differentiates ethnic groups from other kinds of social formations is the symbolism that they use to bind individuals from diverse socio-economic categories in a sentiment of cultural oneness.⁵⁴ In this way an ethnic group is unlike other categories within society.

For the purposes of this thesis, I tentatively define an ethnic group as a moral and historic community whose members share a common identity, or relational notion of social belonging, based on objective elements of sharing and subjective elements of solidarity.⁵⁵ To analyse ethnic groups as moral communities, the study adapts the concept of ‘moral ethnicity’, which has been defined as “the common human instinct to create out of the daily habits of social intercourse and material labour, a system of moral meaning and ethnical reputation within a more or less imagined community.”⁵⁶ A fuller discussion of the conception of ethnicity is provided in Chapter 2.

This thesis presents a case study that aims to further our understanding of the contexts, processes, strategies and rationales of ethnic mobilisation, and support for political

⁵² Lynch, 2007a, p. 20.

⁵³ Eriksen, 2004; Smith, 1987.

⁵⁴ Bates, 1983b, p. 171.,

⁵⁵ I use ‘moral community’ and ‘ethnic group’ interchangeably.

⁵⁶ John Lonsdale, 1994, p. 132. Benedict Anderson coined this term to describe nations, but the argument applies to ethnic groups as well. B. Anderson, 1991.

violence, in Liberia. The analysis traces the historical and structural context of ethnic mobilisation in Liberia, and the issues that made ethnic mobilisation appealing and participation meaningful to ordinary people. The thesis identifies circumstances, causative factors, incentives, and motivations that led to violence between ethnic groups. It offers an analysis of participant accounts, collective narratives, local imagination, group perceptions, interpretations of ethnic identities and presentations and memories of histories, with a focus on both elite and non-elite behaviour.

The narrative accounts of my informants suggest that ethnic mobilisation in Liberia was generated by the severe marginalisation of certain culturally defined groups. Such accounts resonate with studies suggesting that ethnicity is not just a natural signifier for separate cultures but may also be a marker for processes of political, social, economic, and cultural exclusion.⁵⁷ The thesis draws on the concept of ‘horizontal inequalities’, which argues that violent group mobilisation is often driven by the presence of severe inequalities between culturally defined groups.⁵⁸

I argue that horizontal inequalities were so explosive in Liberia because the exclusion and marginalisation of ethnic groups disrupted carefully balanced internal relations between ethnic constituents and their leaders. This disruption made ethnic constituents feel powerless and unprotected by their leaders, thereby creating internal pressure threatening the legitimacy of ethnic leaders. In turn, the threat of being outmanoeuvred by more radical rivals, combined with the attraction of calls to collective self-defence, encouraged leaders and their constituents to adopt more violent strategies of political mobilization. I provide a more detailed discussion of this dynamic in Chapter 2.

Any study of ethnic mobilisation and support in the Liberian war faces the problem of what geographic location to study, with all the concomitant issues of selection bias. As

⁵⁷ See for example: A. Langer, Mustapha, & Stewart, 2009.

⁵⁸ Arnim Langer, Mustapha, & Stewart, 2007; Stewart & Annan, 2008.

ethnic mobilisation was not limited to a single location, many different sites are available. Bearing in mind the need to take a historical and empirical approach, this study primarily focuses on Nimba County where the Gio and Mano ethnic groups were mobilised by the NPFL to start the war in 1989-1990. This will be followed by an analysis of Mandingo mobilisation by the ULIMO counter-rebellion against the NPFL, as well as in the subsequent LURD rebellion. The armed groups that were the main protagonists in the war concentrated their efforts of ethnic mobilisation among these communities. Events in Nimba cannot, however, be seen in isolation. The study, therefore, also addresses events in other parts of the country, especially the capital Monrovia, which influenced ethnic mobilisation on the national level. The war was not the first time that ethnic communities had been mobilised for political conflict. Extensive historical research is therefore also required.

The method of analysis, which I pursue is partly imposed by Liberian social actors who instinctively take a historical perspective to explain how things were in the past, how they came to be, where tensions arose, and how it led to the successful mobilisation of ethnic identity for war. This thesis draws on a wide range of sources, but primarily relies on oral testimonies. This method is a practical necessity in the Liberian case, which has high levels of illiteracy.⁵⁹ After a devastating 14-year civil war, there is also a limited availability of relevant written records and surveys. Moreover, oral testimony methodology is appropriate for the study of an intense conflict. Once the time is invested to develop the relationships of trust that oral testimony requires, interview subjects are more likely to answer queries honestly and it will be easier to understand the inner workings of ethnicity.

Given limited resources and time I assumed an oral testimony approach, rather than a survey method, because it is likely to generate more penetrating and reliable results in this particular context. Several case studies of ethnicity and conflict, and studies of mobilisation

⁵⁹UNICEF estimated total adult literacy rate for 2007-2011 is 61%. See: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/liberia_statistics.html (last accessed 15 August 2013)

of populations in civil wars generally, have used a similar methodology.⁶⁰ The next section provides a broad review of conventional approaches to mobilisation for violence in the Upper Guinea area. This is followed by an overview of the main thesis arguments, and an outline of the rest of the thesis.

Mobilisation for violent conflict on the Upper Guinea Coast: A review

Since the end of the Cold War in 1989, scholarly debates on violent group mobilisation in the Upper Guinea Coast has displayed similarities to earlier debates on Eastern and Southern Africa.⁶¹ Several authors have written about contemporary warfare in Liberia (1989-2003), Sierra Leone (1991-2001), and Guinea (2000-2001), proffering analyses that acknowledge the importance of local concerns in driving civilian mobilisation. Of note are the works of: Stephen Ellis, Mats Utas, Henrik Vigh, Paul Richards, William Reno, Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, which I review below. Although I move beyond these theoretical frameworks because they do not directly address the question of how and why ethnicity may lead to violent group mobilisation, I consider them here because they have been very influential and are useful to discussing the appropriate level of analysis for the Liberian case.

Cultural violence and inter-ethnic animosity

Ellis is one of the few academics to have addressed the impact of culture on violent politics on the Upper Guinea Coast. Ellis's works on the Liberian war can be split into two levels. At the macro level, he provides a superb chronology of events in the war with details of its multifaceted political actors; at the micro-level, which I focus on in this review, he also

⁶⁰ Exemplars include: Kriger, 1992. Ukiwo, 2006.

⁶¹ See for example: Kershaw, 1997; Kriger, 1992.

gives an anthropological, and religious analysis of the dynamics of violence in the war.⁶² One of his main arguments is that the manner in which the war was fought was the result of indigenous religious ideas about power, and that there is a relationship between these pre-state and contemporary ideas about power and domination. In other words, the violence refers to a range of symbols about power widely understood and historically rooted.⁶³

In particular, Ellis suggests that the violence of the civil war bore close resemblance to *Porro* and *Sande* society notions of spirituality. This spirituality entails belief in a supernatural world where deities dwell and exercise powers over the natural world and the living. According to Ellis, these traditional belief systems and practices, which had been previously used for the common good, were used and abused by warlords during the conflict. This he suggests is the explanation for the roots of ‘anarchy’ in Liberia.

Ellis’s analysis of religious ‘traditions’ has been criticised for lacking a historical understanding of cultural change. For instance, he does not address how past *Porro* beliefs and practices have evolved into present day *Porro* culture. One of Ellis’s critics, Thandika Mkandawire, has observed that the implication of Ellis’s thesis is that these cultural categories are timeless. In addition, in Ellis’s framework it is difficult to determine exactly which aspects of culture explain what specific forms of violence.⁶⁴ Ellis invokes the past as relevant to the present without accounting for the intervening period or analysing how tradition reconfigures itself in the present. His work on cultural violence is primarily interpretative, addressing anthropological questions of meaning on the ground and its symbolic uses in the dynamics of violence, rather than offering an explanation of initial causes.

⁶² Ellis, 1995, 1999, 2001, 2003b.

⁶³ Ellis, 1995., Ellis, 1999.

⁶⁴ For more on the heated exchange between Ellis and Mkandawire in the *Journal of Modern African Studies* see: Ellis, 2003a; Mkandawire, 2002, 2003.

Informants' accounts indicate that religious identity is an important feature of local culture that has fostered historical conflict between ethnic groups (Chapter 3). Religious ideas of the past have been used to support moral arrangements of ethnic groups; they provide ways of organising moral norms and obligations between and within ethnic communities. Far from being a resurgence of atavistic ideas or a wartime reinvention of the past, 'traditional' religious reconfigurations are part of a long history of ethnic resistance in Liberia (Chapter 3). Discourses of spirituality and power constitute larger socio-political narratives in, "an on-going contest over ... political legitimacy [which] has characterised the Liberian experience for over a century".⁶⁵

Ellis's main thesis on Gio and Mano mobilisation during the NPFL war is that it was the result of animosity between groups.⁶⁶ In part, this is because, "history as perceived by the belligerent parties tend to support 'neo-barbarism' or 'ancient ethnic hatred' hypothesis of conflict explanation."⁶⁷ But, as subsequent chapter will show, accounting for this perception requires a more nuanced understanding that places ethnic grievances in historical and structural context. Despite these limitations, the totality of Ellis's work provides an invaluable wealth of information that I draw upon to illuminate aspects of violent group mobilisation.

Youth revolution

Utas's publications on the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone exemplify insightful bottom-up ethnography of 'youth' and offer individualist perspectives on how they experienced war as men and women on the Upper Guinea Coast.⁶⁸ Because he writes in

⁶⁵ Moran, 2006, p. 7.

⁶⁶ Ellis, 1995.

⁶⁷ Højbjerg, 2010, p. 274.

⁶⁸ Mats Utas, 2003; Utas, 2005a, 2007; Utas & Jorgel, 2008.

response to NGO discourses that victimise children and youths in conflict, Utas underscores youth agency. He suggests that, “agency is no longer something you possess or do not. Rather, it is something you maintain in relation to a social field inhabited with other social actors. Agency is thus highly dependent on specific social situations”.⁶⁹ This idea is similar to James Scott’s “weapons of the weak”, which places individual agents in their particular milieus to understand everyday forms of peasant resistance.⁷⁰ Utas integrates the opposition of agency and victimhood into the term ‘victimcy’ to describe, “a form of self-representation by which agency may be effectively exercised under trying, uncertain, and disempowering circumstances.”⁷¹ Utas then uses the term to describe the agency of a woman self-staging as a victim of war, as one of many tactics utilised in the navigation of terrains of war. Through victimcy he explains how former child soldiers in Sierra Leone and Liberia tried to assert a form of non-agency by presenting themselves as “legitimate recipients of humanitarian aid”.⁷² Utas’s concept is helpful for highlighting how child soldiers construct their identity through a range of registers, including ‘victims’ and ‘agents’ of war, as an attempt to avoid social blame and seek socio-economic opportunities.

From Utas’s perspective, the Liberian war was driven by a willingness of ‘youth’ to voluntarily take up arms because of their experiences of abjection and marginalisation in Liberian society.⁷³ He writes that, “[e]ven though forced conscription took place in Liberia, most young combatants still joined out of free will.”⁷⁴ “[Y]oung people also saw it as a youth revolution, a possibility to get rid of an elitist urban leadership made up of autocrats who showed little concern for both the young people of Liberia ... and the local gerontocratic leadership....” In this way, they perceived the hostilities “as possibly the only

⁶⁹ Utas, 2005a. Utas’ concept draws from Alcinda Honwana’s notion of ‘tactical agency’: Honwana, 2000, p. 73. This notion can in turn be traced to the work of Michel de Certeau: Certeau, 1984.

⁷⁰ J. Scott, 1985.

⁷¹ Utas, 2005a, p. 408.

⁷² Utas, 2005a, p. 409.

⁷³ Mats Utas, 2003, p. 9.

⁷⁴ Mats Utas, 2003, p. 15.

opportunity for them to experience mobility from the margins, into the centre of politics and economy.”⁷⁵

Several academics share Utas’s perspective.⁷⁶ Richards has, for instance, argued that mobilisation in Liberia was driven by politically and economically excluded youths, who had become marginalised because of the collapse of the patrimonial state.⁷⁷ They were disposed to fight because of a lack of opportunity and freedom and an abundance of labour exploitation and abuse by older generations. He points to practices of indirect rule in Liberia by the Settler-elite and their indigenous allies as a turning point of labour exploitation. According to him, agrarian tensions undermined social cohesion in the countryside between different generations. Elders were given increased control over land under Settler land tenure arrangements, which marginalised youths. Armed movements then fed on these institutional abuses to mobilise civilian support.

While this study does not contradict the perspective of this literature, and recognizes the significance of the historical tensions between elders and peasants (including youth), I part company at the notion that collective action was mainly the product of youth rebellion. I argue that civilians were not mobilised to fight simply on the basis of being young, but rather as members of ethnic communities whose membership included age and class differences. Ethnic mobilisation encompassed wider structural divisions of which youth is only one—albeit important—aspect. Ethnicity was a unifying factor mobilising a variety of participants and overcoming collective action problems to launch violence. The single-minded concern with one stratum of participants has obscured other rationales of mobilisation and support.

Moreover, many youths were coercively abducted into armed groups because they formed a significant proportion of the population and were perceived as easier to control. At

⁷⁵ Mats Utas, 2003, p. 15.

⁷⁶ See for example: Abdullah, 1998; Mkandawire, 2002. Dufka, 2005. UNOWA, 2005. HRW, 2004.

⁷⁷ Richards, 2005.

least half of the informants interviewed for this thesis, who joined as youth, also indicated that they joined under some form of direct or indirect coercion. This is corroborated by a UNDP-Liberia survey of 590 randomly selected ex-combatants drawn from across Liberia in 2006. Those who joined because they were “abducted” and those who joined because they were “scared” accounted for 40 percent of the responses.⁷⁸ Many eventually relied on armed groups to their own advantage as Utas rightly points out. But, and this is the main problem, the narrative of youth revolution clashes with the reality of forcible conscription.

While some youths mobilised to pursue their ambitions of social mobility, this does not mean the conflict should be understood as a youth uprising to overthrow gerontocracy. Rather, many youths understood that ethnic institutions controlled by elders were essential to their ambitions of social mobility. For instance, elders were responsible for safeguarding an important ancestral patrimony—land—that was being expropriated by wealthier immigrants. Therefore, rather than challenging the authority of the elders, they were drawing on shared ethnic values and norms to demand that elders act to protect and recover these lands.

The idea of youths rebelling, moreover suggests that they were seeking a more egalitarian arrangement. But my interviews show that youth were not actively seeking a more egalitarian inter-generational society—but rather a socially justifiable form of inequality through reliable dependence on their ‘Big Men’. Individual autonomy would have been of little consequence in a place where ‘subordination’, through lopsided but reciprocal relations, provided people with some form of social insurance. Rather than a collapsed patrimonial state, it was the high-profile exclusion of their ethnic elites from existing channels of state patronage that triggered the violence in Nimba.

⁷⁸ (2007). ‘*What the Fighters Say: A Survey of Ex-combatants in Liberia*’. Report prepared for UNDP, Liberia. Monrovia: UNDP Liberia. (<http://www.lr.undp.org/UNDPwhatFightersSayLiberia-2006.pdf>)

As we shall see in subsequent chapters, the actions of youth often served to reinforce the structural forms that existed before the outbreak of the war.⁷⁹ Youth mobilisation for upward mobility often occurred within these ethnic structures. Fighting for moral rights and expectations gave the violence meaning as a patriotic ethnic struggle against social injustice.

Tactical social navigation of youth

Somewhere between Utas's emphasis on rebelling youths, and Richards' alternative account of inter-generational struggle, lies Vigh's grounded framework for interpreting youth participation in violent political conflict. Through a study of conflict in Guinea Bissau, he stresses "the socially situated rationales that lead people in and out of warfare".⁸⁰ Vigh studies a group of youths from an irregular militia—the Aguentas—that fought on the side of the government in Guinea Bissau from 1998 to 1999. He situates their participation in a context of decline marked by political conflict that sporadically erupted into violence. From the elite level, the war was about control of the resources of patronage, much like the conflict in Sierra Leone. Those who won stood to gain access to the distribution of economic resources and political patronage. In this context, mobilisation on the ground involved a 'tactical' decision to participate.⁸¹ Vigh writes that, "[e]ntering the military in Bissau is most often a willed choice rather than a forced decision". For the young people who mobilised, war was an opportunity to gain entry into patronage networks and remain in them after the war as a means of escaping the "social moratorium of youth".⁸²

⁷⁹ This confirms the observation in: Boyden, 2006, p. 17.

⁸⁰ Vigh, 2006, p. 11.

⁸¹ See also: Utas & Jorgel, 2008. Tactical agency analysts suggest that those who mobilise are not passive victims completely devoid of agency in war but 'tactical' youths who navigate war to improve their life chances.

⁸² Vigh, 2006, p. 96.

Vigh argues that in this sense mobilisation for war in the region has more to do with “changing the internal power configurations but never the structures of inequality and marginalisation that produce the social situations that are contested in the first place.”⁸³ Central to Vigh’s approach is the concept of ‘social navigation’: “the complex political praxis of moving towards a goal while at the same time being moved by a socio-political environment”.⁸⁴ Vigh uses this term to highlight “the way agents guide their lives through troublesome social and political circumstances”.⁸⁵ Unfortunately for the Aguentas, they were losers in the conflict and ended up remaining in this social moratorium, unable to transition from generational childhood into adulthood.

Vigh’s concepts are highly applicable to the Liberian case. Analysts of ex-combatant re-integration in Liberia have relied on the concept of tactical agency to explain their participation in the war as a decision to ensure personal security when non-participation had become more costly than participation.⁸⁶ More recently, it has been used to study the life trajectories of armed men in Chad and interpret their participation as a practical occupation.⁸⁷ This perspective resonates with the life trajectories of some of my informants from Liberia who explain their long-term participation in the war in terms of a vocation and practical “work”. Daniel Hoffman has observed that warfare in the Mano River region of West Africa can be conceptualised as “literal work”; he argues that combatants in the region can be considered as a workforce in an economy of war that is typified by flexible post-Fordist patterns of accumulation.⁸⁸ Rather than offering an explanation of violent group mobilisation, Hoffman’s work interprets ‘youth’ participation once the conflict is underway. His argument borders on regarding the violence as apolitical.

⁸³ Vigh, 2006, p. 69.

⁸⁴ Vigh, 2006, p. 236.

⁸⁵ Vigh, 2006, p. 13.

⁸⁶ Bøås & Hatløy, 2008.

⁸⁷ Debos, 2011.

⁸⁸ Hoffman, 2011.

Despite the obvious benefits of Vigh's concepts, there is a danger of underplaying the relative effect of coercion on the agency of those who were conscripted.⁸⁹ Merely focusing on the individual actor who faces a variety of life choices and follows a particular trajectory into war, without full appreciation of the consequences, does not tell us how those who are abducted come to see their participation as "literal work". The agency of coerced actors who decide to remain in war as a result of their politicisation or indoctrination is overlooked. Myriam Denov has shown that shifts in the identity of child conscripts in Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front occurred within armed groups as they drew on locally significant techniques.⁹⁰ Interactions between recruited conscripts and more senior combatants helped these youths refashion the meaning of violence.

Vigh's concepts are of limited utility in this thesis because rather than explore the connection between politics and warfare; he offers a perspective on "the pragmatics of warfare" or "the social predicaments and possibilities" that lead individual youth to engage in warfare.⁹¹ Like Richards and Utas, the emphasis is on social becoming, "the construction of social being" or "how a group of agents seek to survive as well as possible when caught in a situation of societal and political instability".⁹² The focus on the cultural, symbolic aspects of violence may illuminate how victims and perpetrators make sense of, justify, and cope with violent acts; but this is interpretative rather than explanatory.⁹³

Such work on youth navigation neglects the fact that organised groups and structures, rather than individual activity, drive mobilisation for violent conflict. There is a need to understand why some people go to war in support of community identity and action. Ethnicity structures the terms for social access and mobility of individual youth. Ethnic communities with their horizontal networks have a high capacity for mobilisation because of

⁸⁹ See Denov, 2010. And, Parsons, 2005.

⁹⁰ Denov, 2010.

⁹¹ Vigh, 2006, p. 11.

⁹² Vigh, 2006, p. 11.

⁹³ Højbjerg, 2009, p. 3.

notions of reciprocity among members. Political and economic participation is predicated on identification with ethnic publics because of particular historical developments in the region. In such a context, ethnicity shapes agency.⁹⁴

Greed or grievance

Unlike the grounded interpretations offered by anthropologists, Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler have suggested a broad-brush explanation that emphasises the economic causes of war on the Upper Guinea Coast. They stress warlords seeking economic gain and ordinary civilians pursuing self-interested economic incentives as drivers of mobilisation.⁹⁵ Following a much debated comparative quantitative model, Collier and Hoeffler propose a ‘greed not grievance’ argument, which asserts that people go to war because of opportunity, motivated by personal gain instead of ideology or identity difference.⁹⁶ They use quantifiable proxies for variables that are hard to capture statistically, such as ethnic grievance. They do not discuss when or how ethnicity becomes a mobilising factor in their framework.⁹⁷ They seek to present an explanatory model with predictive power by providing tools for identifying the likelihood of conflict onset. But, they empty their analysis of crucial empirical content and do not engage with the actual processes through which individuals are mobilised, identities formed, and rebel movements constituted.⁹⁸ Collier and Hoeffler have been criticised for ignoring domestic politics and state policy, and overlooking “the contingent moments when the escalation of armed conflict could be avoided”.⁹⁹ Such

⁹⁴ Claude Ake, 1996, p. 132.

⁹⁵ Collier & Hoeffler, 1998. Collier, 2000; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004.

⁹⁶ This view is somewhat shared by Jeremy Weinstein who argues that resource-rich armed movements recruit by emphasizing material benefits, and therefore attract opportunistic civilians. Weinstein also attributes continued participation to indiscipline: Weinstein, 2007.

⁹⁷ C. Cramer, 2002, p. 1850. Christopher Cramer, 2006, p. 129.

⁹⁸ C. Cramer, 2002.

⁹⁹ Pearce, 2005, p. 154.

abstract models suggest the need for more empirical and historical work to understand cases when conflict actually breaks out.

Academics such as Collier and Hoeffler highlight the importance of resources in conflicts like the Liberian war, but overlook the factors that shape access to them.¹⁰⁰ Christopher Cramer has argued that broad-brush “rational choice theories of conflict typically lay waste to specificity and contingency.”¹⁰¹ In some instances, resources serve to prolong rather than cause violence. There is a difference between what triggers a conflict and how elites try to sustain it, and these questions about cause and effect should be treated separately.¹⁰² What the Collier and Hoeffler model would interpret as greed or criminal theft in the Liberian case were actions taken to redress group grievances over ‘social injustice’. They assume that individuals mobilised for selective incentives provided by armed groups to those who volunteered.¹⁰³ In practice, however, armed groups offered very few benefits to individual volunteers.

The emphasis on individual rational choice ignores relational processes in the mobilisation of civilians.¹⁰⁴ Armed groups tried to offer collective rather than selective goods to ethnic communities; these included fighting for communal land for their ethnic supporters in areas under their control. Individual actions in the war were mediated by social relations and informed by particular historical experiences. Moreover, benefits were not necessarily pecuniary and included provision of some level of protection from the violence, which was largely directed against civilians.¹⁰⁵ Solely focusing on the economic greed of

¹⁰⁰ For more on analysts who link mobilisation for conflict to economic resources see: Klare, 2001. Berdal, Malone, & International Peace Academy., 2000.

¹⁰¹ C. Cramer, 2002, p. 1846.

¹⁰² Collier and Hoeffler’s later works have shifted focus to questions of what makes conflict more or less feasible, which preoccupies much of the comparable rational choice literature. Access to resources is clearly important in that debate.

¹⁰³ This is a popular view in economic literature on causes of war. See for example: Olson, 1977. Popkin, 1979.

¹⁰⁴ Christopher Cramer, 2006, p. 151.

¹⁰⁵ Bøås & Hatløy, 2008.

rebels as motivations for mobilisation fails to illuminate the political rationales that drive group mobilisation and relate these to economic circumstances.¹⁰⁶

Cramer suggests a grounded case study approach to consider how the subjective attitudes of civilians relate to material conditions.¹⁰⁷ Following the Marxist tradition, he looks to class. For him mobilisation of populations for political violence occurs under the conditions in which capitalism and capitalist classes emerge. He argues that many parts of the developing world do not share in the capitalist world economy and it is their integration into this global system that causes violence.¹⁰⁸ Cramer demonstrates this with the example of land rights in the Congo. Land was used for a long time without formal regulation in Eastern Congo. However, the introduction of title deeds—and therefore the exclusive claim to resources by a certain group or class—did not only signal the transition to capitalism, it was also a major source of conflict and violence.

Cramer's approach indicates that historical distributional relationships and struggles linked may be central to understanding the origins and character of mobilisation in the Liberian war. His argument suggests the need to investigate how material realities relate to the ideational, or 'moral', aspects of mobilisation. Analysing historical relations of extraction and accumulation provide an important background to understanding how and why particular identities become the basis of social solidarity.

However, Cramer emphasises class and underplays ethnicity in his framework. Focusing on vertical inequality over inequality between cultural groups is inadequate in the Liberian context because it assumes that only the poor would mobilise for violence. In reality, wealthy elites played an equally important—at times even more important—role in such mobilisation. Field interviews in Liberia highlighted the importance of ethnicity in making collective action possible, and forming the basis of alliances between insurgents and

¹⁰⁶ It is worth noting here that Collier and Hoeffler's writings has since evolved to focus on feasibility.

¹⁰⁷ See Christopher Cramer, 2006.

¹⁰⁸ Christopher Cramer, 2006, pp. 217-219.

populations. They suggest that the nature of Liberian domestic politics did not permit a trans-ethnic or universal public space in which oppositional movements could on the presence of vertical inequalities to try to mobilise the poor in the countryside. Emphasising the importance of ethnic mobilisation does not imply that the war was merely about culture or difference. Rather it seeks to show how inequalities developed within and between culturally defined groups contributed to an outbreak of violence.

Political economy and local concerns

Grounded approaches focusing on sense making of individual youth in war on the Upper Guinea Coast cannot explain the ‘big picture’ of what causes group violence. At the same time, wholesale explanations such as Collier and Hoeffler’s risk misconstruing the complexities of individual contexts. The work of some anthropologists and political scientists in the region, notably William Reno and Richards, offer a compromise between macro-level politics, or political economy contexts, and micro-level dynamics.¹⁰⁹

As a political scientist, Reno emphasises macro-level political economy (including the impact of globalisation and regional factors) over micro-level social tensions in his analysis.¹¹⁰ He highlights that violence in the Upper Guinea region forms part of regional conflicts traversing national borders. This insight is particularly useful in the Liberian case where regional dynamics shaped logistical support for armed groups, such as the NPFL and LURD. In addition to these regional factors, Reno attributes violence to patrimonial warlords seeking to loot national resources through capturing territories to exploit extractive resources. His approach shows interaction between greed and grievance; it has become a common frame for interpreting the war in Liberia.

¹⁰⁹ See for example: Ellis, 1999; Reno, 2007; Richards, 1996.

¹¹⁰ Reno, 1998, 2009, 2011.

Reno highlights patrimonial rule within the powerful ‘shadow state’ that operates behind the cover of formal state institutions. This form of rule undermines the state’s capacity to control illegal economic activity. He describes a ‘warlord economy’ in which armed groups like the NPFL captured, exploited and commercialised natural resources such as rubber and iron ore through relations with foreign multi-national corporations and connections with international markets.¹¹¹ NPFL rebel elites used the war to gain economic resources to provide patrimonial benefits for their supporters as a means of building their authority and legitimacy with an ethnic constituency. Some of these elites relied on this support base to win their bid for political office in the aftermath of the war. Reno tends to underscore elite predation in his work. He infers bottom-up support from the prospect of patronage without fully accounting for the social tensions that shaped grassroots support. Civilian support is generally reduced to accounts of disaffected youths in a way that fails to separate out instances of mobilisation to launch violence from the recruitment that occurred after violence was already underway.¹¹² Moreover, his account of ethnic tensions in Liberia tends to be limited to inter-group animosity and reaction to the repressive rule of Doe, without adequate attention being paid to the internal dynamics that made collective violence possible.

Richards’ work on Sierra Leone also traces the historical material context of violence, trade and primitive accumulation.¹¹³ Writing in opposition to what he calls “new barbarism”, namely Malthusian assumptions that civil conflict in the Upper Guinea Coast is driven by demographic factors, he argues that the Sierra Leone war must be understood as the political economy of patrimonial decline, or collapse, and the state’s inability to provide patronage resources. This he traces to a loss of revenue from the extraction of natural and mineral resources, brought on by a development policy that failed to cultivate the agrarian

¹¹¹ Reno, 1995, 2009, 2011.

¹¹² See for example discussion of Liberian conflict in: Reno, 2011.

¹¹³ Richards, 1996, p. xiii.

sector. He argues that young people, who were particularly marginalised during the period of patrimonial decline, were easily won over by the rebels to resist the state due to their grievances. In Richards account, rebels are not criminals merely pursuing economic wealth. Their participation in the war was a rational response to social exclusion and marginalisation. What may have appeared as barbaric was in fact socially rational.

Richards's work is particularly useful because he shows how crisis at the macro level connects with social tensions that drive mobilisation from below. Richards suggests that the Sierra Leonean war must be understood in the context of "a patrimonial state running out of resources (especially resources to support education)...and the agrarian failures of an urban—and mining—biased development policy".¹¹⁴ The decline of the patrimonial state is attributed to a decline in the price of commodities, on which the state depended for its revenues and a lack of control over trade in diamonds in the 'shadow' economy. Youths were particularly disadvantaged by the decline of patronage because assistance in education is an "end point of much patrimonial redistribution".¹¹⁵ The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels gained legitimacy because they afforded alternate forms of education and training. Violent group mobilisation appealed to a young "excluded intellectual elite" who had become marginalised from the patrimonial state.¹¹⁶ The RUF was led by unemployed or underemployed educated urban youths who had received training in Libya and Burkina Faso. In short, the violence was the result of a political economy of patrimonial crisis.

Civilians were mobilised by a movement that appropriated cultural symbols and idioms of violence, which resonated with Sierra Leone's history and culture. Examples are secret society institutions and practices such as making accusations of cannibalism against those who accumulate resources without redistributing them. These cultural constructs developed through a long history of violent struggles between forest inhabitants and

¹¹⁴ Richards, 1996, pp. 51-52.

¹¹⁵ Richards, 1996, p. 36.

¹¹⁶ Richards, 1996, pp. 25-33.

outsiders. They were deployed to restrain the abuse of power as well as in inter-communal conflicts. Armed groups, such as the RUF, appropriated these cultural symbols and tropes to challenge the state for not redistributing patronage resources. This study is influenced by the idea that a local moral code is reflected in the language of violence and the discourses of grassroots resistance against the neo-patrimonial state.¹¹⁷

Richards' emphasis on marginalisation of youths from patronage networks, particularly educational opportunities, security, and development resources resonate with the Liberian case. While Liberian informants emphasise the importance of exclusion from patronage resources such as educational opportunities, they suggest that collective action was not necessarily due to a generalised decline in patrimonialism, but rather the deliberate and violent exclusion of specific cultural groups—notably Gio and Mano—who had previously had access to state power and resources, by the Doe regime.¹¹⁸

From the 1960s, the Settler elite had run state patronage networks with income derived from Tubman's Open Door economic policy (Chapter 4). Economic decline in the 1970s diminished income from foreign resource extraction. The 1980 coup d'état that ended Settler rule did not transform the fragile Liberian economy, but foreign aid came to play a prominent role as a source of patrimonial resources. In particular, limited incomes from foreign resource extraction were substituted with substantial financial aid from the United States government.¹¹⁹ Liberia had become the main base of United States power in the region during the Cold War. From 1981 to 1985, Liberia received \$402 million in aid from the United States government. It was more than it had ever previously received and the highest per capita aid the United States gave at that time in the sub region.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Richards, 1996, pp. xvii-xviii.

¹¹⁸ Interview, Focus Group, Bahn, 19th March 2014.

¹¹⁹ Ellis, 1999, p. 64.

¹²⁰ Ansorge & Antwi-Ansorge, 2010, p. 268.

The coup had created rising expectations of increased rents within Gio and Mano communities because of the proximity of their elites to state power as leaders in the coup. As Gio and Mano elites became increasingly excluded from sharing power with Doe, it created a sense of unfairness. The exclusion of elites who had legitimised their authority through the provision of patronage such as scholarships created grievances among their followers, as their expectations were not met. Education, for instance, was seen as a means to achieving self-mastery and respect within many local communities. High profile exclusion of Gio and Mano elites and communities from state patronage interacted with historic grievances about increasing socio-economic alienation from ancestral patrimony—in the form of property rights and expectations—through the market by wealthier ‘others’ created contestation within these ethnic groups that culminated in mobilisation.

On this account, the relevant context for understating the outbreak of the Liberian war is not one of a general decline of patrimonial resources available to a generalised non-ethnic elite class to distribute to clients, including youths. Rather, the experience and perception of horizontal exclusion by particular groups created the conditions under which the ethnic mobilisation of certain groups by their leaders became more likely. Many of the youths that organised for collective action to break out were not just part of a general category of marginalised youths. They formed part of an ethnic peasantry that mobilised for civic virtue, and saw themselves as taking part in a struggle to protect their moral norms and expectations.

Horizontal inequalities and local dynamics

A growing body of literature shows that elites find it harder to mobilise ethnic groups in the absence of group grievances against inequalities, exclusion or marginalisation. This

literature emphasises and focuses on the role of inequality between groups rather than individuals. These studies explain the causes of mobilisation as grievances arising from the actual, or perceived existence, of inequalities among ethnic groups. Grievance based approaches range from relative deprivation first proposed by Ted Gurr in the 1970s to horizontal inequalities put forward by Frances Stewart in the 2000s.¹²¹ Gurr's relative deprivation perspective argues that deprivation-induced political discontent combined with a sense of cultural group identity determines political mobilisation of ethnicity.¹²² He emphasises "a perceived discrepancy between man's value expectation and their value capacity."¹²³ Despite this capacious psychological foundation of relative deprivation, Gurr's perspective tends to narrowly conceive of mobilisation in terms of the relationship between economic inequality and violent conflict.

Frances Stewart's horizontal inequalities perspective introduced an important modification to the relative deprivation argument. Stewart defines horizontal inequalities as "inequalities between culturally defined groups or groups with shared identities [...]. These identities may be formed by religion, ethnic ties or racial affiliation, or other salient factors which bind groups of people together."¹²⁴ Stewart contrasts horizontal inequalities with vertical inequality—the classic definition of inequality in the social sciences—that describes inequality between the rich and poor or unequal access of individuals to economic goods. She showed that the rich may be the initiators of violent conflict, rather than the poor, and economic inequality is not the only inequality that instigates mobilisation for violent conflict.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Gurr & Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Center of International Studies., 1970. Stewart & Annan, 2008.

¹²² Gurr & Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Center of International Studies., 1970.

¹²³ Gurr & Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Center of International Studies., 1970, p. 15.

¹²⁴ Stewart & Annan, 2008, pp. 12-13.

¹²⁵ Stewart, 2002.

The main difference between the horizontal inequalities approach and earlier grievance approaches is that it looks to multi-dimensional inequalities between cultural groups comprising of both elites and non-elites.¹²⁶ These are broken down into four dimensions, encompassing (i) political inequalities, (ii) economic inequalities, (iii) social inequalities, and (iv) cultural status inequalities. Proponents have shown that the existence of horizontal inequalities on their own do not lead to conflict. Stewart argues that when these inequalities become severe they provide a general motive for political mobilisation, which can contribute to the emergence of violent conflict.¹²⁷ Grievances can arise from their existence, as certain social groups perceive that they are being discriminated against or about to lose privileges that they previously enjoyed. In addition, Arnim Langer, Raufu Mustapha and Stewart have shown that horizontal inequalities are likely to contribute to the emergence of violent conflict when political exclusion and socio-economic marginalisation are persistent and consistent.¹²⁸

I introduce this perspective to consider the context in which particular ethnic groups mobilised for civil war in Liberia. Horizontal inequality is analytically useful because it highlights the importance of historical grievances, rather than mere short-term incentives, in explaining violent group mobilisation. I argue that mobilisation occurred because horizontal exclusions were perceived as disruptions of established ethnic hierarchies and the moral economy of reciprocity—what Lonsdale refers to as moral ethnicity. The driver for conflict in Liberia not horizontal inequality *per se*, but rather the internal dynamics it generated. I discuss each dimension in detail in Chapter 2. An overview of the main findings and conclusions of the thesis now follows.

¹²⁶ Stewart, 2002, p. 15.

¹²⁷ Stewart & Annan, 2008, pp. 13-14.

¹²⁸ A. Langer et al., 2009.

Overview of thesis findings and conclusions

This study aims to further our understanding of political violence in Liberia, through an analysis of the interaction between micro-level dynamics within ethnic communities and macro level imbalances between ethnic groups. The central argument is that—while the causes of ethnic mobilisation are varied—the interaction of various forms of inequality constitutes an important factor that generates violence. This interaction destabilises socially embedded practices, norms and values of historic, moral communities, and generates processes that can lead to violence. Ideas of social justice and citizenship are deeply connected to ethnicity.¹²⁹ One cannot be disturbed without affecting the other.

The norms and values that legitimise internal inequalities also detail how good citizenship can be achieved. They thereby provide legitimacy for the authority of elites, as well as social insurance and sources of esteem for non-elites. Consequently, the loss or undermining of elite authority and legitimacy, which can result from the breakdown of commonly held norms and values, renders violence more likely. More specifically, it can promote violence as elites, desperate to protect their own positions, endorse increasingly radical strategies in an attempt to outmanoeuvre more extreme competitors. The disruption of existing social relations also changes what “ordinary” people do, in that they become more responsive to demands for violence or mobilisation for violence from above, as a result of their own understanding of the situation and the fact that moral ethnicity is no longer capable of sustaining them. In other words, these processes are of critical importance because they change the attitudes and behaviours of both elites and non-elites.

It is therefore important to reiterate what analysts of horizontal inequality have noted: the existence of such inequality, on its own, does not cause violence. The paths that

¹²⁹ John Lonsdale, 1994.

lead to violence are complex. In the Liberian case, within this messy complexity, one especially important factor for mobilisation along ethnic lines was the way in which the constellations of inequalities interacted with each other to impact the expectations of citizenship within ethnic communities. In Liberia, it was the interaction between particular horizontal inequalities and moral ethnicity that triggered the processes that made collective action possible and generated cooperation between elites and grassroots. People were driven to fight not only because they were upset about their exclusion or marginalisation from power and resources that they had previously enjoyed, but also because this undermined intra-ethnic relations. However, it is also important to recognize that moral ethnicity was not equally significant for all communities and patterns of the perceived severity of horizontal inequalities varied.

These conclusions are derived from analysis of the mobilisation of the Gio and Mano communities to fight in the NPFL rebellion (1989-1996), and the mobilisation of the Mandingo community to start the ULIMO counter-rebellion in the early 1990s and subsequent LURD rebellion (1997-2003). I focus on the Gio and Mano example in this subsection. It was their mobilisation that made collective action for civil war emerge. The analysis in subsequent chapters is organised into three stages of relevant context.

The first stage focuses on the long-term. It traces the constitutive norms and values (moral ethnicity) of these historic, moral communities. Gio, Mano and Mandingo identities are not simply the products of Americo-Liberian Settler 'colonial' invention. By the time of the Settler intrusion in the early 20th century, there were already shared ideas of what being a Gio or Mano meant among fragmented agrarian communities in present-day Nimba. There was also a shared Mandingo identity among a diaspora network of traders. These ethnic identities should be understood as forms of political thought that have slowly evolved through negotiation and renegotiation of shared ideals. They are the outcome of internal

tensions and contradictions over boundaries, relations and reciprocities. Their contentions can, but does not always lead to violence. New relations of power can crease tensions as various strata seek to legitimise them by appealing to contending accounts of precedent from a venerated past. Many of the ideas surrounding legitimacy and leadership, personhood and esteem, that were mobilised by some Gio/Mano and Mandingo communities for the civil war bear resemblance to descriptions of their past moral economy, corroborated by existing historical records and ethnography (Chapter 3).

The second stage focuses on the medium term. It traces the evolution and entrenchment of horizontal inequalities between culturally defined groups in Liberia (Chapter 4). During the period of settler rule the socio-economically ascendant Mandingo minority emerged as the principal ‘other’ of the less advantaged peasant majority Gio and Mano in Nimba. Prior to Settler rule, the Gio, Mano and Mandingo fulfilled specialized economic roles. The Gio and Mano economy was built around kola production. The Mandingo economy primarily consisted of the trade in goods, such as clothing, and specialised knowledge services, such as the marabouts. Mandingo traders from Beyla, Jakudu, and Kankan in Guinea travelled to Gio and Mano market areas such as Ganta, Sanniquellie and Bahn to exchange goods and services for kola. These groups maintained distinctive identities and cultural boundaries. These boundaries determined the location of newcomers in the economic order.

For instance, Gio/Mano allocated land rights based on orders of arrival. Mandingo migration to Nimba increased as they formed alliances with traditional figures of Gio and Mano authority. Many became residents in Gio and Mano communities rather than migrant traders. The introduction of title deeds by the settler state made property alienable and cash-wealthy Mandingo traders were able to purchase lands in commercial towns in Nimba. The Mandingo who had ‘traditionally’ been involved in trade now became prominent in

agriculture. Many Gio and Mano perceived Mandingo prominence in farming as a challenge to their 'traditional' area of specialisation in the economy. Consequently, previously inclusive Gio/Mano moral economies that were based on vertically integrating 'latecomers', such as the Mandingo, as kin or clients became exclusive 'tribes' with a heightened awareness of difference. Gio and Mano concerns about Mandingo ascendancy were exacerbated by the perception that they received preferential treatment from the state. Chapter 4 will trace how ethnic awareness increased in response to political economy (tax and kola), once again through an interaction of the material and the moral.

Land alienation led to some resentment against their political elite amongst Gio and Mano ethnic constituents. Their moral economy subjected individual ambition to agrarian discipline and ethics of communal service under 'landowners' (*sehdeng* in Gio) and 'big men' (also known as 'wealthy person' or *boumehn* in Gio). Labour service was provided in anticipation of reciprocal support and the moral reward of dignity. They formed social trust through the exchange of labour and deference for patronage and esteem. Labour created communal rights to property, and leaders had a responsibility to protect usufruct and ownership rights. Gio and Mano moral economy placed limits on a leader's ownership rights; it also made them socially accountable as custodians of land, which they could not alienate. The granting of lands to the Settlers contributed to tensions. The legend of the Mano town of Zazlon where a chief was skinned alive for attempting to cede land to the Settlers is a good example of informant narratives about land and legitimacy in the period of Settler indirect rule (Chapter 3). Legends like Zazlon suggest that internal struggles over communal lands extend at least to the Settler colonial era.

The third stage focuses on the short-term events that triggered processes that led to violent group mobilisation. It traces how worsening horizontal and internal inequalities for the Gio and Mano interacted with moral ethnicity and contributed to their mobilisation

(Chapter 5). After the Settler oligarchy was overthrown in a coup d'état in 1980, Gio and Mano elites gained unprecedented access to high profile positions. They established reciprocal arrangements with ethnic constituents in Nimba to provide protection, offered development resources such as roads and educational benefits, as well as patronage support of various kinds. But following a leadership struggle many of these elites were publicly excluded or marginalised. Around this time the Gio and Mano developed a shared experience of decline in power and perception of common exclusion under the rule of Samuel Doe as a result of the high profile exclusion of their elites. This was accompanied by violent repression by the Krahn-dominated AFL and increasing loss of ancestral patrimony to the state-co-opted and socio-economically wealthier Mandingo 'others'. Politically excluded elites interviewed for this study, who took part in the launching of the NPFL war, explained that they worried that they would lose their legitimacy as leaders if they did not respond to demands for action to protect the Gio and Mano communities, as they were no longer in a position to deliver largesse and security. To comprehensively investigate a particular issue, I focus on how the bottom-up tensions over land created processes that led to support for the NPFL war.

In the lead up to the war, a narrative emerged that Mandingo settlers in Nimba had used their disproportionate wealth and privileged position to appropriate Gio and Mano lands through illegitimate transactions with local chiefs and government officials. According to this discourse ordinary people—despite their identity—had suffered 'social injustice' in the face of horizontal inequalities. Anger over Mandingo acquisition of what they perceived as their ancestral patrimony combined with historical grievances with their own leaders over their failed moral obligations as custodians of the land.

Elders were seen as appropriating the rights of younger generations through traditional authority for their own economic interests. The exclusion of high profile political

elites from the Doe regime further ruptured relations between the ‘chiefly class’ and commoners. In the 1980s, Doe used Clan Chiefs, Paramount Chiefs, Zone Chiefs, and Town chiefs as his party leaders. The focus was on the social accountability of indigenous elites to the widely recognized criteria pertaining to land and labour that had become undermined or threatened by horizontal inequalities. Ordinary people perceived that the government had marginalised them and their political elites while some chiefs were collaborating with the regime. Bottom-up pressures led to attempts by the chiefs to negotiate with the regime, but this was not successful. In order to be seen as radical actors for their people, many chiefs and elders collaborated with dissidents to organise the NPFL incursion. ‘Traditional’ elites who publicly resisted taking action against Doe lost legitimacy with their constituents.

These two changes in the political system were crucial to the emergence of political violence in Liberia. Elites responded to changes by calling for deprived peasant communities to mobilise to recover their resources. Disruption to the patterns of social inclusion predisposed ordinary people to respond to these calls. For example, in Ganta, Nimba County, pressure from impoverished Manos on their elders, led these elders to mobilise part of the community to recover the ‘lost’ lands acquired by Mandingos. At the same time, poor Manos became more likely to follow their leaders into acts of violence because they saw it as a chance to demonstrate good citizenship. Seen in this way, it is clear that violent group mobilisation was a response to the violation of norms and values of citizenship and was an attempt to return to a previous state of moral, rather than just material, equilibrium. The analysis will show that material and moral resources can not always be neatly distinguished, since they shape one another.

The conflict featured an outer and an inner logic. From the outside, ethnic struggles resisted the threat posed by horizontal exclusion and marginalisation of groups, for instance through regaining alienated lands. From the inside, ethnic mobilization defended

arrangements that provided the leadership with legitimacy and authority, and the poor with social protections. Moral ethnicity provided a discourse that constructed a past moral standard to explain and legitimate accepted forms of inequality. Ordinary people would have been much less willing to participate in the violence had they not perceived this obstruction to their moral ethnicity and been convinced that they would have to fight for their rights and expectations. Fighting for moral rights and expectations gave the violence meaning as a 'patriotic struggle' against 'social injustice', which made ethnic supporters of war treat those who dissented as 'traitors'. Their revolt differs from the model of a peasant rebellion that seeks to overthrow the 'feudal class'. Rather than a revolution, they sought to protect a perceived ethnic order that had enforced their rights and provided support.

Conclusion: plan of the thesis

The thesis is structured to explore the contexts, strategies, and rationales that drove ethnic mobilisation for political violence in Liberia through focusing on the Gio and Mano communities in Nimba County, as well as the diaspora Mandingo community that has a sizable population in Nimba. The next chapter provides an overview of the methods used in this thesis and a defence of the use of oral history as a way of reconstructing the Liberian conflict. Chapter 2 outlines the study's approach to analysing ethnic mobilisation in Liberia, and the theoretical framework for understanding the specificities of the Liberian context. Following chapter 2, the thesis is ordered chronologically and thematically. Chapter 3 primarily relies on field interviews and ethnography to reconstruct a historical account of the moral economies of Gio and Mano societies before the formation of the state. Chapter 4 draws on a combination of field interviews and the rich secondary literature on Liberia to explore the evolution of horizontal inequalities with state formation in Liberia and how it

shaped moral ethnicities. It traces historical disparities in political participation, distribution of socio-economic resources and cultural status between these groups, before analysing how this context of horizontal inequality worsened against the Gio and Mano communities under the rule of Samuel Doe in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 shows how the reconfiguration of horizontal inequalities under Doe impacted Gio and Mano moral ethnicities to create mechanisms for their mobilisation in the NPFL war. Chapter 6 examines how the violence against the Mandingo community in the NPFL war contributed to popularising Mandingo identity, and the nature of the Mandingo community's counter-mobilisation against the NPFL through ULIMO and ULIMO-K. It also analyses how post-war marginalisation of the Mandingo community under Charles Taylor contributed to mobilisation of the Mandingo community for the LURD (and MODEL) war. The concluding chapter examines post-war outcomes and the implications of the study for the current peace.

1 – Researching ethnic mobilisation in Liberia

This thesis draws on a variety of primary and secondary sources: (i) unofficial oral testimony (from a list of interviewees appended to the thesis); (ii) official oral testimony (from recordings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia (TRC), and the Charles Taylor war crimes trial by the Special Court for Sierra Leone); (iii), written archives (of Liberian newspapers and situation reports of the war from the Justice and Peace Commission (JPC), a Liberian human rights NGO); (iv) reports from international organisations operating in Liberia such as the UNDP, and (v) academic literature. This chapter provides an overview of the methods that I have used, and a justification for the reliance of this thesis on oral testimony.

Overview of sources and methods

Newspaper and NGO reportage serve as a useful source of data for the arguments of this thesis. JPC human rights and situation reports were copied and read in hard form. The *Inquirer*, the *Analyst* and the *Daily Observer* newspapers were read online or in hard form for the research period. Important back copies of various newspapers published during the war, and thematically organised newspaper cuttings, were copied from the JPC archives and Library in Monrovia. The journalistic quality of most Liberian newspaper reports from the war period is poor and riven with biases. Yet they provide a wealth of information on events that occurred in the war as well as valuable insights into how the war was presented by the media. Most of the newspapers were privately owned and not controlled by the state.

Oral testimony provides a substantial source and method for the general analysis and the main arguments of the thesis. Oral testimony is the best method in this case study for a number of reasons. This is mainly due to practical necessity. Ellis reports that the main sources used by scholars to reconstruct the histories of indigenous communities in Liberia have been oral traditions.¹ Very little has been textually documented regarding the micro experiences of the Liberian war, which is to be expected in a society with a high illiteracy rate.² Due to the destruction of Liberian national archives during the war, many official records are unreliable and research on the war period is not possible on the basis of national archives alone. Moreover, archives are generally of limited value in the study of civil wars as much violence is not officially recorded and micro details, which are frequently captured through oral histories, are excluded in favour of macro accounts.³

While it would be ideal to combine survey research together with oral testimony to enhance triangulation of resources, there is not a lot of reliable quantitative data on the Liberian war. The first few rounds of Afrobarometer, for instance, do not cover Liberia. There is also very limited relevant survey data available from NGOs operating in Liberia.⁴ Privileging oral history over survey data represents a choice on my part. I believe that there are significant limitations to the utility of survey work in this case. Surveys cannot convey the often multiple meanings behind interviewee responses in oral cultures, which can only be captured through participation in a conversation and context. Surveys are not as responsive and adaptive as open-ended interviews. For instance, many interviewees responded that they joined the war because of ‘advantage’, but they gave different accounts of the

¹ Ellis, 1999, p. 37.

² UNICEF estimated literacy rate for population aged 15 and over for 2000-2005 is 52%. See: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/liberia_statistics.html

³ See Roy, 1994, p. 5.

⁴ A good example that the study draws on is: Pugel, 2007.

meaning of advantage, ranging from the disadvantages of not being a fighter to the opportunity to redress disadvantages caused by horizontal inequalities. As mentioned earlier, how horizontal inequalities are perceived is crucial to the likelihood of mobilisation for violence. These perceptions may or may not reflect actual horizontal inequalities—but, crucially, the perceptions themselves do important work. “[T]herefore, measuring objective inequalities through statistics is inadequate.”⁵ The most appropriate way of obtaining insight on perceptions in Liberian society is through oral testimonies. Moreover, in order to understand moral ethnicity, and its inner workings, it is important to take a more subtle approach that gives people more time in interviews. And that has to be something approximating an oral history methodology. Given limited resources and time, I pursued an oral history approach, rather than a survey method, because oral testimony is more important and valuable in this particular context.

In cases of violence, where there has been a history of conflict, it is much more likely that interview subjects will answer more honestly if you invest the time and the relationship that oral testimony requires. Oral recollections capture personal aspects of conflict and thereby serve as a necessary corrective to the urban bias.⁶ Oral history or testimony is a powerful means of recording and preserving the memories and life experiences of people whose stories might otherwise be lost. It enables us to listen in on events, feelings, attitudes and ways of life that have been hidden from conventional narratives, and thus create a clearer picture of experiences on the ground. I discuss the limitations and benefits of using an oral testimony methodology in more detail below.

⁵ Stewart & Annan, 2008, p. 18.

⁶ Kalyvas, 2006, p. 395.

The locations in which oral testimonies were collected varied. Interviews were conducted in war-affected areas in Nimba, Montserrado, Bong and Bomi counties in Liberia, as well as among the Liberian diaspora in Buduburam (the Liberian Refugee Camp in Ghana), Ghana and the United States of America between 2008 and 2014 (see Appendix for details). I provide some background to war-affected counties in subsequent chapters. The capital, Monrovia, was the primary location for interviews. These interviews still managed to capture a broad swathe of divergent ethnic and geographic groups because the civil war caused widespread internal displacement and migration to the capital. It is estimated that a third of the Liberian population have migrated to Monrovia, including a significant ex-combatant population. I was fortunate to live with Liberians during my stays in Monrovia and the counties; my hosts resided in areas that suffered heavy reprisals during the war. This afforded me the opportunity to immerse myself in local group discussions about the war years. I was also able to accompany Liberian researchers to conduct interviews outside Monrovia, which provided good access to informants in the counties.

My informants included civilians, ex-combatants, men, women, politicians, scholars, political activists, local chiefs, priests, students, civil servants, ministers, farmers, traders, and aid workers, who ranged in age from their early 20s to late 80s. Over 100 informants participated in interviews and focus-group discussions in the study. I conducted 190 formal and informal individual interviews and consulted another 29 group interviews in more informal settings. As mentioned, a breakdown of interviewees is appended to the thesis. Most of my informants were identified through personal recommendations or introductions. This encouraged the development of trust necessary to elicit reliable information from interviews. Key informants were interviewed on several occasions. The level of trust developed from multiple

interviews encouraged informants to provide more vivid details of their experiences. I was also able to verify information and return to them with further questions for clarification. Variations in their accounts are useful in highlighting points of contention.⁷ Interviewing was based on a guideline containing standard background questions for interviewees, and open questions, depending on the category of informant. The open questions merely served as topic guides, which left room for adaptation in the course of individual interviews. Many of the interview sessions were taped and lasted between 1-2 hours. I also conducted many un-taped, informal group and individual interviews.

I did not use randomized sampling to target a general cross-section of the population. My goal was to identify and interview knowledgeable persons who could provide critical insight into the themes investigated, as well as events, processes, individual action and motivations. Therefore, the experience of an informant was more important than their characteristics. Even though I emphasise the importance of ordinary peoples' perspectives, I did not just interview non-elites. Different kinds of oral sources generate different perspectives and the elite perspective is also important to understanding the popular view. Interviews also served as a third point of reference to triangulate information obtained from other primary and secondary source materials. Interview sources are indicated in the footnotes and directly quoted in the main body of the text. I have retained verbatim accounts as much as possible, but for purposes of clarity dense accounts have been edited where verbatim reproduction of Liberian-English accounts would be difficult for a non-speaker to follow.

⁷ Kalyvas, 2006, p. 406.

Table 1 – Summary of interview references

	Nimba	Bomi	Bong	Montserrado	Misc.	TRC/ SCSL	Total number interviews per type of interview
Individual interviews	18	22	18	68	31	16	190
Focus groups	5	5	2	13	4	0	29
Total number of interviews per region	23	27	20	81	35	16	219

With the exception of some prominent figures, who expressed a preference not to be anonymised, pseudonyms are employed to reference informants throughout the study. These have been assigned to protect their anonymity because of the sensitive and emotive nature of the interview content. Moreover, many of my interviews were conducted in the context of political debate about national reconciliation; this required a cautious handling of interview material about the war to avoid any possible repercussions for informants. It is worth noting here that much care was taken to contextualise oral testimonies to properly interpret their content. It was extremely important to consider issues of intentions, perceived audience, and biases and silences that may have influenced or distorted how events were perceived, understood and recounted by informants.

In addition to my own interviews, I was able to obtain over a hundred recordings of TRC testimonies delivered by former ‘warlords’, ex-combatants, politicians, activists, priests, and ordinary men and women. The TRC has been highly

political and divisive since its creation in May 2005 Liberia. It collected testimonies across the country and abroad between January 2008 and June 2009. Many of the testimonies I obtained were delivered within this period. Some transcripts of these recordings are also available on the TRC website. These testimonies are important for comparative purposes to see whether the process generated particular kinds of responses on the themes I study and how they compare with my interviewees' responses. Chapters 3-6 present most of my field data chronologically with different densities for each period of war. TRC sources are also more prominent in these chapters.

I now briefly reflect on my own position as a researcher and how I was liable to be perceived by my interviewees. My Ghanaian background was clearly an advantage to me. Many interviewees said they felt comfortable talking to a fellow "African sister". I was also perceived as a local because I had lived and worked amongst ex-combatants and Liberians in a Security Sector Reform program between 2005 and 2007 and could communicate in Liberian English. At times informants were also more comfortable to share details of their experiences with me because I was a foreigner who would not judge like a Liberian. Some informants were initially suspicious of a foreigner trying to obtain their testimonies of the war, as they thought I might be a journalist trying to look for a story to sell. My position as an insider/outsider gave me some 'cultural' capital with informants. However, my social location as a female scholar living in the United Kingdom and the United States of America meant that I held a lot of power within the researcher-researched relationship. This, coupled with the fact that I decide whom and what to cite or not cite, has the potential to silence informants. As Kriger put it: "It is not possible to produce, on behalf of peasants, an uncontaminated narrative of their perspectives on

their participation.... The interlocutor's identity and the themes chosen for inclusion and exclusion constitute...a 'massive' and 'diffuse' intervention.”⁸

Conclusion: the ethics of studying violence

Kriger's comments, and the research context in Liberia, bring to light the difficult ethical issues involved in the use of oral data. In addition to ensuring the anonymity of informants, I tried to provide informed consent at every session and to forge relationships of trust where possible. I also worked with a local assistant in many instances to obtain a more accurate read of interview circumstances and content as well as encourage active participation of my informants in the research process. Those who took a keen interest in the process initiated opportunities and recommendations for further information. But, the power differentials could also come from the other side of the relationship. There were many instances when informants were all too aware of their role as repositories of information, with some trying to extort financial gain where possible. For the most part, participants were willing to cooperate when I explained to them that my purpose was to obtain the perspective of ordinary people for academic reasons and under conditions of anonymity. I shall now discuss some of the common problems associated with using oral testimony as a substantial source for scholarly work and how these might be turned into benefits in the Liberian context.

Since the 1990s a number of studies on civil conflict in Africa have increasingly utilised oral testimonies of individuals as evidence of the sequence of their motivations, and to explore when and why people fight.⁹ They highlight that issues of memory, recollection, representation and interpretation all present critical

⁸ Kriger, 1992, p. 44.

⁹ Peters, 1998; Richards, 1996, 2004; M. Utas, 2003; Utas, 2005c; Vigh, 2006.

challenges for research projects such as this thesis. Understanding people's motivations from their oral accounts is difficult and fraught with limitations. As Kriger perceptively put it:

How can one know that individuals actually believe what they say or say what they believe? What do you do when individuals give conflicting renditions of the same event or when an individual makes contradictory statements? How do you weight the intensity of people's views? How do you understand the gaps between what people say and how they behave? What of the problem of people being unaware of their real interests because of false consciousness? Do you treat all individual viewpoints and actions as equally important? The slippery problems of unravelling the multiple, confused motives and actions of individuals are compounded when one tries to aggregate individual data to make statements about group behaviour and interests....¹⁰

Nonetheless, Kriger goes on to acknowledge that: "the difficulty of establishing people's motives and interests is not a compelling reason to eliminate them from investigation".¹¹ People can only answer within a discursive construction of what is meaningful to them, even if they are lying or dissembling. The interviews can display how subjects construct their world, what is significant to them, and what meanings various issues hold.

In this case, the influence of current events on interviewees' memory and interpretations presented an important challenge in the field. Some of my informants were ex-combatants who had not participated in the TRC process because of fear of reprisals and prosecution. Others took part in the process and were quite happy to be interviewed, but this raised the problem of the extent that their accounts had been coloured by on-going events and rehearsal for the TRC hearings. These interviewees obviously had a vested interest in depicting themselves in a particular light, especially regarding their role in the war. Some interviewees provided the sorts of answers they thought I wanted to hear. Memories of some interviewees about events in the war

¹⁰ Kriger, 1992, p. 6.

¹¹ Kriger, 1992, p. 6.

were not always accurate. I tried to mitigate these problems by conducting interviews in multiple locations and discussing the themes in a variety of settings. Many interviewees became key informants as I returned to conduct repeated interviews.

Despite these practical attempts to mitigate problems encountered with collecting oral testimonies in the field, the study acknowledges that oral sources can be particularly problematic due to the substantial reliance on informant recollections, after memory has been reprocessed and become susceptible to contemporary inventions.¹² The issue of memory and informant reliability, therefore, warrants further discussion. Memory is crucial to the process of narrating the past because it is the mediating term between individual and society. According to Maurice Halbwachs, social groups construct their own images of the world by establishing an agreed version of the past.¹³ This is not always done consciously. History, memory, and society interact, and all memories are a combination of facts and interpretation of facts (relatively objective and subjective). Following Halbwachs' notion of memory, Elizabeth Tonkin writes that: "Everyone recalls, but we recall our responses to the outside world, and so it is the outside world which gives us our understanding of what we individually are."¹⁴ Tonkin effectively argues that the narration of history is linked to the present, and that knowledge and social life survive when they are passed on, and how this happens everywhere is history.

White, Miescher and Cohen also argue that historical memory is valuable because: "it is not historical veracity of a statement or memory that gives that statement or memory constitutive power. The things that happened and the ideas transmitted by its distorted reporting, silencing or...invention, reveal a space of

¹² Novick, 1999, p. 106.

¹³ Halbwachs, 1975.

¹⁴ Tonkin, 1992, p. 104.

colonial and post-colonial conflict.”¹⁵ This means that oral testimony cannot be taken merely as a storehouse of facts and errors of fact. More importantly, it is not only about the search for what happened, but for discovering other forms of knowledge—therefore its limitations can be used to access ideas of the past. As Luise White put it: “If we can make individual testimony social, we open up historical method to a broader world than personal experience alone might give us.”¹⁶ The question then is what the plausibility of a particular account reveals about that society. In this study possible omissions and standard errors in the oral recounts could also be symptomatic of underlying forms of knowledge and understanding, or there might be specific reasons for altering representations of the war.

This means that beyond discussions about the truth or falsity of oral sources, the subjective nature of oral testimony makes it an excellent way of accessing the worldview of Liberians through a study of the representation of their past. Oral history is a means of obtaining subjectivity by reproducing testimonies as evidence of subjective reflection about the past.¹⁷ Thus, oral accounts are not just reproduced as primary data of historical reality to fill in the gaps in the literature, they are also read as evidence of presented reality.¹⁸ Although it is true that memories are biased, it is also the case that violent events are so traumatic that they remain vivid in people’s minds.¹⁹ The civil war was not an abstract conflict in Liberia, but one that marked the lives of most people in a dramatic way. In times of national upheaval, national history is directly linked with personal history.²⁰

¹⁵ White, Miescher, & Cohen, 2001, p. 16.

¹⁶ White, 2000, pp. 18, 20.

¹⁷ See for example: White et al., 2001.

¹⁸ See Stephen Miescher’s chapter in White et al., 2001, p. 163. Peacock, Dec., 1993.

¹⁹ See Kalyvas, 2006.

²⁰ See Halbwachs, 1980.

The study also draws practical guidance from three exemplars on how to approach oral sources in academic research of violence. Peters and Richards have reproduced verbatim accounts of the Sierra Leone war to let the informants “explain themselves direct.... The reader is left to decide whether they are the dupes and demons sometimes supposed.”²¹ This thesis partially follows their approach by reproducing informants’ accounts in the text. I am mindful not to simply treat them as unmediated authoritative sources, rather I try to point out their own subjectivities and relate them to different sources.

Greet Kershaw is another important exemplar. Guidance is drawn from how she bases her work on oral interviews telling the events from the perspective of those involved in them.²² Kershaw sought to provide the ‘voice of the voiceless’ by rendering a micro Kikuyu perspective, and provides us with the reality of Mau Mau as perceived by the communities she studied. The strength of her method is that it tells a ‘grounded’ story that highlights the local concerns and realities of the revolt. This study draws on the way in which she utilizes oral histories of her informants to investigate the structural context underpinning the revolt.

Similarly, Kriger exemplifies how to draw on ordinary people as oral sources to ascertain peasant experiences of mobilisation and organization.²³ Through verbatim reproduction of peasants’ own accounts of the war in Zimbabwe she revealed that peasants’ internal rationales served as an important driver of the war. Her book shows that the best method for understanding micro motivations and local indigenous structures is by allowing ordinary people to speak for themselves and not only drawing inferences from behaviour. This study draws on Kriger’s approach by leading with the informants’ own accounts.

²¹ Peters, 1998, p. 184.

²² Kershaw, 1997.

²³ Kriger, 1988, 1992.

2 – Re-contextualising ethnic mobilisation in Liberia

*What brought about the war? Discrimination which resulted into marginalization of certain group in society. Unfair distribution of wealth, political power, and suppression of human dignity...*¹

Introduction

This chapter elaborates the key concepts and theoretical assumptions that have shaped my understanding of the field materials. In framing my understanding of ethnicity in Liberia and its mobilising power, I draw on two key concepts: ‘moral ethnicity’² and ‘horizontal inequalities’³ to argue as follows: ethnic groups in Liberia are moral communities: the spheres in which social inequalities are legitimised, and the division of labour it given its moral permit, and where human beings are acknowledged by their contemporaries in accordance with an understood criteria of esteem. In the lead-up to the civil war in Liberia, worsening inequalities of access to state power and patronage, as well as economic resources such as land, took ethnic form. Severely marginalised ethnic groups (or moral communities) did not only experience their exclusion as an external attack, but they also experienced it as an internal threat of dissolution, as social relations understood in an ethnic register became increasingly disrupted. Mobilisation took an ethnic form largely because people were fighting to

¹ Rev. Saizay Zubah, Voinjama City, Lofa, 18th April 2008, Institutional/Thematic Hearings of the TRC.

² This is defined as an ethnic groups ‘moral economy’ or organizational norms and values

³ Horizontal inequalities can be political, social, economic, and/or cultural—with each comprising a number of elements, discussed below. Horizontal inequalities have been found to cause violent group mobilisation when ethnic groups perceive that they are victims of severe inequalities or beneficiaries of privileges that they might lose;³ and where political, socioeconomic and cultural exclusion exist simultaneously.³

‘protect’ their moral communities. This conceptual framework, which guides the analysis that follows in the remainder of the thesis, best explains why Gio, Mano and Mandingo ethnic communities mobilised for civil war to break out in Liberia.

In making this argument, I depart from the prevailing explanation of wars in the Upper Guinea region that are akin to classical Marxist description of class revolt. Richards, for instance, offers a sociological explanation framed as Emile Durkheim’s theory of violent conflict where a forced division of labour is associated with revolt of farm slaves, but as Christian Højbjerg points out this reads more like Marxist class revolt.⁴ The data that I have gathered acknowledges struggles over agrarian resources, and a history of forced labour practices initiated by the state and perpetuated by abusive elders.⁵ But, it does not support the idea of peasant revolution against authority. Rather, it highlights a context of moral crisis, in which people of unequal status were seeking social accountability from those who control resources.

I suggest that we re-contextualise violent group mobilisation in Liberia by seeing it through the lens of ‘horizontal inequality’ and ‘moral ethnicity’. This has the benefit of illuminating the ethnic rationales of many of those who responded to mobilisation—including, but not limited to youth. For instance, Gio and Mano ethnic youth were not arguing for more egalitarian structural relations within their moral community, but rather for elders and elites to fulfil their duties within existing patron-client relations. Accountability ensured protection of norms and expectations, security, livelihood and self-esteem in a way that self-autonomy could not provide ordinary people. This differs from ‘traditional’ peasant revolts in the sense that ordinary people did not want to do away with certain forms of structural relations, but

⁴ Chauveau & Richards, 2008; Højbjerg, 2009, p. 11; Richards, 2005, p. 586.

⁵ This is similar to violence in other parts of the Upper Guinea Coast described by Paul Richards and Jean-Pierre Chauveau: Chauveau & Richards, 2008.

rather prevent their dissolution in order to ensure their security. These relations are the source of protection, land ownership and usufruct rights, livelihoods and esteem.

The main aim of this chapter is to show how the concepts of ‘moral ethnicity’ and ‘horizontal inequality’ apply to Liberia. It is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the three main approaches to analysing ethnicity. This will be followed in the second section by a discussion of how the much discussed concept of moral ethnicity in East African historiography applies to Liberia. The third section discusses the main elements of horizontal inequality and applies the concept to Liberia. The fourth, and final, section summarises my ‘re-contextualised’ explanation of the Liberian war, which places intergenerational tensions in the context of ethnic organisation for violence.

Liberia’s ethnic formation and standard approaches to analysing ethnicity

The current population of Liberia is estimated at just fewer than 4 million people.⁶ There are 16 major indigenous ethnic groups in Liberia that constitute approximately 95 percent of the estimated population.⁷ Indigenous groups can be further categorised into three major ethno-linguistic groups: the Mande (including the Mandingo, Vai, Gbandi, Kpelle, Loma, Mende, Gio and Mano), Mel (including the Gola and Kissi), and Kwa (including the Bassa, Dei, Grebo, Kru, Belle and Krahn).⁸ These groups are thought to have travelled to the region through successive waves of migration covering several centuries, “in response to socio-political and economic disturbances

⁶ Details of the last census results can be found at:

http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/Population_by_County.pdf last accessed on 10 July 2013.

⁷ The number of groups varies between historical accounts. While more recent accounts range between 14-17, older accounts from the early 19-century record some twenty-three ‘tribes’ and ‘remnants of tribes’. See for example: Schwab & Harley, 1947, p. 19.

⁸ See: Schwab & Harley, 1947.

in the great Sudanic empires.”⁹ Generally, the Mel and Mande speaking peoples were centrally organized, while the Kwa speaking peoples had decentralized structures.¹⁰ A seventeenth Settler group that comprises approximately five percent of the estimated population settled in the region in the 19th century. The Settler group formed from an amalgamation of repatriated free blacks from the United States and recaptured ex-slaves from the Atlantic Ocean.¹¹ The Settlers established the political entity Liberia under the auspices of the American Colonisation Society in 1822.¹² The main groups that mobilised during the civil war were: the Gio, Mano, Loma, Krahn and Mandingo. Notably, these ethnic groups all have their ‘homelands’ in the interior or forest regions also referred to as the ‘Hinterland’, as opposed to ethnic groups located in the coastal regions of Liberia.

Map of major indigenous language groups and ethnic categories¹³



⁹ D. E. Dunn & Tarr, 1988, p. 9.

¹⁰ See D. E. Dunn & Tarr, 1988.

¹¹ The Settlers are also known as Americo-Liberians and Congo people. For more on the Settlers and their internal differentiations see: Liebenow, 1969.

¹² The American association set up to repatriate freed slaves from the Americas to Africa. They founded Liberia in 1822 as a colony for the expatriates by purchasing settlement lands from ethnic groups on the coast. For more on the society see Levitt, 2005, p. Chapter 2.

¹³ Levitt, 2005, p. ix.

Regarding approaches to ethnicity in the social sciences, analysts are commonly divided into three schools: primordial, instrumental and constructivist. Primordialists stress the essentialist belief that ethnic groups are atavistic while instrumentalism emphasises the top-down role of elites in manipulating ethnicity as well as the rationality of ethnic action. The existing Africanist scholarly consensus favours constructivism. Constructivists focus on the dual processes of colonial invention and African imagining by which ethnic groups emerged through modernity. They emphasise the incentives facing both elites and their supporters by demonstrating that colonialists provided the external architecture through categorising and labelling previously fluid and negotiable ethnicities, while Africans populated the interior architecture with their imagination. Although this is the received wisdom, there are limits to the idea of invention of ethnicity and fluid concepts of ethnicity.¹⁴

Africans' own views of ethnicity support historically fixed notions as well as fluid, invented notions of ethnicity. While pre-colonial ethnicities were fluid and negotiable, they became progressively fixed and reified during the colonial era. However, this does not mean that they remained unchanged since colonial rule. Ethnicities are "constantly contested and changing" as a result of cultural politics, "the outcome of an endless process in which they are always simultaneously old and new."¹⁵ Similarly, informants speak of ethnicities in Liberia as the product of a relative combination of history of 'traditional' usage and the outcome of recent manipulation and invention. In this case ethnicity resists a clear-cut definition or fixed character, it is a relational idea of social belonging. Much depends on context and no single perspective can fully explain what constitutes ethnicity. It can be much more

¹⁴ See Banks, 1996; Fardon, 1987.

¹⁵ Berman, 1998, pp. 311-312.

comprehensively analysed by considering varieties of instrumentalism, primordialism and constructivism.

The main characteristic of primordialism is that it assumes that ethnic identities are fixed and based on real differences between groups, rather than the incentives on offer to group members.¹⁶ The roots of this understanding can be traced to early colonial and anthropological stereotypes of 'tribal' societies. At present, there are no 'pure' primordialists, but aspects of this theory continue to have resonance.¹⁷ A moderate example is Anthony Smith's criteria of ethnic groups.¹⁸ He suggests that an ethnic group derives from both shared objective elements and a subjective element of solidarity. To Smith a pre-national ethnic community has a collective name; a common myth of descent; a shared history or memories; a shared culture (this could include language, religion, historical experience); an association with a specific territory; and a subjective sense of solidarity and identity distinctive from other groups. Primordialism has become the dominant view of African ethnicity in the Western media. Primordial notions of ethnic identity also resonate with some Africanist interpretations that attribute contemporary phenomena in Africa as a return to the past.¹⁹ Such notions persist in both reportage and scholarly accounts of ethnicity in Liberia.²⁰ Gus Liebenow attributes indigenous ethnicity to elements that resonate with those proposed by Smith.²¹ Liebenow writes that indigenous communities in Liberia share objective factors including common language, territory,

¹⁶ Vail, 1989, p. 1. Mahmood Mamdani, 1996, p. 9.

¹⁷ See for example: Apter, 1955. C. Ake, 1967.

¹⁸ Eriksen, 2004; Smith, 1987.

¹⁹ See: Bayart, Ellis, Hibou, & International African Institute., 1999; Chabal & Daloz, 1999; Diamond, 1997.

²⁰ See for example Ellis, 1999.

²¹ Eriksen, 2004; Smith, 1987.

culture and a subjective consciousness of communal belonging that differentiates them from ‘others’.²²

Primordialist accounts provide space for the emotional power of identity, especially in violent conflict, and the fact that identity is often experienced as primordial, no matter how historically constructed it is. In condemning primordialists, the constructivists tend to overlook this. The emotional power of ethnic identity is not just present in indigenous ethnic attitudes; in Liberia, the nature of Settler group attitudes also resonates with primordialists’ emphasis on the non-instrumental and affective feature of ethnic identity that set it apart from other sources of political identity and mobilisation.²³ There is that Settlers in Liberia perceive themselves as a distinct group with a common cultural origin from the Americas even though this is not based on any real descent from a primitive society; as we shall see later, this perception is imbued with emotive attachment.²⁴

Yet many analysts tend to analyse indigenous Liberians as ‘tribal’ societies with primordial roots in the region while the Settlers are typically analysed as a class because they cannot be primordially connected to the region.²⁵ Osaghae rightly points out that this raises a conceptual problem. David Brown also argues that by distinguishing themselves as ‘civilised’ and separate from ‘uncivilised’ indigenous populations, Settlers used a criterion more in keeping with class than ethnic distinction.²⁶ However, this is too narrow. It neither accounts for the socio-economic differentiations within the Settler community nor the expression of political conflict along culturally defined lines. This thesis suggests that it is more accurate to analyse Settlers as an ethnic group—albeit constructed under the state—with their own

²² Liebenow, 1987, p. 38.

²³ Eriksen, 1993, pp. 54-55.

²⁴ See G. W. Brown, 1941, pp. 125-126.

²⁵ E. E. Osaghae, 1996.

²⁶ D. Brown, 1982.

internal differentiations, including class. They meet the criteria of ethnicity suggested by Smith. Settlers share objective elements such as a common name, language, Christian religion, slave ancestry, history of slave past, culture derived from the Americas, and territory purchased in the region; more importantly they also share a subjective element of common identity and solidarity.²⁷ This subjective element straddles the class divide within the category. They perceive themselves as distinct from ethnic ‘others’ and are perceived as a separate group by indigenous Liberians. Thus, what Brown interprets as class domination can be better analysed as cultural horizontal inequality where Settlers locate themselves at the apex of an inter-ethnic hierarchy over indigenous peoples. I discuss the concept of horizontal inequality in more detail below.

Through considering aspects of primordialism, the insights of academic observers become more consistent with local understanding of ethnicity in Liberia.²⁸ Nonetheless, primordialism cannot be the primary approach to studying ethnicity in Liberia because primordialist analyses are marked by a methodological bias based on a flawed assumption about ‘traditional’ society that lacks a historical view of cultural change. These elements are better understood within a historical account of the evolution of ethnic groups that reveals how boundaries and content have been reconfigured in response to particular political changes. Such an account can show that ethnic mobilisation is not produced simply because of something people believe in but forms part of boundary drawing; it is conjured up in particular political situations to distinguish groups of people from ‘others’. As Abner Cohen put it, ethnicity “operates within contemporary political contexts, and is not an archaic

²⁷ Eriksen, 2004; Smith, 1987.

²⁸ Young, 2003, p. 13.

survival arrangement carried over into the present by conservative people.”²⁹ This view is particularly true of Settler ethnicity.

In contrast to the primordialist approach, the instrumentalist approach focuses on ethnic groups as competitive factions, divided in part by their rivalry. They emphasise the top-down manoeuvring of ethnicity by elite strategists to form a support base for their own political goals. In this view, ethnic mobilisation is really about elite competition for power and resources. This approach became popular with class analysts in the 1970s; they argued that rather than cultural differences, it was the interests of an emerging nationalist bourgeoisie that drove the prominence of ethnicity in politics. These accounts attributed the presence of ethnicity in political conflicts to elite manipulation of the false consciousness of general populations.³⁰ Instrumentalism has evolved from notions of false consciousness, but the top-down emphasis remains and has become popular with many contemporary scholars of Africa.³¹ These instrumentalists highlight the “contingent, situational, and circumstantial” use of ethnicity by elites “in the pursuit of material advantage”.³²

A good example is Lonsdale’s concept of ‘political tribalism’.³³ Lonsdale sees ethnic identity mobilisation as being driven by political leaders struggling to gain access to the state and its patronage resources. These mobilised communal solidarity and political organisation of the ‘tribe’, first against colonial powers and then against the competing interests of rival ethnic groups. Lonsdale’s account resonates with the Liberian case. For instance, elites mobilised indigenous ethnic solidarity to resist the Settler oligarchy in Liberia. Then after the Settlers were removed, indigenous groups became embroiled in an intense form of competition for state power and resources.

²⁹ Cohen, 1969, p. 190.

³⁰ See for example: Sklar, 1967.

³¹ James D. Fearon & Laitin, 2003.

³² Young, 1994, p. 77.

³³ See for example: John Lonsdale, 1994.

One of the things this understanding of ethnicity offers this study is a useful macro perspective to explain aspects of ethnic mobilisation in Liberia.

But this is only part of the story. Lonsdale acknowledges this in his work and formulates the concept of moral ethnicity, discussed below. There are limits to instrumentalist accounts of civilian involvement where populations are manipulated by elites. The older Marxist perspective does not try to explain why non-elites respond to elite mobilisation of ethnicity, except to simply categorise their behaviour as irrational, or produced by false consciousness.³⁴ Yet, recent studies have shown that civilians cannot be treated as passive, manipulated, or invisible actors.³⁵ Ordinary people do not simply respond to elite manipulation because they care about their identity on the basis of some irrational considerations. On the whole, the emphasis on elite behaviour is inadequate to explain events on the ground. In fact, grassroots often manipulate actors at the top to settle local conflicts.³⁶ In the Liberian case, bottom-up pressures played an important role in the emergence of ethnic group mobilisation.

This brings us to the third, and final approach to analysing ethnicity. Constructivism has become the popular analytic perspective within social science to understand ethnic groups and identity in contemporary Africa. It is an important influence of this thesis. There is much variation among constructivists but most agree on four key points. First, ethnic groups are socially constructed. Their formation has less to do with the deliberate manipulation of elites, and more to do with social processes that have created norms of moral economy to which elites have to respond.³⁷ Second, ethnic groups are negotiated over time. The continuing negotiation of ethnicity suggests that their composition is subject to change and boundaries are

³⁴ Sklar, 1967.

³⁵ See for example: Lynch, 2011.

³⁶ Kalyvas, 2006.

³⁷ John Lonsdale, 2010, p. 6.

not precise. The boundaries that determine who is included and who is excluded is a matter of debate.³⁸ These are the outcomes of processes such as incorporation, rebranding, and claims of difference between core and periphery.³⁹ Third, ethnic groups are relational.⁴⁰ Fourth, and finally, ethnic groups are situational.⁴¹ The social relations of ethnic groups respond to situational changes in historical context.

Constructivists stress that contemporary ethnic groups are not unchanging primordial communities with fixed identities. While pre-colonial ethnicities were fluid and permeable,⁴² the more ‘hardened’ contemporary ethnicities are a legacy of colonial modernity.⁴³ They were constructed during the colonial period through the activities of European colonialists, anthropologists, and missionaries, as well as African reactions to colonial modernity.⁴⁴ Many analysts have demonstrated the role of outsiders in transforming, or inventing, the external boundaries of ethnic groups. John Illiffe writes that to colonialists, “every African belonged to a tribe, just as every European belonged to a nation”.⁴⁵ In light of limited resources and personnel, this perception of ‘tribal Africans’ became central to how colonialists sought to administer the African populations in the territories they controlled. ‘Tribes’ were viewed as “possessing a common language, a single social system, and an established customary law”, whose “political and social systems rested on kinship” and “membership was hereditary.”⁴⁶ This meant that in some cases officials tried to find ‘tribes’ where none existed, as well as designated tribal leaders who would become agents of social

³⁸ John Lonsdale, 2010, p. 6.

³⁹ Lynch, 2011, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Young, 1965.

⁴¹ Mitchell, 1956.

⁴² See for example: Southall, 1970. See also discussion in: Lentz, 1995, pp. 316-317.

⁴³ Berman, 1998, pp. 305, 319. Illiffe, 1979, pp. 318-341.

⁴⁴ Berman, 1998, pp. 305, 319. Illiffe, 1979, pp. 318-341.

⁴⁵ Illiffe, 1979, p. 323.

⁴⁶ Illiffe, 1979, p. 323.

control.⁴⁷ ‘Tribe’ was concretised by anthropologists, who assumed its existence, and wanted to classify its characteristics through ethnographies of sections of the population, that were then generalised to the apparent borders of the cultural group.⁴⁸ Missionaries also played a role in the reification of ‘tribes’ in standardizing local languages to enable the spread of the Christian message.⁴⁹

While outsiders constructed tribal boundaries, indigenous ‘collaborators’ became the informants that supplied them with much of what they regarded as ‘factual’ content and which they used to categorise Africans into distinct ‘tribes’.⁵⁰ Terence Ranger writes that, “European classifications and inventions of race, or tribe or language in effect created a series of empty boxes, with bounded walls but without contents. It was all very well to write of ‘the Ndebele’ or ‘the Kikuyu’, but to give meaning to that identity was a much more complex and contested business.”⁵¹ Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale also emphasise ethnic categories as “attempts to define an ‘authentic’ culture and identity out of the hybridity and fluidity of the past while under pressure from colonial regimes to conform to the European image of an ancient and homogenous culture, which defined who had access to wealth and power and to whom they were responsible”.⁵²

In the Liberian case, to complicate matters, ‘colonialists’ were the Americo-Liberian Settlers, or free people of colour, that emigrated from the Americas to settle in the region. Settler rule of pre-existing indigenous societies in Liberia was virtually identical to the British colonial model, except that the colonists were not whites.⁵³ The

⁴⁷ Iliffe, 1979, p. 25.

⁴⁸ Southall, 1970.

⁴⁹ Berman, 1998, p. 322.

⁵⁰ Vail, 1989.

⁵¹ Ranger, 1994, p. 27.

⁵² Berman, 2010, p. 10. John Lonsdale, 1994.

⁵³ Scholars have provided comprehensive analysis of the emergence of Settler ‘colonial’ rule in Liberia. Prominent works include: Liebenow, 1969. Akpan, 1973. Gershoni, 1985. E. E. Osaghae, 1996.

Settlers reproduced two central institutions of the British colonial model in Liberia: the Settler state and its political economy.⁵⁴ As we shall see in subsequent chapters, Settler rule contributed to restructuring the social organisation of indigenous peoples. Observed linguistic affiliations lead missionaries, anthropologists, and ‘colonists’ to categorise indigenous people into linguistic groups.⁵⁵ Despite these classifications, populations were conversant in multiple languages and in reality groups usually reflected a multiplicity of languages and cultures. For instance, coastal Liberians such as the Vai and the De were fluent in the languages of interior groups like the Kpelle, Gola, and Mande.⁵⁶ The linguistic classifications of outsiders were therefore somewhat arbitrary. Accounts of 18th century European travellers describe invasions, wars and regular migration of populations.⁵⁷ Groups were constantly being formed and reformed, prompting one anthropologist to lament “the existence of ethnic confusion in this part of Africa.”⁵⁸ Ethno-linguistic classifications by outsiders, thus, sought to impose order on people who shared a variety of overlapping, and alternative collective identities, but were delineated as fixed tribes as a result of Settler political expansion.⁵⁹

However, there are limits to the ideas of European colonial ‘invention’ of ‘tribes’. For instance, Gabrielle Lynch has found that the Kalenjin ethnic group in Kenya was created and popularised by Africans as a way to unite “Nandi speakers” that were classified as separate ‘tribes’ by the British colonial regime. These previously disparate groups developed closer ties as a single community in the early 20th century, and became politicised in the 1950s out of fear of marginalisation by

⁵⁴ For a discussion of the reproduction of these institutions in other parts of Africa by European colonialists see: Berman, 1998, pp. 312-323.

⁵⁵ See for example: Schwab & Harley, 1947.

⁵⁶ See for example: D’Azevedo, 1962b.

⁵⁷ Hair, 1962, p. 225.

⁵⁸ Schwab & Harley, 1947, p. 19.

⁵⁹ See S. S. Hlophe, 1979, p. 70.

more ‘advanced’ ‘tribes.’⁶⁰ In Liberia, groups such as the Gio and Mano were already ethnic groups in thought before they became single social organisations. The re-organisation of multiple, small Gio and Mano settlements into unified ethnic groups occurred in the Settler ‘colonial’ context. But it was concurrently accelerated from within. These identities already existed as imagined identities before Settler rule, even though they were organised as semi-autonomous settlements. Ethnic groups were not just social organisations, but came to represent certain systems of thought. The somewhat independent settlements shared some idea of being Gio or Mano and identified with certain taboos or totems as well as initiation societies. Settler rule took away some of their organisational independence by re-organising them into larger groups, but the process was simultaneously facilitated from within by a perception that ceding control of territory to Settler ‘others’ would undermine their shared way of life.

Processes of re-negotiation of boundaries of inclusion and exclusion under Settler rule emphasised leadership moral economy around land. They were limited by the requirement for ethnicity to be embedded in primordial narratives of shared territory, history and culture.⁶¹ The constitutive norms and values of these historic ethnic communities, from which they derived their ideas of shared culture, were slow to change, and limited the extent of internal cultural invention. African cultural imagining under the Settler colonial state was, thus, based on real cultural resources and experiences. They were re-constructed and adapted through a combination of some of the old shared characteristics as well as new ones.⁶² A presumed shared past gave ethnic groups their primordial self-perception. It also tied people of unequal status together as one ‘family’. The unequal co-option of groups into the state

⁶⁰ Lynch, 2011, p. 31.

⁶¹ See for example: Lentz & Nugent, 2000.

⁶² See for example: Berman, 1998.

sharpened ethnic cleavages, and created a context in which both political actors and supporters alike could instrumentalise their shared identity.

Contemporary constructivists emphasise the incentives facing both elites and their supporters and the ways that these can come into alignment. For instance, since the early 1980s rational choice constructivists have demonstrated that ordinary populations are not the mere victims of a false consciousness, easily manipulated by instrumental elites. Rather, the appeal of ethnicity stems from material advantages bestowed by ethnic leaderships and political support that they in turn receive from ethnic constituents. Relations between elites and masses are reciprocal as it pertains to the mobilisation of ethnicity. Robert Bates, for instance, has argued that it is important to acknowledge the “rational wellsprings of ethnic behaviour”.⁶³ Analysts like Bates emphasise the important interactions between elites and populations, and suggest that common interests between elites and non-elites is what makes ethnicity matter. Bates describes this as “a form of minimum winning coalition, large enough to secure benefits in competition for spoils but small enough to maximise the per capita values of these benefits.”⁶⁴ However, by exclusively emphasising material rewards, rational choice analysts tend to overlook the importance of affective considerations that give ethnicity emotive power. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, the Liberian case suggests that ethnicity is not merely a cover for greed.

Daniel Posner has taken account of the way in which institutional constraints affect the rational choice of ethnic identity among other possible identities.⁶⁵ He argues that people mobilise along ethnic lines because it is the best strategy to gain political and economic power. According to Posner, out of several possible identities available individuals choose the “identity that will serve them best, and that these

⁶³ Bates, 1983a, p. 166.

⁶⁴ Bates, 1983a, pp. 164-165.

⁶⁵ See for example: Posner, 2005.

decisions are constrained, first, by the option set from which the actors are choosing [that is shaped by institutions and] second, by the formal institutional rules that govern political competition, which make some identities more advantageous than others”.⁶⁶ Posner highlights the prominence of institutions in shaping existing identities and the choice of politically significant identities.

In an alternative to these pure rational choice explanations, Lynch highlights that, “alongside state largesse—one must also include interpreted pasts and associated notions of threat, justice and entitlement” as these also “influence both the option set and their political salience and allow for the possibility that rational calculations of loss and gain may be intertwined, reinforced, and/or come into conflict with more economically irrational feelings of affection, resentment, anger, and hatred.”⁶⁷ She argues that while the construction and mobilisation of ethnic identity may be motivated by what can be gained, the fear of loss plays an equally, if not more, significant role. These fears that are focused on decreasing threats may be irrational or exaggerated to the point of negatively impacting the potential benefits of an ethnic group. What Lynch offers here is a way of speaking about the significance of emotional ties without necessarily buying into the ‘primordialist’ framework.

Kalenjin support for President Moi in the 1992 and 1997 elections was not merely due to patronage, but the result of elite mobilising a sense of fear within the community that they would lose power to an ethnically biased opposition. Lynch’s analysis shows that the incentives facing both elites and their supporters are not just material. Ethnic groups are not merely formed to “secure benefits but as a way to protect interests, limit harm, gain status, and understand and debate interpersonal and

⁶⁶ See for example: Posner, 2005. Mahmood Mamdani, 1996.

⁶⁷ Lynch, 2011, p. 26.

group relations.”⁶⁸ This has some resonance with the Liberian case, where ethnic mobilisation was prompted, not just to gain state power and resources, but also by elite fears of losing their legitimacy, and ordinary people’s fears of losing ethnic norms and expectations connected to their way of life, as well as their sense of dignity and community.

The relationship between ethnicity and violent group mobilisation in Liberia can be more thoroughly analysed by drawing on all three approaches. In line with the constructivist perspective, I suggest that ethnicity in Liberia is not simply the product of instrumental strategy or deliberate manipulation of individual political actors. The sense of identity difference from ‘others’ was socially constructed among people of unequal status through the negotiation of moral rights and obligations over time. Social cohesion and external ethnic boundaries, although previously porous, were formed through social processes that generated norms and values of moral economy. These moral standards that constituted culture and formed the basis of particular discursive traditions have been slow to change. They are memorialised long-standing ‘traditions’ that give contemporary ethnic groups the self-perception of being primordial tribes. Ethnicity is particularly relevant in contemporary politics because of the space and language it gives to populations to make claims and demands on elites, not just to secure short-term interests, but also to protect common interests, promote security and cultural status, and to debate internal relations. To analyse the internal construction of ethnicity I introduce the concept of moral ethnicity in the next section.

⁶⁸ Lynch, 2011, p. 27.

Moral ethnicity and its application to Liberia

As with any society, ethnic groups are moral communities drawn together by a common desire to live according to a particular set of moral ideas. They are not just social organisations, but also ‘imagined communities’ likely to engage in internal argument about the terms of their exchanges with one another—based on their slow to change constitutive moral idea—to prevent certain forms of exploitation.⁶⁹ In Liberia, people mobilised not only to oppose others, but also to protect an ethnic order from which they derived rights and expectations connected to standing, and based on excluding ‘dominant’ others from disrupting these internal arrangements. To explore the internal moral rationales that can motivate external conflict between groups, I present John Lonsdale’s notion of ‘moral ethnicity’—defined as the contested internal standard of civic virtue against which we measure our personal esteem—to analyse the ways in which internal ethnicity drives violence.⁷⁰

Moral ethnicity is an ethnic community’s ‘moral economy’ or organisational norms and values. ‘Moral economies’ are social arrangements of trust and obligation. It is the market in which people of uneven social status negotiate the terms of: subordination, legitimate authority, social accountability of power, compensation for labour, marriage, land rights, good reputation, superior knowledge and the like.⁷¹ In Liberia, moral ethnicity has been the public space in which the capacity to acquire human capital, opportunity, security and human dignity of clients toil and loyalty is bargained against the wealth and power of their patrons.⁷² It is an arena of negotiations and moral debate between leaders and supporters about their loyalty or

⁶⁹ B. Anderson, 1991.

⁷⁰ John Lonsdale, 1994, p. 131.

⁷¹ John Lonsdale, 2010, p. 15. For more on the origins of the concept of moral economy see: J. C. Scott, 1976; Thompson, February 1971.

⁷² John Lonsdale, 2010, p. 15.

civic virtue. Moral ethnicity debates energise ethnic identity.⁷³ They are based on past norms and values of proper behaviour, which have been memorialised through dramatized rituals⁷⁴ and in other forms. These venerated ideas give ethnicity its primordial appeal.

An ethnic culture's moral ethnicity involves criteria of both social accountability and personal responsibility. Moral ethnicity provides the standard against which accountability and good citizenship are measured. Those who fail to demonstrate personal responsibility through self-mastery risk a perpetual lower status as 'youth' and a lack of 'recognition' in their community. Patrons who fail to demonstrate social accountability risk a bad reputation and charges of selfishness, witchcraft, and ultimately a loss of legitimacy and ability to have their commands obeyed. The cultures of contemporary ethnic groups are shaped by particular historically imagined 'moral economies'. They involve negotiated rights and obligations that shape social trust within groups and the way in which they pursue achievement, security, respect and standing. Moral economy has taught patrons and clients, landlords and the landless, young and old, and rich and poor—all relationships understood in an ethnic register—the value of their human dignity.

The concept of moral ethnicity was first developed in the context of Lonsdale's study of the Kikuyu community in Kenya. Kikuyu nationalism, he writes, "was a search for solidarity in the face of class formation and intrusive state power".⁷⁵ The construction of common Kikuyu citizenship was driven by a broadening social gap within their moral community. In the Mau Mau insurgency against colonialists, ordinary Kikuyu insurgents engaged their leaders in an unresolved debate about the sources, range and social accountability of power. He coined moral ethnicity to

⁷³ John Lonsdale, 2010, p. 15.

⁷⁴ Connerton, 1989.

⁷⁵ John Lonsdale, 1992, p. 462.

describe “the discursive and political arena within which ethnic identities emerged out of renegotiation of the bounds of communal membership and authority, the social rights and obligations of moral economy, and access to land and property.”⁷⁶ Both the leaders of the insurgency and their fighters agreed that authority came from the civic virtue of personal achievement, but disagreed about what constituted achievement and the range of power it allowed.⁷⁷

In the Kikuyu case, moral ethnicity underscores the effects of colonial modernity on moral communities, or how relations between colonialists and indigenous people affected the reciprocal relations of indigenous moral economy.⁷⁸ According to Berman, material inequalities in pre-colonial African societies were legitimised through reciprocal obligations of wealthy patrons to their clients and subsistence rights of the subordinated.⁷⁹ These reciprocal rights and obligations were renegotiated through an active internal politics in which superiors and subordinates attempted to rework their obligations and rights.⁸⁰ The ‘colonial’ state challenged these arrangements by creating class formation processes and inter-ethnic inequalities that transformed the internal politics of ethnic communities. Lonsdale adds: “[I]magined common ethnicity [made] an urgent case for people aware of emerging class divisions to devise new agreements to act socially, or morally, among themselves.”⁸¹ The widening social gap within local communities prompted debates over common ethnic identity.

Lonsdale’s conception of moral ethnicity has many parallels with the Liberian case. Much like the Kikuyu case, oral histories of the Gio, Mano and Mandingo

⁷⁶ Berman, 2010, p. 10.

⁷⁷ John Lonsdale, 1994.

⁷⁸ John Lonsdale, 1994, p. 131. John Lonsdale, 1992.

⁷⁹ Berman, 2010.

⁸⁰ J. Scott, 1985.

⁸¹ John Lonsdale, 1992, p. 462.

suggest that processes of identity construction had begun before the advent of the state through arguments about good citizenship. There were reciprocal relations within Gio, Mano and Mandingo moral economies, and these were based on expectations of leaders and their followers (summarised below and discussed in detail in Chapter 3). The way they discharged them brought either material rewards and esteem or loss and dishonour. The Settler ‘colonial’ state challenged some of these arrangements by creating processes of horizontal inequalities and internal inequalities, which I discuss below.

But there are some notable differences between the Liberian case and Lonsdale’s. Leadership in pre-colonial Kikuyu moral community depended on one’s ability to privately acquire material resources such as the means of production. In the Liberian case, notions of past leadership moral economy in pre-Settler communities did not only come from personal material wealth, but was also derived from wealth-in-people. An important significance of this difference is that authority did not only rest on criteria of personal achievement in material resources, but also on the number of dependents a man had and his ability to redistribute resources of patronage to them.

Secondly, under Kikuyu political thought land could be alienated through service or purchase, not just inheritance.⁸² They espoused a Lockian kind of labour theory of land in which land could be privately obtained by adding labour, or ‘holy sweat’, to it in a struggle against the forest. Adding labour to land brought property rights. This is similar to Mandingo moral economy of land where profit is exchanged for rights to ‘tribal’ land. In Gio and Mandingo agricultural societies an important criterion of authority was control of land. But land was, and is, considered a communal resource that could be used for private benefit by members, but could not

⁸² John Lonsdale, 1992, p. 334.

be alienated through purchase or service. Trees or produce planted on land could be personally owned but not the land. Therefore adding labour to land brought usufruct property rights, but it did not bring any rights to private individual possession. Material resources were generally held in common and ancestral lands could not be alienated as personal wealth. Rights to land use came from community membership and service. Individual possession of land was introduced by state land tenure. An important consequence of this difference is that the premise of their political thought and moral economy eschewed ‘possessive individualism’, the idea that an individual is the sole proprietor of their competencies without having to give to society.⁸³

Thirdly, Kikuyu norms of social obligation derided aid; poverty was considered irresponsible and equated with idleness.⁸⁴ In their ancestral religion, wealth brought honour and demonstrated God’s blessing. In pre-Settler Liberia, wealth also brought power and deference, but norms of social obligation encouraged redistribution to kin and those with a lower social status. Cultivating wealth brought virtue, but being able to redistribute such wealth earned leaders respect. Significantly, this means that a leader was accountable to redistribute communal wealth and resources, and the poor could find social insurance through moral community. Their moral ethnicity encouraged socially responsible wealth because it gave the poor a means to get a chance at achieving esteem.

Fourthly, the context in which Kikuyu moral ethnicity mobilised for violence differs significantly from this case. Instead of an oppressive colonial context, ethnic mobilisation in Liberia was driven by perceptions of severe and unjust horizontal inequalities—in the form of political exclusion, socio-economic marginalisation from ancestral patrimony, and cultural status denigration—which were impacting socially

⁸³ This concept was developed by: Macpherson, 1962.

⁸⁴ John Lonsdale, 1992, p. 340.

embedded norms and values for dealing with inequality within communities. It led to external disputes over land ownership between Gio and Mano versus the Mandingo in Nimba County, and Loma versus the Mandingo in Lofa County. This contrasts with Kikuyu external disputes over land, which was directed at colonisers; Kikuyu fought to “regain stolen [colonial] lands”.⁸⁵ Land disputes against the Mandingo, however, were supported by the notion that they did not belong to the area; a notion that was grounded in conceptions of social belonging and autochthony, which I discuss below. In the future, Kikuyu/Kalenjin tensions revolved around these kinds of issues, so the case of Liberia and the case of Kenya are more similar if you take the Kenyan story forwards to the present day.

Lastly, and most significantly, whereas the Kikuyu debate illuminated by Lonsdale has focused on class divisions, internal debates within Gio, Mano and Mandingo communities have focused on various debates that suggest that there are different types of cleavages within moral ethnicities. Their debates have generally focused on three areas. The first is issues of rights and entitlements to territorial ownership and control in Nimba County and Lofa County. The second emphasises leadership moral economy to provide opportunities, redistribute largesse, and development resources, as well as security to their followers to enable them to maintain livelihoods and achieve human dignity. The third, which has become more prominent in post-war Mandingo debates, focuses issues relating to the horizontal standing of ethnic communities and their comparative influence among ‘others’. Bottom-up pressures within the Mandingo community during the LURD war resulted in the articulation of a more inclusive form of moral ethnicity that focused on loyalty of leaders to supporters in connection with redistributing rewards and protecting the

⁸⁵ John Lonsdale, 1992, p. 326.

community's dignity. In contrast, In contrast, bottom-up pressures that came to be expressed within Gio and Mano moral ethnicity during the NPFL war articulated a more exclusive form of moral ethnicity that focused on leadership responsibility to protect their exclusive rights and expectations, especially in connection with territorial belonging. While they both looked at others to criticise their leaders about their responsibilities, one was more internally focused, seeking to enforce unity on the community, while the other was more externally focused seeking to draw external boundaries with 'others'.

This distinction is similar to Lynch's findings about the Kalenjin ethnic alliance in Kenya. She writes that debates within the group have always concentrated on issues of "relative development and spheres of ethnic influence, claims to the rightful ownership and control of a certain territory, and need for ethno-regional redistribution."⁸⁶ She suggests that from the very beginning an inclusive Kalenjin identity was constructed around the time of Kenyan independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s, to challenge Kikuyu supremacy. Kikuyu were considered to have "expansionist and monopolistic tendencies".⁸⁷ In the Liberian case, processes of identity construction had begun before the advent of the state at a time when Gio/Mano and Mandingo inter-ethnicity was largely cordial. But, the new threats posed by Mandingo domination in the context of the state, prompted critical debates about common ethnic identity in the context of the perceived weakening social accountability of elites who had allied with Mandingo often at the expense of their supporters. This was particularly charged in the area of land, relative development and standing, as well as patronage redistribution.

⁸⁶ Lynch, 2011, p. 79.

⁸⁷ Lynch, 2011, p. 79.

The debates about development and patronage also concerned issues of political inclusion and exclusion at the state level. An important expectation within Gio and Mano communities was that political elites would redistribute largesse and development benefits, therefore exclusion from state power prompted fears of elite loss of legitimacy. This has some resonance with Nic Cheeseman's argument that "moral ethnicity in Kenya is based on "the idea that MPs are personally responsible for funding local development and all manner of other local needs."⁸⁸ The financial burdens created by such thinking contribute to external corruption at the horizontal state level. Issues over horizontal inequality and elite accountability came to the under Samuel Doe's regime when Gio and Mano were severely excluded from high profile state power.

For instance, on the issue of land ownership and control, ordinary Gio and Mano argued with their elders that they had permitted socio-economically prosperous Mandingo to use their affluence to illegitimately obtain property rights from corrupt elders.⁸⁹ They argued that horizontal inequalities with the 'dominant' Mandingo community were undermining their capacity to claim what was rightfully theirs, as they understood things based on shared norms and values. External discourses of belonging went hand in hand with internal agitation over land rights. 'Traditionally' a chief's authority partly rested on wealth in land. But they hold land as custodians not individual owners. At issue among many of the Gio and Mano peasants and 'youths' was the question of social accountability for their moral rights and expectations, which had become threatened by the disproportionate prosperity of 'others'. As we shall see later, it was one of the factors that incentivised local elite support for the NPFL, in order to protect their legitimacy. This shows that group dynamics within an

⁸⁸ Cheeseman, 2009, p. 13.

⁸⁹ Interview, Jefferson, Gbarnga, 16th May 2009.

ethnic category can also become competitive or divisive, and an important driver of conflict. The distinction between horizontal inequality and moral ethnicity is useful for analysing the external and internal dimensions of ethnic mobilisation. In the next section, I discuss how the concept of horizontal inequalities can help us to understand the Liberian case.

The concept of horizontal inequalities and its application to Liberia

Horizontal inequality is multidimensional. Stewart identifies four aspects—political, social, economic, and cultural—with each comprising a number of elements. Horizontal inequalities may be spatially distributed.⁹⁰ The horizontal inequalities perspective emerged in the 2000s. It was first proposed by Frances Stewart to differentiate amongst inequalities between culturally defined groups and economic inequality between individuals or the rich and the poor. Horizontal inequalities have been found to cause violent group mobilisation when ethnic groups perceive that they are victims of severe inequalities or beneficiaries of privileges that they might lose;⁹¹ and where political, socioeconomic and cultural exclusion exist simultaneously.⁹² It has also been found that horizontal inequalities necessarily relate with a variety of factors to lead to mobilisation for violence. These include: ethnic group structure and size, state policy, and the presence of discourses about indigeneity.⁹³ There are causal links between differing horizontal inequalities; for example, inequality in political power may lead to similar economic and social inequalities. This makes political

⁹⁰ Stewart & Annan, 2008, pp. 13-14.

⁹¹ See for example: Langer 2009a.

⁹² A. Langer et al., 2009.

⁹³ See Ukiwo, 2006.

power not only important in itself but also a means to achieving other elements. This study applies horizontal inequalities as an analytical concept to understand Liberia.

Horizontal inequalities can be ‘persistent’ ‘severe’, and ‘consistent’. ‘Persistent’ horizontal inequalities are those that last over a long period of time and serve as root causes of conflict. The presence of ‘severe’ horizontal inequalities in a country is considered to become a proximate cause of violence when there is a failure to respond to demands for inclusion or such demands are met with violent repression. Where there is a conjunction of horizontal inequalities, they are considered to be ‘consistent’. But this may not always be the case, for example in some instances groups have political power while others hold socio-economic power and it is the disjuncture of horizontal inequalities that leads to violent conflict. An example is Nigeria, where the North has historically dominated political power, but the South has done better in socio-economic terms.⁹⁴ What matters for violence to erupt is the extent to which the cleavages reinforce each other.

In the Liberian case, horizontal inequalities were persistent, severe and consistent. However, the simultaneous presence of objective horizontal inequalities does not necessarily lead to mobilisation for violence. The crucial factor in the analysis of how inequalities trigger mobilisation for violence is how “victims” and “beneficiaries” perceive them. Victims of horizontal inequalities are likely to mobilise when they consider such inequalities to be unjust or unfair because of their severity, consistency and persistence. Beneficiaries are also likely to mobilise when they perceive that they might lose the privileges they enjoy (or hope to enjoy). Stewart writes that, “[w]e are aware that people take actions on the basis of their *perceptions*

⁹⁴ Mustapha, 2006.

of others and of their relative position rather than *actual* inequality.”⁹⁵ In other words, inequality plus salient grievance over inequality combine to make the successful mobilisation of ethnic groups possible. These perceptions may not necessarily reflect the level of objective horizontal inequalities in a country.

I now turn to the specific dimensions of the concept and their application to the Liberian case. The political dimension of horizontal inequalities includes inequalities in both the configuration and distribution of appointments in national government, local government, parliament, civil service, the judiciary, and the national military.⁹⁶ It focuses on the organisation of politics. Political horizontal inequalities in numerical representation and occupancy of the most important positions in a country’s executive, legislative, bureaucratic, judicial and security apparatus matter because it creates unequal access to political power for cultural groups. The balance of political representation at the top can have an effect on perceptions of horizontal inequality on the ground because state officials are perceived as representing their respective ethnic groups. In most cases, political power is linked to economic resources and development opportunities because of the way in which public goods are distributed.

Political inequalities can evolve from the historical development of a country’s institutions of state and political economy. In many countries in Africa, this occurred under colonial rule. As mentioned, Liberia experienced Americo-Liberian Settler ‘colonial’ rule.⁹⁷ Horizontal inequalities in Liberia evolved with the development of the Settler ‘colonial’ state and its political economy. Chapter 4 covers the institutional evolution of horizontal inequalities in Liberia in more detail. It traces the balance of political representation at the centre of power from the period of Settler rule and how

⁹⁵ Stewart & Annan, 2008, p. 18.

⁹⁶ Stewart & Annan, 2008, p. 13.

⁹⁷ See for example: E. E. Osaghae, 1996.

they have affected perceptions of horizontal inequality in Liberia. In this regard, horizontal inequalities permit analysis of historical grievances and the broader institutional contexts underlying mobilisation of ethnic groups.⁹⁸

In terms of political inequalities leading to mobilisation for violence, it has been suggested that the inclusion of elites from the various ethnic groups within a country in the political centre “is arguably the most important factor for preventing the emergence of violent conflicts along ethno-regional lines”.⁹⁹ Arnim Langer has argued that ethnic elites are the ones “primarily concerned with the distribution of political power” and “the absence of political horizontal inequalities among the elites significantly reduces the risk of violent group mobilization, even if there are severe socio-economic inequalities between different ethnic groups or regions within a country, because in these situations political elites and leaders lack the incentives to mobilize their constituents for violent conflict.”¹⁰⁰ Several analysts share this view.¹⁰¹ This means that political horizontal inequalities are key to the outbreak of violence. This has some resonance with the Liberian case.

However, there are important qualifications. Historically, not all elites from the various ethnic groups were included in the political centre in Liberia. High profile political positions were controlled by select ethnic elites. While this generated mass protests, it did not lead to violent group mobilisation. Rather, various indigenous student elites tried to make common cause to seek greater inclusion in political power through mass demonstrations. A contingent event that interrupted their activities was the 1980 coup d'état that overthrew Settler rule. After the coup new minority elites—particularly, from the Gio/Mano and Krahn communities—gained initial control over

⁹⁸ Ukiwo, 2006, pp. 19-20.

⁹⁹ Langer 2009a, p. 29.

¹⁰⁰ Arnim Langer, November 2004, p. 7.

¹⁰¹ See for example: Putnam, 1976. Case & Monash Asia Institute., 1996. James D. Fearon & Laitin, 2000.

the state. An important factor that created the context for Gio and Mano mobilisation was the severe exclusion of elites that had been previously included in state power. A simultaneous decline in political power of elites and exclusion of their ethnic groups occurred, as whole ethnic communities were violently marginalised by a state regime. In this case, the grievances that generated violence did not just arise from social groups that had been previously discriminated against, rather it emerged from groups that perceived that they were losing privileges that they previously enjoyed, as political exclusion interacted with other forms of inequality.

Moreover, the general emphasis in the literature that what matters is the extent of elite (and non-elite) political exclusion from the various ethnic groups in a country, tends to overlook the fact that internal group relations also matter. This study suggests that whether or not ordinary people feel excluded is shaped not just by the inequality between groups but also by their position within their group. The significance of the exclusion on this is an important factor that triggers violence. In a system of patronage, severe political exclusion of elites that previously enjoy access to state power, does not only dramatically reduce representation it can create perceptions of effective group exclusion from state resources (albeit indirectly). When this happens, elites are seen as unable to fulfil moral obligations to ethnic communities and many ordinary people perceive that it is hard to ‘live well and right’ without these support relations in place. Pressure for action may come from these sections of communities. The disruption of such social arrangements provokes grievances and resistance not just because people feel deprived, but also because rights have been violated and groups face long-term insecurities.¹⁰² The study of these internal understandings about internal relations, which I focus on in subsequent chapters, illuminates what

¹⁰² J. C. Scott, 1976, p. 6.

makes people aggrieved about horizontal inequalities and responsive to ethnic mobilisation, in the context of prevailing factors such as excluded elites.¹⁰³ Chapter 5 will show how a combination of direct and indirect exclusion of Gio and Mano elites and non-elites made successful mobilisation for the NPFL war possible.

The Liberian case also suggests that political inequalities, in the form of exclusions from the centre of power, can lead to conflict because they are particularly symbolic and high profile. It is one thing if members of one ethnic group earn a little less than those of another, because they may not know this statistical reality. But if one group dominates key political positions such as the presidency, this will be immediately publicly visible and divisive. This is one way in which people develop the perception that inequalities are affecting internal relations. Therefore, there is something particularly salient and high profile about the political dimension of horizontal inequalities because of the immediate public symbolism. The political side is typically the trigger because of its high profile salience. As occurred in Ivory Coast, the continued exclusion of the northern presidential candidate Alassane Ouattara triggered violence when it was alleged that his opponent, Laurent Gbagbo, had rigged the 2010 presidential elections.

Social inequalities and economic inequalities are those that have an impact on the physical well-being and life chances of members of ethnic groups.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, I combine these two separate dimensions into socio-economic horizontal inequalities for analytical purposes. The social dimension includes access to various services—such as education, health, housing, sanitation, water—and human outcome gauges—such as measures of health and educational achievements.¹⁰⁵ This relates to the economic aspect, which comprises employment opportunities, incomes, access and

¹⁰³ J. C. Scott, 1976, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Ukiwo, 2006, p. 16.

¹⁰⁵ Stewart & Annan, 2008, p. 13.

ownership of assets—such as land, human capital, social capital. Both affect access to and distribution of material resources. These can be measured by the poverty and human development index. Much like the political inequalities, the causes of socio-economic inequalities are typically historical and associated with the development of markets. Apart from historical factors, they are also shaped by the geographic allocation of natural resources and contemporary national development policies.

Socio-economic inequalities often lead to historical grievances that contribute to the outbreak of violence; but they are likely to generate violence when they interact with political inequalities. As they interact, they create a perception of severe exclusion on multiple dimensions and an internal sense of historic injustice, which can be mobilised for violence. Thus, in the case of Ivory Coast the political exclusion of Alassane Ouattara mapped onto a general sense of socio-economic inequality and political controversy relating to the identity of people who in previous generations came from Burkina Faso and settled in Ivory Coast. This led to the sense of alienation and marginalisation of the north as a whole, but on multiple dimensions. These factors combined to lead to civil war. As we shall see later, a similar configuration of factors lead to Gio and Mano mobilisation against the Krahn and Mandingo in the Liberian war. Socio-economic inequalities over access to land became particularly explosive as they interacted with political exclusion. People perceived that their political exclusion was preventing their big men from protecting communal resources.

The cultural dimension of horizontal inequalities includes the extent to which the state acknowledges or fails to acknowledge a group's cultural practices. It relates to perceived differentials in the status, public recognition and treatment among

diverse culturally defined groups' symbols, practices and custom.¹⁰⁶ This overlaps with political and socio-economic inequalities since ethnic groups are culturally defined. Three main aspects of cultural status have been emphasised in the literature: religion, language and cultural practices. The focus within the theory of horizontal inequalities is on how the state treats the custom and practices of different cultures, and public perception and concern over these differences.

Differential treatment of religious institutions of various ethnic communities by the state has persisted in Liberia. However, religious inequalities have been predisposed to mobilisation mainly because of their connection with group identity and resistance.¹⁰⁷ In a context where ethnicity is politically and economically salient, horizontal inequalities in recognition of cultures becomes important because it can affect the authority structures and institutions that give identity its symbolic value. Thus, the denigration of cultural sites of the Loma in Lofa County during the LURD war triggered mobilisation of the ethnic Loma to join the counter-rebellion against LURD.

Evidently the relationship between horizontal inequalities and violent group mobilisation is complex because there are many instances where the presence of severe, consistent and persistent horizontal inequalities does not lead to violent conflict. What makes collective action possible in each case depends on group perception of inequality. This study argues that violent group mobilisation in Liberia, which was generated by perceptions of horizontal inequalities, was also driven by the perceived damage done to internal reciprocal relations between elites and their followers. I discuss this in more detail in the next section.

¹⁰⁶ This dimension is discussed at length by Arnim Langer and Graham Brown in: Arnim Langer, Stewart, & Venugopal, 2012.

¹⁰⁷ Arnim Langer et al., 2012, pp. 51, 53.

Ethnic mobilisation for the Liberian war re-contextualised

My aim in this section is to provide an overview of the main empirical setting of the study, followed by an overview of the context that sum up my approach to analysing the outbreak of ethnic mobilisation in Liberia. The present administrative hierarchy in Nimba owes much of its configuration to the period of Settler indirect rule (discussed in Chapter 4). At the official introduction of indirect governance in 1904, the interior of the country was divided into five administrative districts; these were subsequently re-organised into three provinces in 1932. Until 1964, Nimba was known as the Central Province of Liberia with two provincial districts, Sanniquellie and Tappita, known as Districts II and III. These have since been divided into six districts: Yarwein-Mehnsoneh, Sanniquellie-Mah, Saclepea-Mah (which are considered Mano districts/chiefdoms) and Zoe-Geh, Tappita, and Gbehlay-Geh (which are considered Gio districts/chiefdoms). The county superintendent replaced the ‘colonial’ provincial commissioner as the administrative head in 1964. He supervises the various district commissioners and their assistants, to whom state-created paramount chiefs report.

Districts comprise chiefdoms, which were renamed ‘paramount chiefdoms’ under Settler rule (Chapter 4). Paramount chiefdoms comprise political and territorial divisions called ‘clans’. Paramount chiefs oversee ‘clan’ chiefs. ‘Clans’ encompass smaller political units called zones (or sections). Zones comprise various towns and villages; designated town chiefs, known as zone chiefs, administer them. In some cases, townships are created within a clan, and placed under the headship of a township commissioner. Nimba has six prominent cities: Sanniquellie (the administrative capital), Ganta, Karnplay, Bahn, Saclepea, and Tappita, which are headed by city mayors. Although informants originated from various parts of the County, the principal sites of fieldwork in Nimba County were: Bahn in Zoe-Geh

district/chiefdom, Ganta in Sanniquellie-Mah district/chiefdom, and Saclepea and Kpein in Saclepea-Mah district/chiefdom.

Nimba has a combined population of 462,026, as of the last census in 2008. This population consists of members of all of Liberia's sixteen ethnic groups, but the major ethnic groups in the County are Gio (Dan) Mano (Mah), Krahn (Kruan), and Mandingo. The Gio and Mano are considered to be the two 'principal' ethnic groups in Nimba.¹⁰⁸ Together, they constitute the majority of the population in the County; the Mandingos follow them in size. The Mandingo are predominantly Muslim, while the Mano and Gio generally adhere to Christianity and indigenous institutions such as the *Poro* society. There are no physical borders separating Gio and Mano from Mandingos. Historically, Mandingos settled as itinerant traders within Gio and Mano towns and villages in Nimba, but they are a diaspora community that is not limited to Nimba. There are large settlements of Mandingo in Lofa and Bong Counties. Therefore, there are good reasons for including a general analysis of the community, which is not limited to the boundaries of Nimba. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the analysis in subsequent chapters will be organised in three stages.

(1) Moral economy in the long-term

The first stage focuses on the long-term. It traces the historical constitution of Gio, Mano and Mandingo moral communities. It will ascertain the constitutive norms and values (moral ethnicity) on which reciprocities between elites and ordinary people were initially established in these historic communities. A contextualisation of the formation of these groups will permit analysis of shifts in their boundaries and

¹⁰⁸ Nimba County Development Committee, 2008-2012, p. 1.

expectations as moral communities, which occurred in response to later events. The main argument is that before the advent of Settler rule there was some sense of being Gio, Mano and Mandingo. Their ethnic histories suggest that these identities evolved in the conduct of particular economic activities. The resultant ethnic mentalities can be understood as slow to change historical structures created to legitimise political and social relations.¹⁰⁹ Their evolution in response to changing external contexts creates internal tension within groups as people appeal to contending notions of the moral to negotiate historical change. This can, but does not always, lead to violence.

My approach to analysing the historical moral economy of the Gio/Mano and Mandingo is informed by the ‘wealth-in-people’ conception of pre-colonial society.¹¹⁰ The term describes the widespread practice of dependents—i.e. children, wives, clients, and slaves—being valued, sought, captured and procured at substantial material expense in pre-colonial African societies.¹¹¹ There are two types of processes for gaining wealth-in-people: accumulative and compositional. Accumulative processes primarily rely on increasing the number of people who produce value. Compositional processes increase efficiency by improving synergy in the patterns of labour and value production. Jane Guyer and Samuel Belinga base this distinction on three sociological dynamics, (i) kinship/status, (ii) demographic, and (iii) knowledge composition.¹¹² The first two—(i) kinship/status and (ii) demographic—involve accumulating more people through procreation, polygyny, servitude and clientship. The third—(iii) knowledge composition—composes different forms of expertise

¹⁰⁹ This is inspired by the idea of the ‘longue durée’ see: Braudel, 1972, 1973, 1980, 1982, 1989.

¹¹⁰ The concept’s initial development focused on Equatorial Africa but it is generally applicable to the Upper Guinea Coast. See for example: Guyer, 1993; Guyer & Belinga, 1995.

¹¹¹ Guyer & Belinga, 1995, p. 92.

¹¹² Guyer & Belinga, 1995, p. 117.

through constructing networks and groups of people that are constantly changing their shape and spatial reach.¹¹³

Accumulation processes of wealth-in-people predominate in the histories of the communities in this study because of the significance of (i) kinship/status and (ii) demographic dynamics. At the same time, (iii) knowledge composition should not be entirely discounted as a means of understanding different aspects of the accumulation processes of the aforementioned communities. Guyer and Belinga's classification is, thus, helpful in highlighting that the main similarity between past Gio/Mano and Mandingo communities is accumulation processes of wealth-in-people. Pre-colonial Gio/Mano and Mandingo societies were all involved in some form of demographic accumulation of wealth-in-people that involved strategies of polygyny, procreation clientship, and servitude to obtain wives, children, clients, and pawns. A man's power and wealth were measured in part by his success in accumulating people. However, these societies had different priorities for accumulating wealth-in-people. While Gio/Mano emphasised wealth-in-people as the capacity of manual labour resources to enlarge agricultural production, the Mandingo emphasised wealth-in-people as converts to Islam, as well as skills/competencies to increase 'profit'. To analyse their divergent priorities, I use the terminology of 'agrarian accumulation' and 'mercantilist accumulation' to frame the accumulation of wealth-in-people in past Gio/Mano and Mandingo societies respectively. These distinctive forms of accumulation defined different types of society with their own moral economy (Chapter 3). Gio and Mano societies were agrarian and territorial, while the Mandingo

¹¹³ Guyer & Belinga, 1995, p. 118.

society was mercantilist and dispersed. I conceptualise Gio/Mano societies as ‘agrarian serfdoms’ and Mandingo society as a ‘trading diaspora’.¹¹⁴

The term ‘trading diaspora’ is useful as a framework for analysing what motivated disparate migrant-traders to organise as a diaspora Mandingo community. It was proposed by Cohen and popularised by Philip Curtin as ‘trading network’.¹¹⁵ It has been applied to a variety of diaspora communities in Africa and beyond.¹¹⁶ Paul Lovejoy used the modified ‘commercial diaspora’ to describe the cultural features of the Hausa ‘trade network’ in the Volta Basin, located in present-day Burkina Faso and Ghana. The Hausa example bears similarities with the Mandingo case. The concept explains how people with a shared occupation with shared cultural characteristics partnered in long-distance trade to overcome difficulties such as communication of trade information, transportation to trading sites, regulation of commercial transactions, and way of obtaining trade finance, while adhering to their religious identities as outsiders in foreign lands.¹¹⁷ According to Cohen, trust and information “are far easier between people who share values, language, a legal system, kinship ties and other sources of solidarity.”¹¹⁸ This resonates with the creation of the Mandingo diaspora trade network in Liberia.

Mandingo diaspora moral community was created by the expertise necessary for long-distance trading activities. The traders were among the later migrants who were dispersed after the break-up of the medieval empires in the western Sudan.¹¹⁹ Trading became an important occupation as they entered into territories in present-day

¹¹⁴ Cohen, 1971.

¹¹⁵ Cohen, 1971. Curtin, 1975.

¹¹⁶ A prominent regional example is: Lovejoy, 1980.

¹¹⁷ See for example: Lydon, 2009, p. 343.

¹¹⁸ Cohen, 1971, pp. 273-274.

¹¹⁹ S. E. Holsoe, 1977. S. E. Holsoe, 1967, pp. 55-88.

Liberia where local societies had carved out economic fortes.¹²⁰ They needed to develop an ecological niche in long-distance trading that straddled numerous ethnic boundaries. Success in long distance trade required particular skills such as literacy to arrange contracts, incorporating local people with access to local markets, the public good of protection and trust to maintain valuable trade secrets, places of refreshment for itinerants and the like. It brought together commercial people in settled communities, itinerant traders and immigrant traders to form a diaspora network community.

Creation of moral community was facilitated by common adherence to Islam. The traders shared religious institutions such as mosques. Islamic education afforded useful commercial skills such as literacy. Because of their common economic interest, they were able to deploy Islam to build trust and a cultural network that straddled territorial boundaries. This is similar to the Hausa case described by Lovejoy. He writes that Hausa traders “relied on the unifying ideology of Islam to buttress economic links...religion and its status orientation furnished a rationalization for the hospitality which landlords extended to passing traders for economic reasons”.¹²¹ They developed a status-driven culture in which people strove for status as good Muslims as this became a norm.

The traders shared an idea of ‘possessive individualism’ where individuals maximised ‘profit’. But Islam shaped the ethics of mercantilist accumulation through the notion of good profit *alal* and bad profit *aram*.¹²² Islam made it a virtue to accumulate wealth-in-people for ‘profit’, but this was tempered with reputation as a devout Muslim.¹²³ For instance, prospective wives from the neighbouring

¹²⁰ Simmel, 1950, p. 403.

¹²¹ Lovejoy, 1980, p. 41.

¹²² See for example: A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 40.

¹²³ Interview, Focus Group, Bomi, 29th April 2009.

communities were chosen not only because of the particular ability that they brought into a polygynous marriage, such as weaving and access to local markets, but also because they were considered potential converts to Islam. Once they became dependents Islamic affiliation created an expectation of benevolent support.¹²⁴ Many of the traders were also Islamic clerics; they were not only seeking “trading opportunities [among ‘others’, but also] new converts”.¹²⁵

Cohen’s concept, however, does not mention merchant reputation; there is an assumption that kinship ties offer adequate restrictions on commercial conduct and social intercourse.¹²⁶ Yet, my informants suggest that reputation was vital for two main reasons. First, it was necessary to build social trust in the evolution of the network. For instance, success in trade required guaranteed credit facilities. A good reputation for meeting debt obligations was necessary for commercial activities like extending credit and entering into trade contracts. Second, it was also an important source of leadership legitimacy.

In their leadership moral economy those who accumulated wealth-in-people within the autonomous settlements in the diaspora were expected to create good order by offering benevolent protections. Islam made it a value to not only add people through polygyny and clientelist arrangements, but also to facilitate their achievement of self mastery through benevolent patronage support. Wealthy patrons gained respect by using their resources to create opportunities for the brotherhood, lineages, and households they associated with. For instance, it was considered a blessing to grant

¹²⁴ Interview, Methuselah, Monrovia, 15th March 2008. See also: Guyer & Belinga, 1995, pp. 116-118.

¹²⁵ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 34.

¹²⁶ Lydon, 2009, p. 349.

loans to upstarts without expecting interest.¹²⁷ A reputation for dependability, necessary for effective trading relations, was a source of respect.

Apart from this, a reputation for personal achievement in knowledge also brought leadership respect.¹²⁸ Many traders maintained fluid and multiple roles as traders, clerics, musicians, craftsmen and so on.¹²⁹ Skill in esoteric knowledge as a marabou was considered a particularly important value.¹³⁰ It was advanced for the protection and survival of community. A reputation for heroic action in, for instance, providing the network with the public good of protection also brought leadership legitimacy. This drew on past legends such as Sundiata Keita and Sao Baso.¹³¹ Finally, a reputation for incorporating public opinion in decision-making that impacted the network was an important source of legitimacy.¹³² The dispersed settlements in the network were relatively autonomous. Those who sought to represent diaspora interests as patriarchs or political leaders, thus, needed some consensus to make their decisions enforceable.¹³³ It was measured through the support of religious elders/cleric.¹³⁴ Islamic elders served as important arbiters in disputes within, as well as between networks. As Mandingo identity has evolved, regional communities have integrated local practices and beliefs to develop regional variations of their faith and contending ideas of the moral.¹³⁵ As discussed later, the source and extent of political leadership authority became an important point of contention in the civil war.

¹²⁷ See for example: A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 40.

¹²⁸ Interview, Focus Group, Bomi, 29th April 2009.

¹²⁹ Ford, 1990, pp. 56-57.

¹³⁰ Interview, M. Nicholas, Monrovia, 19th March 2008.

¹³¹ Interview, Focus Group, Bomi, 29th April 2009. Interview, Focus Group, Monrovia, 12th May 2009.

¹³² Interview, Focus Group, Bomi, 29th April 2009.

¹³³ Interview, Focus Group, Bomi, 29th April 2009. See also the Hausa in: Lovejoy, 1980, p. 33.

¹³⁴ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

¹³⁵ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 39.

Thus, religious affiliation was a key factor that shaped the boundaries of Mandingo ethnicity in the past. Notions of kinship, shared ancestral homeland and common origin were secondary to adherence to ethics of Islamic. Becoming a Muslim was an advantage to would-be traders as it facilitated entry into the network. This differed from Gio and Mano evolution and moral economy.

The term ‘agrarian serfdoms’ is useful as a framework for analysing what motivated disparate migrants to organise in distinct Gio and Mano feudal-like agrarian settlements. It explains how people of unequal status with shared characteristics cooperated to overcome the difficulties of penetrating the forests for crop production as well as subsistence. Gio and Mano moral communities were created by the ‘hard work’ of agrarian cultivation. Migrants needed to band together to accumulate manual labour to cultivate the forests, to protect settlements, and to gain control over people and territory. Land was abundant and people were scarce. Kola was cultivated as a primary currency for material and moral exchange. Organised co-operation between those who delivered their labour and those who controlled or sought to control it became a public good in the forest ecology because of the common welfare it provided. It brought together disparate migrants under the leadership of ‘landowners’ (*sehdeng* in Gio) and ‘big men’ (also known as ‘wealthy person’ or *boumehn* in Gio).

They evolved a morality that subjected individual ambition to an ethic of communal service under ‘landowners’ and ‘big men’ to promote public welfare. Patron-client relations controlled exchanges between those who controlled land and labour and those who gave their labour. Labour was provided in anticipation of reciprocal support from leaders, and the moral reward of esteem. For instance, adding labour to land generated usufruct rights as well as the moral reward of respect for hard

work. People moved in search of new areas to cultivate kola. The moral and the material shaped one another. Big men redistributed material support for the welfare of their dependents. Mano informants referred to this form of benevolent leadership as *dormi*. Individual maximisation was eschewed. Leaders who failed to meet expectations of support were delegitimised. They suffered a damaged reputation and the loss of followers to their rivals. Social trust was formed through exchange of labour and deference for patronage and protection.

The boundaries of Gio/Mano ethnicity were shaped by a combination of factors. These included notions of kinship that permitted incorporation of ‘strangers’ through ‘attachment’; membership in local secret societies, such as the male *Poros* and the female *Sande*, through initiation; and notions of territorial belonging through orders of arrival. Over time, lineage connections to ancestral homelands became an important identity marker, taking precedence over religious affiliation. Ethnic boundaries were relatively porous; it fostered accumulation of wealth-in-people. Family elders, secret society priests, ‘big men’, and chiefs managed the conclusion of followers as, for instance, kin, client, ‘stranger’, pawn or slave. But they were expected to adhere to the shared norms of moral community. For instance, they entered into ‘stranger’-father relations that allowed newcomers to reside in their quarters and farm on communal property. But they could not grant ‘strangers’ ownership rights to such cultivated lands; original ownership derived from orders of arrival and conquest.

Cultural boundaries did not only determine the allocation of means of production to newcomers, but they were also erected to protect communities of common interest. For instance, membership in secret societies such as the *Poros* guarded Gio and Mano specialisation as kola producers by preventing un-initiated

‘strangers’ and potential competitors such as the Mandingo traders from accessing kola production areas.¹³⁶ They were only allowed to trade in designated market sites. Production sites were treated like internal ‘trade secrets’ from outsiders.¹³⁷ By the late 19th century, inter-ethnic relations between Gio/Mano and Mandingo were relatively cordial. Their interaction was largely unaffected by competition among various pre-colonial indigenous kingdoms for control of trade routes in present-day Liberia. This can be attributed to maintenance of distinct specialisations. Gio/Mano exchanged kola for Mandingo commercial goods such as clothing and specialised Mandingo knowledge services, such as those of marabouts.

The Settler ‘colonial’ intrusion, however, triggered an evolution in horizontal and internal social arrangements in the region, and with them ethnic thought. From 1847-1904, indigenous communities had existed as geographically separate political communities. Settler rule was limited to the coastal settlements.¹³⁸ Events surrounding the European scramble for African lands in 1884 pushed the Settlers to forcibly occupy the indigenous communities and assert sovereignty over the hinterland (Chapter 4). The occupation of indigenous lands by the Settlers threatened the rights of dependents, as the real or metaphorical kin of chiefs and land custodians. Oral history suggests that tensions emerged within Gio and Mano moral communities about the moral expectations of leadership in their ethnic thought. The main issue of contention was communal land rights and the boundaries of legitimate action. Agrarian labourers became defensive of their land rights against the perceived betrayal of their leaders. Some ‘traditional’ leaders were seen as exceeding their authority by ceding land to outsiders who had not negotiated inclusion into moral community.

¹³⁶ Ford, 1990, p. 61.

¹³⁷ Interview, Omarkson, Tubmanburg, 9th April 2009.

¹³⁸ D. E. Dunn & Holsoe, 1985, p. 1.

Oral history suggests that ethnic mobilisation against Settler rule in this period was partly an unintended consequence of internal tensions over leadership moral economy around land (Chapter 3). Informants describe how some chiefs were skinned alive by their followers for betraying their followers, and how internal demands incentivised some emergent elites to mobilise against the Settlers. After Settler conquest, territorial boundaries became an important way of (re-)defining self and community as ‘sons of the soil’. This was partly attributable to external designation of territorial tribes by the Settlers, which impacted the ability to acquire ‘virgin’ land, and partly the outcome of internal construction (Chapter 3-4). The changing place of land in Gio and Mano moral imagination will demonstrate that boundaries, roles and expectations of moral communities shift in response to internal and external events. This sometimes—but not always—leads to violence. The next sub-section picks up on how contending notions of the moral and the internal tensions within Gio and Mano societies developed within the Settler state with the evolution and institutionalisation of new forms of inequalities.

(2) Historical evolution of horizontal inequalities

The second stage in the analysis, which focuses on the medium term, traces the evolution and entrenchment of horizontal inequalities between cultural defined groups in Liberia that accompanied Settler rule. I adapt Stewart’s typology of political, socio-economic, and cultural status horizontal inequalities¹³⁹ to suggest that: First, in the Settler era (1847-1980) political horizontal inequalities grew through the manner in which indigenous communities were subjugated, and the policies and legal provisions

¹³⁹ Stewart & Annan, 2008.

of Settler rule, which produced uneven administrative divisions, state citizenship, civic and political participation, high profile state representation, and law making. Second, socio-economic horizontal inequalities developed through the manner that indigenous communities were incorporated into cash labour markets, the way they were taxed, as well as the extent to which they could own and control land, access education, and gain employment in public institutions. Third, political, socio-economic and cultural status horizontal inequalities became institutionalised through the state.

These horizontal inequalities did not only occur between the ‘colonist’ Settler community and indigenous groups such as the Gio and Mano, as is commonly emphasised in Liberia’s broad historiography.¹⁴⁰ But uneven co-option of indigenous groups into the state also created horizontal inequalities between coastal and interior groups, as well as between economically ascendant indigenous groups like the Mandingo and marginal indigenous communities such as the Gio and Mano. The configuration of horizontal inequalities under Settler rule had important consequences at both the local and the state level, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 4. The main argument is that new forms of inequality in the state increased the sense of ethnic difference and rivalry, as well as ethnic awareness of moral economy. For practical reasons, I focus on changes in land relations and the tensions it created between Gio/Mano and Mandingo, as well as within Gio and Mano moral communities.

The introduction of a cash economy under Settler rule initially increased inter-ethnic cooperation between cash-rich Mandingo traders and Gio/Mano peasant communities. From 1912 to 1930 indigenous communities were divided into taxable districts. But, payment of the tax presented a practical challenge to Gio and Mano

¹⁴⁰ See for example: Liebenow, 1969. D. E. Dunn, Beyan, & Burrowes, 2001. Pham, 2004.

subsistence economies that had been concerned with accumulation of wealth-in-people rather than financial capital. Wealth-in-people brought kola, but it was used currency to barter for goods, such as marriage items used as bride wealth, rather than to accumulate financial fortune. Under the state, wealth-in-people created an enormous tax burden. People tried to evade payment, but the government adopted coercive measures to extract the tax.¹⁴¹ People looked to paramount chiefs, and cash-rich Mandingo traders to pay their taxes.¹⁴² Mandingo traders extended credit in expectation of kola harvest. The extension of credit in expectation of kola harvests increased trust and ties between Mandingo traders and Gio and Mano 'big men'. Big men supplied the traders with Gio and Mano labour in the form of porters to carry the kola to Guinea. The traders directly employed some of the labourers, thereby creating direct labour relations between them and the Gio and Mano.¹⁴³ Chiefs who also benefitted from collecting the wages, in the form of taxes, from the hired labourers permitted this practice.¹⁴⁴ It was almost impossible for people to pay the tax without encouraging their dependents to sell their labour to Mandingo traders to obtain money to pay taxes on their huts. The practice of lending Gio and Mano cash for payment of taxes and employing them as labourers led to the perception of a privileged class of wealthy Mandingo and an underclass of Gio and Mano labourers.

However, the new horizontal inequalities that emerged between Gio/Mano and Mandingo merchants in the local cash economy were mainly negotiated between the traders and Gio/Mano chiefly classes. Many of the traders were itinerants that remained for short periods of time. To encourage them to settle, some of them were offered settlement lands by the chiefs in commercial areas through the establishment

¹⁴¹ Akingbade, 1977.

¹⁴² Other sources of revenue recorded by Ford include assistance from government messengers, soldiers, clerks, missionaries etc. who settled in Nimba: Ford, 1990, pp. 231-237.

¹⁴³ Ford, 1990, pp. 273-275.

¹⁴⁴ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 106.

of stranger-father relations. From the later 1920s, the Settler state required chiefs to establish administrative markets for trade. They introduced a quota system that compelled subordinates to furnish markets with sellers. Many chiefs sought and appointed Mandingo traders as “market headmen” to encourage cash transactions in the markets.¹⁴⁵ As clients of the chiefs, the traders were granted land near market areas in places like Saclepea and Ganta. Some chiefs went to the extent of evicting local Gio and Mano to make room for Mandingo settlements.¹⁴⁶ Others constructed buildings for Mandingo traders in places like Bahn. Mandingo quarters started to grow as more migrants settled. New market towns such as Ganta, Kahnplay, Bahn, Saclepea Sanniquillie grew into commercial ‘cities’. They replaced pre-Settler kola markets in the Gio and Mano forests; these declined as trade centres.¹⁴⁷ With the growth of the new government market places, Nimba came to have the largest number of urban settlements.¹⁴⁸ This can be attributed to interaction between the Mandingo traders and chiefs in the period of Settler rule.¹⁴⁹ Mandingo migration into Nimba increased through their alliance with the big chiefs.

Rather than subordination to existing Gio and Mano hierarchies, the Mandingo settlers were permitted to have their own chiefs. Mandingo settlers in Nimba maintained a distinct identity. They did not reciprocate marriages with Gio and Mano; with the exception of Gio/Mano Chiefs who converted to Islam, Mandingo women were not permitted to marry Gio/Mano men because of their Islamic faith. Ordinary Gio and Mano became indebted to Mandingo traders with whom they did not have a common moral economy. Mandingo accumulation under the Settler political economy was not subjected to the sorts of personal ties that linked people of unequal status in

¹⁴⁵ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 109.

¹⁴⁶ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 109.

¹⁴⁷ Ford, 1990, p. 269.

¹⁴⁸ Schulze, 1973, p. 81.

¹⁴⁹ Ford, 1990, p. 263.

household, cliental and other forms of accumulation. They had no social obligations for the values appropriated from ordinary Gio and Mano. Grievances developed over the ties between chiefs and Mandingo. Some chiefs were accused of sorcery, which they had obtained from Mandingo clients. Such narratives were deployed to delegitimise them for seeking to maximise their own economic interests.

It was in this period that the Mandingo emerged as the principal ‘other’ of the Gio and Mano who considered them as ‘strangers’ who did not belong to the soil in Nimba County. They were seen as outsiders whose ancestral lands were located in parts of present-day Guinea. Some migrants had reproduced community through conquest in parts of present-day Lofa County while others settled as itinerants among agrarian communities such as the Gio and Mano in present-day Nimba County (Chapter 3). However, they were able to acquire private land in the Settler political economy. The introduction of title deeds by the Settler state made property alienable through state land tenure, and cash-wealthy Mandingo traders were able to purchase lands in commercial towns in Nimba from chiefs. Chiefs could sell freehold ‘tribal’ lands in their custody to Mandingo traders to obtain cash wealth.

From Peter Geschiere I adapt the concept of autochthony to discuss debates about land belonging and the boundaries of moral community. “Autochthony” literally means “emerging from the soil”; it implies territorial belonging based on a historical link to a particular place as a first comer or original resident.¹⁵⁰ Questions of belonging turn on the issue of who should be considered as an authentic citizen of a particular locality who can enter into the struggle for land rights.¹⁵¹ But ordinary people saw alienation of land as a betrayal of stranger-father norms: Gio/Mano peasants were angered that the Mandingos were acquiring land in Nimba that they

¹⁵⁰ See: Ceuppens & Geschiere, 2005.

¹⁵¹ Bøås, 2009, p. 20.

saw as ancestral patrimony. This fear of social extinction through alienation from land relations help to explain the development of local categories of ‘us’ and ‘other’ from below by appealing to past precedent in which property rights were negotiated through orders of arrival, and the sources and emotive appeal of an exclusive politics of autochthonous ethnic belonging (Chapter 5). Consequently, previously inclusive Gio/Mano moral economies that were based on vertically integrating ‘latecomers’, such as the Mandingo, as kin or clients became exclusive ‘tribes’ with a sharpened sense of difference and competition, which subsequently provoked ethnic exclusion (Chapter 5). Integrated Mandingo became horizontal ‘strangers’ who did not have territorial belonging.

Integrated Mandingo became horizontal ‘strangers’ to ordinary people, when groups such as the Kpelle that had also settled in Nimba remained unchallenged. Meanwhile, some elites referred to Mandingo as ‘cousins’. The new material realities created historic tensions and grievances between the chiefly class that stood to benefit from alliance with the Mandingo and their supporters who saw themselves as disadvantaged in the new political economy. While ordinary people appealed to remembered moral economy, the elite position shifted in response to changing patterns of inequality in the Liberian state, with some referring to Mandingo as ‘cousins’. As we shall see in Chapter 5, Gio and Mano who do not share the view that Mandingo are outsiders suffered heavy reprisals as ‘traitors’ in the NPFL war.

Chiefs were charged with abusing the privileges of their position for individual advantage and undermining reciprocities. Many ‘traditional’ elites sought protection from the rage of their followers by cooperating with the military-backed Settler state. It constrained their followers to turn to emergent literate elites—that was seeking recognition in their moral communities for new forms of ‘labour’ and

leadership—for redress, and to establish reciprocal arrangements for new forms of patronage that would permit upward mobility in the ‘new’ political economy.

At the state level, after the semi-autonomous powers of chiefs were removed and replaced with a patriarchal presidency under Tubman, access to high profile state position became more important for ethnic publics. Particularly, it affected the personal advantages of an emerging indigenous literate category. As they had had better access to formal education, coastal indigenous communities, such as the Vai and Kru, enjoyed better access to employment in state institutions than their counterparts from the interior. A situation emerged where interior people such as the Gio and Mano were not only politically excluded, but also relatively more socio-economically disadvantaged. This situation improved a little with the appointment of the likes of Jackson Doe under Tolbert. But, it was not enough to prevent the popular agitation against institutionalised horizontal inequalities between the minority Settlers and indigenous majority. While indigenous groups were trying to make common cause through the mobilisation efforts of the educated indigenous elite, the military stepped in to overthrow Settler rule through a coup d’état to usher in a new ethnic configuration of power. This was a historical contingent that prevented development of party politics. The next sub-section discusses the re-configuration of ethnic inequalities and the way in which it worsened internal ethnic crisis in Gio and Mano moral communities to make violent group mobilisation likely.

(3) Severe horizontal ethnic tension and crisis of moral ethnicity

The third stage in the analysis focuses on short-term events that triggered processes leading to mobilisation. It traces the way in which further changes in the patterns of

inequalities described above, created the immediate context that led to violent group mobilisation along ethnic lines. The main argument is that inequalities of access to the state and economic resources became particularly explosive as previously included ethnic elites experienced severe exclusion/decline in political power. Perceptions of severe political exclusion interacted with grievances over loss of property, and generated a sense that the understanding of reciprocal relations between patrons and clients could not be realised. Internal tension over disrupted leadership moral economy led to competing views within groups about morality, the boundaries of ethnicity, and the expectations of leadership. Bottom-up arguments about norms and expectations, personal reputation, dignity, accountability, and justice increased the pressure on excluded elites and incentivised them to pursue violent political strategies. It also made ordinary people more likely to respond to calls for violence.

The first example of ethnic mobilisation was the Gio and Mano recruitment to launch the NPFL war (1980-1996). To summarise points that I elaborate in subsequent chapters: The April 12, 1980 coup d'état that ended Settler rule in Liberia was a historical contingency that made it easier for previously marginal Gio/Mano and Mandingo elites to gain unprecedented access to high profile state power. The leadership of the coup reflected members of the Krahn, Sapo, Gio/Mano, Kru, Grebo, Kissi and Loma ethnic groups. Political representation in the new junta was limited to these ethnic groups (Chapter 5). Samuel Doe—from the Krahn ethnic group—was made the leader because of his military rank. A new ethnic political hierarchy emerged with Krahn and Gio/Mano elite at its apex. However, the power-sharing arrangement between the coupists collapsed as a result of elite rivalry. As the regime's main rivals, Gio/Mano elites became excluded from the high profile political power, which they previously enjoyed. A perception emerged amongst Gio and Mano

communities that they had become severely marginalised by Doe and his Krahn ethnic group. A perception of state leadership bias towards the Mandingo contributed to tensions between them and the Gio/Mano, but the main issue of contention was rightful ownership and control over land that Mandingo had acquired in Nimba.

Grievances over the territorial boundaries of ethnicity interacted with historic grievances with ‘traditional’ elites or chiefs—who had been co-opted into Doe’s party—over their moral economy obligation as custodians of ‘tribal’ land. Under the Settler political economy, chiefs and household heads had competed for cash resources to meet their tax obligations, and to accumulate new forms of resource wealth. The alliance between the chiefly and cash-rich Mandingo traders, as well as control over government forced labour had weakened the ties between some of them and their followers. As custodians of land, chiefs were granting their Mandingo allies places to settle and do business, which they might have previously redistributed to their followers. Moreover, hereditary chiefs were appointed to rule communities when previously chiefs could only gain and keep wealth-in-people by following leadership moral economy to redistribute patronage for the welfare and security of their followers. Weakened reciprocities created internal tension, but many chiefs were able to rule with the backing of state coercive instruments. This historical contingency made it easier for the Settlers to exert political control over the hinterland by collaborating with them.

An emergent literate elite seeking recognition in their moral communities offered an alternative source of leadership and patronage to many ordinary people. They established new reciprocities to provide development resources, educational support, farming implements, health benefits and the like to their rural and urban dependents, as currency for reputation and legitimacy. When the coupists came to

power, expectations increased that ordinary Gio/Mano would benefit from access to state resources. These were largely realised through the action of prominent elites like Thomas Quiwonkpa who was considered the ‘strongman’ of the coup. In the eyes of many ordinary Gio and Mano, their political exclusion had not only prevent them from their share of national resources, such as educational opportunities and development resources, it also disrupted relations between political elites and their ethnic supporters.

Consequently, redistributive arrangements that connected ordinary Gio and Mano with their political and ‘traditional’ elites could not be realised. Previously, these arrangements had legitimised internal inequality by creating stable expectations of what elites could claim and what they in turn had to provide to their subordinates. Elites inability to provide their communities with ‘protections’ including security, patronage and protections of development weakened or threatened their authority and legitimacy as custodians of land and/or respectable ‘big men’. Internal pressures for action directed at local chiefs and excluded political elites gave rebel elites an incentive to mobilise ethnic solidarity and non-elites rationales for supporting violent group mobilisation.

An example is John Duo of Gborplay, Nimba who participated in the leadership of the NPFL (Chapter 5).¹⁵² Gborplay was one of the areas where the war first broke out. After the 1980 coup d’état that ousted Settler rule, Duo became a “big man” in Gborplay when he gained access to high profile state power as a Commanding Officer in the military. In this capacity he was responsible for sponsoring local development, subsistence economic activity and health needs in Gborplay Chiefdom. This included providing farming implements such as cutlasses

¹⁵² Interview, Rtd. Lt. Colonel Z. John Duo, Saclepea, 7th and 21st March 2014.

and hoes to the peasants in the area whose main economic activity was farming. He was also responsible for providing educational opportunities and paying for health costs for residents. He explained that this was an important means of gaining civic virtue “as citizens or *good citizens* [my emphasis]”.¹⁵³ When Doe started excluding Gio and Mano elites, Duo lost his position. He narrated that his political exclusion prevented him from fulfilling his duties as a loyal or “good citizen” because he no longer had the resources to maintain himself as a “big man” and patron to supporters in Gborplay, Nimba. He risked becoming marginalised within his community of esteem as people realised that excluded elites could no longer protect the community or deliver support. He decided to become more violent as a result of the pressure placed on him from below by his constituents because he could not fulfil their patron-client demands. This was an important factor that made him change his behaviour. It motivated his participation in calls for external action.

It suffices to indicate that this summary of Duo, which I will elaborate later in Chapter 5, suggests that it was a drive for violence that came from clients within an ethnic group. It may have been generated by horizontal inequalities, but clients’ agitation for their rights and expectations incentivised patrons to pursue more violent strategies through the organisation of the NPFL movement. This means that, it was not merely structural inequality that generated violence, but a historical process that created and amplified internal contradictions within particular moral communities.

A key source of internal agitation within Gio/Mano communities centred on maintenance of cultural boundaries that shaped the allocation of productive resources—namely land for farming, commerce, and settlement. On the one hand, many of those from the lower ranks did not want to absorb Mandingo ‘strangers’

¹⁵³ Interview, Rt. Col John Duo, Saclepea, 21th March 2014.

within their perceived territorial boundaries. This would weaken their economic interests, as they were the most likely to endure horizontal socio-economic domination without access to Mandingo patronage as ethnic ‘outsiders’. On the other hand, dissenting voices in the chiefly class that referred to Mandingo as cousins, however, were less likely to lose socio-economic interests through their integration. In their narrative accounts of the past, these elites emphasised as ethnic morality with porous borders that absorbed outsiders into its ranks. The accounts of Zawolo from Kpein, Saclepea-Mah district will exemplify this view (Chapter 5).¹⁵⁴ In contrast, their youthful, rural opponents stressed orders of arrival as a way of delegitimising Mandingo ownership of lands. They voiced expectations of leadership moral economy to maintain their exclusive rights to ancestral patrimony. The accounts of Jefferson, also from Saclepea Mah-District, will exemplify this view (Chapter 5).¹⁵⁵ As such, they were more readily responsive to military elites such as Duo who called for mobilisation by decrying that “the Mandingos are squatting on your land if we come to power we will make sure they leave your land and give you back the land”.¹⁵⁶

From below, many Gio and Mano supported the NPFL—not only to oppose the regime and its ‘collaborators’—but as an expression of good citizenship and to seek internal accountability; those who dissented were labelled traitors with severe repercussions.¹⁵⁷ Mobilisation supported a patriotic notion of moral ethnicity and a self-protective politics of territorial belonging.¹⁵⁸ Not all NPFL leaders were Gio and Mano elites concerned for their legitimacy. As we shall see below, there were regime opponents like Charles Taylor who were motivated by other rationales to ally

¹⁵⁴ Interview, Zawolo, 11th February 2014.

¹⁵⁵ Interview, Jefferson, Gbarnga, 16th May 2009.

¹⁵⁶ Interview, Focus group, Buduburam, 13th January 2011.

¹⁵⁷ Interview, Jefferson, Gbarnga, 30th April 2009. Interview, Siafa, Buduburam, 8th January 2011.

¹⁵⁸ John Lonsdale, 1994; Lynch, 2011.

with excluded Gio and Mano elites. These played an important role together with external actors in facilitating the acquisition of logistical support for the movement.

The second example of ethnic mobilisation was the recruitment of the Mandingo diaspora community to resist the NPFL through the organisation of ULIMO and their remobilisation to launch the LURD war (1998-2003). Once the NPFL fighting began, the configuration of horizontal inequalities reversed. The targeting of Mandingo by Gio and Mano led to the experience and perception that they were being ‘victimised’ and excluded from their homes and commercial properties by their neighbours. Mandingo political elites lost power when the Doe regime collapsed and he was killed. They became ineffective to defend the community. Many Mandingo fled to Monrovia, and then to neighbouring countries as refugees. But there was internal pressure for leadership action to defend their lives, recover their properties, and to protect their dignity. This led to elite calls for the community to mobilise for ‘self-defence’ through the ULIMO counter-rebellion against the NPFL.

The example of Alhaji Kromah, who led the calls for violence, is illustrative.¹⁵⁹ There was an expectation within the diaspora that high profile Mandingo would lead the community in “self-defence” against the NPFL. Alhaji Kromah had been a high profile cabinet member of the Doe government. Informant accounts suggest that when his efforts to lead the community failed, Mandingo youths forged a “tribal alliance” to demand that he mobilise them for action to meet their moral economy expectations and that he would have become marginalised if he had not responded.¹⁶⁰ This was a decisive factor that led to the formation of the ULIMO movement, which subsequently merged with the Krahn supporters of Doe. Mandingos

¹⁵⁹ TRC Statement, Monrovia, 11th August 2008. This account is also reflected in interviews with members of the Mandingo ethnic group

¹⁶⁰ Interview, Fofana, Allen Town, 17th Sep 2014.

expected those with wealth and power to create conditions for political protection and good order because of their moral economy (Chapter 3). For high profile Mandingo elites like Alhaji Kromah, the expulsion threatened not just their marginalisation from power, but also within the community. Ordinary Mandingos seeking action were willing to respond to Kromah's calls for collective action. Their narrative, described in Chapter 6, will show that the widespread account that predatory elites were using "ethnic appeals" to manipulate support from ordinary people is not wholly reflective of what happened on the ground and why.¹⁶¹

Kromah came to represent the established leadership of Mandingo organisation for war with bottom-up support and the backing of Mandingo elders. However, his leadership—and reputation—came under increasing pressure from youthful opponents. During the NPFL war Mandingo moral ethnicity became divided over the issue of social accountability of politico-military leaders. For practical reasons, I discuss their moral debates in Chapter 6. Kromah's reaction to demands for accountability weakened his legitimacy. Rank-and-file Mandingo ex-combatants who had initially pressured him to lead them accused Kromah of seeking to selfishly enrich himself. This suggests that other rationales came into play after the outbreak of collective action, which did not meet the moral economy expectations the rank and file had of the leadership. Kromah relied on the support of the elders to enforce unity on the community as its leader, but it weakened his legitimacy. Oral testimony suggests that the threats and challenges that were being made to his leadership over time correlated with the actions that he made at the national level in trying to remobilise supporters.

¹⁶¹ See for example: Ellis, 1999, p. 96.

When the NPFL war ended and the Charles Taylor regime came to power in 1997, he embarked on the exclusion of former opponents such as Kromah. Mandingo political marginalisation under Charles Taylor regime (1997-2003) was seen as preventing them from recovering what they had been fighting for in the NPFL war, and further decline in power since the onset of the war. Kromah attempted to enforce unity on the divided community, but his leadership bid failed. Prior to the formation of LURD, Kromah tried to rally his former supporters for action against Taylor while he was in exile in Guinea and the United States, because by being forceful he could outmanoeuvre his opponents and claim to be more radical in his efforts to protect and defend the community than the younger political 'intellectuals' who are challenging him. But his bid for leadership failed. And a new leadership, consisting of some of his former opponents re-organised as LURD. As we shall see, moral ethnicity, in terms of bottom-up pressures did not become as significant factor a factor in LURD mobilisation as it did in ULIMO because the context of exclusion was not as severe. Thus, Mandingo support for LURD was not as significant in comparison to ethnic support for ULIMO.

Conclusion

The above approach shows that horizontal inequalities had two main results in the Liberian war. The first is the classic effect where inter-ethnic violent struggles break out; this has been much analysed in the literature in terms of leadership factionalism. The second is the less understood internal effect where violent struggles emerge from pressures within individual ethnic groups that are not limited to inter-generational conflict. This study emphasises some of the important ways in which internal

dynamics interacts with a context of severe political, cultural and socio-economic horizontal inequalities to generate violent group mobilisation. Violent group mobilisation in the late 20th century Liberia was a consequence of the destabilising interaction of variable configuration of horizontal inequalities with ethnically constitutive social relations and cultural ideas of the past. Grievances about severe external marginalisation intermingled with internal arguments about unfulfilled moral expectations and obligations to motivate violent group mobilisation. The Liberian case suggests that greater attention must be paid to ethnic thought and how histories of venerated pasts are deployed to respond to severe, subversive horizontal inequalities.

3 – The historical creation of moral communities

Introduction

By the early 20th century, the designations Gio, Mano and Mandingo already existed as self-professed communities. Even though they were re-organised under Americo-Liberian Settler rule, these identities were not entirely products of Settler ‘colonial’ invention. There was some idea of being Gio or Mano or Mandingo that had been constructed by indigenous Africans before indirect rule was officially introduced in 1904. The purpose of this chapter is to reconstruct their moral economies on the eve of Settler ‘colonial’ rule. It will trace the development of closer relations between bands of migrants (circa 1500s-1800s); the ecological and political contexts that generated norms and values of moral economy between them; the distinctive ideas that have shaped the terms of ethnic inclusion and exclusion as Gio, Mano and Mandingo, and early political organisation and popularising of Gio and Mano identities in the state.

The main argument is that these ethnicities were forms of political thought that could become engaged in moral argument, particularly when their way of life was potentially threatened.¹ They were not just social organisations, as emphasised in ethnography and historical literature.² Gio and Mano in particular engaged in early political organisation to protect moral community in the face of potential threats—from the Settler ‘colonial’ conjuncture—by appealing to renditions of past standard. The historical backdrop provided in this chapter illuminates some of the main ideas of the moral that were mobilised in the civil war.

¹ This is similar to: Roberts, 1976, p. 65.

² See for example: S. E. Holsoe, 1977; S. E. Holsoe & Lauer, 1976.

To investigate the past moral economies of Gio, Mano and Mandingo, emphasis will be placed on one core symbol of their identities: the kola nut.³ Informants stress the evocative and symbolic power of this caffeine-containing nut in the period before Settler rule. Gio and Mano, in particular, speak of kola production and exchange as an ancestral practice that fundamentally shaped their settlement, adaptation and social life as moral communities.⁴ Mandingo migrant-traders, who settled among the Gio and Mano, maintained a distinctive sense of identity from their hosts as kola merchants. Ethnographies and written histories confirm that kola production and commerce occurred centuries ago (circa 1500s-1800s) among migrant populations who settled in the forest regions of Nimba.⁵ Focusing on accounts of kola cultivation and trade in narratives of the past will, therefore, provide insights into emergence of inclusive identities between them.

As discussed in the previous chapter, my approach to analysing creation of moral economy by Gio/Mano and Mandingo migrants is informed by the ‘wealth-in-people’ conception of pre-colonial society.⁶ The term describes the widespread practice of treating followers—such as children, wives, clients, and slaves—as value in pre-colonial African societies.⁷ I draw on Guyer and Belinga to argue that past Gio, Mano and Mandingo societies were involved in similar accumulation processes of wealth-in-people because of the significance of dynamics of kinship and demographic acquisition of people through procreation, polygyny, servitude and clientship arrangements. As mentioned, Gio and Mano were agrarian and territorial, whereas the

³ Kola nuts are the caffeinated seedpods of various evergreen trees common to West Africa. They were introduced to the region from the West Indies and Brazil. Historically considered to possess medicinal properties, kola nuts were the only available stimulant that Islam did not condemn. Therefore, the spread of Islam in the Savannah region of West Africa from the 9th century onwards, contributed to an increase in the trade in kola: Lovejoy, 1980, p. 2.

⁴ This is corroborated by: Ford, 1992.

⁵ See for example: Ford, 1992. Riddell, 1970.

⁶ The concept’s initial development focused on Equatorial Africa but it is generally applicable to the Upper Guinea Coast.

⁷ Guyer & Belinga, 1995, p. 92.

Mandingo was mercantilist and dispersed. They had different priorities for accumulating wealth-in-people. Gio/Mano emphasised wealth-in-people as the capacity of manual labour resources to enlarge agricultural production, while the Mandingo emphasised wealth-in-people as the amalgamation of converts to Islam and competencies to increase 'profit'. To draw out these differences, I formulate the terminology of 'agrarian accumulation' for the Gio and Mano, and 'mercantilist accumulation' for the Mandingo. These different types of accumulating wealth-in-people were controlled by distinct moral economies, particularly around legitimacy and leadership.

These can be summarised as follows: the Gio and Mano were a fragmented peoples, primarily organised into segments of lineages. These segments were created by the manual labour of cultivating kola for small local markets and subsistence produce. Their political culture was formed not only in production but also in war. Both required galvanising the 'hard work' of manual labour to cultivate the forests, to police settlements, and to gain control over people and territory. Moreover, individual households could not meet their labour requirements for subsistence, growth and security. They had to band together with other households to form village and town settlements. Leadership and organised co-operation among subordinated dependents and those who claimed rights-in-people was, therefore, considered a public good because of the common welfare it provided. They formed social trust through exchange of labour and deference for patronage and protection. The way in which these were discharged brought the moral reward of civic virtue.

Their moral economy subjected individual ambition to agrarian discipline and ethics of communal service under 'landowners' (*sehdeng* in Gio) and 'big men' (also known as 'wealthy person' or *boumehn* in Gio). Social relations were characterised by

a form of serfdom in which subordinates that occupied settlement lands worked for custodian-‘landlords’ and ‘big men’. Labour service was provided in anticipation of reciprocal support and the moral reward of esteem. Their labour brought usufruct rights to property. It also brought kola, which served as an important currency for moral and material exchanging such as brides, goods, esteem among others. I conceptualise this moral economy as ‘agrarian-welfare serfdoms’.

Accumulation of wealth-in-people with the capacity of manual labour brought great benefits to the ‘chiefly class’ of ‘landlords’ and ‘big men’. But, ordinary people shaped the criteria of leadership by which they would be dominated. In Gio and Mano moral economy of leadership, those with wealth were expected to take care of the welfare of their labourers/dependents. Ordinary people expected to share in the wealth of affluence of their patrons whose authority functioned by redistributing privileges such as property. Leaders had a social responsibility to redistribute to meet the immediate needs of dependents and provide protections for hard times. Mano informants referred to this form of benevolent leadership as *dormi*. Leaders who failed to meet these expectations were delegitimised. They suffered a damaged reputation and the loss of followers to their rivals. Gio and Mano political economies in the pre-state era were, thus, driven by ideas of reciprocal support for common welfare rather than individual maximisation.

In contrast to the Gio and Mano, the Mandingo in Liberia were—and are—a diaspora people. While some formed local settlements through conquest in places such as present-day Lofa others trickled in as itinerant and immigrant traders. They partnered to overcome difficulties associated with long-distance trade in territories where local societies had carved out economic fortes. Their political culture was primarily formed through common economic interest and adherence to Islam. Long

distance travel to carve out trade niches required the public good of protection and trust to maintain valuable trade secrets, places of refreshment for itinerants and the like. Traders formed lineage-based trade networks defined by commercial trust and ethics of Islam. The network provided the public good of market expertise and knowledge, protection, partnerships, hosts and the like. Accumulation of wealth-in-people with skills and competencies for trade brought great benefits to leading merchants of trading households and lineages. Their moral economy relied on religious commitment to manage selfish-ambition. They traced common descent to powerful kings and places. They recalled a past in which great leaders led a pre-eminent Mandingo community in the region. Their culture brought together dynastic past with an itinerant commercial network.

The traders shared an idea of ‘possessive individualism’ where individuals maximised ‘profit’.⁸ But Islam shaped the criteria of wealth and power. Their leadership moral economy emphasised the criteria of reputation and knowledge skills. Those with wealth were expected to show benevolence towards the community of faith and their trade brotherhood. It drew on Islamic notions of accountability, where a leader was obligated to promote good order. Authority functioned by offering opportunities to upstarts and dependents that provided their particular skills and abilities for advancement in trade; it encouraged the reproduction of social ties (through bonds of obligation). There was an expectation that those with wealth will create opportunities for commerce through for instance ethical lending, and promote religious knowledge through Islamic education. These were measured through reputation, and enhanced the dignity of the moral community of believers in the eyes of outsiders. Decision-making in the diaspora required a degree of public opinion to

⁸ See: Macpherson, 1962.

be enforceable; it could be obtained through consensus from religious elders with regional authority over the relatively autonomous groups in the network. Mandingo political economy in the pre-state era was, thus, driven by ethics of Islam, which moderated individual conduct.

The chapter draws on narrative accounts of informants and key ethnographic and historical sources to reconstruct the Gio/Mano and Mandingo pasts.⁹ It is divided into three main sections. The first section focuses on the Gio and Mano. It provides an overview of their contemporary political organisation. This will be followed by tracing their historical settlement in the forests of Nimba as agrarian kola cultivators, the processes of accumulation they pursued, and the moral thought that shaped their imagination as a community of ethnic belonging. The second section discusses the early political organisation of the Gio and Mano. It will show that this was driven from within by perceived threats to their way of life at the time of the Settler intrusion. The third, and final, section traces the arrival of Mandingo people as migrant traders, the processes of accumulation they pursued, and the moral thought that shaped their evolution into a diaspora community of ethnic belonging. The chapter concludes with a summary of its main findings.

The Gio and Mano Peoples

The Gio and Mano of Liberia are Mande-speaking peoples. The Mano trace their proper nomenclature to a great ancestor who was called Mah.¹⁰ During the period of Settler indirect rule, Kpelle government officials referred to the Māh-mia (Māh

⁹ It is important to note that the poor quality of studies before the 1950s has created a dearth of ethnographic and historical discussion about the indigenous Liberian past. This makes it difficult to trace an accurate reality of the indigenous groups under study.

¹⁰ Dr Nya Taryor, Personal Notes on the Māh and Dan, provided in an e-mail exchange. On file with author.

people) as Mah nũ (Mah people in Kpelle). This transformed into Mahno and the present version, Mano. Similarly, the Gio consider Danpomehn (Dan speaking people) from which the short form Dan is derived, to be their proper nomenclature. The Mano historically referred to the Gio as Gee-mia (Gee people).¹¹ Over time they became known as the Gio people. They were officially reclassified as Gio by the Settler government.¹² Within each nomenclature there is a shared sense of affinity derived from notions of shared descent, evident in common language, myths of origin, and culture.

Gio and Mano perceive themselves as two distinct, but closely inter-related communities with similar moral economies. As one Gio ex-combatant put it: “The Gios and the Manos are very close; they are like cousins.”¹³ In their various oral histories, Gio and Mano share a common mythological origin. In one account, Māh was the son of a mythological ancestor called Zã; Zã was also the father of the Gio people.¹⁴ Another mythological account trace Gio and Mano ancestry to two brothers who migrated from the Malian regions to the Nimba area with their families several centuries before the arrival of the Settlers.¹⁵

The historical record suggests that the settlement of Gio and Mano peoples in Nimba resulted from the westward migration of Mande-speaking populations towards the forested coast, after the disintegration of the Mali Empire in the 15th century. Waves of migrations occurred between the period of 1450 and 1650, and continued until the colonial intrusion in the early 20th century.¹⁶ Contemporary narratives trace

¹¹ Ford, 1990, p. 95.

¹² This is corroborated by: Schwab & Harley, 1947, pp. 79-80.

¹³ Interview, Stanley, Buduburam, 29 December 2010.

¹⁴ Dr Nya Taryor, Personal Notes on the Māh and Dan, provided in an e-mail exchange. See also: Paramount Chief Toweh’s singer in 1926, as recorded by: Schwab & Harley, 1947, p. 13.

¹⁵ Interview, Saye G., Cuttington, 8th March 2014. See also: Souvenir Magazine published by the Sub-committee on Souvenir Magazine for the 163rd National Independence Anniversary Celebration held in Sanniquellie City, 26 July, 2010, 10-11.

¹⁶ Nimba County Development Committee, 2008-2012, p. 1.

the passage of Gio peoples through present-day Ivory Coast and Mano peoples through present-day Guinea.¹⁷ Gio migrants settled astride the current border between Ivory Coast and Liberia, while Mano migrants settled across the present border between Guinea and Liberia. The historical pattern of their settlement resulted in their current geographic distribution in Nimba.

Creation of moral communities from kola cultivation

The oral accounts of all 32 Gio and Mano informants from a variety of backgrounds and ages ranging from 20s to 80s suggest that the sense of distinctive Gio and Mano identities was socially constructed through the conceptual negotiation of norms and values between people of unequal status in forest ecology of kola cultivation. Kola trees bore fruit—that grew in pods containing three to twelve nuts—within seven years of planting.¹⁸ Production of kola involved shifting cultivation that induced frequent mobility in a difficult terrain requiring labour power to navigate and subdue nature.¹⁹ However, kola trees continued to produce bountiful seasonal harvests for several decades; these production sites formed part of farming cycles.²⁰ The order in which people arrived at a place shaped their social relations. Land was abundant in the forests, but people to cultivate and protect land were scarce. People were considered assets because they were could translate into resource, power and labour in a measurable demographic process. Organising and reproducing a sturdy increase in the number of able-bodied people became an important part of social life in the forest. A pattern of ‘agrarian accumulation’ of demographic wealth developed, with an

¹⁷ Interview, Focus Group, Bahn, 19th March 2014. Interview, Stanley, Buduburam, 29 December 2010. This is also corroborated by scholarly accounts such as: Ford, 1990.

¹⁸ Lovejoy, 1980, p. 2.

¹⁹ Interview, Dorr, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

²⁰ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 107.

associated morality.²¹ Agrarian identities emerged that valued the ‘hard work’ of labour and the prowess of warriors to increase labourers and defend territorial integrity.²² Their way of life was governed by the respect accorded to those who had the means, skills, and ‘hard work’ needed to meet the mutual obligations for thriving in the forests.

Bands of mobile kola cultivators

Although precise dates are not offered, Gio and Mano informants trace their development as agrarian peoples to the waves of migrations that occurred between the period of 15th and 17th centuries, which continued into the 20th century.²³ Bands of migrants developed closer ties through subsistence cultivation—particularly the cultivation of kola.²⁴ Oral history of the Zawolo family from Kpein, Saclepea-Mah district, as presented to me by a Mano informant from the family, is illustrative:

My grandfather explained to me that our ancestors came from somewhere around the Mali area going down into Guinea and then entering Nimba through the Ganta area and then subsequently in the Kpein area. It happened sometime before the creation of the Liberian state.... Initially they were nomadic people. They were people who actually were moving... growing kola in the forest. But eventually they [joined] a group of people to settle...with the mixture from all the other people from that area, it transformed [into] what we normally would call the Mano tribe today.²⁵

Zawolo’s account is representative of how most of my Mano and Gio informants narrated their settlement history—as an alliance of migrants. They suggest that following the break-up of the Mali Empire the gradual movement of Mande migrants towards the coast reflected a savannah-forest rotation. Eventually, the immigrants

²¹ Interview, Elder Guannu, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

²² Interview, Focus Group, Monrovia, 19th March 2008. See for example: McEvoy, 1977, p. 66.

²³ Interview, Focus group, Buduburam, 11th January 2011.

²⁴ Interview, Focus group, Buduburam, 11th January 2011.

²⁵ Interview, Zawolo, 11th February 2014.

banded together as small communities to cultivate crops such as kola; some informants note that they also engaged in hunting and river fishing.

Working the difficult terrain for kola became one of the key ways in which common culture was cultivated among disparate migrants before the advent of the state.²⁶ Gio elders in the town of Bahn, ranging between the ages of 60s and 90s, whose parents witnessed the advent of Settler ‘colonial’ rule in Nimba narrated that:

[We were] from different branches before we c[a]me together. You get your own kola farm to where you coming from. The town that you coming from [that was] where you plant your kola. The cocoa just come; [in those days] that was kola. *They live[d] by kola* [my emphasis].²⁷

Similarly, a quarter chief in the town stated that: “that the kola you see so, that heavy”, meaning it is of great significance in the local culture.²⁸ The historical record also supports this view. Kola cultivation became so intimately connected to the fostering of Gio and Mano culture,²⁹ so much so that Chevalier and Perrot have argued that the Gio became, “attached to the soil by the cultivation of kola trees.”³⁰ Ford also suggests that, “the [Gio and Mano] customs related to kola production, the rituals, affect, symbolism, the very age of some stands of kola, all suggest that this occurred centuries ago.”³¹ As we shall see, the migrants forged a basis of social trust through kola cultivation.

Kola nut became an important symbol of exchange in social transactions. It was the main farm yield that was used to exchange labour value with other goods. For instance, large portions of harvested kola were used as exchange value to barter for

²⁶ Interview, Zawolo, 11th February 2014; Interview, Karzah, Bahn, 19th March 2014; Interview, Dot, Tubmanburg, 5th April 2009.

²⁷ Interview, Focus Group, Bahn, 19th March 2014.

²⁸ Interview, Chief Bero II, Bahn, 19th March 2014.

²⁹ Kay, 1984, pp. 37-42.

³⁰ Chevalier & Perrot, 1911, p. 167. Their publication is considered one of the most definitive studies of kola production for West Africa.

³¹ Ford, 1992, p. 60.

basic necessities such as clothes and salt.³² Transferring kola between a man and a woman's family was used to seal marriage. Contemporary generations of Gio and Mano have become noted for saying that "our [fore]fathers married us with Kola" because kola was used as exchange value to purchase bride wealth.³³ Kola plantation brought respect to household heads. Abandoned villages continued to remain as kola groves to which owners could return to farm kola nuts.³⁴ It was—and still is—regarded as a symbol of peace and blessing.³⁵ Kola trees were planted in household compounds, near villages, and as a memorial on graveyards.

The migrants are thought to have developed into mobile agrarian communities, partly through the cultivation of kola. This is corroborated by the academic history. James Riddell and Martin Ford suggest that the rotational nature of kola agricultural activities encouraged mobility as farmers sought new areas for cultivation during changes in seasons.³⁶ Shifting kola cultivators had to relocate farms. In places where kola was planted subsistence farming through bush fallowing and slash and burn practices was forbidden. The process of kola cultivation contributed to Gio and Mano mobility in the forest as the groves reduced the proportion of land available for cultivating staple foods like rice and cassava.³⁷ Migrant households, therefore, had to move in search of arable land to cultivate kola and food.

In part, frequent mobility did not permit bands of migrants to form state organisation with a monopoly of leadership. Kola producers were fragmented into several relatively autonomous village/town settlements organised according to

³² Interview, Tuago, Tubmanburg, 28 April 2009. See also: Ford, 1992, p. 57.

³³ Ford, 1992, p. 59.

³⁴ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 107.

³⁵ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 107.

³⁶ Riddell, 1970. Ford, 1992.

³⁷ Kay, 1984, p. 45.

common taboos (*tian* in Gio), founding ancestors, and homelands.³⁸ While travelling through Nimba in 1870, Benjamin Anderson observed that “I now saw that I was traversing a portion of the country cut up into small independent communities, not over one or two hours walk from each other...with every village kingdom of a dozen huts.”³⁹ These settlements were characterised by internal lineage-based divisions (now referred to as quarters) unified and distinguished from each other by a variety of principles or idioms, including patrilineal descent.⁴⁰

Orders of arrival and land relations

Informants suggest that the orders in which people arrived at a locality shaped their social relations to land.⁴¹ It involved a division between a secular ‘chiefly class’ of first-comer landowners on the one hand and latecomer land users on the other. Informants suggest that first-comer migrants who gained rights to control territorial lands were able to establish their leadership over later migrants. For instance, Zawolo recounted that:

I been told by my grandparents, my line of family we belong to a kingly or chiefly class [in Kpein]. It came from the acquisition of wealth. With more wealth they were able to exert influence on others and then establish themselves as leaders and then they just pass it from generation to generation.⁴²

The founders of a settlement were known as the ‘landowners’ (*sehdeng* in Gio).⁴³ In theory, *Sehdeng* always lived in the original settlement of the first comer lineage.⁴⁴ In

³⁸ Ford, 1990, p. 95.

³⁹ B. J. K. Anderson & Starr, 1912, p. 14. See also: Person, 1968.

⁴⁰ Interview, Wadeazuwo, Bahn, 19th March 2014. This is corroborated by Ford’s account of the Gio: Ford, 1990, pp. 97-98.

⁴¹ Interview, Wadeazuwo, Bahn, 19th March 2014. This is corroborated by Riddell’s account of the Mano: Riddell, 1970, pp. 27, 74.

⁴² Interview, Zawolo, 11 February 2014.

⁴³ Interview, Wilson, Monrovia, 22nd April 2009. See also: Ford, 1990, p. 105.

⁴⁴ Interview, Wilson, Monrovia, 22nd April 2009. See also: Ford, 1990, p. 106.

his capacity as landowner, a *Sehdeng* became the head of his village/town, lineage, and household.

Orders of arrival also contributed to specific ideas and norms of property ownership and use. All the *Sehdeng*'s dependents were entitled to use land under his control. Latecomers were granted limited land rights in his capacity as stranger-father (host-father of strangers). Latecomers could depend on their labour value to acquire usufruct rights to land.⁴⁵

According to [oral history], when they [specified as new migrants] came in they would work for the people who they met in the area. They would work for certain years as kola farmers, and based on their work and productivity they give them certain wealth [rights] in the land, they would give them cattle, [and] things that they could use for clearing the bush. So they did actually work to earn whatever they had.⁴⁶

Exchange relations were shaped by status in orders of arrival. Newcomer migrants were able to negotiate their integration into these decentralised economies, as well as the terms of their subordination. They were initially enlisted as clients. Members of the 'chiefly class', such as the Zawolos, incorporated latecomer lineages as settlers through 'attachment' and patron-client exchanges. They entered into property relations with latecomers by allotting estates for them to reside in and for their households to conduct their subsistence and productive activities.⁴⁷ The transfer of livestock and other goods could be used as currency to compensate the labourers for their hard work. Crucially, unequal terms of exchange between the 'chiefly class' and labour were accepted on the basis that those who worked would earn "certain wealth". For instance, they could gain rights to land through years of work or "clearing the bush" because the labour expended in kola production was considered valuable.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Interview, Tukupah, Buduburam, 11th January 2011.

⁴⁶ Interview, Zawolo, 11th February 2014.

⁴⁷ Interview, Focus group, Buduburam, 13th January 2011.

⁴⁸ Interview, Zawolo, 11th February 2014.

Kola cultivation created a standard of civic virtue against which labour could measure their esteem. This is because it did not just demonstrate an individual's material value, but it also demonstrated their moral value. Success in kola cultivation was accompanied by material wealth that could be exchanged for basic need. In terms of moral value, it showed one's "hard work" or self-discipline in domesticating the forest; this is what brought people personal esteem.⁴⁹ This is similar to Kikuyu moral economy described by Lonsdale.⁵⁰ Unlike Kikuyu labour theory, however, investing human labour with land through kola production did not necessarily give ownership rights to the farmer, but it established property relations with the landlord because it gave them property rights to what the land produced. Its moral basis was the expended "hard work".⁵¹ Adding labour to land also brought usufruct, as opposed to possessory rights to land. Clients were able to negotiate usufruct rights to land through their labour in "clearing the bush" as Zawolo's account suggests. The general moral economy of Gio and Mano can be summarised as follows:

[I]ndividuals also strove to achieve, to set themselves apart from their peers...[t]hrough achievement or "making a name"...all advancement was achieved either with the aid, the blessing, or at least the sufferance of, one's elders.⁵²

The above quote suggests that apart from social insurance, the ethics of communal service to an elder brought esteem. Their moral economy subjected individual ambition to agrarian discipline and ethics of communal service. Individual ambition (or hard work) was admired in the context of deference to elders, such as *sehdeng*.⁵³

Apart from the desire to find arable cultivation sites, mobility of kola producers was partly induced by the desire to gain status as 'landowners' by starting

⁴⁹ Interview, Stanley, Buduburam, 29th December 2010. Interview, Nya Taryor, 15th February 2014.

⁵⁰ John Lonsdale, 1992, p. 334.

⁵¹ Interview, Stanley, Buduburam, 29th December 2010. Interview, Nya Taryor, 15th February 2014.

⁵² Ford, 1990, pp. 109-110.

⁵³ Ford, 1990, p. 110.

new settlements. A *sehdeng*'s status as leader was limited to people who lived on the land they controlled. It did not extend to new settlements as their founders also gained status as *sehdeng*.⁵⁴ Ford writes that "every man's ambition was to have a village named after him" by moving with dependents to start a new settlement.⁵⁵ If it prospered he gained more people who migrated to join the settlement. The position of *Sehdeng* could be inherited as it was based on the notion of orders of arrival. But individual households that started new settlements could not easily meet their labour requirements for subsistence, growth and security. They had to band together with other households to grow into viable village and town settlements for any length of time.

Processes of accumulating wealth-in-people

All Gio and Mano informants interviewed for this study related that the pre-Settler period was characterised by low population density. This implies labour scarcity, which together with the need for subsistence. It created a political economy of wealth-in-people.⁵⁶ Three processes of 'agrarian accumulation' of wealth-in-people can be distinguished: kinship/lineage, gerontocratic and cliental. First, under kinship/lineage 'agrarian accumulation', family heads increased and organised the number of people who cultivated kola through procreation and marriage. The significance of women in producing labour surplus, children, and clients (through for example damages for adultery and provision of male labourers from male concubine arrangements in which a woman took a lover with the consent of her husband) has been emphasised in the

⁵⁴ Interview, Dahn, Dahn Village, 19th March 2014. See also: Ford, 1990, p. 106.

⁵⁵ Interview, Karzah, Bahn, 19th March 2014. See also: Ford, 1990, p. 104.

⁵⁶ See Bledsoe, 1980; Guyer, 1993.

literature on indigenous groups.⁵⁷ Ford also provides an account of women as agents of reproduction, production and advancement in past Gio society.⁵⁸ Generally, family labour of all forms was essential to the production of kola.

A division between elders and juniors characterised lineage accumulation. Elders mobilised the labour of household juniors for cultivation. It was justified through the patrimonial culture of gerontocracy.⁵⁹ Deference to elders increased production of kola; it also taught hard work. Productivity brought kola wealth, it showed hard work and farming skill, and earned individuals and families esteem. It could also be used for the benefit of juniors. For instance, youthful male juniors were expected to give labour in to produce kola that could be exchanged as bride wealth. More importantly family labour gave deference in exchange for subsistence and future rights to control ancestral patrimony.

Elders were considered as custodians of land, depending on their status in the ranked lineages. Juniors in a lineage did not have control rights to land until they achieved the status of seniority as elders. Land was inherited by generational seniority. In his capacity as a quarter chief, one Mano informant explained that: “My land in my quarter belongs to me and my children, and my children’s children, my cousin, my nieces, my nephews.” A succeeding generation assumed ownership rights “after the death of the [older] people”. Until then, the younger generations were given “the right to use it to any extent except that [they were required not to] cause trouble for others.”⁶⁰

Second, under gerontocratic ‘agrarian accumulation’ elders increased and mobilised communal labour resources, beyond the limits of the household or lineage,

⁵⁷ Gibbs Jr., 1965. Bledsoe, 1980, p. 51.

⁵⁸ Ford, 1990, pp. 117-122.

⁵⁹ W. Murphy & Bledsoe, 1987.

⁶⁰ Interview, Elder Guannu, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

through initiation-based secret societies. The *Pororo* society, which I focus on, has been the common male initiation society of the Mano.⁶¹ It was adopted through interaction with neighbouring societies. *Pororo* means, “of the earth, pertaining to or having to do with the earth or ground”.⁶² Historically, the *Pororo* did not have political power to rule, but it had moral influence through sacred authority. The location of a *Pororo* School (or Grove) was in a secret location in the forest.⁶³ Its primary function was as an educational institution for the initiation of ‘youth’ into adulthood. ‘Boys’ were brought to the school by their sponsors and graduated as men. Entry into the *Pororo* School was voluntary and by circumcision and administration of oaths. Non-initiates continued to be considered boys or ‘youth’. Boys could not own property, marry or be convicted of a crime.⁶⁴ Graduates were considered ‘real tribesmen’ with certain privileges.⁶⁵

Pororo initiation served as a means of accumulating the labour of ‘youth’. It was used to mobilise community labour to cultivate wealth. Both men and women’s roles in generating wealth and producing labour from the trade they learned during initiation in brought them respect.⁶⁶ *Pororo* training introduced initiates to a trade. These skills became a means to self-mastery and recognition with the community. A Mano informant from Ganta explained that:

The *Pororo* is an ancestral way of worship and way of life; it is a culture by itself. They consider it everyone who is born in this tribe must do. It was used as a school as well. Those days our people very few were allowed to go to school. Like most of the educated people in the sixties were educated by a church organisation. The way they went to school was to go in the *Pororo* society and some people spend two years there, some people spend three years in the *Pororo*

⁶¹ The female initiation society of both the Gio and Mano has been *Sande* society. The unifying male sodality among the Gio has been the *Gbon*: Interview, Dr Saye Guannu, Cuttington University, Nimba County, 8th March 2014.

⁶² Schwab & Harley, 1947, p. 267.

⁶³ Interview, Focus group, Buduburam, 11th January 2011. See also: Schwab & Harley, 1947, p. 276.

⁶⁴ Schwab & Harley, 1947, p. 280.

⁶⁵ Interview, Saye, Salala, 1st May 2009. See also: Schwab & Harley, 1947, pp. 274-282.

⁶⁶ John Lonsdale, 1992, p. 327.

society. It brings you recognition within your community. When a lady went in the *Poro*...she also learn how to fishing, she learn how to cook, she learn how to take care of home, when she come from the *Poro* she ready for marriage [that raises her status]. When you go to the *Poro* before you come from there as a man you know how to make trap, you know how to fishing, you know how to climb the palm nut tree and cut palm nuts, you know how to fix palm wine, you know how to do everything to take care of a woman, and to make your contribution in the society. Besides all that it like you came out with a certificate and the certificate you have will be the mark that you got on you. If I tell anybody that I went in the *Poro* bush they will ask me to show my identity and the identity will be where they mark me. This is our symbol. It's like this is what we all hold to. I mean that's our common solidarity.⁶⁷

This passage suggests a close relationship of initiation, inculcating the notion of self-mastery through hard work, and achievement in agricultural activities. This is reminiscent of Kikuyu moral ethnicity to the extent that both men and women's roles in generating wealth and producing labour from the trade they learned earned them civic virtue.⁶⁸ *Poro* elders provided resources to give them a start in manhood.⁶⁹ Through *Poro* initiation, 'youth' were not only taught a trade, they were also taught deference. James Gibbs explains that "[t]he fear and respect for authority and the awe and deference to the great societies as an institution are inculcated during ...initiation."⁷⁰ *Poro* played an important role in social reproduction by creating dependency by interweaving secular and sacred patronage.⁷¹ In this way, the conception of Gio and Mano identity difference overlapped with religious identity.

Crucially, secret societies such as the *Poro* guarded Gio and Mano specialisation as kola producers by preventing un-initiated 'strangers' and potential competitors such as the Mandingo from accessing kola production areas.⁷² They were only allowed to trade in designated market sites. Located deep in the forests,

⁶⁷ Interview, Jefferson, Gbarnga, 30th April 2009.

⁶⁸ John Lonsdale, 1992, p. 327.

⁶⁹ Richards & al, 2005, p. 20.

⁷⁰ See for example: Gibbs Jr., 1965, p. 221.

⁷¹ Interview, Focus Group, Tubmanburg, 29th April 2009. See also: William Murphy, 1980.

⁷² Ford, 1990, p. 61.

production sites were treated like internal ‘trade secrets’ from outsiders.⁷³ Kola was carried to designated market places away from production sites to trade with ‘others’. Gblei and Bapa were prominent Mano markets; but Telo—the first market place for the Gio—became an ethnic frontline market for both Gio and Mano.⁷⁴ It was inhabited by Gbo-Gio who commonly intermarried with Mano communities.⁷⁵ From the early 1900s, Telo became a central kola market for Mandingo migrant traders.⁷⁶

Third, and finally, under cliental ‘agrarian accumulation’, patrons sought clients through the exchange of patronage for labour value. Labour was procured through agreement and warfare.⁷⁷ Followers were mainly recruited by agreement through voluntary ‘attachment’. The ritual cow feast described by informants and corroborated by Ford is illustrative.⁷⁸ The ritual cow feast served as a prominent means to deprive people of their followers. The Shorthorn cow was a prized possession and symbol of material affluence among the Gio and Mano. This was partly because they were the breed of cattle with the longest survival rate in the Nimba forest. Apart from kola, these were useful as bride wealth and compensation for serious crimes. However, they were slaughtered only on ritual occasions to mark significant events such as harvests and coming of age ceremonies. Invitations were distributed to a wide variety of people. It was seen as a gesture of benevolence, which increased the reputation of the feast holder. It also demonstrated a chief’s control over resources. This could attract followers of less endowed and benevolent peers through subversion.⁷⁹

⁷³ Interview, Omarkson, Tubmanburg, 9th April 2009.

⁷⁴ Ford, 1990, pp. 152, 155.

⁷⁵ Ford, 1990, p. 153.

⁷⁶ Interview, Dot, Tubmanburg, 5th April 2009. See also: Ford, 1990, p. 155.

⁷⁷ B. J. K. Anderson, 1870, p. 86.

⁷⁸ Ford offers a description of this in: Ford, 1990, pp. 111-112.

⁷⁹ Meillassoux, 1978, p. 143.

The porous borders of aggregations of cultivators also received successive bands of disparate migrant groups as clients. Informants' emphasise that households commonly enlisted external support through clientship to increase their labour supply and wealth. Clients produced wealth for the lineages they became attached to. They also expected to be rewarded for their work. Labour procured through warfare was engaged through various forms of servitude. A powerful slave could rise through the ranks to become a chief.⁸⁰ Slaves could also become incorporated at the household level through marriage.⁸¹ Slaves were considered commodities and labourers. But they too could become incorporated into a community and improve their status through their prowess as powerful warriors. Marriage played a key role in this change of status. A patrimonial leader could give their daughter's hand in marriage to a powerful warrior. Powerful warriors earned respect from their reputation.

Warfare was a common occurrence and important means of obtaining followers. The warrior (*kruah* in Gio) played a prominent role in these. They were typical clients to political chiefs; some became chiefs through their success in warfare. They were granted wives to found their own settlements. These could also usurp the position of a chief. Warriors were commonly 'employed' to subjugate bordering settlements to gain more people. Cooper recounted that:

At the time our people used to fight people to gain territory. They used to fight and so if you have somebody here who is very powerful such a person becomes automatically the leader of the community, and this man is your hero. He will go and wage war against the other community; he will go and capture that particular place.

This implies that wealth-in-people involved different levels of dependency, which could be negotiated through a variety of achievements, as successful warriors could

⁸⁰ Little, 1967, pp. 38-39.

⁸¹ Ferme, 2001, p. 84.

negotiate their entry into the chiefly level to become leaders of conquered settlements.

Similarly, the elders at Bahn expressed that:

When the people fight war, and the people kill and throw white chicken [as a sign of surrender]...then when the [conquering] people come, any place they [occupy] they will leave somebody there to control [territory]...to show that the place for them.]⁸²

The primary aim of conquest was to extend control of wealth-in-people who were cultivators, to gain a stake in their production. As Cooper put it: “at the time whatever you do automatically was for the chief. So whatever that is cultivated from the land is brought to the king’s palace or in the rich man home”.⁸³ The people that were conquered became the slaves/labourers of the victors. But, these captives were considered to continue to “work for their selves” as denying them of a means to subsistence was seen as tantamount to “condemn[ing] me that I not human being”.⁸⁴

Even though they had lost ownership rights to the land, capture and integration meant:

They doing the work which they done before, but at the end of the day they must report... at least one cup of rice they bring it for you, they say *father* [my emphasis] this one is for you. So when [traders] buy the kola from [the labourers] like this. Whatever they give him he brings it to the one who conquer. Sometime when they come, sometime they can divide it they say, “This one here that you the one over there for you and your group them.” Whether you can give it to the group *woo*, you can’t give it to the group *woo*, that one there [is up to the leader]. [The rationale was that] You see when you conquer somebody, you see, they need to respect you [or show deference] This thing here that two head work together...exchange. You conquer my area but you still let me still to work, but the land is not for me because you conquer me but I have right to do my work. When I work then I bring something I say take small.... Now when time hard for me. Because of what I been giving you, I can always come back again because of what I been giving you. You will still give it.⁸⁵

This suggests that newly subjugated dependents saw their subordination as negotiating a return on their labour products as well as some form of social insurance for subsequent hard times. Crucially, this patronage from their new ‘masters’, in the

⁸² Interview, Focus Group, Bahn, 19th March 2014.

⁸³ Interview, Dorr, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

⁸⁴ Interview, Chief Bero II, Bero Quarter, Bahn, 19th March 2014.

⁸⁵ Interview, Focus Group, Bahn, 19th March 2014

form of common property rights (albeit limited to usufruct rights to land) and whatever they received during hard times, gave them a chance at self-mastery and esteem.⁸⁶ As one informant put it: “Sometime you [the leader] get cow, then you say take my two three cow and raise it. Then that’s the place now you too can become *somebody* [my emphasis].”⁸⁷ These expectations were governed by the moral concept of social accountability. This suggests that leadership and organised co-operation among subordinated dependents and those who claimed rights-in-people was considered a public good because of the common welfare it provided.⁸⁸

Moral economy of leadership and legitimacy in the Gio and Mano past

From the above, wealth-in-people in past Gio and Mano societies corresponded to the distribution of power within particular types of social relationships, notably: ‘landowner’ and ‘land users’, patrons and clients, ‘youths’ and elders relations.⁸⁹ Gio and Mano informants commonly recounted that wealth-in-people became an important criterion of power or leadership. An example is the account of Cooper, the current Mayor of Ganta:

[One of the ways in which people became leaders was] how rich you were in terms of how many women you have how many children you have so you were perceived as the leader of that particular community.... There were people who were married to many women and then they had many children. Such people were, you know people used to work for them and that’s how they assumed leadership...because they are going to cultivate land for you...at the time they had kola nut as the major economic thing that they have...actually if you have more manpower, they go out and hunt, they get meat, and then you get [material wealth] out of it....⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Interview, Paul, Guthrie Plantation, 27th April 2009. This is corroborated by: D’Azevedo, 1962a, p. 509.

⁸⁷ Interview, Chief Bero II, Bero Quarter, Bahn, 19th March 2014.

⁸⁸ Interview, Wilson, Monrovia, 22nd April 2009.

⁸⁹ Cohen, p. 362.

⁹⁰ Interview, Dorr, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

This implies that they practiced a form of serfdom in which peasants were required to work for ‘landowners’. But Ordinary people shaped the criteria of leadership by which they would be dominated.

The *Sehdeng* was seen as a custodian of land, as opposed to an individual owner with total rights. This is partly because, as discussed above, those who worked the land gained rights to it. As owner, the *Sehdeng* bore social responsibility for its redistribution for the subsistence of his dependents, and the protection of their rights to the land. He received ritual deference in exchange for proper access to use land. It brought him moral authority. While they has some form of power in Gio and Mano societies, landowners were not necessarily political leaders. Their authority was generally limited to the land they controlled.

‘Big men’ known as *boumehn* in Gio (literally ‘wealthy person’) exercised political or chiefly authority over people in past Gio and Mano societies.⁹¹ *Bou* referred to material possessions including but not limited to land; *boumehn* possessed livestock, land, salt, clothes and the like. In the course of their travels through the hinterland in the early 1900s, Schwab & Harley observed that each settlement had its own chiefly authority.⁹² It was not uncommon for the same person to serve as both *Sehdeng* of a founding lineage and its big man.

The criteria for becoming a *bouman* were “hard work and generosity”.⁹³ These ‘Big men’ included those who had achieved status as warriors (*kruah* in Gio) and earned their own wealth-in-people. *Boumehn* demonstrated hard work through their possessions, but they were expected to redistribute through generosity to their followers. While the position of *sehdeng* could be inherited, a big man’s position could not be inherited, it was earned. The emphasis was achievement; this is

⁹¹ Interview, Karzah, Bahn, 19th March 2014. See also: Ford, 1990, p. 107.

⁹² Interview, Karzah, Bahn, 19th March 2014. See also: Schwab & Harley, 1947, p. 177.

⁹³ A detailed description of *Boumehn* can be obtained from: Ford, 1990, p. 107.

corroborated by Ford who likens it to the Western idea of personal or individual achievement without the notion of “self-made man”.⁹⁴ Social mobility as *boumehn* was achieved through the notion of community service.⁹⁵

The moral economy of reciprocity and loyalty was the main cultural source of a *boumehn*’s legitimacy, as opposed to authority to wield a monopoly of violence over a population or territory. This normative or ideological means of legitimising power involved “a set of expectations and obligations in reciprocity and exchange between dependents and patrons, constituting a cultural form of economic justice in these political relations.”⁹⁶ This political thought, which is common to the Upper Guinea Coast, has been historically displayed through various expressions, idioms, stories, and symbols in the local languages and cultures of the region.⁹⁷

Informants highlight that one such expression that shaped their political thought by setting the criterion for legitimising leadership is the concept of *dormi*. It denotes the reputation to protect and provide for dependents. The account of a Mano quarter chief and elder in Ganta, which is corroborated by other informants, suggests that deference to authority was maintained through the expectation of social accountability to ordinary people. From the social responsibility to redistribute, the Mano evolved the concept of *dormi*, for good leadership. A good leader was known as *dormi*. As one elder explained:

That the meaning we have in Mano, *dormi*. This one, *dormi*; it means my provider. If I’m a *dormi* when you come here, you gat any problem you come to me, then I direct you or I protect you, then I make provision for you. That [is] the meaning we have. When I *jamm* I come to you.... And, quite often when I do this then other people join in; besides the family [other people] come to me. That [is] what we call *dormi*. Another thing they did, if you were strong. Very strong indeed you will fight back. So when enemy come to attack you, you fight

⁹⁴ Ford, 1990, p. 107.

⁹⁵ Interview, A Saye, Salala, 15th May 2009. See also: Ford, 1990, p. 107.

⁹⁶ William Murphy, 2010, p. 40.

⁹⁷ William Murphy, 2010, p. 40.

them back. And this is actually how the town chief and other people became strong people....⁹⁸

Dormi brought legitimacy, honour, and more wealth-in-people. *Dormi* enabled ordinary people to gain the self-mastery of civic virtue by becoming “somebody” within the community.⁹⁹ Ford corroborates this; he writes that: “Elders invariably focus on the generosity of the *boumehn*, a characteristics that denoted virtue.... He was entitled to certain prerequisites, rice from the new harvest, labour on his wives’ farms, and portions of fish or game. Whereas a slave or pawn may have been compelled to offer tribute, others gave out of respect for his virtue and leadership...they were rendered in recognition of past hope and future gain.”¹⁰⁰ In exchange, he provided, refuge, land for residence and farming, women in marriage, and sometimes raised the children of his clients as his own.¹⁰¹ This form of relationship in which labour surplus is redistributed and converted into followers has been well documented in the ethnographic literature.¹⁰² Town/village leadership, for instance, was equated with redistribution of wealth and the ability to protect dependents, and a perceived failure to meet dependents needs could lead to the delegitimising and ouster of established leadership. In the same vein, lineages could become “extinct” when they no longer had powerful patrons to support them; in such instances they would become numerically reduced and compelled to “add themselves to other [more viable] quarter”.¹⁰³

This was perceived as a loss of esteem to the lineage and its leadership. According to Schwab and Harley, lineage heads ensured that a lineage’s “honour

⁹⁸ Interview, Elder Guannu Sr., Ganta, 18th March 2014.

⁹⁹ Interview, Elder Guannu Sr., Ganta, 18th March 2014.

¹⁰⁰ Ford, 1990, p. 114.

¹⁰¹ Interview, Dahn, Dahn Village, 19th March 2014. See also: Ford, 1990, p. 114.

¹⁰² For Liberia see for example: Bledsoe, 1976; Gibbs Jr., 1965. On the Kpelle. More generally see for example: Malinowski, 1922.

¹⁰³ Interview, Elder Guannu Sr., Ganta, 18th March 2014.

[was] upheld and that its pride [did] not suffer”; they were addressed as “the ‘big father’ that everyone [approached] for counsel, guidance and help”.¹⁰⁴ Members of a lineage could become subject to expulsion for “giving it a bad reputation” by their conduct. Household heads were also seen as accountable to their dependents. They could also lose their honour if they failed to discharge their social obligations. In an economy of wealth-in-people, loss of followers was seen as a sign of dishonour to leadership because it implied that they were not adequately performing their social responsibility to protect their dependents.¹⁰⁵ Political leaders could be stripped of their authority for ineffectually serving the interests of the community.¹⁰⁶

Thus, ‘big men’ in society, attained status not only through the number of followers they had, but also by how they ruled them. Followers could escape to join rivals if they were not well taken care off. The impulse to retain followers served as a check on leadership power. The relationship of leaders and followers was cast as one of mutual exchange. The outcome of a patron’s failure to act within moral limitations could also cost them their life. Those who fail to redistribute could be labelled as selfish practitioners of witchcraft.¹⁰⁷ Redistribution, thus, had a legitimising function.¹⁰⁸ This form of negotiable interaction inspired local politics at the time of the Settler intrusion.

¹⁰⁴ Schwab & Harley, 1947, p. 162.

¹⁰⁵ Interview, William Whenda, Township Commissioner, Kpein, 21st March 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Bellman, 1984.

¹⁰⁷ See also: Richards, 1996, pp. xvii-xviii.

¹⁰⁸ Interview, Wilson, Monrovia, 22nd April 2009.

The Settler intrusion and early political organisation in the 1900s

The Gio and Mano interviewed for this study were born after 1925 when the ‘pacification’ of the hinterland (territorialisation of the Settler state) ended.¹⁰⁹ They had no memories of life at the time of Gio and Mano incorporation into the Settler state. But their oral accounts of the ‘colonial’ period, passed down from the previous generations suggest a heated moral debate about political thought at the time of the Settler intervention. Many ordinary peasants felt that their norms and values, particularly concerning leadership, moral economy and land, were under threat of dissolution.¹¹⁰ Some compared the early ‘colonial’ period with the lead up to the civil war when exclusion under the Doe regime was seen as a threat to their way of life.¹¹¹

Settler expropriation of land opposed the rights of chiefs with those of their subordinates. As mentioned earlier, Gio and Mano moral economy placed limits on a leader’s ownership rights; it also made them socially accountable as custodians of land, which they could not alienate. Granting of lands to the Settlers, thus, created moral indignation from below. The legend of the Mano town of Zazlon is a good example of informant narratives about internal disagreement over the issue of land and leadership legitimacy in the period of indirect rule:

There’s a town called Zazlon. The issue in Zazlon was that the Americo-Liberians had gone there and negotiated with a certain chief to give access to their lands. And one of the things the chief said to his people was that they were going to make a road to go through there. And the townspeople refused. And when the chief insisted, the townspeople mobbed their chief and then skinned him, took the skin off his body and then left him in a public place to display that they would never ever surrender their land. There’s a legend that major road has not run into that area [ever]. I remember as a little child my grandfather had a farm in that area. There was no road, there was no car going there. We will walk

¹⁰⁹ Sawyer & Center for Self-Governance., 1992, p. 242.

¹¹⁰ Interview, Omarkson, Tubmanburg, 8th April 2009.

¹¹¹ Interview, Focus Group, Bonah Farm, 22nd April 2009.

for like five six miles to get there. And there was a story and that was the legend that my grandparents gave to me.¹¹²

Legends like Zazlon suggest that internal struggles over communal lands can be traced to the Settler colonial era.¹¹³ Some of these are long-standing disputes over the legitimacy of 'traditional' leaders. As one elderly Gio informant put it: "There were always those issues about how land is redistributed and how land is acquired."¹¹⁴ Internal struggles over property touched on the scope and legitimacy of authority.¹¹⁵

In Gio and Mano historical imagination of their past moral economy described above, a leaders ability to maintain a following had much to do with how they discharged their moral responsibility including redistribution of settlement lands and labour surpluses for the welfare of their supporters. The threat of losing discontented followers served as an important check on leadership power, as loss of people impacted wealth, status and power.¹¹⁶ However, under the new system of indirect rule formerly mobile subordinates became restricted constituencies. Land rights and expectations became particularly emotive. They raised issues of property rights, economic livelihood as well as good citizenship. The town chief in Kpein explained that:

[I]t's not that the land *per se* [was important], what was the most important thing was the [fact] that the land was [used as] the means to getting your people to work, using your people to, you know, get their subsistence, get their respect.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Interview, Zawolo, 11th February 2014.

¹¹³ This has been acknowledged by the TRC in its final report: TRC, 2009, p. 212.

¹¹⁴ Interview, Dahn, Dahn Village, 19th March 2014.

¹¹⁵ See also: Lund & Boone, 2013, p. 1.

¹¹⁶ Interview, Elder Guannu, Ganta, 20th March 2014. This is corroborated by: Ford, 1990, p. 250.

¹¹⁷ Interview, William Belleh, Town Chief, Kpein, 21st March 2014. Interview, Dr Taryor, 15th February 2014.

The ceding of land to Settlers was, therefore, seen as a threat to moral economy. It undermined the legitimacy of many pre-existing chiefs and created political pressure.¹¹⁸

These grievances interacted with internal outrage over Settler acquisition of land for companies like the LRC. The example of the Sanmehn Gio in Sanniquellie District in Nimba is instructive.¹¹⁹ When the Settlers formally introduced indirect rule in 1904, the Public Lands Law was enacted granting the Settler state ownership and administration of all lands. It allowed the Settler government to grant concessions to foreign companies. A concession was given to the Liberia Rubber Corporation (LRC), a British firm, to obtain rubber in Zekepa and Tappita (Tappi's town) in the lower Nimba area, amidst opposition from Gio communities in the area.¹²⁰ The activities of the LRC clashed with local trade activities between Mandingo migrant traders and local Gio and Mano kola farmers who had forged a moral economy through kola cultivation. The LRC agents complained to the Settler government that Mandingo traders were undermining their economic activities in the region.¹²¹ Following the complaints, Francis Bernard, the Settler district commissioner for the region, began to interrupt local markets. He arrested and prevented Mandingo traders from trading with the Gio. It affected the Sanmehn Gio who carried their kola from neighbouring settlements to trade in these markets. An estimated material value of "several million francs" was lost for the 1909-10 period as a result of the disruption to local trade.¹²² In the wider Gio and Mano region, the LFF soldiers were instructed to disrupt Gio/Mano contact with Mandingo traders in kola markets around the border region. Mandingo traders attempted travelling deep into the forest region of Telo, a key

¹¹⁸ This is corroborated by: Richards, 2005.

¹¹⁹ Interview, Dorr, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

¹²⁰ Guannu, 1997.

¹²¹ The remainder of this paragraph is adapted from: Ford, 1990, pp. 167-168.

¹²² Ford, 1990, p. 169.

assembly area for kola. But, they were thwarted by the LFF.¹²³ The disruption to trade created grievances within the Sanmehn Gio community and the wider Gio and Mano region against Settler domination.¹²⁴ Gio and Mano perceived that the dominant Settlers were attempting to use their political dominance to undermine their means of material and moral value.¹²⁵

My oldest Gio informants, whose parents participated in the resistance against Settler rule, recount that the threatened loss of moral community by disruptions to kola trade and land arrangements from the dominant Settler community prompted amalgamation of Gio and Mano communities to resist Settler rule.¹²⁶ This is corroborated by Martin Ford who records that “the Liberians had evidence of attempts at unification...[they] learned that [Gio] had sent emissaries to “their brother Mano” in Dingama and Kpowi, asking them to join in the siege” against Settler rule.¹²⁷ A Mano revolt broke out in the region in August 1911, but the first recorded account of battle between the LFF and the Gio dates from 1912, when the soldiers sieged Tappita.¹²⁸ They were resisted by a Gio confederation from the Zo area of Nimba, a two-day trip from Tappita, including the local Domehn and Sanmehn Gio.¹²⁹ Many of these confederations were organised by young warriors. A prominent example is Tuazama of Bahn, a young warrior who led Zo Gio of the Bahn area; informants recount that he organised eight different towns to resist the Settlers.¹³⁰

The ‘colonial’ Liberia Frontier Force (LFF) officers tried to selectively establish relations with local chiefs to prevent their alliance with the rebellion by

¹²³ Interview, Dr Taryor, 15th February 2014. See also: Ford, 1990, p. 173.

¹²⁴ Interview, Dorr, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

¹²⁵ Interview, Dorr, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

¹²⁶ Interview, Dorr, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

¹²⁷ Ford, 1990, p. 175.

¹²⁸ Ford, 1990, p. 167.

¹²⁹ This is recorded in: Ford, 1990, p. 167.

¹³⁰ Interview, Focus Group, Bahn, 19th March 2014.

presenting them with gifts.¹³¹ But the chiefs who surrendered lost legitimacy and were killed by their own people. A good example is the narrative about the Mano town of Gbein:

According to [oral] history, when the Settlers came our people resisted initially, and they fought a long war, and at the end of time they [the Settlers] realised that instead of fighting, they decided to go through powerful [indigenous] leaders [to subdue the population]. [Consequently], some of our leaders even were killed by our own people. For instance, in Gbein there used to be a powerful leader of that particular community they called him Wonyen Kalen.... [The Settlers] extended invitation to meet at a town in Totota, in [present-day] Bong County...at the time this whole place was called Central Province. [They reasoned with] some of our leaders, powerful people [about] form[ing] a government to be one instead of fighting [and that they would maintain their autonomy] to be leaders the same way [as] expansion [was] not meant to take away [their] territory.... So they gave them time. The powerful chiefs asked them for time to consult their communities that's how they came back. When they came to Gbein...at the time they called that place Lawo, but then Gbein was like the chiefdom, he [Wonyen Kalen] called his people and reached it to them. [However,] this was being perceived by the people as a way of conniving with [Settlers] to impose foreign ideology on them. So that's how they said look but then you are not a committed leader so they grabbed him and tied him and they skinned him. They took his skin and dry it for some days and they fix a drum.... [T]he effort at the time [of Settler colonialism] divided both the leaders from the ordinary. Leaders were being hated by their own people because they were now perceived as betrayers. Most of them ran to Monrovia.¹³²

Chiefs like Wonyen Kalen lost legitimacy because they were perceived as betrayers who wanted to circumvent traditional restraints on their power by ceding the rights of their followers to a dominant 'other'. Consequently, many pre-conquest chiefs were killed in the external resistance by their own followers. As we shall see in the following chapter, the issues of land and leadership legitimacy resurfaced as a pivotal issue in the mobilisation of the Gio and Mano for the NPFL war.

Apart from chiefs, Gio and Mano settlements that yielded to the Settler government during the rebellion were treated as traitors. The Gio subdivision known as Zo, for instance, suffered heavy reprisals from their Gbamehn neighbours.

¹³¹ Ford, 1990, p. 175.

¹³² Interview, Dorr, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

Tuazama, who had led the Zo Gio of Bahn in a confederation against the Settlers, journeyed to surrounding villages/towns bearing gifts to local leaders to try to persuade them not to resist.¹³³ Bahn elders recount that Tuazama initiated process of aggregation involving the consolidation of eight different villages and towns:

Tuazama [was the] Paramount Chief who control[ed] this place. [He] call[ed] all those people [from various] small, small, small, town. [They were from] different, different, different area. [These included] Fahngunleu [who joined] with him, Zlantuo, Tontuo, Tahwin, Gbiegehnleu, so that [was] eight [village/town leaders that joined him to] come together [to form re-organised] Bahn here...[H]e tell them say let go together we will be plenty when we come together.... Then he say let go we build one [leading] town. They go together and build one town.¹³⁴

When the Gio and Mano resistance was suppressed in 1918, amalgamations such as Bahn became re-organised as paramount chiefdoms headed by new paramount chiefs. Many of those who became paramount chiefs were young warriors, turned loyalists, such as Tuazama. The prominence of youth, such as Tuazama, as leaders in the period of Settler indirect rule contradicts the prevailing notion of elder domination of youth, which is characteristic of much of the recent accounts of internal relations under Settler colonial rule. It was partly based on expediency and partly on an assumption by the Settlers that these had been pre-existing organisations. Local groups took the legislative designations of paramount chieftaincies by the state as proof of their long-standing connection to particular territory and perpetual rights/claims to land. Territorial belonging became even more critical to 'tribal' identity, as the practices of the Settler government focused imagination on territorial boundaries.

It is therefore not surprising that the 'new' political chiefs such as Tuazama relied on territorial amalgamation to construct solidarity among alliances of formerly

¹³³ Interview, Dr Taryor, 15th February 2014. See also: Ford, 1990, p. 180.

¹³⁴ Interview, Focus Group, Bahn, 19th March 2014. This is corroborated by: Ford, 1990, p. 221.

autonomous towns/villages by appealing to past precedents. The elders of Bahn recalled that:

After that they build that town now [as an integrated Bahn consisting of eight villages/towns with a head town], then they go together, they came to clean this town. They came they clean the spot when they throw cutlass like this they meet tortoise, throw cutlass like this they meet tortoise. They say oh we are Bahn [tortoise]; that the one they call Bahn. They say tortoise, tortoise home here...so tortoise is our tradition. We get special place to go make special farm for the tortoise. As we sit down now, now in every year we get hand we go make sacrifice.... What tortoise say we know it.... Paramount Chief Tuazama the head of Bahn, [he was from] Zoegeh, Gbeh Town.... but what we talking [about now was] the place, the town where he control. Yes, because all those people they were under Bahn. From here to the border. The Butuo and all it was Tuazama. Because he was a warrior and he defend the war at the same time he end the war. So he [became] the leader. People were scared of him....¹³⁵

From this account, Tuazama was able to legitimise his authority by drawing on past ideas of prowess in war as a means to achieving wealth-in-people. Similar to his predecessors, the above account suggests that Tuazama was united with his supporters through a similar notion of kinship involving land belonging. For instance, Fahngunleu and Gbiegehnleu traced agnatic kinship. They were able to forge a sense of common belonging in which different villages/towns were unified through the idea of orders of arrival and the language of territorial belonging.¹³⁶

From below, territorial belonging acquired an affective appeal. This was partly because a connection with the land framed people's sense of self and their allegiances. But more critically, belonging ensured that the rights of present and future generations would be secured within the state in a time when land had increased in value over labour and could be alienated through state tenure arrangements by the more powerful Settler minority.¹³⁷ This sense of belonging was ritualised through special land-related sacrifices; in the above example, this was through shared taboo and annual sacrifices

¹³⁵ Interview, Focus Group, Bahn, 19th March 2014. This is corroborated by Ford, 1990, p. 221.

¹³⁶ Interview, Chief Bero II, Bahn, 19th March 2014.

¹³⁷ Boas & Dunn, 2013, p. 40.

for the tortoise. By drawing on past ideas, re-organised Gio and Mano communities in the Liberian state developed a particular self-perception as ‘traditional’ tribes’.

The Mandingo peoples

The Mandingo are Mande-speaking people. They trace their nomenclature to Manding. Mandin’go means ‘people from Manding’.¹³⁸ Manding was an area that spanned the Niger and Sankarani rivers in southern Mali and north-eastern Guinea. It was known for expansive trade and powerful dynasties, and became the location of one of the largest Islamic Empires in western Africa, the Songhai Empire or state that was formed around the 14th-16th centuries. The empire got its name from its foremost ethnic group the Songhai. Mandingo oral historians trace their earliest origins to the Songhai people of Manding. A Mandingo oral historian from Saclepea-Mah district in Nimba, that I name Idrisu, recounted that:

We are originally Songhai and we all part of old Ghana. The land we resided in that land happened to be in Mali and that land is called Manding. Our civilisation came from revolutions. From Songhai Empire [after] Sundiata Keita, it was a Manding Empire and then came down to Samori...So revolutions forced Mandingo to travel all over West Africa from Manding.¹³⁹

Idrisu’s account not only connects Mandingo roots to the Songhai Empire, but also to its two predecessors: the old Ghana Empire that came to prominence in the 8th century for its gold trade, and the Mali Empire that emerged in the 13th century under Sundiata Keita, who is celebrated as the first king of the Mande people.¹⁴⁰ The Songhai Empire expanded under the leadership of a Mande Muslim general, Askia Muhammad Toure, in the late 15th century. The historical imagination of informants from a variety of backgrounds and ages trace their roots to revolutionary Mandingo

¹³⁸ This is corroborated by the historical literature: Diouf, 2003, p. 141.

¹³⁹ Interview, Idrisu, Congo Town, 27th May 2009.

¹⁴⁰ Diouf, 2003, pp. 139-140.

heroes such as Sundiata Keita and Askia Muhammad Toure.¹⁴¹ As discussed below, legends of Mandingo heroes illuminate prominent leadership criteria of the venerated Manding past that contemporary Liberian Mandingo evoke.¹⁴²

In the 16th century internecine war prompted waves of migrations from Manding. Consequently, people-groups identifying as Mandingo (or Malinke, Maninka, Mandingue, Many, Mandinga, Mandinka, Manding) can be found in the Gambia, Senegal, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali and Sierra Leone. Around the mid-16th century, Mandingo clans under the leadership of the Kamaras from Kangaba in Mali had begun the 'Mane Invasion' towards the coast to establish trade relations with the Portuguese. One of two movements of the invasion settled in the Beyla region of Konyan in present-day Guinea. They became known as Konyaka (Mandingo from the Beyla region) from the topography of the Konyan area where they settled.¹⁴³ The other settled in the Touba-Man area of present-day Ivory Coast and became known as Mauka. Some of those who settled in Konyan entered into long distance trade between the Niger markets areas to the north and the interior forest to the south, trade routes had extended to the Atlantic coast by the end of the 18th century.¹⁴⁴ Thus, while the diaspora Mandingo in Liberia trace their earliest origins to the medieval empires in the western Sudan, many trace more recent ancestral connections to Konyan, particularly the town of Musadu in present-day Guinea.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Austen, 1993.

¹⁴² Interview, Focus Group, Monrovia, 6th April 2009.

¹⁴³ Person, 1984, p. 319.

¹⁴⁴ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 9.

¹⁴⁵ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 26th January 2014.

Creation of diaspora moral community from trade and Islam

The oral accounts of all 28 informants from a variety of backgrounds and ages ranging from 20s to 60s suggest that the sense of a distinctive diaspora Mandingo identity evolved through development of norms and values between people primarily involved in commerce—particularly as merchants—in markets that straddled the northern savannah and the southern interior forests and coastal regions of present-day Liberia. The traders shared a common economic interest; they relied on Islam to build economic links. Islam was deployed to build trust and trading networks that incorporated members of settled communities, itinerants and immigrant traders, thereby creating a new diaspora community.

Islam and trade were seen as mutually reinforcing. Trading was perceived as the primary profession of the Prophet Muhammad. Before his death, Muhammad reportedly “encouraged every Muslim to engage in business to achieve economic independence and to promote Islam” in his farewell sermon. “Therefore, every Muslim trader is presumed to be an ambassador of Islam.”¹⁴⁶ Many Muslim traders in the new diaspora community were also Islamic clerics.¹⁴⁷ The historical record corroborates this. Massing suggests that one of the main factors that prompted Mandingo invasion and settlement in parts of the Lofa region was the spread of Islam; great Mandingo Chiefs like Samori and the Kamaras subscribed to Islam.¹⁴⁸ While Yves Person stresses the need to preserve control trade routes between the savannah and the coast as the likely motive for violent conquests, which occurred along the

¹⁴⁶ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 31.

¹⁴⁷ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 26th January 2014.

¹⁴⁸ Massing, 1978-79, p. 52.

trade route between Bopolu in the south and Musadu in the north.¹⁴⁹ Islamic beliefs reinforced economic success, it was seen as a reward from God.¹⁵⁰

The historical record suggests that many of those who came to identify with this diaspora were among the later migrants who were dispersed from the former Songhai Empire and its predecessors.¹⁵¹ Simmel argues that because the Mandingo intervened into existing societies where local economic fortes had already been founded, trading became an even more important role.¹⁵² An ecological niche in trading that spanned numerous ethnic boundaries afforded them their own intermediary specialty. They exploited interregional differences in production of goods and service to their advantage by becoming itinerant traders, serving as middlemen between regions. As Ford put it, “traders survived by converting a material disparity into mutual benefit.”¹⁵³ As specialists traders with a variety of knowledge competencies, they brought not only sort after goods such as salt and clothing, but also skills that were not common in forest communities, in their personal capacities as clerics, craftsmen, leather makers and so on. From Nimba, for instance, they carried local produce such as kola to the upper Niger where it was considered a luxury consumption item.

Trading activities led to the diffuse settlement of merchants in various villages and towns in present day Liberia, particularly present-day Lofa, Nimba and Bong counties. By the late 18th to early 19th century, Konyaka had established communities in Lofa through conquest. They became the primary inhabitants in these settlements. But the vast majority of migrant traders settled among ‘other’ local societies with their own distinct identity through cooperation. For instance, settlement in Nimba was

¹⁴⁹ Person, 1968, p. 558.

¹⁵⁰ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 31.

¹⁵¹ S. E. Holsoe, 1977. S. E. Holsoe, 1967, pp. 55-88.

¹⁵² Simmel, 1950, p. 403.

¹⁵³ Ford, 1990, p. 54.

driven by trade cooperation with Gio/Mano host populations. Traders came in small groups that were related through kinship or marriage.¹⁵⁴ Adherence to Islam kept the resident traders from assimilating into many of the local societies that they traded with.

Success in trade required guaranteed credit facilities, commercial trust and knowledge of trade routes, translation assistance, temporary accommodation and more. Many of the settled traders and their offspring considered themselves as foreigners.¹⁵⁵ They identified more closely with the new comers because of shared economic interest and Islamic institutions such as imams, mosques and schools with them. Konneh's account of the Sesays and Kabahs in Voinjama is illustrative.¹⁵⁶ In the 1880s, Foday Kaba travelled from Macenta, Guinea to settle in Voinjama, Lofa County. He established himself as a holy man and trader after sending for his kin who were also involved in trade. During the 18th and 19th centuries families like the Kabas who had settled in trading towns and centres acted as hosts and landlords to subsequent arrivals; it contributed to the establishment of Muslim-trader communities in these towns. The Kabas became political and economic leaders in Voinjama. When Abdulai Sesay arrived in Voinjama as an Islamic cleric in the late 19th century, the he and his family affiliated with the Kabas through attendance at the local Mosque. It was common for these trading families that shared religious faith and institutions to intermarry. They also increased their presence through intermarrying and converting local women to Islam, but their women were not permitted to marry into non-Muslim neighbouring ethnic groups.

The resulting sense of diaspora Mandingo identity and community was not only based on similarity in occupation, but more importantly shared religion, myths of

¹⁵⁴ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 32.

¹⁵⁵ This is noted by: A. Konneh, 1996a.

¹⁵⁶ A. Konneh, 1996b, pp. 34-35.

origin, use of the Mandingo language, and intermarriage within the diaspora settlements. They relied on Islam to develop the constitutive norms and values of moral economy needed for trustworthy market transactions among diaspora residents and itinerant traders. To be Mandingo presumed an association with trade and Islam. Those who were not involved in commerce were incorporated on the basis of their shared faith. It was maintained through Islamic institutions: elders such as imams, Mosques and schools. It facilitated easy integration of subsequent migrant-traders into what became dispersed autonomous Mandingo settlements.

As hosts, the resident traders provided temporary accommodation and houses of prayer. They also served as intermediaries between itinerants and host societies. Settled and itinerant traders shared a common economic interest, from participation in similar business activities, and a mutual adherence to Islam that brought them together. They developed lineage-based networks through inter-marriage and absorption that linked the earlier autonomous settlements with the more diffuse resident and itinerant traders. Leaving the faith was tantamount to leaving the community. Kinship and other relationships served to reinforce cohesion of local communities and trade alliances within the diaspora.

It is as a diaspora community of autonomous trading groups with a shared faith that Mandingo dominated local economies in Liberia. Their culture brought together conquering merchants (that settled in areas in Lofa) and itinerant traders (that settled in Nimba). It did not stop their oral historians from recalling a celebrated common Manding past featuring leaders like Sundiata Keita and common descent to regional heroes like the Kamaras and Sao Boso who shaped regional history. Their way of life was governed by respect for religious devotion, knowledge skills and success in trade. Before offering a detailed discussion of the constitutive norms and

values of the Mandingo diaspora, it is useful to trace the settlement of Mandingo traders in Nimba.

Settlement of small autonomous Mandingo trading groups among the Gio and Mano

From the 14th century to the 19th century, Mandingo itinerant-traders developed long-distance commerce between commercial centres in the savannah and the interior forests of Liberia. Narrative accounts of informants suggest that a common interest in the kola trade was one of the factors that encouraged the settlement and development of autonomous Mandingo trading groups with connections to the wider diaspora network, among the Gio and Mano.¹⁵⁷ The traders migrated from the savannah towards the forest regions of places like Nimba to seek opportunities to trade in kola.

One Mandingo 'Oldman' narrated that:

From the early civilisation, kola, kola nut was very important because from the savannah and desert area of Mali, the whole area was called Sudan at the time, kola was a traditional symbol that was seen as a symbol of respect, a symbol of civilisation. To get kola nut you have to go to the forestland, in [present-day] Ivory Coast, Liberia and those areas. And, those places were not occupied [as part of states] at the time. You only find people in small, small places and which give the Mandingo more advantage to go to those areas. Because where you got more people you got a lot of competition. Where you got nobody you got no competition, which made Mandingo move further to the rain forest or grain coast of Africa, which is Liberia and Sierra Leone to trade.¹⁵⁸

The traders were termed *Dyula* in the Mandingo language.¹⁵⁹ *Dyulas* brought salt, clothes, livestock, and manufactured products from the savannah region to barter for kola nuts and minerals. Around the early 18th century, Mandingo trade routes had extended to the Atlantic coast to trade in items such as European manufactured products, guns, gunpowder, and slaves. But kola nut remained the principal item for

¹⁵⁷ Interview, Focus Group, Bomi, 27th April 2009.

¹⁵⁸ Interview, Ibrahim A, Monrovia, 29th May 2009.

¹⁵⁹ Interview, Lansdowne, 26th January 2014.

those who travelled to the Nimba forests. They traded kola back to the savannah from the Liberian region. Working long distant circuits to trade in kola became one of the key ways in which common culture with the diaspora developed among migrant traders.

In the mid-18th century, regional competition for control of trade routes between the Atlantic coast and the interior increased with the rise in European trading activities on the coast. Trading activities transformed from raw materials, to manufactured goods, to the trans-Atlantic slave trade.¹⁶⁰ Power struggles and economic competition led to changing epicentres of power, which produced the successive political and economic dominance of different linguistic groups: the De and Vai in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Temne and the Mande in the seventeenth century, the Mandingo Confederacy of Condo at Bopolu in the 18th century, and the Gola Confederacy at Kongba in the 19th century.¹⁶¹

The powerful Condo political confederation developed in the early 18th century in the region to the south of Upper Lofa, in present day Cape Mount and Montserrado and conquests in parts of present day Lofa. It encouraged increased cooperation among strangers claiming common descent from Manding that operated along the trade route between Musadu, Guinea and Bopolu, Liberia.¹⁶² Bopolu had become the most important commercial town in the region, and the centre of regional and international trade in items like clothing, leather, salt, kola, rice and malaguetta pepper.¹⁶³ The revolutionary success of Sao Baso in assuming control of the Condo Confederacy contributed to increased commercial opportunities between Monrovia

¹⁶⁰ D. E. Dunn & Tarr, 1988, p. 14.

¹⁶¹ See for example: Hair, 1962. Westermann & Bryan, 1952. D'Azevedo, 1962b.

¹⁶² Højbjerg, 2010, p. 281.

¹⁶³ S. E. Holsoe, 1977. S. E. Holsoe, 1967, pp. 58-59. A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 50. B. J. K. Anderson, 1870, pp. 22, 26.

settlements and the interior.¹⁶⁴ But the coastal trade with European traders began to decline in the 19th century prompting increased migration into the forest regions for commercial opportunities in the kola trade.

Contemporary narratives trace the settlement of Mandingos in Nimba to the major influx of Konyan traders from Beyla, in present day Guinea, around the late 19th century.¹⁶⁵ This was mainly prompted by a combination of the declining coastal trade and events surrounding French colonisation of the region. Beyla was considered one of five towns that formed part of the Western Mandingo country. Its capital was situated in Musadu.¹⁶⁶ Samori Toure, the Muslim Mandingo leader of the region, had led a resistance against French domination in the area and tried to consolidate his power in the region. But, the French succeeded in gaining control over Beyla, which was an important commercial region at the time.¹⁶⁷ Ford writes about an increase in waves of migration of Konyan traders from Beyla to Nimba as a result of the French annexation of the Beyla region in the 1893.¹⁶⁸

The imposition of a head tax by the French contributed to an increase in long distance trade. The demand for rubber by the French colonial government also provided an incentive for Mandingo trading activities between the Guinean and Liberian regions. Trade was partly prompted by the need to meet their tax liability and to provide for their large family networks.¹⁶⁹ The colonial government's demands became an important factor that encouraged Mandingo migration. Many of the traders migrated from the Western Mandingo country in present day Guinea to settle in what

¹⁶⁴ Interview, Idrisu, Congo Town, 27th May 2009.

¹⁶⁵ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 26th January 2014.

¹⁶⁶ Interview, Sheriff, Bonah Farm, 25th April 2009. See also: B. J. K. Anderson, 1870.

¹⁶⁷ Ford, 1990, p. 67.

¹⁶⁸ Ford, 1990, pp. 54-57, 67.

¹⁶⁹ Interview, Sheriff, Bonah Farm, 25th April 2009. See also: A. Konneh, 1996b, pp. 103-104.

was then known as Mano Country and Gio Country in the Nimba area. They settled alongside Gio and Mano farming households to trade in kola and rubber.¹⁷⁰

Initially, the Konyan itinerant traders relied on the existing commercial network on the trade route between Beyla and coast to obtain kola from the forest region to trade in the Beyla area. However, some remained in the forest region to establish new communities among their Gio and Mano hosts, which became part of the diaspora network. The market in kola had increased the wealth and status of some local chiefs.¹⁷¹ Marriages were arranged between Mandingo men and Mano and Gio women to form alliances. Some of the traders developed close ties with Gio and Mano communities through these inter-marriages. Konneh, the Mandingo scholar, who writes that the Gio and Mano considered Mandingos as 'kin' or 'members' of the community at various points in history, corroborates the existence of close ties.¹⁷² Informant accounts suggest that these alliances were primarily between the chiefly class and the traders (Chapter 5). But Mandingo women were prevented from marrying their neighbours because of their Islamic faith.¹⁷³

The Mandingo migrant traders were given places to stay near market grounds by their hosts to encourage them to trade in the region, partly because of their success in trade. Gio and Mano transported kola to market areas in Ganta, Yekepa, Kanplay and Sanniquellie for trade with Mandingos. An increase in migrant traders contributed to an expansion of Mandingo commercial activities.¹⁷⁴ By the early 19th century, Mandingos dominated long-distance trade between the northern savannah, the forest regions, and the southern Atlantic coast. Some of the traders became involved in

¹⁷⁰ Ford, 1990, pp. 68-70.

¹⁷¹ Interview, Focus Group, Bahn, 19th March 2014. See also: A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 109.

¹⁷² A. Konneh, 1996a, p. 145.

¹⁷³ Interview, Mustapha, Monrovia, 18th March 2008. Interview, Jefferson, Gbarnga, 30th April 2009. See also: A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 109.

¹⁷⁴ Interview, Focus Group, Bomi, 29th April 2009. This is corroborated by: Ford, 1990, p. 264.

agriculture and craft industries such as goldsmithing, blacksmithing, and leatherworking.¹⁷⁵ Although many settled, married local women, and raised children among host populations, the migrant traders considered themselves as foreigners.¹⁷⁶

Oral history of a Mandingo family named Konneh is illustrative of an itinerant trading family that settled as migrant traders. Oldman Konneh is a good example of a Mandingo migrant trader who settled in Nimba prior to Settler 'colonial' rule to take advantage of expanding economic opportunities, and developed ties with Gio and Mano society. As the first generation Konneh, he settled as a trader in Saclepea, from Beyla in the mid 19th century.¹⁷⁷ According to Oldman Konneh's grandson:

My grandfather settled in Nimba County in the 1800s. He was an orphan from Beyla, Guinea. He decided to venture out of Beyla to seek opportunity outside. My grandfather followed the route that were followed by most Mandingo people [from Beyla] at the time. Mandingo were trading between Musadu [Guinea] and the Mano region [in Nimba County] in the 1800s, even from 1600 and 1700s there's been interaction between the Mandingos and Gio. Because of that a lot of them settled in Nimba County. In most of the big cities like Saclepea, Ganta, Sanniquellie Mandingo were in huge numbers before the war. They found opportunity for trading. Kola is grown in the forest region, which is in Nimba County and Mandingo people being people that came from the savannah, they've always been travelling taking kola nut from the forest, taking it to far away places like Mali and other places. He was a young man in his early twenties when he came to Saclepea.... He was given Mano women to marry because it was the tradition for people to give their daughters to powerful people in the area. That is how he married my grandmother. Mandingo did not go to Nimba County as warriors they went there primarily to do business.¹⁷⁸

Konneh married seven Mano women from Saclepea, with whom he had many children. These women were given to him by his hosts to encourage him to settle in the area. Inter-marriage with Gio and Mano women who converted to Islam facilitated his creation of a small autonomous Mandingo trade community among them. Generally land acquired through marriage alliance between people of different identities, such as that between Konneh's grandfather and his Mano hosts above,

¹⁷⁵ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. ix.

¹⁷⁶ See for example: A. Konneh, 1996b.

¹⁷⁷ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 26th January 2014.

¹⁷⁸ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 26th January 2014.

created a hierarchy between people of different ethnic communities, which was regulated by ‘stranger-father’ institutions. Their Gio/Mano hosts, thus, considered Mandingo acquisition of land in Nimba as ‘loaned’. This implied that it came with restrictions that prevented the transfer of ownership rights held by host community members with usufruct expectations.

Similarly, there are also accounts of Mandingo migrants from Beyla settling in Lofa in the 19th century to establish family-based networks of traders in areas of Upper Lofa such as Fesibu, Foya and Zolowo. But there were already well-established Mandingo settlements in the region with their own town chiefs.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, while examples like Oldman Konneh can be found in Lofa, the predominant narrative of Mandingo origin and property rights in the County stands in contrast to that of places like Nimba County where settlements had not been created through conquest. Mandingo settlement narratives in Lofa (and parts of present day Bopolu) make an important distinction between lands acquired through conquest and long-term settlement and land acquired through alliance, as in Konneh’s account. In areas where Mandingos acquired land through conquest they challenged the local account of the ‘stranger-father’ institution, whereas in areas where they settled through co-operation they generally recognise the local narrative, and claim land rights through state land tenure.¹⁸⁰ As we shall see later, this became an important distinction during the war.

Ethnic relations grew out of networks of trust based on shared religious values and norms. Islam gave them common culture of trust. Mandingo identity overlapped with religious identity. Trade networks provided the public good of protection, market expertise and knowledge, partnerships, hosts and the like. In Nimba County, it united migrant traders from Guinea with a diaspora network of traders, which developed into

¹⁷⁹ Interview, Focus Group, Bomi, 29th April 2009. See also: A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 16.

¹⁸⁰ This is corroborated in: Højbjerg, 2010, pp. 284-285.

a diaspora community of esteem.¹⁸¹ The first trader to arrive in a town or village became *jatigi*, meaning land host; he became the designated sponsor of subsequent arrivals, to assist them in their acclimatisation to local communities.¹⁸² They also provided protection and trading advantages to guest traders. Through this practice many trading families became represented in villages and towns along the trade routes; it led to the establishment of a trade network characterised by division between lineages based on origin and ancestry.¹⁸³ Through these networks, household heads could obtain financial assistance to increase their procurement of skilled labour to engage in trade.

The Jabateh family is another example of a small autonomous Mandingo group that emerged in Nimba, but identified with the wider diaspora network.¹⁸⁴ After they settled in Nimba, they established a trade business in a Mandingo settlement that evolved into a quarter in Ganta. This has become an established Mandingo quarter within Ganta, with its own line of chiefs. Family networks were relied on for trade opportunity and assistance. For instance, traders by the name of Kaba, received mutual assistance, such as credit facilities, from the Konneh, Kamara and Konate families, all of whom trace their ancestry to Sundiata Keita.¹⁸⁵ Some established families, such as the Jabateh's, become involved in cultivating produce for trade in local markets.¹⁸⁶

Apart from family networks, exchange relations between Mandingo migrant traders also derived from shared Muslim brotherhood.¹⁸⁷ Mandingo traders that could

¹⁸¹ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 16.

¹⁸² Interview, Sheriff, Bonah Farm, 25th April 2009. See also: A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 14.

¹⁸³ Interview, Focus Group, Bomi, 29th April 2009. Interview, Focus Group, Monrovia, 12th May 2009. This is corroborated by: A. Konneh, 1996b, pp. 14-15.

¹⁸⁴ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

¹⁸⁵ Niane, 1970.

¹⁸⁶ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

¹⁸⁷ Interview, Focus Group, Bomi, 29th April 2009.

not rely on common family connections could draw on their common faith to receive assistance in the network of trade. Some families entered into blood pacts to provide mutual protection and trade assistance. When a family met another family with whom they had established such agreements they were treated as family relations.¹⁸⁸

The networks of traders maintained their identity as a distinct Mandingo social group, even though they tried to adapt to the local communities among whom they settled, and their men inter-married with local women. As one Mandingo ex-combatant from Saclepea named Fofana put it:

You find a lot of tribes in Liberia you find them elsewhere in Africa but they have no connections. For example you find Bassa in Liberia, you find Bassa in Cameroon, they have no connections. But you find Mandingo in Mali, you find Mandingo in Liberia they have connections, networks...the barriers that would bring about settlement that was taken away. Because the Mandingo received the Islam religion many centuries ago from Mali and go through Islamic studies they have Islamic values which encourage individual to work hard for their own benefit, and to support their self and their family.¹⁸⁹

Accounts like this suggest that they developed a common culture of trust through Islam and ‘traditional’ beliefs of ancient Manding (discussed below), based on patrilineal principles. These constitute an important part of an individual’s social identity as Mandingo in contemporary Liberia: The Chairman of the Nimba County Mandingo Community stated that: “The [Mandingo] culture came from the Quran.... The religion come[s] first. [Then] as long as your father that Mandingo, you Mandingo. It can’t be your mother. It can be only your father.”¹⁹⁰ Many of the traders, such as Oldman Konneh, were Islamic clerics possessing esoteric skills linked to ‘traditional’ Manding religion such as divining.¹⁹¹ They established Mosques and

¹⁸⁸ Paulme, 1968, pp. 12-27.

¹⁸⁹ Interview, Fofana, Allentown, 15th September 2014.

¹⁹⁰ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

¹⁹¹ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 26th January 2014.

Quranic schools that became a forum for interaction among the traders. Islam was, thus, central in the construction of a moral community among the traders.¹⁹²

The historical pattern of Mandingo migrant traders settlement in Liberia, reflects their current geographic distribution across Liberia. The contemporary Mandingo population in Liberia is a diffused group that is not limited to a single geographic territory, although pockets of Mandingo communities can be found in Bong, Lofa, and Nimba counties. Despite their dispersal, Mandingos perceive themselves as a close diaspora community with shared culture. They have historically shared a cultural identity that has transcended political and territorial boundaries.

Accumulation of wealth-in-people

A distinctive pattern of accumulation of wealth-in-people developed with Mandingo settlement as dispersed autonomous groups linked to a trading diaspora community. As both merchants and Islamic clerics, many of the migrant-traders such as Oldman Konneh were seeking “trading opportunities and new converts”.¹⁹³ Accumulation of wealth-in-people was effected through procreation, polygyny, clientship, and servitude. Two processes of accumulation can be distinguished: household and cliental. First, people were added as wives, children, servants, pawns, and clients. But, the emphasis was not merely on accumulation; it rested on increases in converts to Islam that also represented a broad array of knowledge skills such as craft making and ‘medicines’. For instance, prospective wives from the neighbouring communities were chosen because of the particular ability that they brought into a polygynous

¹⁹² Cohen, 1971.

¹⁹³ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 34.

marriage, such as weaving.¹⁹⁴ Accumulation of people was mercantilist in the sense that it brought together knowledge competencies for acquiring ‘profit’.

Success in trade networks depended on accumulating clients with specialised skills and knowledge. They could be incorporated into Mandingo households because of their knowledge of trade routes and conditions in particular forest regions; an example was inclusion of runaway slaves with knowledge of forest regions that converted to Islam.¹⁹⁵ Trading skills such as artisanship was valued. People were predominantly differentiated by their competencies. People became wealth because of their knowledge competencies.¹⁹⁶ This implies a form of labour scarcity, which was distinct from their Gio and Mano neighbours who needed manual labour for crop production.

A person in Mandingo society was a combination of knowledge and competencies achieved through for instance learning and striving.¹⁹⁷ This idea continues to have salience in contemporary accounts. For instance, an Islamic cleric with skills as a diviner derived a living from his specialised knowledge and Arabic literacy skills; blacksmiths also derived both material and moral value from their labour.¹⁹⁸ They became invaluable because people believed they could make amulets that could be used to inflict wounds at a distance. Mandingo herbalists relied on knowledge in using herbs and plants to bring protection and to provide cures for various ailments. Education became a value not only as a means to inculcate Islamic values through learning and literacy, but also because of the economic benefits they afforded. For instance, literacy in Arabic became a value because “the Arabic script is

¹⁹⁴ Interview, Methuselah, Monrovia, 15th March 2008. See also: Guyer & Belinga, 1995, pp. 116-118.

¹⁹⁵ Interview, Focus Group, Bomi, 29th April 2009.

¹⁹⁶ Interview, Methuselah, Monrovia, 15th March 2008. Interview, M. Nicholas, Bonah Farm, 22nd April 2009.

¹⁹⁷ Interview, M. Nicholas, Bonah Farm, 22nd April 2009.

¹⁹⁸ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 26th January 2014.

believed to have the power to protect an individual from injury...and success in economic pursuits.”¹⁹⁹

Thus, wealth-in-people was perceived as corresponding to a high distribution of labour competencies for increasing control of goods, as well as a sign of religious piety and success. A network of trading households afforded the means for traders to penetrate non-Muslim areas to grow the community of faith and to accumulate wealth-in-people for ‘profit’. Their activities brought economic and moral rewards. Traders used their resources and skills to increase their status and influence. As discussed next, their moral economy relied on religious commitment to manage the selfish-ambition of those with wealth-in-people.

Moral economy of leadership in the Mandingo past

The traders shared an idea of ‘possessive individualism’ where individual maximisation of ‘profit’ was encouraged. But Islam shaped the relations and ethics of mercantilist accumulation by balancing success in accumulating wealth with obtaining a good reputation as a devout Muslim.²⁰⁰ Individual maximisation of ‘profit’ came with an expectation of Islamic benevolence towards family, the community of faith and their trade brotherhoods.²⁰¹ In this way, “Islam provided a status system which supplemented the emphasis on wealth...since...religious piety were respected as much or more than commercial success.”²⁰² As Lovejoy put it,

¹⁹⁹ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 33.

²⁰⁰ Interview, Focus Group, Bomi, 29th April 2009.

²⁰¹ Interview, Sheriff, Bonah Farm, 25th April 2009. Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

²⁰² Lovejoy, 1980, p. 41.

“religion and its status orientation”, provided a rationalisation for the hospitality that landlords extended to itinerants for economic reasons.²⁰³

Those who accumulated wealth-in-people within the autonomous settlements in the diaspora were expected to create good order by offering benevolent protections and opportunities to upstarts and dependents that provided their particular skills and abilities for advancement in trade; it encouraged the reproduction of social ties (through bonds of obligation).²⁰⁴ There was an expectation that those with wealth will create opportunities for commerce and take care of their dependents.²⁰⁵ For instance, they could be rewarded with credit facilitates and material support as upstarts to get a foothold as traders.²⁰⁶ As Fofana put it “Islamic values which encourage individual to work hard for their own benefit, and to support their self and their family.”²⁰⁷

Typically, wealth-in-people was accumulated by male heads of household, such as the Konneh household, or lineages. Islam made it a value to not only add people through polygyny and clientelist arrangements, but also to facilitate their achievement of self mastery through benevolent patronage support. They could enhance the productive forces of community members in their acquisition of knowledge/skills for self-mastery, and promote their horizontal esteem as a community of faith. Successful traders were also expected to demonstrate benevolence towards the brotherhood of faith. For example, supporting the community’s centres for religious learning by donating to religious leaders and providing assistance for the construction and maintenance of Mosques.²⁰⁸ In exchange for benevolence, they were assured of the custom of a vast Muslim clientele

²⁰³ Lovejoy, 1980, p. 41.

²⁰⁴ Interview, Focus Group, Monrovia, 12th May 2009.

²⁰⁵ Interview, Sheriff, Bonah Farm, 25th April 2009.

²⁰⁶ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 26th January 2014.

²⁰⁷ Interview, Fofana, Allentown, 15th Sep 2014.

²⁰⁸ Interview, Sheriff, Bonah Farm, 25th April 2009.

and respect. As these sites of community formation spread around the trade routes, a wealthy person or leaders legitimacy was judged by their reputation, as evident in the following account by Idrisu:

During the Mandingo revolutions leader can only come from certain families. In Manding at the time people who were meant to be leader were there. For example, the original leaders from Manding at the time was Kamara, was Keita, was Koroma. So when you don't come from any of those three major groups you can't be a leader. That extended until Liberian time. It came until in Liberia Sao Boso Kamara was also a Kamara. Person who is well renown, person who come from the leadership families who are supported to lead were selected. After certain time, that began to slip away a little bit and Mandingo begin to look elsewhere [at different criteria] because they were not home [in their homeland] anymore, they were not in Manding. People were in different places. So they will look at the more renown [reputation] and the more educated person [knowledge skills] or the oldest person because it is experience by itself. We learn the Arabic language long, long, long, time and pass on from generation to generation so Mandingo. Even when the Settlers came, when they reach Mandingo settlement, they met the Mandingo people, they saw that they could read and write.²⁰⁹

This account, which resonates with that of other Mandingo informants, suggest leadership authority within the groups, as well as in the diaspora, was no longer limited to dynastic lineages, as in the Empires of Manding, it was judged by reputation based on moral economy criteria. Being a stateless trading diaspora, they were concerned with reputation. A good leader in the diaspora was judged by his reputation.

First, wealthy patrons gained respect by using their resources to create opportunities for the brotherhood, lineages, and households they associated with. Redistributing largesse in the form of hosting newcomers, facilitating commercial credit, and brokering relations with local producers to facilitate lower status men's achievement of wealth promoted good order and brought wealthy traders a good reputation. Their largesse was encouraged by their Islamic faith; it brought them favour from Allah and respect among men. Those who failed to follow this norm

²⁰⁹ Interview, Idrisu, Congo Town, 27th many 2009.

incurred disfavour and a poor reputation for undermining the means of self-mastery and social reproduction of newcomers.

A reputation for dependability, necessary for effective trading relations, was a source of respect. For instance, resident *Jatigis* provided information about good and bad potential trading partners to new arrivals based on their reputation. They also mediated relations between itinerant traders and local populations. These achieved esteem from the way in which they facilitated trade relations. Through their assistance, newcomer clients benefited from access to local producers, as well as the commercial credit of more established and wealthier traders within their own diaspora.

A second source of esteem for leaders within the trade network was a reputation for personal achievement in knowledge.²¹⁰ Traders maintained fluid and multiple roles as traders, clerics, musicians, craftsmen and so on.²¹¹ Skill in esoteric knowledge was considered a particularly important value.²¹² It was advanced for the protection and survival of community. This idea drew on the legends of old Manding. For instance, Sunjata Keita practiced Islam and ‘traditional’ Manding beliefs. An important component of this ‘traditional’ Manding religion was:

the conviction that everyone possesses a secret force or energy, the *nyamo*, which was controlled through...sorcery. The Manding recognise good sorcery done for the benefit of the community, and negative sorcery turned against it. The men with the highest concentration of *nyamo* and occult skills are the hunters, the blacksmiths, the sorcerers and the rulers; and...warrior [aristocracies]. The men said to possess this force operate in the occult world by manipulating the energy, and by creating protective and offensive amulets... Sunjata belonged to a lineage of hunter-kings, men well versed in magic.²¹³

He achieved fame for possessing immense esoteric knowledge; his epic is replete with transcendent acts and victories that are explained in mystical terms. The centrality of

²¹⁰ Interview, Focus Group, Bomi, 29th April 2009.

²¹¹ Ford, 1990, pp. 56-57.

²¹² Interview, M. Nicholas, Monrovia, 19th March 2008.

²¹³ Diouf, 2003, p. 144.

knowledge in past Manding societies has also been well described by Patrick R. McNaughton, who writes that:

The Mande consider knowledge of all kind to be important and powerful, but the instrumental knowledge of sorcery stands at the pinnacle of potency. The great epic poems that celebrate hunters, heroes, and the founding of states all devote major portions of the texts to sorcerers' exploits. In fact, epics stress the occult strategies and preparations that pre-figure major events, such as military campaigns, rather than the events themselves. And, as reflection of real life, the epics emphasize the need of leaders to have access to sorcery, as a vital component of their capacity to solve problems, address crises, subdue antagonists, and satisfy their ambitions.²¹⁴

Skill in knowledge became an important criterion of leadership among the Mandingo traders of Nimba.²¹⁵ Leaders became patrons providing patronage in skilled knowledge. Oldman Konneh's grandson narrated that:

When my grandfather settled in that area [Saclepea in his twenties] it was more or less a little village. My grandfather was a *mole-man* [or *mori-man*] maybe some people will say soothsayer, but he was doing that in the sense of a marabout [Islamic cleric], and he prayed and made some sacrifice praying to God that Saclepea will grow to be a bigger town.²¹⁶

Konneh's knowledge as a marabout brought him material wealth and moral esteem within the Mandingo trader network and among his neighbours. He was credited with the political success of local political elites like Johnny Volker, former Mano paramount chief who was selected as senator of Nimba County in 1964.²¹⁷ As they valued Islamic learning, Mandingo children were sent to Quranic schools.²¹⁸ This became the institutional setting where literacy and common culture was passed on to Mandingo children. The religious-cultural knowledge of marabouts afforded them with a source of income. Their students were expected to exchange their labour, through on his farm or in his trade, as payment for the educational services.²¹⁹ Their

²¹⁴ McNaughton, 1993, p. 13.

²¹⁵ Interview, M Nicholas, Bonah Farm, 22nd April 2009.

²¹⁶ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 26th January 2014.

²¹⁷ N. Konneh, 2013.

²¹⁸ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 26th January 2014.

²¹⁹ A. Konneh, 1996b, pp. 32-33.

skill in divination brought them much respect because they could be rendered for the benefit of the larger community. The prominence of Ganta as a key commercial centre in Liberia has been credited to prominent Mandingo marabouts-traders. A common narrative among Mandingo informants from Nimba is that:

The story about Ganta...the people from here, they went and asked the Mandingo people: “We want this our town to grow, we want this town to be big”.... The people went all the way to Kankan, in Guinea to go and get [marabouts] to come do that work for Ganta to get large....²²⁰

From the value of esoteric knowledge an important norm emerged among the Mandingo that “the men who can master invisible forces and divination have the responsibility to come to the [physical and transcendental] rescue of their community.”²²¹

The third source of esteem for a leader was ‘fame’ or reputation for heroic action in providing the network with the public good of protection by defending the community. This also drew on the venerated Manding past.²²² Fofana emphasised that “Islamic values of leadership are very, very important. [In the past] it was based on mutual respect from Mali. The leader will come to the need of the needed. He will help to build people up.”²²³ Oral history, which is confirmed by written accounts, suggests that dynastic leadership in the Mandingo diaspora depended on the ability to acquire ‘fame’ through a good reputation as a warrior who not only gained control of vast territories containing important trading networks, but also provided political protection in defending the community.²²⁴

This thought continues to shape expectations of contemporary leadership in the community. The story of Sao Baso has become memorialised as an example of the

²²⁰ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

²²¹ Diouf, 2003, p. 144.

²²² Interview, Focus Group, Bomi, 29th April 2009. Interview, Focus Group, Monrovia, 12th May 2009.

²²³ Interview, Fofana, Allentown, 15th Sep 2014.

²²⁴ Interview, M. Nicholas, Monrovia, 18th March 2008.

‘fame’ of a nationally respected courageous Mandingo political leader. It is commonly recalled that:

Sao Boso was leader of the Condo Confederacy, which covered northern and Western Liberia before the arrival of the settlers. The King, who was Mandingo and Muslim, was the leader that came from his capital of Bopolu to Monrovia to reconcile the settlers and the indigenous people in the area, telling them to consider each other as members of one African heritage. Sao Boso earlier led [an army] from upper Lofa to establish a safe security corridor for traders and travelers along the highway between Lofa and the coastal areas by way of present day Gbarpolu County.... The accomplishments and peace efforts of the King were distinctly recognized about 150 years later when a descendant of the Settlers, President William R. Tolbert, renamed Front Street in Monrovia as King Sao Boso Street.²²⁵

The success of Sao Baso in assuming control of the Condo Confederacy, as well as his efforts to assist the Americo Liberian Settlers that arrived in the early 19th century, brought the Mandingo name to pre-eminence. It was from this evidently ‘civilised’ race of successful traders that the Settlers co-opted partners to develop markets in the interior in the period of indirect rule (Chapter 4). Contemporary Mandingo leaders like Alhaji Kromah, who mobilised the Mandingo community for war, go as far as to trace his ancestry to “Kumazii Siryon, the religious Companion and cousin of King Sao Boso.”²²⁶

The fourth, and final, source of esteem was respect for public opinion.²²⁷ The diaspora community was not politically or territorially organised, but unity of its component parts was key to its economic success in the region. The various small groups that identified with the network were relatively autonomous sets of patriarchal households. Those who sought to represent diaspora interests as patriarchs or political leaders needed a degree of public opinion to enforce decisions.²²⁸ Most of their decisions, thus, had to be reached with some level of consensus from the various

²²⁵ TRC Statement, Monrovia, 11th August 2008. This account is also reflected in all of my interviews in the Mandingo ethnic group.

²²⁶ TRC Statement, Monrovia, 11th August 2008.

²²⁷ Interview, Focus Group, Bomi, 29th April 2009.

²²⁸ Interview, Focus Group, Bomi, 29th April 2009. See also the Hausa in: Lovejoy, 1980, p. 33.

religious elders in the community that gained a regional sphere of authority.²²⁹ But, within established settlements in places like Lofa, dynastic authority such as links to the Kamara lineage is recalled to validate political leadership.

As Mandingo identity has evolved, regional communities within the diaspora have integrated local practices and concepts into their ethnic mentality. Ideas about land ownership are one example. The integration of local traditions and beliefs has led to development of regional variations of faith, and contending notions of the moral.²³⁰ As such, the source and extent of political leadership authority have become an important point of contention in the civil war. As we shall see later, moral thought about leadership shaped the debate between youthful Mandingo intellectuals and politico-military elites in the civil war (Chapter 6), as the latter tried to draw authority from dynastic lineage and consensus of religious elders. In conclusion, whereas their neighbours view them as a grouping being that is not fully embedded, by drawing on the above-mentioned past, Mandingos see themselves as a historical ‘tribe’ with deep roots in Liberia and the region as a whole.

Conclusion

The above discussion of territory, and the analysis of the changing place of land in the moral imaginations of the Gio, Mano and Mandingo show that the contours, roles, and expectations of moral communities were constantly shifting, in response to internal and external events. These changes do not always lead to violence. For instance, the existence of a Mandingo diaspora identity with internal tensions over a shared ethnic

²²⁹ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

²³⁰ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 39.

thought did not fuel a process of mass organisation against Settler rule, as in Gio and Mano communities.

As we shall see in Chapter 5, Mandingo organisation was prompted by the civil war. I have argued that Gio and Mano early political organisation was driven by perceived threats to their moral ideas, as they perceived that leaders were trying to break their moral reciprocities by ceding land to the Settlers. The existing literature suggests that the enduring forced labour practices of elders were an important source of grievance, which motivated ‘youth’ participation in the war. Richards observes that ‘Agrarian tensions upon which the Mano River conflicts fed reflect institutional abuses deeply rooted in an era of domestic slavery.’²³¹ He sees the civil war as an outcome of domestic labour exploitation of young people. Similarly, Jairo Munive notes that historical mobilisation of forced labour shaped civil war mobilisation of youths.²³² The exploitation of youth labour by chiefs is undeniable.

Yet, whatever the impact of these practices, in the popular memory of the period, as narrated by my informants, they did create internal opposition or grievance against ‘traditional’ elites. But, the specific grievance with ‘traditional’ leaders at the time of the ‘colonial’ intervention that a substantial number of interviewees mentioned was actual and threatened land dispossession. None of them referred to forced labour as a source of long-standing internal tension. Throughout my interviews with Gio and Mano peasants, officials, teachers, ex-combatants and youths in the rural areas of Nimba land questions were central in their memories of the eve of Settler rule as passed down by their parents and elders.

They suggest that an important factor that caused them to engage in dispute was perceived threats to the social relations related to land. From below, leadership

²³¹ Richards, 2005, p. 571.

²³² Munive, July 2011.

cessation of land to the Settlers was perceived as subversion of pre-existing relations between landowning patrons and their followers. Peasants were morally outraged about perceived betrayals by some patrons. It created fears of loss of moral community, which contributed to external revolt.²³³ Through this struggle many of the ideas surrounding legitimacy and leadership continued into the state. A sense of being Gio and Mano has become connected with communal claims to rightful ownership and control of 'tribal' lands in Nimba. As we shall see later, the fact that violence emerged as opposition against dominant 'others' perceived as a threat to territorial ownership and control, and to prevent internal dissolution of social relations, continued to have important consequences for internal and external ethnic relations in the state. The next chapter traces the historical trends that led to ethnic mobilisation for civil war.

²³³ Interview, Dr Guannu, Cuttington, 8th March 2014.

4 – The historical evolution of horizontal inequalities

Introduction

This chapter traces historical trends that led to the political mobilisation of the Gio and Mano ethnic groups for civil war in Liberia. It provides a broad historical survey of the period of Settler rule in Liberia between 1847-1980 (which is also known as the First Republic). Focusing on the political history of this period is essential because it was under Settler rule that imbalances in political power and distribution of socio-economic resources between culturally defined communities first evolved and became systematically institutionalised in Liberia. It was in this period that the socio-economically ascendant and state co-opted minority Mandingo emerged as the principal ‘other’ of the less advantaged majority Gio and Mano in Nimba. In this context, communal concerns over the threats posed by other dominant communities generated a heightened popular sense of difference and increased inter-ethnic rivalry, as well as critical consciousness of internal moral economy. As such, the Settler era constitutes a necessary backdrop to understanding the roots of ethnic mobilisation for civil war.

I adapt Stewart’s typology of political, socio-economic, and cultural status horizontal inequalities¹ to argue that: First, in the Settler era (1847-1980) political horizontal inequalities grew through the manner in which indigenous communities were subjugated, and the policies and legal provisions of Settler rule, which produced uneven administrative divisions, state citizenship, civic and political participation, high profile state representation, and law making. Second, socio-economic horizontal

¹ Stewart & Annan, 2008.

inequalities developed through the manner that indigenous communities were incorporated into cash labour markets, the way they were taxed, as well as the extent to which they could own and control land, access education, and gain employment in public institutions. Third, political, socio-economic and cultural status horizontal inequalities became institutionalised through the state. These horizontal inequalities did not only occur between the ‘colonist’ Settler community and indigenous groups such as the Gio and Mano, as is commonly emphasised in Liberia’s broad historiography.² But uneven co-option of indigenous groups into the state also created regional horizontal inequalities. In Nimba, this occurred between economically ascendant and unevenly co-opted mercantilist Mandingo on the one hand and marginal agrarian indigenous communities such as the Gio and Mano. The configuration of horizontal inequalities under Settler rule had important consequences at both the regional and the state level.

At the regional level, Mandingo ascendancy generated a popular sense of difference and increased inter-ethnic tension within Gio and Mano communities. However, it was not just the mere existence of horizontal inequalities that provoked this; rather, it was the popular perception regarding their morality and threat.³ Inter-ethnic difference between Gio/Mano and Mandingo in the pre-Settler era had protected trade relations by fostering opposite specialisation in production. Gio and Mano produced kola for barter with Mandingo traders. Mandingo ascendancy was seen as a threat to the rights and expectations of ordinary Gio and Mano, particularly as concerns land and livelihoods. It created an internal sense of historic, moral injustice and grievance. These grievances served as an important root cause of agitation against ‘traditional’ leaders and violence against the Mandingo in the NPFL

² See for example: Liebenow, 1969. D. E. Dunn et al., 2001. Pham, 2004.

³ This is similar to the finding in: Lynch, 2011, p. 51.

war (Chapter 5). The perception of threat help to explain the appeal of local narratives of belonging that served to exclude Mandingo (Chapter 5). It generated a controversy over the identity and belonging of Mandingo who in previous generations came from Guinea and settled in Liberia among groups such as the Gio and Mano in Nimba. This long-standing perception of socio-economic inequality and injustice mapped unto severe high profile political exclusion of Gio and Mano elites under the Doe era (1980-1989), to contribute to the outbreak of external violence (Chapter 5).

At the state level, after the limited powers of chiefs was removed and replaced with a more powerful presidency in the Tubman era (1944-1971), Settler domination of high profile state positions created a heightened perception of Settler-indigenous political inequality in access to the state and its resources. There was some co-option of indigenous elites into presidential patronage networks under Tubman and his successor William Tolbert (1971-1980). But co-option was uneven and coastal communities gained more high profile representation than interior communities such as the Gio, Mano and Krahn. Meanwhile, liberalisation of education policy had opened up access to education for indigenous peoples. Political action in this period primarily came from indigenous literates concerned for their moral economy obligations as an educated 'labour' force and would-be elites, as opposed to rural indigenous masses, concerned with the distribution of state power on their own social position. Their grievances contributed to student-led urban struggles framed in terms of Settler minority domination of the indigenous majority. Anti-Settler student opposition created the conditions for the eventual overthrow of the Settler oligarchy in the 1980 coup d'état by army personnel from interior marginal communities, notably Gio, Mano and Krahn.

This chapter will be divided into two main sections. The first section traces the advent of Settler ‘colonial’ rule and attendant evolution of horizontal inequalities. It will also examine how horizontal inequalities under Settler rule became entrenched through the state. The second section will primarily focus on the experience and perception of Mandingo socio-economic ascendancy by the Gio and Mano and the regional tensions it generated. The third section traces the state-level factors that led to the 1980 coup d’état against Settler rule. The chapter ends by proposing that Liberia’s history suggests that analysts must bring the lens of horizontal inequality together with that of loyalty to moral economy to better understand ethnic mobilisation.

Evolution of horizontal inequalities under Settler rule

The arrival of the Americo-Liberian Settlers (the Settlers) in 1822 was prompted by the movement to abolish slavery in the 19th century. The American Colonisation Society (ACS) was organised to address the problem of free blacks among slave-owning Southern communities in the United States. In 1821, ACS and United States government agents, accompanied by the US Navy, travelled to Cape Mesurado to secure land to resettle free blacks from the Americas and recaptured slaves. Following negotiations with Dei, Gola and Mahnbahn leaders, Cape Mesurado was reluctantly ceded to the ACS with the signing of the Ducor contract on December 5, 1821.⁴ In 1822, the first group of Settlers landed in Cape Mesurado. By 1860, the Settlers numbered approximately 15,000.⁵ There were no substantial additions from resettlement in the ensuing years. Between 1822-1847, the Liberian colony remained

⁴ D. E. Dunn & Holsoe, 1985, p. 1.

⁵ D. E. Dunn & Holsoe, 1985, p. 8.

under the control of ACS agents with protection from the US Navy. Under the auspices of ACS agents, the colony transformed into the Commonwealth of Liberia in 1839 comprising a number of coastal settlements. These were Montserrado County (from which Grand Cape Mount County was later created), Grand Bassa County, Sinoe County, and Maryland County. With the support of the ACS, Liberia was declared a republic on 26 July 1847.⁶

From 1847-1878, competition and conflicts emerged within the Settler community for state control. After their arrival in 1822, the Settlers had embarked on the establishment of a system of agricultural capitalism akin to what they had observed in the American South.⁷ An agrarian elite emerged to control it. However, by the mid-1860s the plantation system was already on the decline worldwide and becoming substituted by industrial capitalism. It prompted some of the Settlers to engage in commercial trading. A Liberian shipping fleet developed with a powerful Monrovia mercantile elite.⁸ The Liberian merchants struggled to compete with European competitors who had operated in the region long before their arrival. They tried to wield control over the state to protect their own interests and controlled political power from behind the scenes. Eventually, their competitors outdid them in commerce, and precipitated the collapse of Settler plantations. Consequently, the decline in private economic activity made government employment the principal economic business in the state.

Within the Settler community, political access to the state was shaped by “skin pigmentation and occupational prestige”.⁹ A colour cleavage emerged between the Monrovia-based mercantile settlers (including the formal elite) and the agrarian

⁶ For more on Liberia’s founding history see for example: Liebenow, 1969. D. E. Dunn et al., 2001. Pham, 2004.

⁷ G. W. Brown, 1941.

⁸ G. W. Brown, 1941.

⁹ S. S. Hlophe, 1979, p. 91.

Settlers in the rural coastal settlements. It produced political parties based on skin colour.¹⁰ The Settlers broadly separated themselves into two main groups: mulattos or lighter-skinned, free people of colour from northern United States who had some education and darker skinned former slaves from the southern parts of United States with no education. There were also darker-skinned, recaptured slaves from other parts of Africa called Congos. A social hierarchy emerged amongst the Settlers based on skin colour and education, and darker skinned settlers were accorded a lower social status.¹¹ The division also reflected regions of origin in Liberia. Mulattos were generally Monrovia based, while darker-skinned Settlers tended to be based in the coastal settlements.

The political elite in those days consisted of mulattos; they controlled access to state power and economic resources through membership in the ruling Republican Party. Mulatto Settlers in the Republican Party occupied all the high profile positions in government. In 1848, the Masonic secret society was introduced to Liberia, but unlike the *Porro* equivalent, membership was limited to mulattos. It became a sodality for Mulatto politicians, merchants, administrators, and church officials to develop common bonds of belonging and to exclude 'others' as a way of maintaining mulatto hegemony.¹² It became an exclusive mulatto organisation whose members benefited from government patronage and commercial and political favouritism.¹³ Hlophe argues that, "it constituted the centre for the creation of Mulatto ethnic ideological symbols. Political participation in the Liberian government was defined almost exclusively along ethnic lines."¹⁴ However, mulatto oligarchy was short-lived.

¹⁰ D. E. Dunn & Holsoe, 1985, p. 8.

¹¹ Serroo, 2000, p. 98.

¹² S. S. Hlophe, 1979, p. 93.

¹³ Boahen, 1970, p. 194.

¹⁴ S. Hlophe, 1973, p. 249.

Increasing unequal access to political office and socio-economic resources prompted intense political rivalry between mulattos and darker-skinned Settlers.¹⁵

In 1869, the TWP was formed to represent darker-skinned Settlers who comprised the majority of small landowners and cash crop farmers in the settlements. They politically mobilised as a social group to take power from the mulattos by integrating the Congoes, indigenous Africans who met the criteria of assimilation into their ranks, and emigrants from the West Africans. The latter category included 346 Barbadians who had arrived in 1865, including Arthur Barclay (president from 1904-1912).¹⁶ The TWP came to power in 1878 and ruled Liberia in a de facto one-party system until Settler rule was overthrown in 1980. The political ascendancy of the TWP gave darker-skinned Settlers control over high profile political offices and the civil service.

From 1847-1904, indigenous communities had existed as geographically separate polities. Settler rule was limited to the coastal settlements, covering a width not beyond 40 miles from the coast.¹⁷ In 1869, the Interior department was created and the adjacent territory became known as the hinterland, but it did not lead to political control over the hinterland.¹⁸ Eventually, the Settler state expanded to incorporate interior communities through conquest and occupation, rather than consensus. Expansion into the hinterland was prompted by a variety of commercial, military and political reasons. As mentioned earlier, trading activities between the hinterland indigenous peoples and Europeans weakened the economic interests of the mercantile Settlers. French and British European colonial expansion and encroachment of borderlands in the latter part of the 19th century exacerbated these

¹⁵ S. Hlophe, 1973, p. 249.

¹⁶ Liebenow, 1987, p. 50.

¹⁷ D. E. Dunn & Holsoe, 1985, p. 1.

¹⁸ D. E. Dunn & Holsoe, 1985, p. 1.

threats. However, it was the European scramble for African lands in 1884 that impelled the Settlers to forcibly occupy the indigenous communities and assert sovereignty over the hinterland.¹⁹ Settler occupation of indigenous peoples was primarily a move to prevent their own occupation by the French and the British.²⁰ France had offered to place Liberia under its protection in 1879; it was American diplomatic action that saved the Settler state from European occupation.²¹ Treaties were enacted to officially establish the external borders of Liberia during Arthur Barclay's administration. Indirect rule of the indigenous population was formally introduced after Barclay's inauguration in January 1904.²²

From the onset, the Settlers maintained the political exclusion of indigenous people from full state citizenship.²³ An indigenous person's membership in the state depended on belonging to an ethnic group, and full state citizenship was limited to membership in the Settler category through the constitutional distinction between 'Negros' and 'aborigines'. The 1847 constitution limited eligibility for citizenship in the state to, "none but Negroes or persons of Negro descent".²⁴ Indigenous groups were labelled 'aborigines' instead of 'Negros' in the 1847 Declaration of Independence to show that they were not citizens of the state. The country was administratively divided into two jurisdictions: five 'civilised' coastal counties and five 'aboriginal' interior districts. A state law system was put in place to rule the counties, based on the 1847 constitution, while interior districts were to be ruled by 'traditional' leaders under the headship of state appointed district commissioners.

¹⁹ See Akingbade, 1994.

²⁰ This was the case in Sierra Leone where black settlements became subject to British colonial domination.

²¹ See Mower, July 1947, p. 270.

²² Akingbade, 1977, p. 133.

²³ Interview, Robert, Monrovia, 8th May 2009.

²⁴ 1847 Constitution of Liberia, Article V, Section 13.

Indigenous people were not eligible to vote or run for public office.²⁵ The belief guiding interactions with indigenous Liberians was that they would be ruled as semi-autonomous groups under chiefs with limited powers, but could be individually assimilated into the Settler group by following criteria under an apprenticeship law.²⁶

Political horizontal inequalities evolved simultaneously with socio-economic and cultural status inequalities. As the TWP government did not have a robust productive industry to generate income for the ‘colonial’ bureaucracy, it resorted to taking foreign loans. But, overwhelming reliance on foreign loans led to a debt crisis, which “created the possibility for financial and commercial capital to become entrenched in the Liberian economy”.²⁷ It begun in 1871, when the legislature authorised the negotiation of a loan of \$500,000 from Great Britain.²⁸ The government had difficulty settling the loan so it turned to granting concessions for commercial extraction around the country as a means of generating revenue to address the debt crisis. In the absence of a hegemonic Settler bourgeoisie involved in the private accumulation of capital, the productive parts of the Liberian economy were generally placed under the management of foreigners. For instance, in 1906, the government leased a small area of land to the US Firestone Tire and Rubber Company for rubber production. The Firestone loan was subsequently increased in 1926 to \$5 million loan in return for a 1 million acre concession for 99 years for the company to tap rubber trees. This increased foreign control over the extraction and production of the country’s major resources. But revenue for extraction of resources primarily benefited the Settlers who occupied high profile positions in the state.

²⁵ Pham, 2004, p. 20.

²⁶ This law had been established in 1838 to permit Settlers to keep the offspring of indigenous Liberians in their homes: Gershoni, 1985, p. 27.

²⁷ For more on the debt crisis see: Tokpa, 1990, pp. 27-28.

²⁸ For details of loans obtained by the Settler government in this period see: Tokpa, 1990.

Socio-economic inequalities became entrenched through the establishment of an ethnic hierarchy that gave Settlers exclusive control over all branches of state and economy to the Settlers. Gus Liebenow has suggested that the social stratification developed by the Settlers “resembled in form and spirit the caste relationship which long existed between the Tusi [sic] and the Hutu of Rwanda and Burundi.”²⁹ Settlers were accorded the upper caste status and indigenous ‘tribal’ were accorded the lower caste status. The upper caste was considered as *Kwii* or ‘civilised’ and while the lower caste were considered ‘uncivilised’. To be ‘civilised’ involved formal education, membership in a Christian organisation, fluency in English, and following the way of life in, for example dressing and housing, of the Settler community. To be ‘uncivilised’ meant that one was not Christian and lived according to a ‘tribal’ culture.³⁰ Indigenous people could be assimilated into the ‘civilised’ category under the Apprenticeship law, through adoption, intermarriage, or education.

At the top of this hierarchy was a core of powerful TWP families who dominated senior government positions, church leaderships, masonic lodges, and functioned as ‘kingmakers’ of the presidency.³¹ For example, “in 1958, the Speaker of the House of Representatives was also Leader of the True Whig Party for Montserrat County, Grand Master of the Masonic Craft, Chairman of the Board of Trustees at the University (where his wife was Dean), and owned one of the leading law firms in the republic.”³² Extended family networks had become important within the Settler community following the TWP overthrow of mulatto hegemony. According to Hlophe “family ties became the only useful channels for political

²⁹ Liebenow, 1987, p. 4.

³⁰ Warren D’Azevedo, 1970, p. 110.

³¹ Fraenkel, 1964, pp. 197-198.

³² Fraenkel, 1964, p. 198.

advancement.”³³ In Liebenow’s observation, “they provided access to the spoils available to the True Whig Leadership.”³⁴ Webster and Boahen also note that government became preoccupied with balancing positions in the civil service for the network of TWP families.³⁵ The core elite was able to amass vast wealth through access to high profile positions in the state and control of rubber plantations and vast tracts of land.

Next in the status hierarchy were lower strata Settlers who occupied levels of authority in the bureaucracy other than high profile positions, legislature, and judiciary. ‘Tribal’ representatives also occupied positions in the legislature but they did not have the same social standing as the Settlers. This was followed by civil servants, teachers, nurses and the like, including co-opted coastal indigenous people such as the Gola and the Kru. For instance, Dei and Bassa participated in the Settler economy as clerks as a result of missionary education, and as artisans and domestic workers.³⁶ Educated Gola and Kru were able to form an alliance with some prominent Settler families. Vai leaders were also able to form an upper-class coalition with the Settler political leadership; Vai families like the Fahnbulleh and Massaquoi benefited from Christian affiliations to receive political appointments.³⁷ In a similar vein mission educated Grebo were able to gain employment as ministers and teachers in the early 1900s.³⁸

The Settler government pursued administrative divisions that led to discriminatory differences between the coast and interior, and which placed the interior and its peoples “in a politically subordinate relationship with the coastal areas

³³ S. Hlophe, 1973, p. 250.

³⁴ Liebenow, 1969, p. 136.

³⁵ Boahen, 1970, pp. 156-157.

³⁶ Liebenow, 1987, p. 35.

³⁷ Liebenow, 1987, p. 35.

³⁸ Liebenow, 1987, p. 36.

until the 1960s”.³⁹ An administrative distinction was established between the first counties and the hinterland under Edwin Barclay (1930-1944).⁴⁰ In 1932, Edwin Barclay divided the five hinterland districts into the eastern, central and western provinces, while the coastal region maintained the existing division into five counties, with a sub-division of four territories (namely, Marshall, Sasstown, River Cess, and Kru Coast). Crucially, counties were ruled by a state law system based on the 1847 constitution, while hinterland provinces ruled through informal ‘protectorate’ arrangements.⁴¹ Interior communities such as the Gio and Mano remained largely marginal. But this did not generate mass mobilisation against the Settlers, as they were administered through semi-autonomous indigenous chiefdoms, backed by coercive instruments of the state, namely the LFF. Rather, horizontal inequalities that emerged at the regional level between Mandingo and Gio and Mano played an important role in the origin and development of local categories of ‘us’ and ‘others’, that formed the roots of an exclusive politics of ethnic belonging, which intermingled with historic moral ethnicity grievances against ‘traditional’ leaders.

Horizontal inequalities and origins of Gio/Mano ‘othering’ the Mandingo

By the late 19th century, there were relatively cordial relations between long-distance Mandingo traders and fragmented Gio/Mano agrarian communities (Chapter 3). They traded in complementary goods and service. Each group purchased from the other what they did not produce. The Gio and Mano economy was dominated by kola production. Kola was a currency of self-dignity and civic virtue for ordinary Gio and Mano. It was also currency of wealth and power. The Mandingo economy was

³⁹ D. E. Dunn & Holsoe, 1985, p. 2.

⁴⁰ D. E. Dunn & Holsoe, 1985, p. 1.

⁴¹ D. E. Dunn & Holsoe, 1985, p. 2.

dominated by trade in goods such as clothing and specialised knowledge services, such as those of marabouts. Mandingo traders from Beyla, Jakudu, and Kankan in Guinea travelled to Gio and Mano market areas such as Ganta, Sanniquellie and Bahn to exchange goods and services for kola. These groups maintained distinctive identities with some form of cultural boundaries (discussed in Chapter 3). These boundaries determined the allocation of means of production to newcomers. For instance, Gio/Mano allocated land rights through orders of arrival. Stranger-father relations defined land rights between them and the Mandingo migrant traders. But boundaries were fluid and movable; assimilation was encouraged through marriage alliance and religious conversion. Favourable kola trade conditions attracted an influx of Mandingo traders away from other interior regions such as present-day Lofa and Bong counties to Nimba.⁴²

Settler colonial rule in Nimba in the early 20th century encouraged closer inter-ethnic economic activity between Gio/Mano and Mandingo. This was prompted by the introduction of a cash economy. The new system made inter-ethnic cooperation desirable between cash-rich Mandingo traders and Gio/Mano peasant communities. Under the presidency of Daniel Howard (1912-1920) and Charles King (1920-1930) indigenous communities were divided into taxable districts and placed under the headship of district commissioners. Cash was needed to pay the 1912 government loan. The hut tax only applied to those adult males who lived and owned a hut in the interior parts of the country. It involved a \$1 charge per hut when it was first introduced among the Loma in 1915; payment was subsequently made in shillings.⁴³ The tax law was formally enacted in 1916. After the integration of Nimba in 1918, the tax became common across the region. Village/town chiefs were ordered to collect

⁴² Kay, 1984, pp. 32-35.

⁴³ Ford, 1990, p. 226.

taxes from all huts within their authority. They were required to pass them up the chain to the paramount chiefs for delivery to district commissioners in the regions administrative base in Sanniquellie.

Payment of the tax presented a practical challenge to these subsistence economies that had been concerned with accumulation of wealth-in-people rather than financial capital. Wealth-in-people brought kola, but it was used currency to barter for goods, such as marriage items used as bride wealth, rather than to accumulate financial fortune. An elder of Kpein recounted that:

[O]ur people those days never actually believed in the financial [material] resources but in human resource. That was their belief. So the more people you got around you, the more you wealthy. That what encourage the polygamy. If I got 4, 5 wives and people coming making my farm, my wife going so, the other wife going my one got 4, 5 kitchen of rice you know I become big man.⁴⁴

Ironically, polygamous men with several huts faced an enormous burden. They had to meet the tax liability for each household's hut, but they could not use the kola their dependents produced as direct payment for the tax. Instead of limiting one household per hut, households tried to group together under a single hut. But in 1929, President King directed that chiefs and adult men were to provide a hut for each of their wives.⁴⁵ People tried to evade payment, but chiefs were abused for failing to meet their tax quota. In Bahn, informants who witnessed the collection of the hut tax recounted that: "This man will have about four houses, he gat four women, [but] when the tax time reach, this man not get \$5. They will tie this man with stick."⁴⁶

The government adopted coercive measures to extract the tax.⁴⁷ They relied on abusive tactics of LFF soldiers to enforce the collection of taxes. Some commissioners served as soldiers. LFF soldiers and commissioners were not paid

⁴⁴ Interview, Chief Elder Domah, Kpein, 21st March 2014.

⁴⁵ Ford, 1990, p. 231.

⁴⁶ Interview, Focus Group, Bahn, 19th March 2014.

⁴⁷ Akingbade, 1977.

promptly and often abused their authority by engaging in excessive tax collection for private benefit.⁴⁸ Bahn informants recalled that:

That time you don't get it those soldier from Sanniquellie they come they get ladder. They can put it on you. They can put on you they climb on you...they walk over it they jump. Then they turn around they walk over you they jump.... You bend like this they tie the ladder on you and then they climb on your back because you don't pay. If you get lucky they will tie a stick on your foot.⁴⁹

The abusive practices of the LFF prompted Gio and Mano men, including lower-ranked chiefs, to seek credit facilities from two main sources to meet their tax liability: senior chiefs, particularly paramount chiefs, and cash-rich Mandingo traders.⁵⁰ High-ranking political chiefs gained cash-wealth from commissions received for collecting taxes for the government. They also gained cash from sending labourers to work in extractive industries; a good example is the income Tuazama derived from Firestone after their expansion in the 1920s pulled Gio and Mano into the labour market. Subjects loaned wives to chiefs and pawned their labour, livestock and dependents to chiefs for cash until President King banned it after the League of Nations report. As in the pre-Settler era, pawning brought wealth-in-people who could cultivate material affluence in the form of cash, livestock, labour, wives, and produce to the big chiefs.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Gio and Mano moral economy of leadership in the pre-Settler era expected big men to provide relief from hard times. It was seen as part of the welfare obtained from providing service to big men. Transacting with chiefs for payment of the tax was seen as part of their moral economy. It became an important way for the new chiefs to legitimise themselves and to support the practice of forced labour. Assistance with tax needs was seen as discharging an obligation to reciprocate

⁴⁸ Reeve, 1923, p. 26.

⁴⁹ Interview, Focus Group Interview, Bahn, 19th March 2014.

⁵⁰ Other sources of revenue recorded by Ford include assistance from government messengers, soldiers, clerks, missionaries etc. who settled in Nimba: Ford, 1990, pp. 231-237.

the labour provided by subjects. It also explains Gio and Mano compliance or acquiescence with the practice. In this way, pre-existing ideas continued despite leadership reorganisation by the Settlers, as a “leader’s sense of obligation to his supporters survived the transition to indirect rule”.⁵¹ Ford suggests that while chiefs may have tried to conform to pre-existing *boumehn* (Gio word for Chief) ideals, this was only maintained with “core” followers because chiefs were “opportunistic and transactional” with their peripheral followers.

However, informants suggest that the use of generosity as a balancing tool between power and labour was extended to peripheral followers through extending access to ancestral patrimony and assisting with tax payment. In this way the nature of accountability did not change. People perceived that their real exploiters were the Settler-dominated state evidenced by the actions of the LFF, not their chiefs as the latter maintained familiar practices of accountability. As we shall see in Chapter 5, when state domination by minority groups was seen to interrupt top-down relations of exchange it led to what informants refer to as “noncompliance” against some chiefs; it became an important sign of resistance from below against chiefs who lost legitimacy in the 1980s.

By far, cash-rich Mandingo traders were the main source of payment for the hut tax. The tax was collected in the rainy season when many farmers did not have sufficient stores of kola to trade; many relied on borrowing from Mandingo traders for payment:

Then the Mandingo Man will come say hold that my stranger-father here.... So that Mandingo Man will gave you his cash. When the kola time come, then you pay the Mandingo Man with the kola. Then at the same time they [local elders] use to transfer the kola [to] Guinea [by providing portage] for the Mandingo

⁵¹ Ford, 1990, p. 254.

Man. They will take two bucket they pay you 60 cents one bucket for 30 cents.... Then our fathers too turn round they love the people.⁵²

Mandingo informants recounted similarly recounted that:

[T]he only thing Mandingo use to do was collection time when they say they are collecting hut tax a Mano friend or Gio friend that you have in the town that does not have the [means] take the money and give to him. Sometimes when they come to collect tax...some of them can't afford to get it, and now they will tie capital *cutu* on their foot. Put stick here, put stick here, and tie it. Put them under the sun to say you have to pay. Then some of them will say oh, my Mandingo friend went to Bahn. You loose me when he come I will pay. They didn't [have to] pay them back that is why they open the friendship. [This was one reason why the older generation had relatively peaceful interactions with their wealthier neighbours].... There are some Mano that stay with the Mandingo to go to Kankan [in Guinea] they say you are my business partner let's go.⁵³

Mandingo traders extended credit in expectation of kola harvest. The extension of credit in expectation of kola harvests increased trust and ties between Mandingo traders and Gio and Mano big men. Big men supplied the traders with Gio and Mano labour in the form of porters to carry the kola to Guinea. The traders directly employed some of the labourers, thereby creating direct labour relations between them and the Gio and Mano.⁵⁴ Chiefs who also benefitted from collecting the wages, in the form of taxes, from the hired labourers permitted this practice.⁵⁵ It was almost impossible for people to pay the tax without encouraging their dependents to sell their labour to Mandingo traders to obtain money to pay taxes on their huts. This has prompted analysts like Ellis to argue that the hut tax was created to monetise rural economies, and to integrate them into the central economy as a way of providing cheap labour for foreign companies such as Firestone.⁵⁶

An increase in kola trade led to an influx of Mandingo traders in Nimba Chapter 3). It also contributed to Mandingo socio-economic ascendancy in the

⁵² Interview, Town Chief Bero, Bahn, 19th March 2014.

⁵³ Interview, Commissioner Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

⁵⁴ Ford, 1990, pp. 273-275.

⁵⁵ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 106.

⁵⁶ Ellis, 1999, p. 46.

county.⁵⁷ However, the horizontal inequalities that emerged in the local cash economy were mainly negotiated between Mandingo migrant traders and Gio/Mano chiefly classes. When the traders arrived, they were reluctant to settle in the midst of non-Muslims because of their Islamic faith. Many were itinerant traders that remained for short periods of time. To encourage them to settle, some of the traders were offered settlement lands by the chiefs in commercial areas through the establishment of stranger-father relations. An example is the Mandingo settlement in Ganta, which later became known as Sukolala.⁵⁸ According to Jabateh,

It was very hard for the native people to get money. They don't have money so in between there, those who got money, they were able to get properties.... That how we managed to get some of these lands. Like the Sukolala you talking about, they tell everybody you go brush that area it for you and your people to be there. Because of the traditional way of living. You and myself don't have the same way for you and myself to live in the same room, it very hard. And like the Muslims not used to mingle with people who are not Muslims. Even for them to drink in the same cup, no. Even to eat in the same pan, no. Even to sleep in the same room, and their counterpart, the people, they get their traditional way of living. They don't allow anybody to go in that [*Poro*] bush if you are not a member. The Sukolala [area]...⁵⁹

Some of the chiefs converted to Islam. For instance, Paramount Chief Tuazama and some of his lower chiefs converted to Islam in 1933; he constructed mosques and Quranic schools in Bahn.⁶⁰ Houses were constructed for the traders. Chiefs arranged marriages between Gio/Mano women and Mandingo traders to form alliances with them. for instance, Tuazama arranged for his nephew's daughter to marry Musa Sackor, the son of a prominent Mandingo 'traditional' healer and trader by the name Soko Sackor.⁶¹ But, Mandingo did not reciprocate marriages with Gio and Mano; with the exception of Muslim chiefs, Mandingo women were not permitted to marry Gio/Mano men because of their Islamic faith.

⁵⁷ Ford, 1990, p. 264.

⁵⁸ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

⁵⁹ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

⁶⁰ This is corroborated by: Ford, 1990, p. 267.

⁶¹ This is corroborated by: Ford, 1990, p. 266.

From the later 1920s, the Settler state required chiefs to establish administrative markets for trade. They introduced a quota system that compelled subordinates to furnish markets with sellers. Many chiefs sought and appointed Mandingo traders as “market headmen” to encourage cash transactions in the markets.⁶² As clients of the chiefs, the traders were granted land near market areas in places like Saclepea and Ganta; an example is Sukolala. Some chiefs went to the extent of evicting local Gio and Mano to make room for Mandingo settlements.⁶³ Others like Tuazama constructed buildings for Mandingo traders in Bahn. Mandingo quarters like Sukolala started to grow as more migrants settled. New market towns such as Ganta, Kahnplay, Bahn, Saclepea Sanniquillie grew into commercial ‘cities’. They replaced pre-Settler kola markets such as Telo in the Gio forest, and the Mano village-markets at Gbapa and Gblei in prominence; these begun to decline as trade centres.⁶⁴ With the growth of the new government market places, Nimba came to have the largest number of urban settlements.⁶⁵ This can be attributed to interaction between the Mandingo traders and chiefs in the period of Settler rule.⁶⁶

Oral history of the Konneh family is typical. As noted in Chapter 3, the first generation Konneh came to Saclepea, the main town in Saclepea-Mah District from Beyla in the mid-19th century as a migrant trader.⁶⁷ He was given, and married, seven Mano women from Saclepea, with whom he had many children. These women were given to him by his hosts to encourage him to settle in the area. Konneh acquired ‘big land’ in the town, which he turned into private houses for his family and commercial properties. He constructed stores to trade in produce and a peanut farm. He hired

⁶² A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 109.

⁶³ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 109.

⁶⁴ Ford, 1990, p. 269.

⁶⁵ Schulze, 1973, p. 81.

⁶⁶ Ford, 1990, p. 263.

⁶⁷ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 26th January 2014.

Mano labourers to work on his farm. In 1922, Konneh was co-opted by President King as Marketing Coordinator for Saclepea and its environs. In this capacity, he was responsible for ensuring that various towns and villages brought particular items to trade in the local market to ensure its proper functioning, as part of the Settler incorporation of the area into the central economy of the state. Those who failed to deliver were fined. After his death in 1962 he passed the properties on to his children.

Mandingo migration into Nimba increased through their alliance with the big chiefs. Many became residents in Gio and Mano communities rather than migrant traders. According to the results of the first two national censuses, their population grew from 29,750 in 1962 to 58,414 in 1974.⁶⁸ Many commercial families developed tight trade networks and entered into mining, tailoring, and other trades. An example is Konneh's son, Toure, who entered into diamond mining in Dumpea, Zoe Geh District, Nimba. In addition to trading Toure employed local people to dig diamonds in a mine he owned.⁶⁹ In the late 1960s, a group of Mandingo traders including a prominent Mandingo by the name of Alhaji Bility organised an investment company in Nimba areas of Yekepa and Woloto to promote Mandingo involvement in farming. Many Mandingo entrepreneurs were granted financial capital at low interest rates to buy lands for farming.⁷⁰ Mandingo employed Gio and Mano wage labourers.

The practice of lending Gio and Mano cash for payment of taxes and employing them as labourers led to the perception of a privileged class of wealthy Mandingo and an underclass of Gio and Mano labourers. Rather than integration with the Gio and Mano among who they settled, the Mandingo permitted them to have their own chiefs. In the case of Ganta, Jabateh recounted that:

⁶⁸Government of Liberia National Censuses: 1962 and 1974.

⁶⁹ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 26th January 2014.

⁷⁰ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 115.

[The] Mandingo Chief here they call him Musa Kroma, Jerome Kroma father, the man that was running MONICO, his father. [He was] elected as Mandingo Chief. Elected by his people. Because my eye open on him, even though I was born, but for my eye to open on him and even I went to his office. I was born before he became Chief. The Government say the Mandingo must vote for their Chiefs. To be a Mandingo Clan Chief And they was having Mandingo Clan Chief, Mandingo Paramount Chief, Mano Clan Chief, Mano Paramount Chief. Musa Kroma] He was a Paramount Chief. the Clan Chief they called him Bangalee Dorleh. The Quarter Chief [of Soqualala] it was one Mr Kroma.

But despite their social organisation as a group in Nimba, Mandingo were exempted from government forced labour. To ordinary Gio and Mano Mandingo exempted themselves on the grounds that they were foreigners; this is used as a basis to contest Mandingo claims to belonging in the region. Informants in Bahn recalled that:

These Mandingo people had said that they were not citizens, they were strangers and could not do the force labour; to build this motor road, some people died on this road, when they were building these roads from here to Monrovia, from here to Sanniquellie from here to Tappita; it was not an easy thing and they will always consider themselves strangers.⁷¹

Such accounts are recalled with emotion as Gio and Mano chiefs provided the Mandingo settlers with Gio and Mano government labourers as porters and builders, even though they were exempted from the practice.⁷² The chiefs benefited from cash payments in exchange at the expense of subjects. One such chief was the rival of Tuazama, Paramount Chief Soka Doa, popularly known as Johnny Volker, who later became Senator of Nimba. Like Tuazama, Volker came to power in his youth in the period of indirect rule. One prominent Mano informant from Saclepea named Queeglay recalled that:

[W]hen time comes like that Volker will command people like this week, Bole kola will go to Guinea. And he will collect his own Mano people to give him forty Mano men to support it to the nearest town in Guinea, so they can be haul inside Guinea. That's how my uncle died. My uncle, my father brother was carried away by the people to go carry the kola to Lola and that the old man didn't return and one day I went to Lola to find out and that was that [dead] [Labourers] were expecting the chief to protect their going, not to go for force

⁷¹ Interview, Elder Guannu Sr., Ganta, 20th March 2014.

⁷² A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 29.

labour. They will give something to the men; [Mandingo traders] give some amount of money if you can make manpower available to carry [their] kola then they do it.⁷³

Consequently, accusations were levelled that, “Voker went [too] far. He started associating [with] the Mandingo too much and some came from his ‘medicine’ [sorcery that he obtained from them] and some came from this reason. They don’t want Volker, they don’t [want] him at all.”⁷⁴ This suggests that commoners were not just passive and completely dominated by the elite. Grievances developed over the ties between chiefs and Mandingo. Volker was accused of sorcery, which he had obtained from Mandingo clients. Such narratives were deployed to delegitimise him for failing to protect his people as leader. Ordinary people who had been initially receptive of Mandingo settlement started to harbour resentment towards them, even though this was mainly directed against chiefs. According to Queeglay,

[T]he Mano people were angry with their leaders that they give the Mandingo people place to stay and now they took it from them. Mano people were angry with their leaders, if you are the owner and the chief who become the [leader] put [them] there they will become enemy to that chief.... It was a boiling pot being boiled already, so they were just looking for an opportunity so they get slow. That thing have been happening years and years since way back, so they was like incubating that bad feeling hurt.⁷⁵

Chiefs sought protection from rising ethnic consciousness and discontentment among the local strata by accommodating Settler rule. Through alliance with the state they were able to enforce unity and derive a degree of support from distributing patronage. Leaders like Volker engaged in “conspicuous consumption [to serve the] political function of legitimising power...new roads, lakes, “story houses”, markets and lavish feasts all redounded on a chiefs’ name, winning him praise and luring followers from

⁷³ Interview, David Queeglay, Former member of the House of Representative and Superintendent of Saclepea, Saclepea, 19th March 2014.

⁷⁴ Interview, David, Saclepea, 19th March 2014.

⁷⁵ Interview, David, Saclepea, 19th March 2014.

competitors.”⁷⁶ The imperative to win support was accentuated by the introduction of elections to select chiefs, and then state legislative representatives under Settler rule. Through his patronage Volker was able to win support to represent Nimba in the Liberian Senate until his death in 1977.

New wealth in resources expanded the terms of civic virtue to include personal achievements in commercial wealth, as local elites emulated their Settler counterparts by constructing colonial style houses. As Ford notes, prior to conquest there was no differentiation between the houses of big men and their followers; this was largely attributable to shifting cultivation practices of the Gio and Mano.⁷⁷ Moreover, the payment of taxes did not encourage this change until the late 1920s when the government started the practice of using forced labour to construct presidential compounds for official visits to the interior, such as President King’s conference with chiefs in Kakata in 1929. Chiefs like Tuazama and Volker emulated this style by constructing multi-story palaces built from zinc and cement. Having a home constructed out of zinc and cement, as opposed to a mud hut, came to signify wealth and status in the countryside. But pre-Settler forms of affluence such as following, land, and livestock continued to be sources of esteem and respect. Wealthy chiefs like Volker, who were rich in livestock, were noted for throwing abundant cow feasts for their supporters.⁷⁸ As noted in Chapter 3, this was an important method for *boumehn* to obtain followers through voluntary attachment in the past.

Over time, Mandingo business activities expanded from trading in kola to activities in the extractive sector. They thrived to the extent that the decline of the Liberian economy in the 1970s did not have a severe impact on Mandingo traders as diamond deposits were discovered in parts of Nimba such as Gbapa. Mandingo

⁷⁶ Ford, 1990, pp. 282-283.

⁷⁷ Ford, 1990, p. 281.

⁷⁸ Becker-Donner & Deans, 1939, p. 301.

businessmen like Bility made a fortune in the diamond trade.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, the decline in the economy affected Gio and Mano employment in the main local industry LAMCO, which had been established in 1958 to mine iron ore. LAMCO provided employment for foremen, drivers, storekeepers, and the like. Socio-economically marginalised Gio and Mano ‘youths’ and peasants resented Mandingo ownership of lands in Nimba, which they had partly acquired from settlement and inter-marriage, co-option into the state, and wealth accrued from trade. According to Augustine Konneh, “they blamed the Mandingo for their bad economic situation”.⁸⁰ Martin Ford has also noted that “Dan [Gio were] too young to recall the pre-world War II period were more likely to speak of the ‘Damn Dingo’ than to refer to ‘my Mandingo’.”⁸¹

Mandingo socio-economic ascendancy in Nimba did not immediately translate into political power or the high socio-cultural ‘civilised’ status at the state level. This was largely because they maintained their Islamic religion, polygynous marriage and ‘tribal’ dress in a state where Christianity had become established as the religion of the ‘civilised’ Settlers.⁸² Unlike many European missionaries, those who went to Liberia as missionaries also stayed and became Settlers; through them, Christianity became the religion of the Settler state.⁸³ The social hierarchy was still ‘bureaucratically based’, with the business class largely separate from ‘civilised’ educated elite and Mandingos could not get government jobs as publicly practicing Muslims.⁸⁴ This changed under Tubman as Mandingo became co-opted and appointed into important government positions.

⁷⁹ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 116.

⁸⁰ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 118.

⁸¹ Ford, 1990, p. 5.

⁸² Fraenkel, 1964, p. 209.

⁸³ Lowenkopf, 1976, pp. 40-42.

⁸⁴ Fraenkel, 1964, p. 210.

For many ordinary Gio/Mano, Mandingo political and socio-economic ascendancy led to a heightened sense of difference. An important factor was the failure to negotiate increasing horizontal inequalities with Gio and Mano commoners. Ordinary Gio and Mano became indebted to Mandingo traders with whom they did not have a common moral economy. The chiefly class benefited from commercial alliances and transactions with Mandingo traders, often at the expense of their subordinates. However, it was not just the mere existence of these inequalities that provoked this sense of difference. Rather new material realities heightened popular perception regarding the threat of social extinction from moral community because of two main reasons: threat of disruption to land relations, and Mandingo competition and control in areas in which ordinary Gio/Mano had ‘traditionally’ specialised and exchanged their labour for support.

First, the introduction of title deeds by the Settler state made property alienable through state land tenure, and cash-wealthy Mandingo traders were able to purchase lands in commercial towns in Nimba from chiefs. Chiefs could sell freehold ‘tribal’ lands in their custody to Mandingo traders to obtain cash wealth. Jabateh recounted that:

When Tubman came [1944-1971] he declared that everybody should buy their land. And now, when he was setting off, if that half lot, if that one lot, the surveyor come and you pay for it, they tell you come pay \$30. \$30 that day, today is 100,000 to somebody right? A lot of money for them. For you to touch it is not easy. Ok, and now those people who were able to afford that amount, they were able to buy land.⁸⁵

Under Tubman’s rule, Mandingo traders in Nimba were permitted to have their own chiefs for purposes of tax collection, rather than submitting to Gio/Mano political authority. Mandingo who had been granted settlement lands begun to refer to

⁸⁵ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

settlements like Sukolala as their quarters.⁸⁶ But ordinary people saw alienation of land as a betrayal of stranger-father norms:

When the [indigenous migrant] settlers came and say: “Y’all give us place to squat and make small farm.” They go and prepare their own paper and come and say undersign. Sitting with the impression of squatting there but deep down in their mind, it’s for them. When the first family die, the second people that will take over, he will deny I who gave the land to him, I who allow him to squat there, he will deny my children from entering the place. He say man your parent had sold this place before, he sold this place to me before. Now they become owner of this place now. My children can’t go there no longer. So now, after experiencing these things, I say...if I allow you to sit here, only plant rice. Don’t grow any cash crops. Now we became sceptical, [this is] how stranger occupying land. [Instead of respecting the stranger-father.] How he’s a stranger-father...he allows [them] to marry his sister of his daughter, after harvest [they] should give him the courtesy.⁸⁷

It led to rising emotions among ordinary Gio and Mano because people feared that they would become socially extinct.⁸⁸ People could not negotiate the exclusion of land by inter-marriage with Mandingo women. Moreover, there was a perception that Mandingo felt they had a higher cultural status because of their refusal to permit their women to inter-marry:

The problem is that Mandingo was so segregatory, they don’t want Mano man to marry. They feel they are more civilize and more unique and they are not Muslim in faith so they don’t allow you. So their [integration] was very difficult...[even] if they marry and stay long in the relationship you can be with them for twenty years you are not part of them...so it is hard for Mandingo man allow you to eat with them from the same pan.⁸⁹

Gio/Mano peasants were unhappy that the Mandingos were acquiring land in Nimba that they saw as ancestral patrimony from ancestors ‘investing’ labour value in settlement lands. In the pre-Settler era, these horizontal inequalities could be circumvented through war (Chapter 3), but in the State arena inter-ethnic exchange could not be negotiated. Mandingo enjoyed leadership support. This fear of social extinction through alienation from land relations help to explain the development of

⁸⁶ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

⁸⁷ Interview, William, Kpein, 21st March 2014.

⁸⁸ Interview, William, Kpein, 21st March 2014.

⁸⁹ Interview, David, Saclepea, 19th March 2014. This is corroborated by: Ford, 1990, p. 270.

local categories of ‘us’ and ‘other’ from below by appealing to past precedent in which property rights were negotiated through orders of arrival, and the sources and emotive appeal of an exclusive politics of autochthonous ethnic belonging (Chapter 5).

Consequently, previously inclusive Gio/Mano moral economies that were based on vertically integrating ‘latecomers’, such as the Mandingo, as kin or clients became exclusive ‘tribes’ with a sharpened sense of difference and competition, which subsequently provoked ethnic exclusion (Chapter 5). Integrated Mandingo became horizontal ‘strangers’ who did not have territorial belonging. As we shall see in chapter 5, the worsening of these inequalities became an important factor that mobilised Gio/Mano moral ethnicity (ideas) for war.

The second reason that made new inequalities under Settler rule prompt a heightened popular perception regarding the threat of social extinction from moral community among the Gio and Mano was Mandingo engagement in farming activities. The Mandingo who had been ‘traditionally’ involved in trade became prominent in agriculture. One of the Mandingo families that became involved in agriculture was the Jabateh family in Ganta. They were able to buy a large farm in Kpein to grow cash crops such as rubber, coffee and cocoa. Apart from recruiting family labour, they hired Gio and Mano labourers to work on the farm:

My father was farmer, all my family [became] farmers in Kpein. They plant rubbers, coffee, cocoa, etc.... As soon as you pass that depot right on your left there, you look at that whole palm bay, it’s for me.... [A]ll the tribes like Kpelleh, loma, like this people here Gio people [worked for him]. My father, he was having almost 18 wives. My father borne 43 children. Out of the 43 children, I’m the first born. What my eye open on, what my father was doing for all these 18 women that he was having. They go to the farm. They gat a farm land for all of them, when I say farm land, they plant you know every year they make rice farm etc.... Now, they get *kuu* [labour union] and that 18 woman they will be in this *kuu* [union]. [M]y father avoid future embarrassment in the family that will split the family. [In] his will, [he said take my pace] “all my properties, all my farm, all my house all for you [as the first born son].... I’m

farming, right now people are tapping, right now I have a palm bale, right now I planting. On my own I have 250 acres of land.⁹⁰

Konneh provides similar accounts of Mandingo expansion into farming in Nimba.⁹¹ In the 1960s, an investment company was set up by prominent Mandingo traders in Nimba County towns such as Yekepa and Woloto to back Mandingo agricultural activities; it provided financial support to potential Mandingo farmers to enable them to purchase land and hire labourers to engage in farming.⁹² The company provided lower interest rates to Mandingo, which could not be matched by similar Gio and Mano companies.⁹³ Many Gio and Mano perceived Mandingo prominence in farming as a challenge to their ‘traditional’ area of specialisation in the economy. In their historical subsistence economies, peasants relied on their labour to achieve self-mastery and respect by exchanging it for support. Competition with economically dominant Mandingo was seen as a threat to their vocation. According to Konneh, Mandingo traders “faced opposition from the local people, led by the power associations...who traditionally controlled trade [and] and found themselves in competition with the Mandingo.”⁹⁴ The commercial activities of Mandingo were also seen as a challenge to local economic activities.

These fears account for why the Mandingo became the significant ‘other’ of the Gio and Mano in Nimba County.⁹⁵ Consequently, previously inclusive Gio/Mano moral economies that were based on vertically integrating ‘latecomers’, such as the Mandingo, as kin or clients became exclusive ‘tribes’ with a sharpened sense of difference, which subsequently provoked ethnic competition (Chapter 5). Integrated Mandingo became horizontal ‘strangers’ who did not have territorial belonging. Yet,

⁹⁰ Interview, Joseph Kogbay, Kpein, 21st March 2014.

⁹¹ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 115.

⁹² A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 115.

⁹³ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 115.

⁹⁴ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 15.

⁹⁵ Interview, Focus Group, Kpein, 21st March 2014.

‘others’ such as the Kpelle maintain settlements in what is considered Gio and Mano country without a similar form of contestation.

The apparent threats of Mandingo ascendancy were increased by a perception of state leadership bias towards them. The Mandingo enjoyed such close ties with the Settler elite that Gus Liebenow referred to them as “an auxiliary of the Americo-Liberian community”.⁹⁶ After Tubman came to power in 1944, he entered into a socio-economic alliance with Mandingo businessmen who already dominated much of the trading activities in the interior. Recognizing the Settler community’s need for goods from the interior, Tubman promoted state policies that openly encouraged the Mandingos to gain increasing importance in the Liberian economy in the form of increased trading networks and new economic opportunities. During the 1940s the Settler elite developed close commercial links with Mandingo pastoralists for sheep and cattle.⁹⁷ Mandingo businessmen were, thus, able to expand their economic activities under Tubman. They increased the volume of their existing trade in goods like cocoa.⁹⁸ They also became involved in new businesses such as transportation, textiles and fuel supplies.⁹⁹ Through state leadership co-option, Mandingo businessmen were able to compete with foreigners such as the Lebanese for emerging opportunities in commerce and retail trade by starting shops to provide for the basic needs of workers of the booming extractive industries.¹⁰⁰ Mandingo became prominent in the economy as traders in diamonds, gold, foreign exchange, and cattle.¹⁰¹ They became the vast majority of a class of wealthy Liberian traders in the interior.

⁹⁶ Liebenow, 1987, p. 111.

⁹⁷ W. D’Azevedo, 1969, pp. 14-15.

⁹⁸ A. Konneh, 1992, pp. 184-185.

⁹⁹ Liebenow, 1987, pp. 232-233.

¹⁰⁰ Kieh, 1992, pp. 56-65.

¹⁰¹ Fraenkel, 1964, p. 210.

The Mandingo constituted approximately 4 percent of the population, but they enjoyed disproportionate political representation under Settler rule.¹⁰² Tubman appointed Mandingos as officials in his government. For instance, Momolu Dukuly, a Mandingo attorney and politician, was the first indigenous Liberian to be appointed Secretary of State (minister of foreign affairs) in 1954.¹⁰³ By the end of the Tubman era the Mandingo had made massive achievements in both commerce and political representation (albeit small).¹⁰⁴ These advantages, however, were not extended to their Gio and Mano neighbours.¹⁰⁵ Tubman's successor, William Tolbert (1971-1980) also allied with Mandingo businessmen. Tolbert awarded commercial contracts for the transportation of gasoline, supply of materials for public buildings and provision of foodstuffs for various government establishments to Mandingo businessmen.¹⁰⁶ He also increased ties with Mandingo traders.¹⁰⁷ In a similar move as his predecessor, he appointed Mandingos as ministers in his administration between 1971 and 1980.¹⁰⁸

Thus, the evolution and configuration of socio-economic horizontal inequalities between Gio/Mano and Mandingo under the Settler era did not only increase a sense of difference and rivalry between these groups, but it also became an underlying source of tension (Chapter 5). Faced with increasing ethnic-class consciousness from below, many chiefs that allied with members of the Mandingo ethnic community relied on accommodation to Settler rule to maintain their rule. Those who were favoured by the Settler regime were able to rely on the protection of coercive instruments of such as the LFF. But, the evolution of horizontal inequalities under Settler rule created a historic sense of socio-economic threat to pre-existing

¹⁰² D. Harris, 1999, p. 453.

¹⁰³ D. E. Dunn et al., 2001, p. 116. For more, see: Lowenkopf, 1976, pp. 45-51.

¹⁰⁴ A. Konneh, 1993, p. 53.

¹⁰⁵ Liebenow, 1987, pp. 153-154.

¹⁰⁶ A. Konneh, 1993, pp. 53-56.

¹⁰⁷ Kieh, 1992, p. 61.

¹⁰⁸ *The Daily Observer Newspaper*, Monrovia, 13th June 1975, 3-4

indigenous moral economies. This sense of threat and grievance worsened in the Doe era (1980-1989), to become a significant factor in violent group mobilisation of Gio and Mano against Mandingo in the NPFL war (Chapter 5) when socio-economic inequalities interacted with severe political exclusion of the Gio and Mano under Doe.

Institutionalised horizontal inequalities, ethnic loyalty, and the 1980 coup

During the rule of William Tubman (1944-1971), the semi-autonomy of indigenous chiefs, established under indirect rule, was removed and replaced with a powerful presidency.¹⁰⁹ It increased the importance of access to high profile state position. A ‘Unification Policy’ was designed to try to foster greater political inclusion of indigenous peoples. Under Tubman, all indigenous peoples were granted citizenship, political and civil rights in the Liberian state. They were granted suffrage and increased representation in the legislature through local representatives. This was restricted by Article 1, Section II, of the constitution, which limited voting rights to those who owned a hut and paid taxes on them.¹¹⁰ The property qualification for voters was not amended until the 1980s. As Osaghae put it, interior peoples, “did not effectively become Liberian until the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.”¹¹¹ A legislative act was passed in 1963 to effect an administrative reorganisation of the provinces into counties. The following year, Liberia was divided into nine counties, comprising of the original five coastal counties (and their territories, to which Bomi and Margibi were added) and four new interior counties (namely: Lofa, Nimba, Bong and Grand

¹⁰⁹ For more on the nature of the patrimonial state in Liberia see for example: Sawyer & Center for Self-Governance., 1992. Sawyer, 2005.

¹¹⁰ 1847 Constitution of Liberia, Article I, Section 2.

¹¹¹ E. Osaghae, 1998, p. 137.

Gedeh).¹¹² In principle, it bridged the political division between the coast and the interior.

But, coastal communities such as the Grebo, Kru, Gbandi, and Vai that had previously had closer contact with Settler colonies, and greater levels of literacy increased access to the state, while communities in the interior such as the Krahn, Gio and Mano enjoyed negligible access to the state.¹¹³ Nowhere was this more evident than in the ethnic composition of cabinets under Tubman and his successor Tolbert. Even though they only comprised 4 percent of the population, Settler political elites held all the important political posts.¹¹⁴ They controlled at least 60 percent of its economic wealth through control of the state.¹¹⁵ They controlled high profile government positions and dominated government institutions as bureaucrats, judges, and army officers. Under Tubman, there was a modest change in the alignment of particular ethnic groups with particular positions.¹¹⁶ The privilege of ministerial appointments was extended to coastal indigenous Liberians in the 1960s, but hinterland indigenous Liberians did not have this privilege until 1973.¹¹⁷ Educated indigenous people from the coastal areas gained high profile appointments in Tubman's cabinet as early as 1964 (see Table 2).¹¹⁸

¹¹² D. E. Dunn & Holsoe, 1985, p. 2.

¹¹³ E. Dunn, 1999, p. 98.

¹¹⁴ A. Adebajo, 2002.

¹¹⁵ A. Adebajo, 2002.

¹¹⁶ Twe, 1952, p. 105.

¹¹⁷ See Table below.

¹¹⁸ Fraenkel, 1964, p. 228.

Table 2: Ethnic composition of Cabinets between 1964-1973¹¹⁹

Ethnic category	Number of Cabinet Ministers		
	January 1964	January 1968	May 1973
Settlers	12	12	11
Coastal indigenous	4	4	6
Hinterland indigenous	0	0	2
Total	16	16	19

High profile representation of ethnic groups was significant because people's personal advantages and disadvantages in the state became tied to having access to ethnic big men in high profile positions. Tubman pursued an Open Door economic policy that encouraged unprecedented influx of multinational corporations. Over three quarters of the country come under agricultural business lease, mining and logging concessions. The economy experienced substantial growth and the country achieved relative economic independence. He expanded the power of the presidency and utilised income generated by foreign concessions to incorporate the country into presidential patronage. As Amos Sawyer, put it: "all incomes were perceived to be derived from President Tubman."¹²⁰ For instance, he became responsible for authorising the sale of public lands, and all official cheques exceeding \$25 (and later \$100); he also appointed or dismissed civil servants at will.¹²¹ As a consequence of increased presidential power he was able to build an unparalleled system of patronage that extended across the country. Distribution of patronage resources to indigenous groups was channelled through high profile position in the state.¹²² High profile political

¹¹⁹ C. S. Clapham, 1976, p. 48.

¹²⁰ Sawyer & Center for Self-Governance., 1992, p. 285.

¹²¹ Lowenkopf, 1976, p. 109.

¹²² Fraenkel, 1964, p. 227.

privilege became particularly important as a source of educational opportunity and scholarships after Tubman opened up higher education to indigenous peoples. It also became an important source of development resources, government contracts, and crucially, state employment for the new educated indigenous ‘labour’.

An educated young person looking for employment relied on a relative or member of his ethnic group who was an official. There was “an unwritten obligation for a ‘big man’ to help his kinfolk and tribespeople”.¹²³ It resulted in “homogenous tribal clusters within several government departments.”¹²⁴ For example, the coastal Vai dominated the Interior Department. Vai were the first indigenous group to be co-opted into government service, while the coastal Kru dominated the Department of Public Health. Officials acted as patrons by providing overseas scholarships, jobs, school fees.¹²⁵ Merran Fraenkel noted during fieldwork in Monrovia in the late 1950s that it was leading to “the emergence of a new alignment of the immigrants from the interior tribes, especially the young students, *vis-a-vis* the coastal people as a whole”.¹²⁶

It was not until the Tolbert regime in the 1970s that Gio/Mano elite gained access to high profile positions in the state. Notably, Tolbert appointed the Gio lawyer, teacher and prominent politician, Jackson Fiah Doe (no relation to Samuel Doe), as his Deputy Minister of Education from 1973-1975. Doe was born in 1943 in Glolay, Yarlay clan, Zoe-Geh chiefdom.¹²⁷ He was the son of a Gio chief who had been loyal to the TWP. His entry into the political establishment was facilitated by connection to the prominent Settler family of Chief Justice Louis Arthur Grimes. He became a ward of the Grimes family from the 4th grade through his college education

¹²³ Fraenkel, 1964, p. 227.

¹²⁴ Fraenkel, 1964, p. 227.

¹²⁵ Fraenkel, 1964, p. 200.

¹²⁶ Fraenkel, 1964, p. 228.

¹²⁷ D. E. Dunn et al., 2001, p. 110.

at the University of Liberia.¹²⁸ After graduating from college, he became an educator in Nimba County, before going to the United States on a scholarship to obtain a masters degree in educational administration. He became a member of the House of Representatives for Nimba County from 1967-1972, and a County Senator from 1975-1980. He became a prominent member of the TWP, rising from county chairperson of Nimba for the party to second vice national chairman in August 1976.¹²⁹

Before elites like Jackson Doe came to high profile position some Gio and Mano maintained a practice as artisans in wood carving and weaving.¹³⁰ Others became involved in the Settler economy as labourers in rubber plantations and extractive industries as new labour markets emerged through the granting of concessions around the country.¹³¹ By far many ordinary Gio and Mano remained in the rural areas as subsistence and cash crop farmers. Politicians like Jackson Doe legitimised their authority with Gio and Mano ethnic publics by providing educational and development opportunities that would enable ordinary people to achieve self-esteem. An example is John Duo, a Gio soldier from Gborplay who participated in the 1980 coup d'état against Settler rule and the NPFL war in the 1990s. With the opening up of educational opportunities to Gio and Mano through Jackson Doe, Duo was able to enrol in night school while working in the army communication room as a radio operator.¹³² He recalled that:

Jackson F. Doe help to the citizens of Nimba are countless...as a Minister of Education he gave a lot of scholarships to many of the citizens, even Dr. Korto [prominent contemporary politician] all of them got their education through Jackson Doe.... Jackson Doe built a lot of schools in Nimba County....¹³³

¹²⁸ D. E. Dunn et al., 2001, p. 110.

¹²⁹ D. E. Dunn et al., 2001, p. 110.

¹³⁰ Liebenow, 1987, p. 36.

¹³¹ Liebenow, 1987, p. 36.

¹³² Interview, John Duo, 7th March 2014.

¹³³ Interview, Rtd. Lt. Colonel Z. John Duo, Saclepea, 7th and 21st March 2014.

As a result of increased educational opportunities, indigenous Liberians came to outnumber the Settler student population at the University of Liberia. They organised the Student Unification Party (SUP) in 1970 “to challenge domination of campus politics by children of the elite”, represented by the All Student Allied Party (ASAP).¹³⁴ The organisation of SUP marked the beginning of indigenous political opposition against Settler rule. ASAP received almost all its financial backing from the William Tolbert administration (1971-1980), but the SUP won all student elections in the 1970-1979 period.¹³⁵ While SUP advocated class as the primary cleavage in Liberia, ethnicity played an important role in the movements successes. Alaric Tokpa, a leading Liberian academic, who participated in the student movements as a leader, writes that:

[T]here were what may be termed the ethnicists. They saw the subordination of the indigenous Africans by the settlers as the main obstacle to the social progress of the indigenous population. Once the opportunity did not avail itself for their integration into the system, they opposed the Settler controlled administration. But their opposition to the ruling class usually ended with their graduation from the university of Liberia and/or their subsequent employment in the system. These were the “opportunistic faction in the SUP.”¹³⁶

This suggests that the main concern of the students that emphasised ethnicity was their exclusion in state structures through, for instance, government employment. Their mobilisation in the 1970s was not on the basis of transforming the state; rather its primary purpose was to seek social change in the content of power—to replace the settler elite with an indigenous elite. As the state lacked a coherent political language for all the groups within it, the new political actors found that ethnicity supplied an imaginative political vocabulary with much deeper historical resonances than any joint experience of domination by the state, which they could draw on to mobilise

¹³⁴ Tokpa, 1990, p. 80.

¹³⁵ Tokpa, 1990, p. 83.

¹³⁶ Tokpa, 1990, pp. 83-84.

urban and rural indigenous people from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds to resist Settler domination.

The student leaders and membership of the SUP became a prominent part of the external political opposition against the TWP. Although dominated by indigenous Liberians, this opposition consisted of liberal Settlers such as, Gabriel Bacchus Matthews, who was of Settler-indigenous parental heritage and played a prominent role in PPP leadership. Three main movements dominated the political opposition in the 1970s. The first was the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL). PAL organised as the Progressive People's Party (PPP) in the mid-1970s with the express aim of mobilising the indigenous masses to compete for power against the TWP. The PPP maintained a socialist rhetoric. The second prominent movement in the opposition was the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA), which was organised at the University of Liberia in 1973 to fight colonial domination, and campaign for social justice and fair distribution of wealth in Africa generally. MOJA tried to organise Liberian peasants from the interior to campaign for social justice in Liberia through cooperative farming arrangements. MOJA did not develop into a political party, but it affiliated with the third prominent movement, the All Peoples Freedom Alliance (APFA). APFA was formed in the mid 1970s. MOJA integrated into APFA in March 1980. APFA also maintained a socialist rhetoric.

The symbolic and public nature of political inequalities made it relatively easy for indigenous elites seeking access to the state to use it as a framework to garner widespread support against the Settlers.¹³⁷ Political inequalities overlapped with socio-economic and cultural status inequalities. As Tokpa put it: "[Mass] discontent already existed in Liberian society. the [sic] discontent centred on the high level of

¹³⁷ Interview, Edmund, Monrovia, 17th March 2008.

inequality that existed. The role of the mass movements was to organise the exploited classes and politicize their grievances.”¹³⁸ The mass movements initiated a national debate about social justice, redistribution, and political inclusion of indigenous communities through PAL and MOJA.¹³⁹ They blamed the institutionalisation of horizontal inequalities between the settlers and indigenous communities for marginalisation and exclusion of the indigenous majority in the country. The opposition employed a variety of measures to mobilise urban and rural Liberians to demonstrate against the TWP government. For instance, the University of Liberia Student Union organised public forums in Monrovia, and published magazines, such as the *Revelation* and the *Spokesman*, to condemn discriminatory government policies that served the interests of the ruling elite.¹⁴⁰ MOJA regularly held mass political rallies in Monrovia and peasants in the interior into agricultural cooperatives. The APFA distributed its news magazine, the *APFA FANGA* to mine and plantation workers. PAL organised rallies as well as demonstrations to make direct demands on the government.¹⁴¹

The vice presidential selection process after the death of Vice President James Greene in 1977 increased resentment against the Tolbert regime. There was a general expectation that an indigenous politician would succeed Greene. The Gio and Mano, for instance, believed that Jackson Doe was, “was supposed to have been the next vice president under Tolbert. [But] [t]he people [Settler elite], did not give it to him because he was a native born”.¹⁴² As an act of conciliation, Jackson Doe was appointed first vice national chairman of the TWP in October 1979.¹⁴³ However,

¹³⁸ Tokpa, 1990, p. 88.

¹³⁹ E. Dunn, 1999, p. 92.

¹⁴⁰ Tokpa, 1990, p. 88.

¹⁴¹ For more on opposition activities in this period see: Tokpa, 1990, pp. 88-91.

¹⁴² Interview, John Duo, 7th March 2014. This is corroborated by: D. E. Dunn et al., 2001, p. 110.

¹⁴³ D. E. Dunn et al., 2001, p. 110.

opposition intensified in the late-1970s when the Tolbert government increased the price of a bag of rice from \$22 to \$30. The 1970s oil crisis had had an impact on inflation and the price of rice—the indigenous staple. PAL mobilised many indigenous Liberians to protest the increase. According to a former PPP Chairman, the new rice policy and import restriction “was a strategy to enrich elite embarking on mechanical farming not indigenous farmers. Imported rice was subsidized, but the price was not fair.”¹⁴⁴ A demonstration was organised to seek a reduction in the price of rice, but it disintegrated into a violent riot on April 14, 1979. Increases in unequal access to socio-economic goods played a direct role in outbreak of the riots.¹⁴⁵

The government’s violent response to the riots made the regime highly unpopular. In March 1980, the PPP organised a midnight demonstration requesting the resignation of President Tolbert. Despite the intense political agitation of intelligentsia from the interior regions, it was soldiers from the AFL that overthrew the Settlers. On 12 April 1980, seventeen AFL soldiers successfully launched a coup d’état to overthrow the True Whig Party. It ended over a century of minority Americo-Liberian rule in Liberian politics. Notably, the ringleaders of the coup were mainly soldiers from interior ethnic groups including Gio and Mano such as Thomas Quiwonkpa, who later formed the NPFL.¹⁴⁶ Duo explained their participation in the coup as follows:

1979 the Rice Riot came about... The enlisted men of the AFL we got involved because we were not satisfied with the salary and living conditions. We were earning \$33.33 per month. At that time the price of a bag of rice was \$16. We were living in zinz shacks, no concrete. We have our parents, our wives, our children our people who were farmers to take care of. We did not protest because we were soldiers not politicians. What we did [by engaging in a coup d’état] was for better living conditions.... Even though the money was very small, but [my ‘family members] they expect me to send them to school.... That’s the expectation, if you are the only one who could at least read and write

¹⁴⁴ Interview, Edmund, Monrovia, 17th March 2008.

¹⁴⁵ Interview, Edmund, Monrovia, 17th March 2008.

¹⁴⁶ E. E. Osaghae, 1996, p. 60.

on this side [Monrovia], you holding small money you gat to send your people to school. Then from there when your uncle, your aunt or your niece or whosoever get sick [you take care of them]. Finally when your friend them get sick, you go and take that person, send the person to hospital, they depend on me.¹⁴⁷

In this sense, ethnic loyalty was an important concern spurring the coup d'état. Literate indigenous Liberians such as Duo, with his high school education and rank as corporal in the army, were expected to redistribute resources to support dependents in Nimba. They agitated for increased inclusion in the state to be able to meet this obligation and to achieve moral respect within their community of esteem, defined in terms of ethnicity. The Settler-state had not fostered an imagined national community that could have provided a means to moralising the new political economy. Civic thinking among the vast majority of indigenous Liberians who were denied full state citizenship and excluded from political participation in the state developed at the local ethnic level. In any case, any moral authority of the new economy would have been limited because it would not have been based on the common means of civic virtue.¹⁴⁸ The new educated 'labour' did not want to be seen as socially separated from their moral communities. They wanted to remain respected members of their communities by meeting their moral obligations. Because they could not come to agreement with the TWP state for redistribution of political power and resources they opposed it politically.

Conclusion

Since the analysis proffered in subsequent chapters needs to be understood in light of changes in the severity of the prevailing horizontal inequalities against arrangements

¹⁴⁷ Interview, John Duo, Saclepea, 21th March 2014.

¹⁴⁸ John Lonsdale, 1992, p. 317.

of particular ethnic groups, this chapter has presented some evidence on the evolution and entrenchment of political, socio-economic and cultural status horizontal inequalities in Liberia. It has shown that ethnically discriminatory policies and legal provisions produced political inequalities in national citizenship, civic and political rights between Settlers and indigenous communities, and between coastal and interior communities in Liberia's First Republic. Political inequalities were accompanied by socio-economic and cultural status inequalities. These inequalities evolved to give the Settlers complete control over state power and economic resources, as Settlers used their domination of the state to gain economic wealth.

While coastal indigenous communities enjoyed some co-option into cabinet positions, interior indigenous communities such as the Gio and Mano became underrepresented in the government and the top-level of the civil service. As traders, Mandingos too were also able to use their dominance of interior trade routes to gain socio-economic prominence and limited political inclusion. In Nimba, a situation emerged where ordinary Gio and Mano felt relatively disadvantaged vis-à-vis their Mandingo neighbours. Mandingo commercial skills enabled them to be disproportionately incorporated by the Settlers governments and indigenous elites as heads of administrative markets. Introduction of the hut tax contributed to their socio-economic ascendancy as their cash-wealth was needed by Gio and Mano to meet their tax obligations. With the introduction of title deeds, Mandingo traders were able to procure cheap labour and purchase land in Nimba as well as dominate in local activities, such as farming, that were previously considered to be the specialisation of Gio and Mano. It created historic grievances over their morality, and tensions over elite accountability that served as an underlying source of violence (Chapter 5).

At the state level, after the semi-autonomous powers of chiefs were removed and replaced with a powerful presidency under Tubman, access to high profile state positions became more important for ethnic publics. Particularly, it affected the personal advantages of an emerging indigenous literate category. As they had had better access to formal education, coastal indigenous communities, such as the Vai and Kru, enjoyed better access to employment in state institutions than their counterparts from the interior. A situation emerged where interior people such as the Gio and Mano were not only politically marginalised, but also relatively more socio-economically disadvantaged. This situation improved a little with the appointment of the likes of Jackson Doe under Tolbert. But, it was not enough to prevent the popular agitation against institutionalised horizontal inequalities between the minority Settlers and indigenous majority, which culminated in the 1980 coup d'état. Arguably, if the educated elite had had more time they would have developed a strong political party to contend with the TWP and overthrown them through the ballot box. The coup was a contingent event that prevented the achievement of political change in this era through party politics.

Liberia's history suggests that analysts must not only look at the configuration of such inequalities, but also the way in which they are perceived to affect internal loyalty to a particular way of life. Ethnic loyalty matters to various strata within ethnic groups because of its connection to both material and moral values such as self-esteem. It shaped the way in which people reacted to horizontal inequalities, and motivated political action against Settler state. Ethnic loyalty is, therefore, critical to any analysis of horizontal inequality and violence. The following chapter will analyse the ways in which the configuration of horizontal inequalities changed after the 1980 coup d'état and intensified against Gio and Mano. It will pay particular attention to

the way in which moral outrage against perceived internal disruptions brought on by worsening horizontal inequalities contributed to political pressure and ethnic violence.

5 – The NPFL war: Gio and Mano mobilisation and support (1980-1996)

The war started as a political and tribalism thing.¹ The real thing that was happening it was ethnicity on the bottom.²

Introduction

On Christmas Eve 1989 a rebel group consisting of over 100 fighters crossed the Cestos River from Ivory Coast into Butuo, a border town in Nimba County on Liberia's border with Ivory Coast. The rebels called themselves the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), with Charles Taylor as their spokesman. Shortly after entering Butuo, their number rapidly increased with thousands of Gio and Mano supporters from Nimba.³ The NPFL set up their first base to mobilise and train supporters in the town of Gborplay, about two hours away by road from Butuo. They were rapidly filled with Gio and Mano recruits, including those that had fled to the Ivorian side of the border.⁴ Within six short months, the NPFL was besieging the capital Monrovia. This chapter examines the mobilisation and support of the Gio and Mano ethnic groups in the Liberian civil war. The aim is to demonstrate how and why collective action emerged along ethnic lines in the NPFL rebellion against Samuel Doe.

Several explanations have been proffered for the outbreak of the rebellion. Some analysts emphasise the role of international actors.⁵ The rebels were backed by international financial and military support from Côte d'Ivoire, Libya and Burkina

¹ Interview, Alfred, Congo Town, 18th March 2008.

² Interview, Tukupah, Buduburam Refugee Camp, 11th January 2011.

³ Berkeley, 2001.

⁴ Transcript of anonymous Gio witness at the trial of Charles Taylor, Special Court for Sierra Leone, The Hague, 5 November 2008

⁵ See for example: Aboagye & Bah, 2005; Ellis, 1999.

Faso.⁶ However, the involvement of international actors does not account for the collective action of Gio and Mano, which turned what looks like the beginnings of an attempted coup d'état into full-scale civil rebellion. A common argument—questioned in this analysis—is that it was a generational conflict, and that youths voluntarily took up arms to revolt against their experiences of abjection; the rationale is that many saw it as their only opportunity for upward mobility.⁷ These explanations, which draw on the trope of 'youth', would be much more persuasive in the context of an organised youth agenda where people were mobilised to fight primarily on the basis of being young. But, civilians were primarily mobilised as members of ethnic groups whose membership compassed age differences. Informants suggest that the violence was driven by "a big tribal agenda".⁸ This "tribal agenda" was not about ethnic hatred manipulated by elites, as some suggest.⁹

Ethnic hatred does not account for why Gio and Mano informants like Cooper—a former NPFL combatant from 1990-2003, who joined the war as a Mano youth—answered the question 'Why did you get involved?' with the following reply:

I was one of those who saw the [pre-]war [events] as an attempt to erase our tribe from the face of Liberia and we saw that as unacceptable as anything else.... my reason of affiliating with the war even before the war I saw what was happening in Liberia.... I saw it like a nation is for all its citizens a nation is belonging to all its citizens. Once one side of the nation is affected...I saw it as a process that if Quiwonkpa and the rest of these guys could not survive the devil, myself could not survive as well.¹⁰

Rather than a generational revolution or ethnic hatred, his political language, like that of other informants who mobilised in the war as youthful ethnic citizens loyal to their way of life, linked external exclusion in the pre-war to the threat of internal dissolution, and personal survival to the survival of elites.

⁶ For more on the origins of the NPFL see: Ellis, 1999, pp. 75-76.

⁷ See for example: Abdullah, 1998. Munive, July 2011. Mats Utas, 2003.

⁸ Interview, Tiawan Gongloe, Monrovia 7th May 2009.

⁹ See for example: Ellis, 1999; Outram, 1997, p. 165.

¹⁰ Interview, Cooper, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

This chapter demonstrates that the drive for violence in the NPFL war, was not only generated by the experience and perception of severe horizontal exclusion under Doe, but also resulted from an internal dynamic. The main arguments are as follows: First, there was a shared experience and perception that Gio and Mano had become severely excluded under the rule of Samuel Doe: through the high profile exclusion of their elites, violent repression by the Krahn-dominated AFL, and increasing loss of ancestral patrimony to the state-co-opted and socio-economically wealthier Mandingo ‘others’. Second, there was a perception these worsening inequalities were threatening internal moral arrangements. Internal debates about land and patronage show how horizontal inequalities interacted with moral ethnicity tensions. For instance, external grievances over loss of ‘tribal’ lands to socio-economically dominant ‘others’ interacted with internal historical tensions over the ‘moral economy’ of land between traditional elites and ethnic publics.

Third, internal pressure about loss of moral community created a sense that elites risked not only external exclusion but also internal marginalisation; this was an important factor that motivated and incentivised their calls for external action together with ‘outside’ opponents of the regime. In this context, many Gio and Mano supported the NPFL—not only to oppose the regime and its ‘collaborators’—but as an expression of good citizenship and to seek internal accountability; they labelled dissenters traitors. They supported a patriotic notion of moral ethnicity and a self-protective politics of territorial belonging.¹¹ Ethnic elites concerned for their legitimacy, and their self-interested allies such as Taylor, promoted this through an emotive rhetoric of land, social justice, and redistribution in calls to violence.

¹¹ John Lonsdale, 1994; Lynch, 2011.

The chapter primarily draws on field interviews. It is divided into four main sections. The first section focuses on the experience and perception of Gio and Mano political exclusion and socio-economic marginalisation under Doe, and the grievances this exclusion created. The second section analyses how the experience of horizontal inequality interacted with their moral ethnicity tensions, highlighting perceptions of loss and threatened loss of rights and expectations of land. The third section highlights the internal alarm about leadership legitimacy and accountability, and how this motivated elite action to mobilise. The fourth section will review the calls to mobilise and consequences of internal dissent within Gio/Mano communities. The analysis shows that internal rationales were not simply about horizontal competition; they had more to do with internal dynamics about the moral economy of leadership and land. This view differs from the opinion of some analysts that Gio and Mano support for the war was a spontaneous reaction to the violent reprisals by the Doe regime against Gio and Mano.¹² Moreover, the pervasive notion of youth revolt and elite instrumentality in manipulating ‘ethnic violence’ only provides a partial and limited understating of mobilisation for the Liberian civil war.

Gio/Mano experiences and perceptions of horizontal inequalities (1980-1989)

This study argues that perceptions of inequalities, rather than mere objective structural inequalities, served as an important factor that contributed to the emergence of violent group mobilisation in Liberia. As such, the primary focus of this section is on how Gio and Mano perceived horizontal inequality in the 1980s, and ways in which these perceptions contributed to the outbreak of group action in late 1989. Nonetheless, the

¹² See for example: HRW, 1990.

discussion will be interspersed with descriptions of the general trends of inequalities in Liberia. This will help us understand the context in which Gio and Mano communities became oriented towards violent strategies. I begin with an overview of changes in the hierarchy of ethnic groups in the immediate aftermath of the 1980 coup d'état.

While the educated indigenous elite was trying to make common cause against the Settler oligarchy, the military stepped in with a new ethnic arithmetic in high profile state leadership. On 12 April 1980, 17 non-commissioned Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) soldiers ended 153 years of Settler rule in a coup d'état. Table 3 shows the ethnic composition of the leadership of the coup d'état. It reflected members of the Krahn/Sapo¹³, Gio/Mano, Kru, Grebo, Kissi and Loma ethnic groups, with a clear Krahn/Sapo majority.

Table 3: Ethnicity of the seventeen 1980 coupists¹⁴

Ethnic group	No. of coupists
Krahn/Sapo	5/1
Gio/Mano	4
Kru	3
Grebo	2
Kissi	1
Loma	1

They coupists formed the People's Redemption Council (PRC) military junta, which lasted from 1980-1984. In composing the junta, they did not seek to strike a balance

¹³ The Krahn belong to a Kru-group linguistic unit that identifies with the Sapo. See for example: S. E. Holsoe, 1977; S. E. Holsoe & Lauer, 1976.

¹⁴ For more on the ethnic distribution of the coup makers see: E. Osaghae, 1998, p. 145.

between the various ethnic groups in Liberia. They effectively replaced Settler minority rule with the minority rule of select indigenous groups. Table 4 illustrates that high profile political representation on the PRC was largely limited to appointees from Krahn/Sapo, Gio/Mano, Grebo, Loma, Kru, and Kissi ethnic groups, which had been represented in the leadership of the coup. With eight Krahn/Sapo and six Gio/Mano members, these groups were overrepresented in the new regime, even though they constituted approximately five and sixteen percent of the population, respectively.

Table 4: Ethnic composition of the twenty-eight member PRC¹⁵

Ethnic group	No. of Members
Krahn/Sapo	8
Gio/Mano	6
Grebo	4
Loma	3
Kru	3
Kissi	2
?	2

While few interior ethnic groups monopolised decision-making positions on the PRC, the various ethnic groups were generally represented in the public sector and state administration. Specific figures are not available, but secondary sources suggest that ethnic groups such as the Vai, Gbandi and Gola, were well represented in government agencies as a whole.¹⁶ These were able to gain appointments, as the number of

¹⁵ See: E. Osaghae, 1998, p. 153.

¹⁶ See for example: E. Osaghae, 1998, p. Chapter 4.

government employees increased from 18,000 to 56,000 between 1980 and 1983.¹⁷ Some ethnic groups, particularly the Mandingo, derived socio-economic advantages from alliance with the PRC. As we shall see below, elites of the Mandingo community were not included in the PRC, but Mandingo merchants gained access to Doe's patronage by securing commercial privileges through alliance with the regime.

A new political hierarchy emerged with Krahn/Sapo and Gio/Mano elite at its apex. As the highest-ranking member, Master Sergeant Samuel Doe of the Krahn ethnic group was selected by the coupists to become chairman of the PRC.¹⁸ Thomas Gunkama Quiwonkpa, who was widely perceived as the "Strongman of the Revolution" and a popular hero, was appointed as a senior member of the junta and commanding general of the AFL.¹⁹ The Gio/Mano perceived themselves as joint state leaders with their Krahn neighbours. They had emerged from the margins to control access to state power and resources through the coup d'état.²⁰ The ensuing discussion needs to be understood in light of the unravelling of this new political hierarchy, as Gio/Mano became severely excluded from political power by Doe.

Political horizontal inequalities

For the Gio and Mano communities in Nimba County, the aftermath of the coup was seen as a new era of unprecedented access to the state through increased high profile representation of new Gio and Mano politico-military elites. For instance, Quiwonkpa's patronage (discussed below), fuelled rising expectations of increased access to state resources among many ordinary Gio and Mano. With a Mano father

¹⁷ Sawyer & Center for Self-Governance., 1992, p. 376.

¹⁸ For more on the Doe regime see: Liebenow, 1987. Sawyer, 1988.

¹⁹ See for example: TRC Statement, Alhaji Kromah, Monrovia, 11th August 2008.

²⁰ These communities had co-existed relatively peacefully in Nimba, where Krahn maintained a minority presence. Krahn predominated in neighbouring Grand Gedeh County.

and a Gio mother, both the Gio and the Mano referred to Quiwonkpa as their ‘son’.²¹ In total, 6 Gio and Mano politico-military elites occupied the seventeen-member council (Table 5).

Table 5: Gio/Mano members of the PRC²²

Name	Status
Thomas Quiwonkpa (Gio)	Senior member and commanding general of the Armed Forces of Liberia
Henry Zuo (Gio)	Member
Kolonseh Gonyor (Gio)	Member
Jeffry Gban (Mano)	Member
David Karmai (Gio)	Co-member
Robert Zuo (Gio)	Co-member

Shortly after the PRC was installed, Doe began to reverse the power-sharing arrangement between the members of the junta. In an attempt to control state power Doe embarked on the elimination of rival military members from the junta that he perceived as a threat to his power. As early as August 1981, five members of the PRC were executed for allegedly plotting a coup d’état against Doe. He reduced the representation of the ethnic groups closely associated with the leadership of the coup.

Doe’s main ethnic opposition came from the Gio and Mano communities, as they experienced a sense of declining power and a sense of loss—or threatened loss—of their sphere of ethnic influence. Many Gio/Mano felt that the close proximity of their political elites to state power, which they had shared with the Krahn, had become

²¹ Interview, Dr. Saye Guannu, Cuttington University, Nimba County, 8th March 2014.

²² D. E. Dunn et al., 2001, pp. 90-91.

undermined by Doe's actions. More than the Kru, Grebo, Kissi and Loma ethnic groups that had also been represented on the PRC, the Gio and Mano felt that Quiwonkpa had played the most prominent role in the coup.

The most significant rivalry within the junta occurred between Doe and Quiwonkpa. It culminated in the downgrading of Quiwonkpa position from Commander-General of the AFL to Secretary-General of the PRC, in October 1983. The conflict was popularly perceived as the result of disproportionate appointment of members of Doe's Krahn ethnic group in state institutions such as the AFL. Duo, a former Gio officer of the AFL, recollected that:

[B]efore '85 the Gio people were no more useful in Liberia, most especially in the security. That was the time Quiwonkpa was in conflict with Doe. Doe was just elevating his own people in the army and the other people were let down. And most of the important positions were given to his tribe people. So Quiwonkpa was not too satisfied. So it brought conflict between Quiwonkpa and Doe. As a result Doe relieved Quiwonkpa from his post as Commanding General. That was the most powerful position within PRC.²³

After Quiwonkpa declined the position of Secretary-General, Doe discharged him from the army and stripped him of all his military retirement benefits.²⁴ Eventually, Quiwonkpa fled into exile with his close associates, including Samuel Dokie, a Mano from Nimba, and Prince Y. Johnson, a Gio from Nimba who had been his aide-de-camp in the AFL.

To consolidate power Doe started to replicate many of the strategies that the Settlers had used to entrench their rule. Doe tried to dominate the PRC by appointing members of his Krahn ethnic group to key positions of power.²⁵ Older informants recounted how Doe re-established minority monopolisation of the state and the military through the 'Krahnisation' of state institutions and a one party system,

²³ Interview, Rt. Col John Duo, Saclepea, 21st March 2014.

²⁴ TRC Statement, Alhaji Kromah, Monrovia, 11th August 2008.

²⁵ D. Harris, 1999, p. 433.

similar to what the Settlers introduced with the True Whig Party.²⁶ He appointed Krahns to head the police, the military, and security agencies.²⁷ The elite First Infantry Battalion and Special Anti-Terrorist Unit were all predominantly Krahn. He headed and staffed the Immigration Service, the Liberian National Police and Executive Mansion bodyguards with Krahns.²⁸ All my informants, including Krahn and Mandingos, noted that this enforced a perception among ordinary Liberians that Doe was only looking out for his people.²⁹

‘Krahnisation’ did not only exclude Doe’s rivals from the interior. It also excluded many indigenous coastal elite who had dominated the student movements of the 1970s. It provoked the Liberian National Students Union to create a charter demanding that Doe rectify Krahn dominance of the junta and hand over power to civilians. Doe reacted by repressing student groups and removing former indigenous student activists from his administration. He replaced them with many members of the ousted Settler True Whig Party, in part because of their prior advantages in education and experience in government.³⁰ Popular expectations of indigenisation of state institutions, were thus, not realised. Neither were expectations of socio-economic change and increases in political representation for all indigenous Liberians. Rather the Krahn continued to be overrepresented in the PRC, and the level of political and socio-economic inequality worsened between some communities such as the Gio and Mano.³¹

As a result of external pressures the PRC was dissolved in 1984 and replaced with the transitional Interim National Assembly headed by Doe. It comprised of ex-

²⁶ The True Whig Party ruled Liberia from 1870-1980.

²⁷ C. Clapham, 1989, p. 109.

²⁸ E. E. Osaghae, 1996, p. Chapter 3.

²⁹ Interview, Focus group, Monrovia, 19th March 2008.

³⁰ C. Clapham, 1989, p. 109.

³¹ Liebenow, 1987, p. 192.

PRC members and 31 civilian representatives from all the counties in Liberia. Multi-party elections were held in 1985. Doe announced his candidature as the leader of the National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL). He rigged and won elections in 1985; yet was only able to claim 50.9 percent of the popular vote.³² The NDPL controlled both the Senate and House of Representatives following legislative elections, effectively returning Liberia to a one party-state.³³ The party controlled 21 out of 26 Senate seats and 51 out of 64 seats in the House.³⁴ Jackson Doe, the prominent Gio politician from Nimba County (introduced in Chapter 4), was widely deemed to have won the elections. He was the leader of the opposition Liberia Action Party (LAP).

The failed opportunity to install Gio leadership in the junta and following the 1985 elections became a source of grievance within the Gio and Mano communities.³⁵ Tiawan Gongloe, a former Mano minister under the current regime, reflected that, “the conflict was about a fraudulent election” and that “Taylor said he brought the war for Jackson Doe” to redress the rigged elections and to continue the failed Quiwonkpa coup against the Doe regime in 1985.³⁶ Even though Taylor was not from the region, he had been closely allied to Quiwonkpa through marriage to a close relative of Quiwonkpa and claimed affinity with Gio and Mano. He had fled Liberia six years earlier after he was accused by the regime of misappropriating state funds during his time as head of the General Services Agency, a notoriously corrupt agency. He joined Gio and Mano exiles in Burkina Faso after escaping from jail in the United States.³⁷ John Stewart, a Commissioner at the TRC, also deduced that, “the cause of the civil war had its roots in ... the exclusionist pattern of governance” and the “rigged [1985]

³² C. Clapham, 1989, p. 106.

³³ E. E. Osaghae, 1996, p. chapter 1.

³⁴ C. Clapham, 1989, p. 106.

³⁵ Interview, Omarkson, Tubmanburg, 29th April 2009.

³⁶ Interview, Tiawan Gongloe, Monrovia, 7th May 2009.

³⁷ See for example: Ellis, 1999.

elections was a trigger” because it deprived the Gio and Mano of the opportunity to put one of their own—Jackson Doe—in power.³⁸ Many ordinary Gio and Mano informants perceived the rigged election as a lost opportunity to install Gio leadership in Liberia to receive their share of national power and resources, which they had been denied by the Quiwonkpa rivalry.³⁹

Political horizontal exclusion was perceived to be particularly severe against the Gio and Mano because of its connection with horizontal socio-economic marginalisation. To understand this it is necessary to recall the historical context described in Chapter 4. The Settler elite controlled incomes from foreign concessions in Liberia through control of the state. They instituted a political order in which resources such as road construction funds, educational scholarships and even incomes were distributed as patronage from high profile state positions, most notably the presidency. The 1980 coup d’état did not alter this political ‘tradition’. For many ordinary people, opportunities derived from access to patronage rather than effort. The exclusion of Gio and Mano elites from political power was particularly symbolic to many ordinary Gio and Mano people, who saw it as exclusion from redistribution of national socio-economic goods. As one Gio driver from Nimba put it:

[It was] because of the kind of a way the Samuel Doe regime was doing things. You know in Liberia we have 16 tribes so if you are doing something you have to balance it. You cannot make one tribe to enjoy and the other people suffer. Even on the line of scholarship, when scholarship and other facilities come from international donors only one tribe benefit, and it hurt a lot of people.... And other vacancies and various positions in the government offices...it came a time all the decision-making, all the high-ranking generals were Krahn. And that was the leading tribe because Samuel Doe was a Krahn man...when people get in power, they don’t share, and if people go against them they [exclude] the other tribe, so we look at it as attack [on the group].⁴⁰

³⁸ Interview, John Stewart, Monrovia, 8th May 2009.

³⁹ Interview, Focus Group, Congo Town, 18th March 2008.

⁴⁰ Interview, Tuago, Tubmanburg, 28th April 2009.

But not all Gio and Mano had the perception that their political exclusion was preventing them from socio-economic rewards. For instance, Gongloe opined that:

The ordinary man will say Krahn people are in power and they are suppressing us. [Yet] even if you go to Grand Gedeh, as I did during Doe's time, not even his district that he came from was developed, but his town, part of his town.... Many people of Krahn origin suffered from the perception that Doe is in power so Krahn people are in power.... At the same time, Taylor is coming and they [Gio and Mano] are saying they are fighting because Jackson Doe, a Gio man from Nimba was cheated, so it is the Gio and Mano people fighting the Krahn people.⁴¹

Informants like Gongloe who contradicted the popular perception of Gio and Mano political exclusion interacting with their socio-economic marginalisation were mainly urban elites who were not experiencing the same level of marginalisation or deprivation as the rural poor and 'youth' in Nimba. As we shall see below, ordinary people perceived the exclusion of elites, while Doe continued his unofficial policy of 'Krahnising' the state, as a reduction in patronage resources of whole communities that was impacting their rights and expectations from elites, which they relied on to achieve self-esteem.

As mentioned, Krahns only comprised approximately five percent of the population, but they held 31 percent of cabinet positions after the 1985 elections.⁴² Gio and Mano had nine and seven percent representation of the total population respectively, but they were grossly outnumbered in high profile representation by the Krahn.⁴³ To placate the Gio and Mano, Doe tried to take steps to include Gio and Mano elites in high profile positions. He appointed Gio and Mano elites to political positions in his administration, including as Minister of Health, Agriculture and Internal Affairs, Supreme Court Justices, and the National Port Authority.⁴⁴ In spite of

⁴¹ Interview, Tiawan Gongloe, Monrovia, 7th May 2009.

⁴² A. Adebajo, 2002, p. 26.

⁴³ D. Harris, 1999, p. 453.

⁴⁴ E. E. Osaghae, 1996, p. chapter 3.

these placements, there was a perception that Gio and Mano appointees did not enjoy the same benefits and privileges as their Krahn counterparts.⁴⁵

After the rigged election in 1985, Quiwonkpa launched a coup d'état to overthrow Doe. Upon capturing the television and radio station, Quiwonkpa hastily announced that the coup had been successful. His radio message stated that "You shall have your self-respect and you shall have a free and fair election in a democratic society."⁴⁶ But the coup d'état failed and he was brutally murdered by Krahn soldiers of the AFL and his body was paraded on the outskirts of Monrovia as a deterrent to any further plots against the regime. The failed coup led to more severe marginalisation and repression of Gio and Mano elites. A Mano informant whose father was in the Doe government at the time recalled:

My dad [a Mano] worked within the Samuel Kanyon Doe government as Assistant Minister of Education for Vocational and Technical education. He was a second-class minister. He never had the entitlements that other Krahns who were Ministers in the Doe government had. I remember in 1985 when we had the attempted invasion, the alleged attempted invasion by General Thomas Quiwonkpa, I was a student at the University of Liberia, and an activist, and a brave one. After the aborted attempt by General Quiwonkpa, Manos and Gios were being rounded up. They were executed, they were slaughtered, they were beheaded, women were raped, they were violated in many, many ways. My dad was so terrified that I had to go at his office and sit there from in the morning to the evening time just to give him some comfort. I saw an ethnic Krahn who was a Minister of Education, and dangling what [was] to be alleged to be a human testicle belonging to a Gio right in front of my dad's face, it was sickening. [He said: "We are killing them; we will destroy all of their people." He was sending a message to my dad that look if you [are] in our government and [ever] thinking about joining those people this is what is going to happen to you. Our people saw that. So there had to be a time when they had to take action.... It was those kind of things that created tension in Nimba and made Nimba breeding ground for so called 'freedom fighters'.⁴⁷

Not only did ordinary Gio and Mano perceive that their elites had been marginalised they also suffered heavy punishments for supporting the coup. Members of the Krahn-dominated AFL were deployed to Nimba to violently repress the Gio and Mano for

⁴⁵ Interview, Junior, Monrovia, 7th May 2009.

⁴⁶ Berkeley & Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (U.S.), 1986, p. 20.

⁴⁷ Interview, Zawolo, 11th February 2014.

their alleged support for Quiwonkpa. Many were reportedly openly celebrating after the announcement of the coup. The army carried out brutal actions against thousands of civilians, killing, destroying homes, raping women and pillaging.⁴⁸ The violence intensified Gio and Mano grievances against Doe and his Krahn supporters. Several of Quiwonkpa's supporters, including aide de camp Prince Johnson, and former Labour Minister Moses Duopo, went into exile in neighbouring countries such as Côte d'Ivoire. These would later join with Gio and Mano supporters in the launching of the NPFL rebellion against Doe.

Socio-economic horizontal inequalities

By the late 1980s Nimba County exhibited a distinct ethnic hierarchy. At the apex were the business elites of Mandingo ethnicity. They constituted the third largest ethnic group in the County. Next came the Gio and Mano who together formed the majority of the population in the County. While Gio and Mano communities were experiencing severe exclusion under Doe, members of the Mandingo community were perceived to be enjoying greater co-option into the state through Doe's leadership bias. As Krahn dominated politics, Doe's government allied with the Mandingos and granted them increased access to commerce. This was not the first time Mandingos had been favoured by state leadership (Chapter 4). Doe's bias towards the Mandingo was driven by similar motives as his predecessors. Mandingos constituted the only indigenous ethnic group with a high concentration of wealthy merchants.⁴⁹ He needed their support to increase his patronage resources. Political representation of Mandingos, therefore, increased under Doe. He appointed several Mandingos from

⁴⁸ See Ellis, 1999, pp. 54-65.

⁴⁹ E. E. Osaghae, 1996, p. chapter 1.

Nimba County into his regime.⁵⁰ Mandingo traders also benefited disproportionately from their share of government procurement contracts. For instance, Alusine Donzo was granted government contracts for textile supplies, involving army uniforms. In the 1980s, Mandingo commercial influence came to extend beyond trading goods in the interior to include retail interests in major foreign concessions, trading in gold and diamond, textile industries, tailoring, and control of the transportation systems around the country.⁵¹ Joining the Lebanese, Syrians and Indians, they became a dominant community in retail trade in Liberia.

The historical horizontal inequalities between Mandingo and Gio/Mano, discussed in Chapter 4, increased inter-ethnic tensions among these communities in Nimba. One of the main factors that contributed to this tension was the Doe regime's decision to publicly recognise Mandingos as citizens.⁵² Generally speaking, Mandingos are considered to be 'foreigners' who are not full Liberian citizens.⁵³ Informants from a variety of ethnic groups all expressed this view; it is also corroborated by scholarly accounts. The Mandingo scholar, Augustine Konneh writes that, "throughout the history of Liberia, the Mandingo have stood at the margins of citizenship-always taken to be 'something more' than the other indigenous groups of Liberia but 'something less' than the full citizens the Settlers consider themselves to be."⁵⁴

Informant accounts commonly suggest that many Gio and Mano peasant and 'youths' historically perceived Mandingo as a threat to their land rights in Nimba (Chapter 4). Doe's public acknowledgment of Mandingos as citizens was interpreted

⁵⁰ These included: Edward Sackor, Lansanah Kroma and Ansumana Kroma, into official positions. See The *Daily Observer* (Monrovia), 12 August 1984.

⁵¹ Liebenow, 1987, p. 232.

⁵² Interview, Focus Group, Tubmanburg, 29th April 2009.

⁵³ See for example: A. Konneh, 1996a, p. 1.

⁵⁴ A. Konneh, 1996a, p. 1.

as granting them the right to enter the local struggle for land. As Mahmood Mamdani put it, “citizenship does not entitle you to resources, it entitles you to enter the struggle for resources” or negotiations over rights to distribution of land.⁵⁵ A new constitution was enacted in 1986 under Doe to replace the 1847 independence constitution, which stipulated a citizenship requirement for land ownership.⁵⁶ Doe’s acknowledgment of the Mandingos was seen as an attempt to legitimise their acquisition of properties such as land.

Particularly grievous was the regime’s granting of concessions in mining minerals in the Nimba to Mandingo businessmen. Much of this was done in areas where Mano claimed communal ownership. For instance, Mount Nimba, from which the County gets its name, is located in Saclepea-Mah Chiefdom of the Mano region. The mountain is a site of mineral wealth. Iron ore was extracted from this mountain by LAMCO. The Mandingo community’s perceived political ties with the Doe government, and the face of the regimes exclusion of Gio and Mano elites, increased the resentment against them from their Gio and Mano neighbours.

When news of the 1985 Quiwonkpa coup d’état was announced, Gio and Mano who heard the news started jublations, some removed billboards featuring Doe’s picture and crowds danced in the streets.⁵⁷ The Mandingo writer, Nvasekie Konneh recounts in his memoir that following the coup, there were Gio and Mano threats to take back their lands from the Mandingo and exclude them from Nimba because they taught they had now assumed political power through the coup. At a local market in Saclepea there was a Mano man threatening that: “when the night time came they would drive the Mandingoes from town and ‘send them to Guinea’”. He also witnessed: “mad jubilation in Bahn, a town in Gbelly Geh district. A group of

⁵⁵ M. Mamdani, 2002, p. 505.

⁵⁶ The 1986 Constitution of the Republic of Liberia.

⁵⁷ Berkeley & Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (U.S.), 1986, p. 20.

excited Gio folk were going around issuing actual threats to Mandingoes....”

According to him, similar events happened in Ganta and Yekepa.⁵⁸ Ibrahim, who lived in Saclepea in the 1980s, corroborates this:

Before the war, there were tensions. You could tell the resentment of some Mano and Gio because if you go to major towns in Nimba properties were mostly owned by Mandingos.... That has been a major source of conflict. The few hours that people assumed that Quiwonkpa had taken over, some Gio and Mano surrounded Mandingo property, including my father’s property, to take it. That happened as far back as 1985.... Mandingo happen to be an affluent minority [in the County] they live in better houses, and eat three times a day. Gio and Mano felt that how in the world the stranger doing better than us.⁵⁹

But these plots were dashed when the coup failed, while many of his associates who survived fled into exile. Doe’s Krahn soldiers, led by General Julu, were sent to Nimba to mete out heavy reprisals against the Gio and Mano. When the 1985 coup d’état failed, Gio and Mano identified Nimba Mandingos as the spies and collaborators of the Doe regime who had informed on them and set the wrath of Krahn AFL soldiers on them after the failed coup. It increased grievances against the Mandingo.

Of the 32 Gio and Mano informants that were interviewed for this study, 25 argued that Mandingo settlers in the County had used their disproportionate access to wealth and state power to illegitimately obtain Gio and Mano lands. These were mainly peasants and ‘youths’, many of whom participated in the war. From below, tensions over land increased and began to turn on the issue of Mandingo origin. This led to the deployment of an increasingly familiar narrative of origin and property rights by ordinary Gio and Mano (Chapter 4). This narrative did not only serve to draw a boundary between Gio/Mano and Mandingo, but it also served to exclude Mandingos from legitimate ownership of lands in the County. As discussed below,

⁵⁸ N. Konneh, 2013, pp. 38-39.

⁵⁹ Interview, Ibrahim M., 25th January 2014.

rural Gio and Mano ‘youths’ and ordinary peasants deployed an emotive popular discourse of rights and expectations to communal ownership and individual use of Mandingo lands in Nimba as ‘ancestral territory’. These narratives, which were generated by a perception of socio-economic dominance, not only reveal inter-ethnic tensions over land and belonging, but were also linked to intra-ethnic discontent over leadership accountability.

Interaction of horizontal inequalities with moral ethnicity tensions

This section discusses how perceptions of Mandingo socio-economic dominance interacted with moral ethnicity tensions that fuelled Gio and Mano mobilisation against Mandingos. It focuses on two main areas of internal grievance. First, historical grievances with ‘traditional’ elite centred on the perception that they had permitted socio-economically dominant Mandingo to use their wealth to illegitimately obtain property rights from corrupt leaders. It was a source of moral outrage among ordinary Gio and Mano who saw land as an important source of their livelihoods and dignity. Second, many chiefs were co-opted into Doe’s party. Reminiscent of the Settler period, they were involved in mobilising forced labour of ordinary Gio and Mano to work on government farms. Not only did this deprive people the time to work on their own farms, they could not benefit from their labour value on communal lands. It further alienated them from those chiefs who were seen as regime collaborators. These grievances contributed to internal pressures on ‘traditional’ leaders to support external action. In order to be seen as radical actors for their people, many chiefs and elders collaborated with dissidents to organise the NPFL incursion.

Prior to the war bottom-up agitation emerged that Mandingo settlers in Nimba had used their disproportionate wealth and state favouritism to benefit from the Gio and Mano lands due to illegitimate transactions with local chiefs and government officials. According to this narrative ordinary people—despite their identity—had suffered ‘social injustice’ in the face of horizontal inequalities. The accounts of Mano informants from Saclepea-Ma district are instructive. They show how moral ethnicity and horizontal inequalities interacted by linking anger over Mandingo acquisition of what they perceive as their ancestral patrimony with historical grievances with their own leaders over their failed moral obligations. They highlight that the complainants were not necessarily divided by ethnicity. And, that what has been called a generational struggle was based on the contradictions of local accountability of political power—which made inequality socially responsible and justifiable in practice—and disproportionate access to resources that allowed people to achieve dignity. The focus was on the social accountability of indigenous elites to the widely recognized criteria pertaining to land and labour that had become undermined or threatened by horizontal inequalities.

One of the ‘youths’ who decried ‘social injustice’ is Jefferson. His narrative account is illustrative of the emotive popular discourse of territorial belonging that divided rural Mano ‘youths’ and peasants against the ‘chiefly class’ in Saclepea-Ma district. Jefferson was born and raised in Saclepea. His father was a soldier in the AFL and his mother supported the family through farming. He was in the 11th grade when the war broke out, but volunteered to fight for the NPFL. Jefferson argued that before the war Mandingo ‘strangers’ had been able to illegitimately acquire Mano lands because of their socio-economic dominance in the County and alliance with Doe’s regime, upsetting local arrangements over land rights:

The Mandingo ethnic group, it like our parents [way] back invited them to Nimba. But then at certain time they decided to, because they had the influence, they are business oriented, so they felt they had money, and wanted to claim certain part of Nimba County, but then they don't have any claim, because they don't have any document to this area. So what they did was, they firstly join the AFL to clear the Ganta and Saclepea out, and include it into the Dingo community, but then it didn't work. It leak out before even the rebel war could come... They wanted to carve out a parcel of land and make that Mandingo land and that came up before the war.... They been living there as brothers and sisters, our parents offer them land...our parents have this culture where if you came to my house...I will offer you a place. I'll say well you and my daughter can be here. So its how the Dingo tribe [settled here]. If you invited a Dingo tribe here. Of course the dingo tribe will again call another Dingo tribe. And the other person too will call another person. This is how they'll be migrating into that community. But the problem they have is, you who call them, they will keep pushing you, keep pushing you, keep pushing you, until if you have your land and farm with you they will take the entire farm from you. So this is how the Dingo ethnic group behave. But, their being out of Nimba [i.e. not belonging to Nimba is because] they don't have...like for example in Lofa they have district in Lofa. But they do not have any district in Nimba. They don't have, you know, a town that they come from [a home town]. It like, ok I am from Nimba, I am Mano by tribe, so I am from Saclepea. But then where do you come from? Yeah, you in Nimba, you are Mandingo, but then which district do you come from? Which town do you come from, who are your parents then? Where you migrated from?⁶⁰

The implication of Jefferson's argument is that Mandingo's in Nimba cannot have rights to possess lands in the County because they do not belong, even though they had used their wealth to obtain them. This view was shared by all thirteen Mano 'youths' were interviewed for this study, who argued that: "our [ancestral] parents gave us the land".⁶¹ They viewed their territorial belonging as a value inherited from a venerated past that pre-dates Settler rule and state formation. Their claims to legitimate ownership of Mandingo land is based on a notion of territorial 'belonging' understood in terms of orders of arrival and "clearing the bush", as opposed to purchase.⁶² Mandingos did not have 'hometowns' in Nimba; they were 'strangers'

⁶⁰ Interview, Jefferson, Gbarnga, 16th May 2009.

⁶¹ Interview, Jefferson, Gbarnga, 16th May 2009.

⁶² Cllr. James W. Zotta, TRC testimony, Sanniquellie City, 17 May 2008.

who had been permitted to settle on ‘tribal lands’ by their forefathers through marriage alliances.

Not all those who identified as Gio and Mano shared the above discourse. In particular, ‘elites’ from the ‘chiefly class’ dissented. The narrative account of Zawolo is instructive of the dissenting view of some Mano elites. Zawolo argued that much of what is considered Gio and Mano ‘tribal’ lands in the County by people like Jefferson were designated by the Settler state, and that the Settlers allocated a more extensive autochthonous status to these groups to the exclusion of ‘others’ who also had a claim to land in the County. He stated that:

The history of Liberia that was forged by the Americo-Liberians was misleading. In the history books, the one we went to school and read was that, Nimba County was a county for the Manos and the Gios. They ignore the Kpelle, they ignore the Krahn, they ignore the Mandingos. Then they go and say Grand Gedeh was a county for the Krahn, they ignore the Sapos. The history that was being taught in the schools created that belief that Nimba County was the belonging of the Mano people and the Gio people and no others. They took that from the history that was given to them. Bong County, for instance, they said was for the Kpelle people, but Bong County inhabited by the Kpelle, Bassa and Mano...because of the way the history was being sold, the way the history was being presented. They have a county belonging to a tribe all other people there are ‘strangers’. When you ascribe such a right to people who are not sophisticated to understand the real issues, they align themselves to a particular individual [to resist those they see] as people who are encroaching on their wealth, that they need protection.⁶³

This account forms part of a general perception among the upper stratum that the grassroots have been manipulated into thinking that they have a broader claim to lands in the County by certain political elites. A former Mano government Minister who opined that ordinary people “suffer from a misperception” also shares a similar view.⁶⁴ Other elites argue that those who claim Mandingo lands are simply motivated by jealous resentment. Thus, in his testimony provided before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Zawolo Z. Zuagele, a former member of the

⁶³ Interview, Zawolo, 11th February 2014.

⁶⁴ Interview, Tiawan Gongloe, Monrovia, 7th May 2009.

legislature from Nimba County opined that the way ethnic Gio and Mano perceived “...the Mandingoes’ economic successes in trade, transportation, etc. that pushed Liberia into national crisis....”.⁶⁵ At the heart of what elites call manipulation, misperception, and jealous rage was a demand for accountability. Many of the Gio and Mano ‘youths’ and peasants who supported the war were seeking social accountability. Konneh noted that in his hometown of Saclepea: “the demand for the land of the Mandingo people were passed through [the internal] agitation and politicisation of the Mano and the Gio people.”⁶⁶

Traditional elites have claimed historical control over the means of production, and thereby social mobility of ‘youths’ through land use. But there was a moral ethnicity expectation among ordinary people that land allocation would be carried out in a way that conformed to the norms and cultures of small community, which also protected subordinates. As one Mano youth argued:

The Mandingo never had this kind of privilege to have a tribal land. But some of them were squatting and later on they bought the land from government and our elders. The tribe of Mandingo was never known as a tribe if you check the Liberian history, Mandingo was never part of our sixteen tribes. Mandingo were these people that came from Guinea. They came as business people and then later on they started having children with the citizens. We gave them this area.... If you look at Nimba, especially in Ganta along the main road, which is seen as a good alley for business, most of the land that Mandingos are claiming are their land it was given to them by our forefathers and they were just there as strangers and business people who were passing through.... There were always some of those accusations [against the elders], and government would normally send people to go in and investigate it and normally there will be money that will be passed around.... There were always tensions. Even in my own area, my parents and my grandparents fought a very long battle for land with another family. We had to reach to the government. I was very young at that time. There were always those issues about how they got the land and how the land is being [redistributed]....⁶⁷

Such narratives suggest a deeply held suspicion against ‘traditional’ elites who manage ‘tribal’ lands. ‘Traditionally’ a chief’s authority partly rested on wealth in

⁶⁵ TRC testimony, Zawolo Z. Zuagele, Sanniquellie City, 17th May 2008.

⁶⁶ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 8th March 2014.

⁶⁷ Interview, A. Saye, Salala, 1st May 2009.

land. But they hold land as custodians not individual owners. At issue among many of the Gio and Mano peasants and ‘youths’ was social accountability for their moral rights and expectations, which had become threatened by the disproportionate prosperity of ‘others’. Their contentions were more moral than political in the sense that they touched on their (in)ability to achieve the self-mastery of self-esteem rather than unequal structural relations.⁶⁸

Many ordinary people felt betrayed that some of their elders had transferred lands to more prosperous Mandingos in exchange for money. As discussed in Chapter 4, Mandingo elites allied themselves with the ‘chiefly class’ in Nimba rather than the peasants during Settler rule.⁶⁹ According to the historical record, the alliance provided the chiefs with profitable and commercial opportunities under Settler rule.⁷⁰ Their role in the kola trade and the establishment of markets made them powerful allies. Mandingo traders were given Gio and Mano women as wives, and lands for cash cropping. Many of the Gio and Mano ‘youths’ interviewed for this study were born in the early 1970s and therefore had no adult memories of life under Tubman, Tolbert or the early rule of Doe. Yet they all maintained a narrative of Gio and Mano autochthony. Such ‘youths’ had grown up hearing legends such as the account of Zazlon (Chapter 3) emphasising the importance of land as a communal value, which some corrupt chiefs co-opted by the Settler government tried to illegitimately alienate through contractual transactions.⁷¹ Elders were seen as appropriating the rights of younger generations through traditional authority for their own economic interests.

⁶⁸ This has resonance with: John Lonsdale, 1994, p. 426.

⁶⁹ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 110.

⁷⁰ Ford, 1990, p. 296.

⁷¹ Interview, Zawolo, 11th February 2014.

Historical grievances with elders centred on the perception that they had permitted prosperous Mandingo to use their affluence to illegitimately obtain property rights from corrupt elders.⁷² As one informant opined:

People look at them as having what belong to them and they took it from them through various commercial transactions. They exploited them. They got it from them; it was not through the right means and so they got to get it back. So that's what they think. They have so much influence. They come to our country, they come to our land, and they have influence. They control the business, they control the government, everything. That's the perception, that's the reason....⁷³

This perception intensified internal pressures against 'traditional' elites in the 1980s, in the context of marginalisation under Doe and the exclusion of Gio and Mano from state patronage. To informants like Jefferson land was:

a means of getting livelihood.... if you get land you can do farming. Nimba County is a very rich area; part of the belief is that there could be deposits of bauxite, deposits of gold and other minerals. You can give lease rights to people to come to live on [the land]. In that area, those are some of the things that bring recognition in the community. The ability to do those kind of things.⁷⁴

Land is central to many ordinary people because as the Chairman of the Land Commission put it:

Recognition and acceptance of membership in these communities, is inextricably linked to and manifested through customary land rights enjoyed by community members. Land and land rights are therefore fundamental to how Liberians relate to their communities and how they view themselves as citizens of Liberia.⁷⁵

For many Gio and Mano 'youths' like Jefferson, whose main economic activity in the County derived from land-related activities, land is not only an economic resource but also a key element in defining moral community membership and achieving self-esteem. Historically, land has been an important source of self-esteem within these moral communities because of the status that adding value to land brought.⁷⁶ Land

⁷² Interview, Jefferson, Gbarnga, 16th May 2009

⁷³ Interview, Moses K., Tubmanburg, 29th April 2009.

⁷⁴ Interview, Jefferson, Gbarnga, 16th May 2009.

⁷⁵ Statement of Dr. Cecil T. O. Brandy published in the *New Liberia Newspaper* on 23 May 2013.

⁷⁶ Interview, Robert Karloh, Monrovia, 8th May 2009.

promoted social mobility and as well as the opportunities for marriage.⁷⁷ Many people achieved recognition in moral community through land and land rights. Some also find social insurance and security at the level of ‘tribe’. Unlike the children of ‘big men’ who are typically sent to schools in urban areas to ‘lean book’ to become ‘*kwii*’ (or civilised as the Settlers), rural peasants largely depend on access to land for their subsistence and recognition.⁷⁸

The rise in cash crops farming before the war, such as rubber planting, reduced the extent of land available for food crops, creating food insecurity among some peasant families.⁷⁹ The emotive discourse demonstrated a widespread hostility to threats that might disturb this security. Land poor peasants and ordinary ‘youths’ agitated for the recovery of dispossessed lands in Nimba through emphasising their expectations and ideas as ethnic citizens. In their view, communal land was inalienable and could not be commoditised. Communal land could not be bought or sold. Their lands were therefore alienated in a manner that they did not recognise as legitimate. They had an expectation of access and use, as a generational right. The emphasis in their thought was more moral than political.

Apart from grievances over land ownership and control, the exclusion of Quiwonkpa from the Doe regime further ruptured relations between the ‘chiefly class’ and commoners. The accounts of Cooper illustrate the source of the increasing divide and how inaction threatened their legitimacy.⁸⁰ Cooper was born in the 1960s into a peasant household. He traced his ancestry to his birthplace, Nyonbein quarter in Glehyee-Zorpea, Yarwemencelon District. According to oral history, the settlement

⁷⁷ Richards & al, 2005.

⁷⁸ Richards & al, 2005, p. 20.

⁷⁹ Wiley, 2007, p. 199.

⁸⁰ Cooper joined the NPFL in 1990 as a Mano youth, and fought till the ending of the war in 2003. He rose to the rank of Major General in the NPFL. His account is representative of those who joined the war in 1990 as Mano and Gio youth from a rural background to fight out of a sense of duty to protect threats to the ethnic ‘nation’.

was established in the 1800s by three villages, currently town quarters, named Zangbein, Yeebompea, and Nyonbein. Rights to settlement land developed through mixing of labour with land (described in Chapter 3). However, when Doe came to power, he replicated past forced labour practices that required young men like Cooper to work on “tribal reserves” for the benefit of the Doe government:

Communion farming was one of the agriculture development projects undertaken by the Doe Government. It was almost like a force labour job where you established the big general farming the town and its for government. Men in the town are forced to go and work and the women are also forced to go and work...the proceeds, the rice is for government.... The quarter chiefs are summoned by the general town chief to say look Monday by next week Monday there's general work on the farm. So they met in a quarter they all assemble in the morning by six here with their cutlasses to go on the farm.... It happen to me.⁸¹

Not only did this deprive people the time to work on their own farms, they could not benefit from their labour on communal lands; yet, “yes people knew that they have right to them.” Moreover, local chiefs implemented “communion farming”. After, Doe's NDPL won elections in 1985 under widespread allegations of fraud, he appointed chiefs and elected officials as NDPL party leaders in places like Nimba. Cooper recalled that:

In the 80s, Clan Chiefs, Paramount Chiefs, Zone Chiefs, town chiefs were all elected. Commissioners were appointed.... [Y]ou know one thing Doe achieved was to use the chiefs at the time as [his] party leaders. The NDPL leadership itself was just in the hands of these political leaders. So the zone chief was automatically the zone chairperson of the party. The commissioner [was] the district head of the party. So now when the situation intensified leaders were perceived as betrayers in most communities. That's why you will see that most of the chiefs in Nimba got killed by the NPFL. They saw them as people who were driving the vision of Doe and against them....⁸²

Ostensibly, co-optation of chiefs implied some level of political participation. But, as this account suggests, some chiefs were seen as “betrayers” who were not redistributing their gains. From the time of Settler indirect rule, a general mistrust had

⁸¹ Interview, Cooper, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

⁸² Interview, Cooper, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

developed from their perceived economic alliance with the Mandingo. Many of them had relied on coercive instruments of the state, such as the LFF, as protection from the ethnic consciousness of their followers (Chapter 4). State protection, however, weakened under Doe in the context of the ending of the Cold War.

Many ordinary Mano and Gio such as Cooper had perceived senior politico-military elites such as Quiwonkpa as “their representation in the government and the fact that he was being expelled from the government.... The ordinary people saw that as been disenfranchised by the government” while some chiefs were collaborating with the regime. This created moral outrage. Many ordinary people put pressure on their chiefs to act through ‘noncompliance’. Cooper explained that:

Farmers refused to even go to their communion farming work that was by Doe. Even my hometown [Glehyee-Zorpea], it was difficult the Zone Chief at the time it was difficult to give instructions for people to take it. At the time it was one old man Yelegar. Most of those people became disrespectful to his order.... Noncompliance of the people with such a ‘chief’ is one way [that they put] pressure on the chief.... Like I was in my home when one of our honourables at the time from Tappita District took some AFL and some security personnel’s from village to village to talk to people, and they reached in my town the people say they can’t go there. And when he called a meeting, he was in the town the whole day nobody go there. At the time I was a young man I was in the town myself....⁸³

When Quiwonkpa was killed it prompted youths such as Cooper to support political action. He explained that:

He [Quiwonkpa] was like the voice for the people of Nimba in government... So if your own powerful person in government is being treated this way and then shown to you, you can’t abandon him that is why the people of Nimba decided to accept the truth... It affected relationships... it affected the community... the community too said no, no but this is unacceptable.

According to the Mano scholar, Dr. Saye Guannu, there was a generalised demand for “moral, financial and security support” for the Gio and Mano communities; Gio and Mano associations such as “labour unions put pressure on...most especially

⁸³ Interview, Cooper, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

[‘traditional’ elites]. It was very effective” in generating political action.⁸⁴ The first was an attempt at peaceful negotiations with the regime. The second was support for radical action by way of the NPFL rebellion.

Regarding peaceful action, ‘traditional’ elders, civil society and religious groups in the County organised peace talks with the government to try to end the conflict. Doe called the meeting in Nimba. But not all the chiefs and elders were in favour of peaceful settlement. The negotiations did not translate into increased political power and economic inclusion for the Gio and Mano to placate these communities. Duo narrated that

In Nimba we get elder council.... People complained to their leaders and they went to Doe to complain. The chiefs, the paramount chiefs, the clan chiefs, [including] the late Delozuo Toweh, paramount chief of Nimba County, they went to Doe to complain that Nimba citizens have been marginalised. He was a Gio paramount chief for the Tappita district, the place Moses Duopo was from. He was not just the paramount chief; he was also the chief of elders of Nimba County. Traditionally, the citizens went to him to complain and they went to Doe. Doe was not listening. When they were not getting anywhere they use violence to try to remove him.⁸⁵

In order to be seen as radical actors for their people, many chiefs and elders collaborated with dissidents to organise the NPFL incursion. ‘Traditional’ elites who publicly resisted taking action against Doe lost legitimacy with their constituents. For example, Chief Jerry Gonyon who was perceived as a loyal supporter of Doe lost legitimacy in his chiefdom. Shortly before the rebellion broke out, Clan Chief Jerry Gonyon of the Zoe Geh Chiefdom wrote a letter to Doe informing him that, Stephen Daniels, the County Superintendent, “along with Paramount Chief Gonwoe Cooper, District Commissioner Lamuel G. Karnue, Zone Chiefs Dennis G. Yormie, Lama Mento, Town Chief Moses Saye Krayee, Zone Chief Johnson Zeedweh and Secretary

⁸⁴ Interview, Dr Saye Guannu, Cuttington University, Nimba, 8 March 2014.

⁸⁵ Interview, Duo, 7th March 2014.

Peter Ben Zeedweh” were plotting with the dissidents to overthrow Doe.⁸⁶ The chief had been reinstated by Doe after a fallout with the County Superintendent and was therefore not in favour of the incursion. As a result of his actions, he lost legitimacy with some members of his chiefdom.⁸⁷ They accused him of being a traitor and trying to establish authoritarian rule in the chiefdom.⁸⁸ Further investigations by Doe’s Minister of Internal Affairs, Edward Sackor, failed to corroborate the Chief’s assertions. The implicated heads of the County denied the allegations, which later turned out to be accurate when the rebels eventually announced the rebellion over the airwaves. Philip recalled that

The people didn’t want Chief Jerry Gonyon as chief anymore because he had committed some excesses so they no longer wanted him as chief they wanted him removed. He started to implicate some of the people that they were part of the rebellion that was about to come to Liberia, it was pretty much an open secret during that time, but what nobody knew was when.⁸⁹

Reminiscent of the Settler ‘colonial’ era, chiefs like Gonyon eventually fled to Monrovia. Cooper reminisced that:

[Chiefs] were now feeling uneasy with the people of the county.... [E]ven [political elites like]the late [Mano] Commissioner Volker from Saclepea, was very loyal to Doe and faced lot of difficult times with his own people. Commissioner Voker even lost his life during the war. He lost his life because he was loyal to Doe.... Some of them [chiefs and political leaders] were even given arms. Some of them were given police and army protection, the means of continuously suppressing the people to take order from them. So if you were the leader of this community and you see that people are resisting your order, and you explain it to Doe it was possible for Doe to empower you with security personnel.⁹⁰

To publicly display that they were acting on behalf of their ethnic constituents, the Gio and Mano elites who led the NPFL war framed their mobilisation rhetoric as a response to grievances over political exclusion, insecurity and socio-economic

⁸⁶ Nepe, 1991, pp. 75-76.

⁸⁷ Interview, Tiawan Gongloe, Monrovia, 7th May 2009.

⁸⁸ Nepe, 1991, p. 75.

⁸⁹ Interview, Philip, 10th March 2014.

⁹⁰ Interview, Cooper, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

marginalisation. They mobilised on the promise of recovering and redistributing lands and livelihoods so that they could fulfil their local obligations. Thus, the re-organisation of Quiwonkpa's NPFL appealed to those seeking action. They were, therefore, more likely to follow their leaders and this was a contributing factor to the onset of violence in Nimba.

Moral ethnicity crisis and internal pressure for elite action

This section discusses how perceptions that internal arrangements between political elites and their followers had been disrupted by their external exclusion became an important source of Gio and Mano mobilisation. They created internal pressures that incentivised elite action. This motivated them to pursue strategies of violent action. Informant accounts show that these internal pressures were not just because of horizontal exclusion, but the result of moral ethnicity. In particular, politically excluded elites felt a sense of threat to their legitimacy as leaders if they did not respond to these demands because they could no longer deliver largesse and security.

There is no comprehensive biography of Quiwonkpa—the man whose demise from high profile political position triggered the events that led to civil war. Quiwonkpa was born in 1955 in the town of Zurlay, Nimba County, into peasant household. He was Mano by birth; his father was from the Mano town of Zorgowee, Saclepea-Mah district. But, his Gio mother raised him in the town of Zortiaba.⁹¹ After completing primary education in Nimba, he enlisted in the Armed Forces of Liberia in June 1971, at the age of 16.⁹² He was promoted to the rank of Sergeant in 1972.⁹³ In 1978, he received his high school diploma at the military high school at the Barclay

⁹¹ Interview, Cooper, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

⁹² D. E. Dunn et al., 2001, p. 274.

⁹³ Interview, Rt. Col John Duo, Gborplay, 7th March 2014.

Training Center (BTC) in Monrovia. He was assigned to the Record Section of the AFL at the BTC and held the rank of staff sergeant at the time of the 1980 coup d'état.

Oral accounts by Gio and Mano informants portray him as a popular ethnic patron who legitimised his authority by adhering to moral economy norms and values around leadership benevolence as the source of community security and individual achievement of self-esteem (Chapter 3). For instance, it is commonly recounted that during his time in power he transformed one of his primary constituencies in Nimba, Karnplay, from a town into a 'city' through the provision of development assistance and redistribution of patronage. Moreover, he facilitated an increase in Gio and Mano political 'big men' through distribution of political positions. This was significant; as mentioned in Chapter 3 individual ambition within Gio and Mano societies relied on attachment to a big man to achieve esteem. One informant recalled that:

Karnplay became a city under Quiwonkpa's influence. A city mayor was appointed under Quiwonkpa's influence. Quiwonkpa paved the roads. He built a town hall. Quiwonkpa recommended position for citizens of Nimba County in the government. Many of our people from Nimba County became deputies and assistant ministers because of Quiwonkpa's recommendation.... The late Moses Duopo became the Minister of Labour. He was advisor to the PRC until Quiwonkpa recommended him to become the labour Minister. Moses Duopo was from Tappita. Moses Duopo helped a lot of citizens from that end. He gave them loans from bank at the time. Like farmers, giving them loans to farm. Giving them farming tools.... [In short] Quiwonkpa was [seen as] very instrumental in the development of Nimba County.⁹⁴

A representative informant who benefitted from Quiwonkpa's patronage, to achieve self-esteem as a 'big man', was Duo. Duo's oral accounts illustrate how internal pressures and threatened loss—or actual loss—of leadership legitimacy within ethnic community, from severe political exclusion led to top-down processes of Gio and Mano mobilisation for violence. Duo was born on 15th June 1948 into a peasant

⁹⁴ Interview, John, Saclepea, 7th March 2014.

family in Gborplay (one of the towns on the Liberian-Ivorian border where the war broke out). He did not start his formal education until he was 20. According to him, “those days school business where hard.” He was admitted at the Garplay Mission School when his father contracted leprosy and joined a leper colony in the Mission.

In 1968, following his primary education at the Mission, Duo was sponsored by a prominent relative to continue his elementary education in Monrovia at present-day Newport High School. However, in 1969 he was forced to leave the 5th grade and return to Gborplay to manage his household when after his father became ill again. He returned to Monrovia in 1970, but this time he could not secure a sponsor to complete his education. He managed to join the national army as a private in 1971. Then in 1972 he was promoted to private first class (PFC). It was during his time as a PFC in the army that Jackson Doe became deputy minister of education (Chapter 4). Duo recalled that it was in this time when Jackson Doe “as a Minister of Education...gave a lot of scholarships to many of the citizens”, that he was able to further his own education.⁹⁵ With the opening up of educational opportunities to Gio and Mano, Duo was able to enrol in night school while working in the army communication room as a radio operator.⁹⁶ Duo obtained his high school diploma from the Barracks Union Institute (now known as Gray D Allison High School) at the Barclay Training Centre in Monrovia in 1979. On the eve of the 1980 coup d’état Duo had been promoted to the rank of corporal in the army. He provided intelligence to the coupists before it was carried out in 1980.

After the coup d’état, Duo was promoted to the rank of captain, and assigned as a Commanding Officer of Bassa Detachment in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, through Quiwonkpa’s patronage. Duo’s experience is a good example of how Gio and

⁹⁵ Interview, Rtd. Lt. Colonel Z. John Duo, Saclepea, 7th and 21st March 2014.

⁹⁶ Interview, John Duo, 7th March 2014.

Mano who came to prominence in Nimba as politico-military big men through high profile state patrons like Quiwonkpa, legitimised their position with local ethnic publics:

When I became captain in the Army, I started to work for money, people from this particular village [Gbalay in Gborplay]...I was their Big man. I attend[ed] to every matter [in the community]. Like when someone is sick from my village, and they bring that person to me from my village to Monrovia. And the person is to the hospital and they say somebody is from Gbalay in the Hospital, you don't have to come to from my quarter, I have to go there to attend to you because you from my home when you are from Gborplay Chiefdom.... Then there is a need of development, when you come from Gborplay, when you are prominent citizen from that chiefdom. We will have to go, we [were] consider[ed] the prominent citizens of that particular Chiefdom.... When they are farming, they come to us to Monrovia for help. You give them money you buy cutlasses you buy hoe, you buy all farming materials and give to them they carry those things and farm. And we as elders, we as citizens or *good citizens* [my emphasis] we help them. [If] you don't help them sometime you want position, they don't look at you, they say this man is a mean man. They will not look at you. For instance like elections, when time come for elections, if I want to be a member of parliament for my district or for my village and I raise my hand up, I say look I want to go into the House, the people will look at your record. When this man was working in Monrovia. What did he do for us? Did he help us? Yes we used to go to Mr Duo and that the man who help us to build our school. That the man who help us to fix our bridge. This is the man who help us to make farm last year. So let's vote for him. [Those who] can sit down with their money, sit down with their property, rule selfishly, you don't get position. They don't recognize you. People don't show their respect to you.... That is why Quiwonkpa is still loved, when Quiwonkpa [became] commanding general [after the coup d'état] he's not from all over Nimba County, but people from all of Nimba County use to go to his Office with their problem....⁹⁷

This account is reminiscent of notions of past moral economy of leadership that emphasised leadership benevolence to supporters as a way of gaining respect and legitimacy (Chapter 3). The removal of Quiwonkpa from the PRC was a major blow to new elites like Duo because of the impact it had on their ability to obtain patronage for their supporters. He recalled that:

When Quiwonkpa got removed the Nimba citizens were marginalised. They were removed from all the important positions. Even in security apparatus. We the soldiers in the military, the Gio, were denied by Doe as the citizens of Nimba County.... Because of what we were doing if you take two or three of us

⁹⁷ Interview, Rt. Col John Duo, Saclepea, 21th March 2014.

from work, it means you affecting the whole village. It affects the village because people are no more able to get cutlasses from you, they cannot obtain hoes for their farming, they cannot get even generator now at least to have cold water. I used to buy generator for my village and let the people use the generator for their cold water. If I am not working, I am not there, who will do that for them again?⁹⁸

The interruption of resources such as educational opportunities and development assistance, also linked to political exclusion of Gio and Mano elites like Duo, had a broad impact around the county:

A lot of scholarships were given to the citizens of Nimba County by General Quiwonkpa and majority of the scholarships were denied because Doe's Minister of Education at that time, a Krahn man called Dr Boley, Dr George Boley cancelled most of the scholarships of Nimba citizens.... Even developments like roads, road condition in Nimba County was despicable. General Quiwonkpa wanted every part of Nimba County to be connected with roads and Doe denied these things....⁹⁹

Loss of educational resources, in particular, were significant because they facilitated personal achievement of ordinary Gio and Mano in the wider national economy. These losses threatened the legitimacy of politico-military elites such as Duo.

Prior to their coming into power, a line of attack from ordinary Gio and Mano was directed against those who 'know book' for lack of support. They were looked upon as leaders because of educational attainment, which was valued by the *Kwii* Settler state. But many of them had failed to deliver. According to Dr Guannu, within the state, Gio and Mano political "leaders are chosen by their ability to provide patronage...first and foremost protection, security for the community."¹⁰⁰ Educated political elites were considered to have failed not because of their own greed, but mainly because of their marginalisation by the Settler elite. Moreover, they were seen as detracted by internal competition among themselves. As one informant put it: "The intelligentsia of Nimba have failed the people across both the Gios and the Manos.

⁹⁸ Interview, Duo, Saclepea, 21th March 2014.

⁹⁹ Interview, Duo, Saclepea, 21st March 2014.

¹⁰⁰ Interview, Dr Saye Guannu, Cuttington University, Nimba County, 8th March 2014.

They spent too much of their time fighting each other than fighting on behalf of the people”.¹⁰¹ Leaders had social responsibility to redistribute privileges to their dependents in exchange for deference.¹⁰² In the modern state, people expected redistribution from ‘traditional’ and political patrons. Ordinary people had been disappointed that the education of the ‘literate’ had not translated into communal benefits.¹⁰³ A Liberian scholar commenting on this ‘tradition’ explained that, “the people wanted attention to their social welfare...housing, roads, employment, health etc. In Liberian politics, a leader is rightly or wrongly required to bear so much of the burden financially.”¹⁰⁴

Marginalised ethnic constituents responded positively to the politico-military elites that came to power through the coup partly because of the perceived failures of conventional literate elites. What Gio and Mano elites in the PRC offered when they came to power after the coup was greater access to the state to obtain resources for community development and personal achievement. Dr Guannu observed that the perception was that “the coup leaders they had done what the Liberian elite or let’s say the indigenous elite had not done...for the Mano and the Gio in particular they had become the new leaders...so they should have the highest say in political arrangement.”¹⁰⁵ Despite the rivalry with Doe, they were able to establish reciprocities with ordinary people shortly after coming to power, by bringing development to the county and increasing access to educational opportunities and state employment. The political exclusion of politico-military elites was, thus, seen as a threat to ordinary Gio and Mano.

¹⁰¹ Interview, Siafa, Buduburam, 8th January 2011.

¹⁰² Richards & al, 2005, p. 8.

¹⁰³ Timothy Nevin notes a ‘a generalized distrust on the part of illiterate and semiliterate Liberians of their literate fellow citizens’ at the time: Nevin, 2010, pp. 79-80.

¹⁰⁴ Interview, Alaric Tokpa, Lakpazee, 16th March 2008.

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Dr Saye Guannu, Cuttington University, Nimba County, 8th March 2014.

The breaking of these local reciprocities between high profile politico-military elites and grassroots that started after Quiwonkpa's demotion in October 1983, and worsened after the failed 1985 coup, thus, led to local agitation. It included appeals to 'traditional' leaders for action. Informants commonly recalled that local citizens in places like Gbalay: "complained to their leaders and they went to Doe to complain."¹⁰⁶ But these complaints did not bring much improvement. Political pressure was also directed at excluded political elites. A variety of different sources suggest that some of Quiwonkpa's own ethnic constituents from Nimba who had benefitted from his patronage went to Gborplay to put pressure on him to take action against the regime. These included members of his 'family' and many of those who had received government jobs through him, such as Samuel Dokie and Duo. A Nimba informant recounted that:

When Quiwonkpa was removed by Doe from the government he was still living on the military barracks. He was still popular, there were a lot of people, diplomats, leaders from opposition parties, ordinary people used to go to speak to him so that angered President Doe who told him to vacate the place. So when he left the military barracks he went to live with one of his sisters somewhere in Monrovia. But then he was being constantly harassed so he left and went to his mother's farm in Nimba County. So he was in the farm when Dokie and other people decided to carry a Nimba raid, so that, that would make Quiwonkpa to rise up to do something because they all felt that Quiwonkpa didn't want to do something so Samuel Dokie and some other family members...decided to carry a Nimba raid so that what fired Quiwonkpa into action.¹⁰⁷

In his testimony provided at the TRC, the Mandingo politician, Alhaji Kromah, similarly recounted that:

The Nimba Gio and Mano political community in Monrovia was all too cognizant of the protection Quiwonkpa provided for them in the government, and they too joined the stream [of visitors that visited Quiwonkpa] on Carey Street.... The influx of people to see Quiwonkpa did not only dramatize the popularity of the young soldier, but also provided a rally ground for some public action against Doe.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Interview, Duo, Saclepea, 21st March 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Interview, Stanley, Buduburam, 29th December 2010. Another Gio informant corroborates this: Interview, New York, Philip, 10th March 2014.

¹⁰⁸ TRC Statement, Alhaji Kromah, Monrovia, 11th August 2008.

The protests “drew in the wrath of an already fidgety Doe” against Quiwonkpa. Consequently, he left Monrovia and resettled in Nimba County. But, the people of Nimba became increasingly disgruntled because their patrons were no longer able to protect their interests. Duo recalled that:

There was a pressure. The pressure was on some of the politicians that left in the country. They that left in the country organise themselves and they started to communicate among themselves in palava huts.... To get job it was very hard so they cant help their families.... The national cake, it was not shared.... When they were not getting anywhere they use violence to try to remove him.¹⁰⁹

He suggests that leaders like Quiwonkpa and himself risked losing their legitimacy with other excluded elites if they had not responded to these pressures in the way that people wanted. This means that elites like Duo did not just feel that people were pressuring him to act because of horizontal inequalities alone. It was driven by moral ethnicity concerns that he was losing legitimacy and was at risk of becoming marginalised because he could no longer deliver what he had in the past to his supporters. As a result of the pressure for action: “In 1983 Quiwonkpa decided that Doe should be killed. As a result there was [an insurrection] called the Nimba raid...in Nimba so that we can take over in Monrovia.”¹¹⁰ Accounts like Duo’s show that political elites like Quiwonkpa changed the way they thought about using violence to respond to their exclusion from power, and the strategies they were using, in response to considerations of internal pressures. If he had not acted, the actions of supporters such as Dokie would have undermined Quiwonkpa’s legitimacy as a “strong man” of the Gio and Mano people.

On 21 November 1983, Quiwonkpa and his compatriots launched the raid as a way of returning to power and maintaining their position as political leaders in their

¹⁰⁹ Interview, Duo, Saclepea, 21st March 2014.

¹¹⁰ Interview, Duo, 7th March 2014.

community. They attacked government installations in the LAMCO area in Yekepa, Nimba County. The plan was to draw attention to the County that would distract the Monrovia government and permit the coupists to take over the central government in Monrovia. But the plan leaked. Meanwhile, Krahn soldiers and their families were attacked. In particular, General Julu lost four children in the raid, leading to massive reprisals from the AFL.¹¹¹ It forced Quiwonkpa and his compatriots into exile. But political agitation for elite action continued. Philip, a Gio informant who was a student in Nimba at the time narrated that:

Some of the people that were surrounding him [Quiwonkpa] were extremists. Some of them were extremists so they wanted him to do something at all costs. Like the ex-military officers, security officers who were dismissed by Doe, the rank and file members of the military who felt disillusioned by what was going on. They were mostly Nimbadians. Since he didn't want to stage a counter coup they say well we have to create a situation that will force him to act.... The people were pretty much disgruntled. There was disillusionment within the rank and file of the [Gio and Mano] population. They thought that they were no longer part of the body politic of the country given the fact that their representative, somebody who they thought was their representation in person of Quiwonkpa was removed in such a manner that they felt they were no longer part of the body politic and they were really, really, disillusioned. And that how the disgruntlement started to grow within the population of Nimba. There were pressure groups and political parties that were active prior to the [1985] coup...in Nimba, especially the student movement. All of these people were not satisfied with the status quo.¹¹²

Quiwonkpa's widow, Tarloh Munah Quiwonkpa, corroborates accounts like Philips. She asserted in an open letter that the fraudulent 1985 elections and Doe's actions against family members were used to pressure him into taking action to remove Doe, corroborates this.¹¹³ In light of increasing "disgruntlement", in 1985, shortly after the elections, Quiwonkpa launched the failed coup d'état under the National Patriotic Front of Liberia. After Quiwonkpa was killed, bottom-up pressure increased against 'traditional' elites. Consequently:

¹¹¹ Interview, Duo, 7th March 2014.

¹¹² Interview, Philip, 10th March 2014.

¹¹³ Tarloh Munah Quiwonkpa, An Open Letter to Harry Yuan, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Amos Sawyer, Boima Fahnbulleh, and Others, *The Perspective*, Atlanta, Georgia August 9, 2005.

The chiefs, the paramount chiefs, the clan chiefs, [of Nimba] they went to Doe to complaint that Nimba citizens have been marginalised. An example is the late Delozuo Toweh, paramount chief of Nimba County. He was a Gio paramount chief for the Tappita district, the place Moses Duopo was from. He was not just the paramount chief; he was also the chief of elders of Nimba County. Traditionally, the citizens went to him to complain and they went to Doe. [The elders went on a peace mission to talk to Doe. But] Doe was not listening.¹¹⁴

Excluded elites like Duo also felt a sense of threat to their legitimacy as leaders and this was one of the main things that pushed them into action. He explained that:

If we had not done anything we would have been booed we would have been blamed.... So we came to bring in a government that will bring us equal representation the people [wanted]. [I]t was because there were our leaders that were affected...that were working and that were forcibly removed and denied their right to lead us. That is why most of us were angry...because they were not properly treated and there were no more leadership. So as a result we came in with force so that we will bring in leaders who will represent us in Government. Not that they was not leading us or correctly. It is because they were no more there.... Our people were crying, dying. They used to communicate with us [about what was happening]. We mobilised in exile.¹¹⁵

On 24th December 1989 the re-organised NPFL launched a rebellion against Doe in the Butuo, Nimba County. It was led by many of the Gio and Mano dissident soldiers and political elites, such as Duo, and Moses Duopo who had founded the NPFL with Quiwonkpa, and taken part in the 1983 raid and the 1985 coup.¹¹⁶ Other notable members included Prince Y. Johnson who later broke away and formed the splinter Independent National Patriotic Front (INPFL). Duo was “one of the planning and training officers” as well as an “instructor of the Uniform Code of Military Justice”.¹¹⁷ Moses Duopo, a former Gio Labour Minister who had been excluded by Doe, was initially named the Secretary General of the NPFL.¹¹⁸ Duopo confirmed on the Voice of America radio station from exile in Lagos, Nigeria that he was the NPFL

¹¹⁴ Interview, Tuago, Tubmanburg, 28th April 2009.

¹¹⁵ Interview, Duo, Saclepea, 21st March 2014.

¹¹⁶ Interview, Paul, Buduburam, 11th January 2011.

¹¹⁷ Interview, Duo, Saclepea, 21st March 2014.

¹¹⁸ Interview, Paul, Buduburam, 11th January 2011.

Secretary General, but he was killed shortly after entering Liberia.¹¹⁹ Taylor's leadership of the majority Gio and Mano rank and file of the NPFL has been partly attributed to rivalry between Gio and Mano elite over political leadership of Nimba.¹²⁰ However, other sources suggest that Taylor usurped power because he was able to obtain external financial support in Libya.¹²¹ Many 'outsiders' like Taylor instrumentalised the "tribal agenda" for their own self-interest. But accounts like Duo's suggest that many Gio and Mano elites were motivated by moral ethnicity. As mentioned, Taylor claimed affinity with Gio and Mano through marriage to a close relative of Quiwonkpa; he justified his leadership in terms of leading them to obtain their 'freedom'.¹²² These elites provided ordinary Gio and Mano with logistical support for collective action.

Calls to mobilise, ethnic support for war and dissent within

Radio broadcasting played a key role in promoting a narrative of ethnic solidarity with the Gio and Mano to try to win voluntary support. There were practical reasons for choosing this medium. The majority of the movement's supporters were illiterate rural peasants and youths who lived outside the scope of print media. Besides, it would have been slow and dangerous to produce and disseminate print media to recruit support because of the AFL's presence in the County and the condition of the road networks. Many of these rural residents had wider access to radios and some limited access to televisions. Broadcasts on international media, especially the BBC, were therefore useful as a means for mobilising support. Apart from practical reasons,

¹¹⁹ TRC Statement, Alhaji Kromah, Monrovia, 11th August 2008.

¹²⁰ TRC testimony, Zawolo Z. Zuagele, Sanniquellie City, 17th May 2008.

¹²¹ TRC Statement, Prince Y. Johnson, Monrovia, 26th August 2008.

¹²² Testimony provided by Teman Edward Zammy at the trial of Charles Taylor, Special Court for Sierra Leone, The Hague, Netherlands, 6th May 2010.

there was an emerging tradition of political rivals using radio broadcasts to promote opposition. All the 1980 coup d'états had been announced on radio. Doe had also relied on radio as a primary means of chastising his critics and opponents, and for communicating with the public. In light of this historical importance of radio as a means of political communication, it was not surprising how Taylor chose to announce the rebellion.

When politico-military elites called for violent action their rhetoric was couched as a response to both external grievances over horizontal inequalities and internal pressures linked to moral ethnicity. This was arguably attributable to the close interaction between horizontal exclusion and internal demands. Two themes stand out in informant accounts of NPFL mobilisation discourse in Nimba. The first touched on political power and patronage; Gio and Mano were called upon to mobilise to remove Doe for the chance to be included in political control over the state and to obtain the internal benefits that came with access to high profile state power.¹²³ A Gio informant recalled that:

They were able to mobilise fellow kinsmen around that theme that 'it is our time'. It was a question of this is our pride. We had the power and now is our time to regain it. And if we stand back here as ethnic Gios and Manos and allow it to pass from us for the second time it means what do we stand on? We are valueless. We are meaningless. It was [because] the pressure of the need for a change.¹²⁴

On New Year's Day 1990, Taylor announced the rebellion in a radio interview on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service, stating that the rebellions' goal was to overthrow President Doe.¹²⁵ Informants recalled how Taylor declared that the rebellion was launched for Jackson Doe to redress the rigged elections and to

¹²³ Transcript of anonymous Gio witness interviewed by the Special Court of Sierra Leone in the trial of Charles Taylor at The Hague on Wednesday, 5th November 2008.

¹²⁴ Interview, Siafa, Buduburam, 8th January 2011.

¹²⁵ BBC Focus on Africa Programme, 1700GMT, January 1, 1990. The programme became the central point for coverage of the civil war. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17845592> (last accessed 22 August 2013).

continue the failed Quiwonkpa coup d'état against the Doe regime in 1985.¹²⁶ The rebels “promised lucrative government jobs, and that upon entering Monrovia and unseating the government, [Gio and Mano] could takeover any private residence of their choice”.¹²⁷ This was not simply about horizontal inequality; it was also about moral economy of leadership and legitimacy.

The second theme focused on Mandingo exclusion and land. This too connected the interaction of moral ethnicity claims to rightful ownership and control of land with perceptions of illegitimate horizontal inequality. The rhetoric of Gio and Mano rebels called for Gio and Mano to fight Mandingos to reclaim lands in the County, which Mandingos had used their access to power and wealth to ‘grab’. Ex-combatant informants recounted that:

You see what happened is that people like General [Prince Y.] Johnson even the [recruitment] propaganda in the communities and areas they controlled was very clear: the Mandingos are squatting on your land if we come to power we will make sure they leave your land and give you back the land.¹²⁸

Taylor is quoted as saying that the rebellion was an opportunity for the Gio and Mano to “deal with the Mandingo”.¹²⁹

The NPFL deployed boundary-maintenance practices such as *Porro* institution to in recruitment of fighters. This encouraged adherence to commander rule by villagers and townspeople through *Porro* unity. *Porro* groves became sites of mobilisation and an important means for the leadership of the NPFL to obtain legitimacy with their rank and file supporters.¹³⁰ One participant described that:

We got something call the devil now. And, when the devil is coming out, the Mandingo people they’re not part of this, since they don’t join, when the devil is

¹²⁶ Interview, Moses S, Monrovia, 10th May 2009.

¹²⁷ TRC Statement, Alhaji Kromah, Monrovia, 11 August 2008.

¹²⁸ Interview, Focus group, Buduburam, 13th January 2011.

¹²⁹ The *Daily Observer* (Monrovia), 24 December 1989, 3-6

¹³⁰ In a similar vein, Paul Richards has demonstrated how the Revolutionary United Front appropriated *Porro* society groves as a means of mobilisation in the 1990s Sierra Leone civil war. Richards, 1996.

coming out all those who are not member of the Poro and the Sande society they have to go inside because the devil has some mysterious power. That's one of the way they mobilise people. In the Poro sometimes it is compulsory, by force; the Poro is the highest authority. So when the devil comes out and say this that means everybody have to subscribe to it.¹³¹

NPFL commanders' assumed partial control of the process of initiating 'youths' into adulthood to inculcate recruits into armed units.¹³² Through their actions the rebels tried to transfer the legitimating power of *Poro* practices to the movement.

Civilian *Zos* of the *Poro* were also given an important influence in the organisation and control of fighting units. *Zos* played a significant role in facilitating youth support for the NPFL. *Zos* replicated the 'tradition' of administering initiations by overseeing oaths to recruits. One former recruit recounted that: "[T]hey will give you cola, to eat, to swear, to take oath now and you will not connive against them."¹³³ Another stated that "native *Zo[s]* [provided real protection for all able-bodied men to protect their families."¹³⁴ Apart from administering oaths, *Zos* offered fighters 'protection' from the violence. In practice, this was signified with amulets and complex instructions about proper behaviour.¹³⁵ An informant revealed that "they gave us mark; I don't go with a woman menstruating."¹³⁶ Talismans and outfits were widely used for protection.¹³⁷ Apart from fortification, talismans and outfits for protection were also practical as status signifiers for combatants. These taboos and fortifications reverberated with the idea of family taboos. It formed an essential part of forging solidarity with the movement's ethnic support base; it was also a practical means of promoting loyalty within the ranks.¹³⁸ These fighters too had a vested

¹³¹ Interview, Simeon, Buduburam, 11 January 2011.

¹³² See Ellis, 2003b, p. 5.

¹³³ Interview, Paul, Guthrie Plantation, 27 April 2009.

¹³⁴ Interview, Fred, Salala, 1 May 2009.

¹³⁵ Interview, Alfred, Congo Town, 18 March 2008.

¹³⁶ Interview, Focus Group, Buduburam Refugee Camp, 10 January 2011.

¹³⁷ Interview, Fred, Salala, 1 May 2009.

¹³⁸ Ellis has written extensively about the role of the Poro in the war: Ellis, 1995, 1999, 2001, 2003b.

interest in the *Poro* as a means of asserting their rights to land and gaining recognition as moral agents. But, despite overwhelming support from Gio and Mano communities in Nimba, it was neither unanimous nor uniform.

While many supported the removal of Doe, not all Gio and Mano subscribed to violent action, and the narrative of autochthony and exclusion of Mandingos from lands that was so popular with peasants and ‘youths’. When the rebellion broke out, ‘ethnic struggle’ exacerbated the contradictions within Gio and Mano communities. While they argued that Mandingos were ‘strangers’ illegitimately occupying their property, many of those from the ‘chiefly class’ dissented on the grounds that Mandingos were ‘family’ and had a legitimate right to their properties. They did not share the sentiment that the Mandingos were ‘strangers’ who lacked legitimate rights to land in the region because of a shared affinity and long-standing economic interests. A complaint arose among the rank and file supporters of the war that the members of this ‘chiefly class’ who were protecting Mandingos were “traitors” and “enemy collaborators”.¹³⁹

In some places like Saclepea-Mah district and Sanniquellie Ma district, these complaints acquired a religious dimension, which was coloured by the discourse of belonging and property rights, as evidence from the following account:

There was a conflict over whether the Gios and non-Muslim Manos consider the Muslim Manos, especially Manos of the Saclepea Ma area and Sanniquellie Ma district area to be traitors because some of them were accused of protecting Mandingos who the Gio saw as squatters, people who were squatting on their land, and people who were acquiring wealth in their land.¹⁴⁰

By acknowledging the Mandingos as legitimate residents and owners of property, dissenters were seen as people denying the fighters their rights. An example of

¹³⁹ Interview, Siafa, Buduburam, 8th January 2011.

¹⁴⁰ Interview, Fred, Salala, 1st May 2009.

dissenters who were targeted as traitors, were the Zawolo family in Saclepea Ma district. Zawolo recounted that:

My cousin was beheaded in the presence of my parents, my son, and my other neighbours. And, one of the issues that they had was our relation with the Mandingos. He was beheaded by NPFL fighters, which at that time were...the ones who beheaded him according to what I was told were Gios predominantly and Manos who did not come from our area, the Saclepea Ma district area. Our people, the people from the Saclepea Ma district area, enjoyed for the most a very good relationship with the Mandingos. One of my great aunts had several children by a very wealthy Mandingo person. So we have cousins who are Mandingos so we did not see them as 'strangers', we saw them as one family. Now, because of the tension that had been created between Gios and Mandingo and certain Manos and Mandingo there was an expectation that every Mano would treat a Mandingo with such disregard and disdain that if a Mano was seen [during the war] not to be doing that he was considered a traitor. So the issue was how people considered the Mandingos, [whether] you think the Mandingos are entitled to their place in Nimba County. That is a major political issue. There are those of us who say yes, they are entitled to their place in Nimba County, that they are part of the County. And on the other side, there are those who say that no they are not entitled to it, they need to go to Guinea or they need to go to Lofa, they don't belong. So that's one of the tensions within the [Mano] community. That's one of the major, major issues concerning the Manos. That's what divides us, other than that we are together. That's one of the major issues, how do we see the Mandingos.¹⁴¹

Similarly, the rebels targeted Gio and Mano who had been affiliated with Mandingo. An example is the mother of Junior Duo, a Gio ex-combatant from Tappita, who was killed because she had been married to a Mandingo man.¹⁴²

To those who mobilised for their community, they were not just reclaiming their rights and expectations, but also expressing good citizenship and protecting moral community. 'Youths' like Siafa who joined the rebellion stated that, "it was a sense of duty for every Mano or Gio to join the war.... We felt disrespected".¹⁴³ The notion that they were fighting for their human dignity is a commonly expressed inner rationale.¹⁴⁴ In a focus group discussion, one Mano informant explained that he

¹⁴¹ Interview, Zawolo, 11th February 2014.

¹⁴² TRC testimony, Junior Duo, Sanniquellie, 16 May 2008.

¹⁴³ Interview, Siafa, Buduburam, 8th January 2011.

¹⁴⁴ See for example TRC testimony of Mano ex-combatant from Saclepea: TRC testimony, Tarkpor Wotoe, Sanniquellie, 15th May 2008.

joined because “according to my *Poro* society I must take care of my family because of tradition.”¹⁴⁵ Many Gio and Mano ex-combatants echoed this; they intimated that fighting for one’s ‘family’ was seen as showing good citizenship.¹⁴⁶ Those who did not support the war were, therefore, considered disloyal. For instance, William Yeapoe, Town Chief of Lapea No. 2, Gbehlay-Geh District, in Nimba, recalled in his TRC testimony that he was accused of witchcraft and tortured by Gio NPFL fighters from his town for not supporting the war.¹⁴⁷ About 10-15 other persons in the town were also accused of witchcraft and tortured by the soldiers for lack of support.¹⁴⁸ According to Yeapoe, their lives were spared only by the mediation of the town elders.

Even though there were some occurrences of youth violence against elderly people, there are numerous accounts that suggest that town elders played a role as mediators between the NPFL rebels and those perceived as disloyal. This contradicts the narrative of youths revolting against ‘traditional’ elders authority. For instance, a Tarkpor Wotoe, Mano ex-combatant from Saclepea, recounted in his TRC testimony that:

[W]e were sent to Green Hill under the command of Mangoe Miller a Special Forces Commando.... We were ordered to ask all the people in the community for their single barrel guns and there was one man in the area that was working with LAMCO as Supervisor who had his single- barrel gun but hid it. One man came and told us that the man had single-barrel gun in his house and when he was asked, he denied; and we were ordered to tie him and beat him; when we started beating him, the elders in the town came and apologized to us and the man gave the gun to us.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Interview, Focus Group, Buduburam, 11th January 2011.

¹⁴⁶ This is corroborated by: Pugel, 2007., 36.

¹⁴⁷ TRC testimony, William Yeapoe, Sanniquellie, 13th May 2008.

¹⁴⁸ This is corroborated by: TRC testimony, Matthew Montoe, Sanniquellie, 13th May 2008.

¹⁴⁹ See for example TRC testimony of Mano ex-combatant from Saclepea: TRC testimony, Tarkpor Wotoe, Sanniquellie, 15th May 2008.

Examples like this, where the fighters responded to the mediation of the elders suggest that ‘traditional’ leaders who were attacked or flouted were likely those who had lost legitimacy. The violence was, therefore, not necessarily a generational revolt. There was some degree of wonton violence as in any war.¹⁵⁰

The internal conflict acquired a generational dimension due to the large number of rank-and-file ‘youths’ that joined the war. While elders recalled positive relations with Mandingo traders in the County, youth resented their presence as regime collaborators and ‘squatters’. Konneh observed that, “generational differences between elders and young men of the Gio and Mano...fed into the persecution of the Mandingo during the Liberian civil war.”¹⁵¹ If this was a generational struggle, it was based on the disagreements over accountability. At the heart of what has been called a generational struggle, ‘youths’ did not trust the elders to reallocate land because of past abuses. This suspicion formed part of their opposition. Meanwhile, elders accused youths of disrespecting ‘tradition’. But it was not just ‘youths’ that mobilised. Many informants who joined as ‘youths’ recounted that, “the ageable men recruited we the children [into] the war”.¹⁵² These ageable men were mainly rural peasants, suggesting that in Nimba the rebellion did not start as a ‘youth’ struggle as some analysts propose.

Politico-military elites of the NPFL war tried to address the issue of local accountability of political authority by giving area commanders the autonomy of decision to address the parochial politics of the communities they ruled. To satisfy the norms of moral ethnicity among their support base commander rule of villages and towns during the war mimicked chiefs’ social accountability function. ‘Youth’ expected their politico-military patrons to reward them for their ‘labour’ in the war.

¹⁵⁰ See for example: TRC testimony, Gertrude Pajebo, Sanniquellie, 16th May 2008.

¹⁵¹ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 117.

¹⁵² Interview, Siafa, Buduburam, 8th January 2011.

The NPFL offered many ordinary ‘youths’ incentives for soldiering; they would have access to patrons, women, resources, and power.¹⁵³ They had an expectation that an ethnic struggle to win power would translate into benefits that would allow them to achieve self-mastery. Cooper explained that ex-combatants—like himself—claimed rights to land in Ganta as a reward for their ‘public service’ of “wasting [shedding] their blood” for the sake of the community. He subsequently relinquished rights to property gained during the war as part of his efforts to restore peace in Ganta.¹⁵⁴

The actions of Gio and Mano rebel elites like Prince Y. Johnson, who survived the war, earned them legitimacy and a loyal constituency that supported their successful bid for senatorial seats in the aftermath of the war. Many ordinary people described elites like Johnson as: “Our heroes, [because] they did not betray us....”¹⁵⁵

[Even though] they are not really respected among the educated Nimba intelligentsia, but they’re very much respected among the peasants and the young people. So they got support from the ordinary people. The ordinary people were looking for somebody who was practical. Somebody who was very clear in standing by them and standing with them. So people like General Johnson and General Dolo were seen as people who would do that.¹⁵⁶

In the 2005 elections Johnson and Dolo won the senatorial elections in Nimba competing against members of the ‘intelligentsia’. Some ex-combatants like Cooper who rose through the ranks to become NPFL Generals have also transformed into public officials. Cooper won the bid to become Mayor of Ganta after the war.

Thus, in contrast with analysts who have suggested that ‘youths’ revolted against a culture of deference to elders through the gun,¹⁵⁷ this study suggests that many of the ‘youths’ and peasants who participated in ethnic mobilisation were seeking social accountability of power for their cultural rights and expectations and to

¹⁵³ Interview, John T. Richardson, Monrovia, 15th April 2009.

¹⁵⁴ Interview, Cooper, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

¹⁵⁵ Interview, Focus Group, Congo Town, 19th March 2008.

¹⁵⁶ Interview, Zawolo, 11th February 2014.

¹⁵⁷ See for example: Richards & al, 2005, p. 8.

facilitate their own self-mastery. Their internal arguments were more moral than political in the sense that they revealed a continuing cultural expectation that ‘big men’ would take action to protect their interests. And, that obtaining public power and wealth, including but not limited to land, would be distributed in exchange for respect. These resources were not only important for livelihood, but they also permitted ordinary people to achieve self-mastery and esteem. As one informant put it: “Land provides opportunity for people to farm, and farming is a form of income for people. People are going back to the farms [for subsistence] but they also seeing land as an opportunity to make money for recognition among our people.”¹⁵⁸

Conclusion

From the early 1980s (with the rule of Doe) a situation emerged where Gio and Mano perceived that they were not only relatively more disadvantaged in socio-economic terms, but also were also increasingly politically excluded. The experience and perception of alienation from national patronage and increased Mandingo acquisition of lands in Nimba fostered a strong sense of injustice among the Gio and Mano. Scholarly sources confirm that Doe was the first head of state to overtly exclude specific indigenous groups from political participation, while simultaneously granting increased land access, commercial privileges, and state employment opportunities to others.¹⁵⁹

This configuration of horizontal inequalities impacted internal arrangements for managing Gio and Mano communities. It disrupted deeply held notions of usufruct rights to land that had developed over time, and political protections from patrimony

¹⁵⁸ Interview, Stanley, Buduburam, 29th December 2010.

¹⁵⁹ For instance, this is confirmed by Ellis in Ellis, 1999, p. 65.

that were to be provided by ‘traditional’ elites (‘old men’) and political elites (‘big men’). It increased tensions between elites on the one hand and the subordinates on the other. Internal pressures for redress gave excluded politico-military elites seeking to maintain their legitimacy and authority within their moral communities an incentive to mobilise ethnic support. At the same time, the way in which local moral and political systems were undermined drove youths and poor rural peasants to mobilise. All of these groups played a significant role in the emergence of the NPFL war.

This chapter suggests that the notion of youth revolt and elite predation or instrumentality can only provide a limited understanding of ethnic mobilisation for violent rebellion. It must be reconsidered in conjunction with an understanding of the role played by horizontal inequalities, and of how these interact with moral ethnicity, to create the conditions for violence. For instance, informants like Duo felt a sense of threat to their legitimacy and risk of marginalisation from failing to meet the mutual obligations owed between leaders and their constituents to provide for and ‘protect’ their community and to earn or maintain their respect. For Cooper, ethnic loyalty was not unreflective or simply based on unquestioning patriotism from having a shared identity, but a sense of duty derived from perceived danger to how he thought about his ethnicity as a Mano youth. This is what gives the concept of moral ethnicity analytical import in the Liberian context. It demonstrates that ethnicities are “states of mind” as much as “actual social organisation”.¹⁶⁰

Their cultures were shaped by particular ‘moral economies’ understood as negotiated and institutionalised rights and obligations that shaped social trust and the way they sought material achievement, security, respect and standing. It taught

¹⁶⁰ Roberts, 1976, p. 65.

patrons and clients, young and old—all relationships understood in an ethnic register—the value of their human dignity. Horizontal inequalities upset these relationships by destabilising rights and expectations; it also threatened their respect in the wider world. The looming and perceived loss of that self-esteem created agitation and motivated collective action. They mobilised ethnic loyalty to fight to protect their moral communities from external threat and internal disintegration. ‘Youths’ and peasants like Cooper were not arguing for a more egalitarian intergenerational society, but socially accountable leadership. Fighting for moral rights and expectations gave the violence meaning as a ‘patriotic struggle’ against ‘social injustice’, which made ethnic supporters of war treat those who dissented as ‘traitors’. Instead of a youth rebellion, they were fighting to protect ethnic arrangements that gave them rights and supports connected to their social standing, and based on ethnic exclusion of the market rich Mandingo ‘others’. The next chapter takes up the case of Mandingo mobilisation against the NPFL and for the LURD war.

6 – The ULIMO and LURD war: Mandingo mobilisation and support (1990-2003)

ULIMO and LURD were concrete agenda to return our people in Liberia in dignity. It resonated well with all our people who invested their time, energies, resources, their blood and lives into its success.¹

Introduction

After the NPFL rebellion broke out, ULIMO forces emerged in September 1991 to oppose them. They appealed to, and won the support of, the Mandingo and Krahn ethnic groups. This chapter traces the mobilisation and support of the Mandingo diaspora community in the Liberian war. The aim is to demonstrate how and why violent group mobilisation of the Mandingo community emerged in the ULIMO counter-rebellion against the NPFL, and continued in the LURD rebellion against Charles Taylor (1999-2003). The chapter shows that, much like the Gio and Mano case in the NPFL war (Chapter 5), the drive for violence, although generated by the experience and perception of severe horizontal exclusion, also resulted from an internal dynamic. It had much to do with the interaction of external grievance over exclusion from political power, properties and homelands with internal tensions over the ‘moral economy’ between politico-military elites and their supporters about their obligations and expectations. Violent mobilisation was a response to the pressures building from below about perceived loss of moral community as well as social unrest about external ‘victimisation’.

The main arguments are as follows: first, there was a shared experience and perception that the Mandingo diaspora community had become severely ‘victimised’

¹ N. Konneh, 2011.

by the NPFL rebellion through violent eviction of Mandingos from their homes, severe loss of life and property in the countryside. In particular, Mandingo had become socio-economically excluded from their properties in Nimba Lofa, and Bong counties where ‘others’ contested their cultural status as indigenous people and national citizens of Liberia. The violent exclusion of Mandingo did not only threaten their lives and livelihoods, it also undermined how they gained security, trust, and self-dignity. The diaspora had become displaced and they could no longer ensure the provision of public goods such as political protection and opportunity for their families and the wider community to carry out commerce. Elite action in calling for ‘self-defence’ against the NPFL was incentivised by bottom-up pressures, which made people respond.

Second, victimisation and marginalisation continued when Taylor came to power after the NPFL war and excluded prominent politico-military Mandingo elite from high profile state power and rank-and-file Mandingo from the military apparatus. A reduction in Mandingo political participation, including representation in the military, was seen as a continuation of the diaspora’s displacement from moral economy rights and expectations, particularly rights to commercial properties ‘taken’ by members of rival ethnic groups in the counties. For instance, Gio, Mano and Loma had become militarily and politically empowered in the counties by an alliance with Taylor’s ‘government forces’ and were preventing Mandingos from returning to their properties and ‘homelands’.

The shared experience and perception of horizontal exclusion and victimisation under Taylor also interacted with internal tensions of moral economy of leadership and legitimacy, which had begun in the NPFL war. When the ULIMO counter-rebellion was happening, many rank-and-file fighters felt that their leaders

had become greedy and were pursuing selfish interests at their expense. Demands for leadership accountability generated internal tensions between politico-military elites like Kromah and his supporters. A leadership contest also emerged between young ‘intellectuals’ on the one hand, and politico-military elites on the other hand that contested the reputation of Kromah. The chapter suggests that apart from the external horizontal inequalities, this internal leadership struggle also exacerbated the prospect of a return to violence through the organisation of LURD, by creating incentives and motivations for excluded elites to try to make a renewed attempt at re-mobilisation. By calling for disgruntled supporters to remobilise for external struggle they could outmanoeuvre, and claim to be more radical, than the weakened established leadership. But, moral ethnicity was more prevalent as a factor in ULIMO than LURD, in terms of bottom-up pressure on leadership. This was because horizontal inequalities were not as severe against the community under Taylor’s rule as the NPFL days, or even Doe’s exclusion of the Gio and Mano. Thus, even though LURD begun with Mandingo support, it was not as widespread as in the ULIMO struggle.

This chapter mainly draws on informant accounts. It is divided into four main sections. The first section describes the experience and perception of political exclusion and socio-economic marginalisation under Taylor’s rule, as well as the grievances this created. The second section examines the interaction of horizontal exclusion with moral economy rights and expectations to property ownership. The third section traces ethnic mobilisation and support of the Mandingo community from the ULIMO counter-rebellion, focusing on the internal debates that shaped their continued participation in the LURD movement. The fourth section focuses on how Mandingo leadership competition contributed to the emergence of LURD. This chapter demonstrates that these internal deliberations had less to do with structural

relations between youths and elders within the community, and more to do with the moral economy of leadership, and their obligations to their supporters.

Mandingo experiences and perceptions of horizontal inequalities (1997-2003)

Political exclusion and socio-economic 'victimisation'

On 19 July 1997 Charles Taylor was inaugurated as president of Liberia after winning elections with more than 75 percent of the votes.² The popular vote was prompted by widespread apprehension that he would return the country to protracted warfare if he had not won.³ The election followed the Abuja Peace Accord II that was signed in Abuja, Nigeria on 17 August 1996. It concluded a seven-year period of war that had claimed more than 150,000 lives and displaced more than 40 percent of the population.⁴ The Abuja Accord II called for the disarmament and demobilisation of all the warring factions, formation of a transitional government that allowed power sharing between the leaders of the armed groups, and holding of a free and fair election under UN and ECOWAS oversight.⁵ The UN Mission ended within three months of the elections and ECOWAS peacekeepers departed within a year of the elections.⁶

² For more on the election see: D. Harris, 1999.

³ A popular campaign slogan among ordinary people was: "He killed my ma, he killed my pa, but I will vote for him". See for example BBC report: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8171244.stm> (last accessed on 8 February 2014).

⁴ Pham, 2004.

⁵ Abuja II Accord, 17 August 1996, online at <http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/liberia/index.php>. (Last accessed 12 November 2013)

⁶ A. Adebajo, 2002, p. 234.

However, the peace process failed because of the discriminatory conduct of the Charles Taylor regime.⁷ Consequently, Liberia descended into a second civil war when LURD rebels—mainly consisting of former ULIMO-K fighters from the NPFL war—crossed into Lofa County to launch a rebellion against Taylor in April 1999. A group called MODEL—mainly consisting of former ULIMO-J fighters—subsequently emerged from the southeast in March 2003 to join them. The dynamics of regional politics during the first year of Taylor’s rule encouraged neighbouring regimes to provide logistical support for the rebellion and its splinter movement. Both LURD and MODEL relied on regional actors for the resources (financial and military) to organise. However, this chapter argues that the conflict was also driven by the experience and perception that under Taylor’s rule political, socio-economic and cultural status inequalities were arrayed against the Mandingo community—and to a lesser degree against the Krahn community. This made collective action for violence possible.

The power sharing arrangement that followed the peace accord mandated ethnic inclusion in state power. In the immediate aftermath of winning the elections, Taylor pursued a number of policies that emphasised reconciliation. For instance, he appointed former Krahn opponents such as Raleigh Seekie the former Deputy Minister of Finance in the Doe government and chairman of ULIMO as Auditor General. He also appointed Roosevelt Johnson, leader of the Krahn-dominated splinter ULIMO-J armed group, to his cabinet as Minister of Rural Development. Other ULIMO officials that were offered appointments include Alhaji Kromah, also former Minister of Information under Doe, and former leader of ULIMO and the

⁷ See for example: Call, 2010.

Mandingo-dominated splinter ULIMO-K movement, as head of the National Reconciliation Commission.⁸

However, within one year Taylor began excluding persons he perceived as a threat to his rule. The most significant acts of exclusion carried out by the regime were directed against prominent Krahn and Mandingo elites who had led factions that had opposed the NPFL during the war. The *Liberian Orbit* reports that fourteen prominent Krahn political figures were arrested in 1998 tried on treason charges, and each given twenty-year prison sentences. The convicted political figures included Raleigh Seekie.⁹ Another prominent example is Taylor's actions against ULIMO-J's Roosevelt Johnson and his supporters for allegedly plotting a coup d'état against him. On 18 September 1998, Taylor's security forces launched a planned operation against Johnson and his supporters called 'Operation Camp Johnson Road'.¹⁰ Johnson fled to the US Embassy. Government forces besieged the outskirts of the embassy for about 17 hours killing a reported 300 predominantly Krahn supporters of Johnson.¹¹ After the event and the unrest that ensued, about 9,000 Liberians, mostly Krahn, reportedly fled Liberia.¹²

In 1998, less than a year after the elections, many of Taylor's opponents went into exile mainly because Taylor used his security forces to intimidate and harass them.¹³ He convicted many of his opponents in absentia. For instance, treason charges were levelled against Kromah after he fled into exile.¹⁴ Kromah is illustrative of a broader dynamic of high profile exclusion of prominent Mandingo elites by the

⁸ Cook, 31 December 2003, p. 15.

⁹ Editorial, "Lest We Forget Seekie and the Krahn Inmates", *Liberian Orbit*, Minneapolis, 15 October 2001

¹⁰ USSD, February 1999, p. 1.

¹¹ USSD, February 1999.

¹² USSD, February 1999.

¹³ Call, 2010, p. 353.

¹⁴ JPC, 2000, p. 3.

regime. First, he led the ULIMO movement to counter the NPFL rebellion. Then he formed an alliance with Taylor towards the ending of the NPFL war. He was offered a position in Taylor's government only to be subsequently excluded and convicted in exile.

Meanwhile, Taylor increased high profile political appointments of Gios. For example, Taylor appointed a Gio man, Enoch Dogolea as his vice president. Following the death of Dogolea in 2000, another Gio man, Moses Blah, former Special Forces commander of the NPFL, replaced him. High profile political appointments under Taylor regime created a perception of bias towards Gio and Mano elite and simultaneous marginalisation of Krahn and Mandingo communities.¹⁵ Taylor's actions led to public complaints by Krahn and Mandingo communities that political appointments were "unfair and politically expedient."¹⁶

Apart from marginalising his opponents from political power, Taylor also excluded former Mandingo and Krahn anti-NPFL forces (mainly ULIMO, ULIMO-K, ULIMO-J) from the national military, national police, and other security forces. It created much uproar among these ex-fighters because many of them saw the national security institutions as their entitlement following the peace agreement. Officers and rank and file fighters of anti-NPFL groups had expected to be incorporated into state armed forces and other parts of the security sector.¹⁷ Instead, Taylor incorporated former NPFL soldiers, including a significant Gio and Mano membership, into state security apparatuses in a re-organised AFL, which became known as Government of Liberia (GOL) forces.¹⁸

¹⁵ Despite this perception, not all Gio and Mano elites were included by the regime. Some of Taylor's opponents included former Gio and Mano allies such as Sam Dokie. He was murdered on 28 November 1997. See for example: *The News*, Volume 8, Number 130, 9th February 1998.

¹⁶ This is reported by the JPC, 2000, p. 2.

¹⁷ Call, 2010, p. 354.

¹⁸ *The News*, Volume 8, Number 160, 13 April 1998.

LURD's actions and rhetoric suggest that the rebellion was in large part caused by Taylor's marginalising policies and practices. A key grievance expressed in LURD's 'Blue Print for Stability in Liberia' (2002) was that the Taylor government reneged on the peace accord in regard to the security sector.¹⁹ It refers to provisions of the Abuja agreement that called for "restructuring of the military and security institutions of Liberia to reflect ethnic and geographical balance."²⁰ The fourth paragraph of the Blue Print specifically states that: "the first post-war government which is now headed by Mr Taylor, was mandated to restructure the Army, Police and the various security agencies with a view to reflect neutrality. That is, none of the parties to the agreement was to maintain dominance over the army or any of the security agencies".²¹ Taylor had violated these expectations by excluding rank and file fighters and officers of his former opponents' armies from the security sector while staffing the national army and other parts of the security apparatus with ex-NPFL fighters. He demobilized more than 2,600 soldiers from the armed forces, including the majority of the remaining Krahn officers, to effectively weaken it, and replaced many with his former NPFL fighters.²² He then reinforced the Liberia National Police and other security forces such as the SSS and Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU) to oppose his opponents.²³ LURD's stated view formed the perception on the ground among ordinary Krahn and Mandingo.

What made Taylor's exclusionary policies and practices so significant to ordinary people were that they marginalised Krahn and Mandingo patronage networks, particularly in the security sector, many of which had been established

¹⁹ Call, 2010, p. 355.

²⁰ Abuja II Accord, 17 August 1996, online at <http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/liberia/index.php>. (Last accessed 12 November 2013)

²¹ LURD, 'Blue Print for Stability in Liberia', as printed in *The Perspective* (Atlanta, GA) 4 October 2002. See also: Call, 2010, p. 355.

²² Pham, 2004, p. 177.

²³ Call, 2010, p. 355.

through the war.²⁴ Taylor's actions disrupted expectations about inclusion in competing informal patronage networks typical of the Liberian state that fell along ethnic lines.²⁵ It effectively produced a similar situation as that created by Doe's fraudulent election of 1985, which had denied Gio and Mano elites excluded from state power with a legitimate way of challenging Doe's rule, other than through violent means.²⁶

Although Krahn and Mandingo suffered disproportionate political and military exclusion under Taylor, horizontal inequalities under Taylor were perceived to be much more severe against the Mandingo community, in particular because of the simultaneous exclusion of returning Mandingos from their lands and properties. Taylor was perceived as "a Hitler for the Mandingoes [even though there were some] Mandingoes in his government".²⁷ The rest of this chapter mainly focuses on the Mandingo community. Political exclusion of Mandingo elites from high profile state positions and from the military interacted with their socio-economic marginalisation and cultural status denigration because they were no longer in a position to protect the community's socio-economic interests and the properties that gave them a claim to indigeneity in Liberia. For instance, in his TRC testimony, Layee Sedekee Konneh, a Mandingo businessman from Saclepea, described widespread taking of Mandingo properties by Mano youth in Saclepea under Taylor's regime, sometimes under the alleged behest of Taylor's Gio Vice President.²⁸

As leader of the NPFL-NPRAG government, Taylor managed to build a vast commercial empire in 'Greater Liberia', constituting 90 percent of the entire

²⁴ Call, 2010, p. 365.

²⁵ Call, 2010, p. 348 and 365.

²⁶ Adekeye Adebajo, 2002, pp. 70-71.

²⁷ Quoted from listserv of the Liberian Mandingo Association of New York (E-mail exchange in the possession of the author).

²⁸ TRC testimony, Layee Sedekee Konneh, Sanniquellie, 13th May 2008.

country.²⁹ It was based on controlling the export of resources such as mining, rubber, gold, timber, and diamonds. This is what William Reno has described as a “warlord economy”.³⁰ In this economy, the NPFL captured, exploited and commercialised these natural economic resources through relations with foreign multi-national corporations and ties to international markets. For instance, Taylor was reportedly receiving \$10 million a month for trading iron ore to European, United States and Japanese steel producers.³¹ The warlord economy of the NPRAG was patterned after the “shadow state”.³² Some of the proceeds from the NPFL economy were used to provide jobs and livelihood for many of their rank and file supporters.³³

After winning the presidency, he was able to rely on his official position as president to gain some measure of legitimacy to consolidate his control over resources. Rebel patrimonialism transformed into the state patrimonialism that it had tried to replicate. As the NPFL’s chief ‘papay’, Taylor maintained the patron-client link between the movement’s elite and its supporters, by incorporating ex-combatants who were supposed to be demobilised by ECOMOG in 1997 into the ranks of the Liberian security sector. Taylor established “a system of personal rule constructed behind a façade of statehood. This system of authority is founded on the ability of the ruler to control his subordinates’ access to markets”.³⁴ Political marginalisation of Mandingos and Krahns under Taylor’s rule was tantamount to socio-economic exclusion of Mandingo businessmen from access to markets and the president’s patronage, a privilege that they had enjoyed and taken for granted under previous regimes. As discussed below, horizontal marginalisation under Taylor increased

²⁹ For details of Taylor’s commercial empire see: Reno, 1995, 1997, 1998.

³⁰ Reno, 1995, 1998.

³¹ Reno, 1998, p. 100.

³² Reno, 1998.

³³ TRC statement, Adolphus Dolo, Monrovia, 10th September 2008, and also: Munive, July 2011, p. 370.

³⁴ Reno, 2007, p. 71.

internal grievances within ethnic groups, which in turn drove violent group mobilisation against the regime.

Interaction of horizontal inequalities with moral ethnicity rights

Of the 28 Mandingo informants that were interviewed for this study, 23 related their support for LURD to two main rationales. First, they mobilised for the recovery of lost socio-economic properties and settlement lands by relying on elite organisation and financial support. Second, they mobilised to fight for leadership accountability. As one informant explained: Mandingo “were fighting for two things, property and leadership”.³⁵ I address the issue of property in this subsection and that of leadership in the next section.

Mandingo informants voice a common narrative about horizontal injustice against their property rights. These narratives of property rights are permeated by a form of ‘possessive individualism’ that differs from the more communal accounts of Gio, Mano and Loma land ownership (Chapter 5).³⁶ Lofa Mandingo emphasised the acquisition of lands rights through conquest and long-term settlement whereas Nimba Mandingo stressed land rights acquired through state land tenure. But, they all emphasise rights to property as an individual right. The account of Jabateh illustrates personal narratives about Mandingo acquisition of rights to land in Nimba through state land tenure. Jabateh was born in 1946 into a land-rich Mandingo household in Ganta. According to him, his birthplace in Ganta, Soqualala:

is a Mandingo Quarter [this is challenged by Gio and Mano], and the same area there where my mother was born. The same area there where my father was

³⁵ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

³⁶ See: Macpherson, 1962.

born. My great, great grandfather was born here in Ganta. First of all, Ganta is not for specific tribe; everybody met their self here, but somebody came before somebody here. [S]omebody met somebody here, but that does not make you to be the owner. The land does not belong to nobody. The only time land start belonging to person, when the government declared, when the constitution decided that everybody buy land [in Nimba] from 1950s.... [But before that] The land was not own by nobody. When you brush the land, you consider it to be for you...cause your labour is there. You consider it to be for you...because there where you have built your kitchen, there where you making your farming, and people there to attest to it that this man here that his part of farming area here. Those days it [was] different, and you know it different from the time the constitution was pass[ed].... Like the Soqualala [I am] talking about, they tell everybody you go brush that area for you and your people to be there because of the traditional way of living.... So when you enter in any town, you get your stranger-father. Your stranger-father is the person that you going to meet there. That does not mean that person own the town. Everything belongs to government, but they got caretakers.... When the law pass that from today date all land must belong to people, and this is the process, then people start thinking...that we should buy the place.... During the time when government decided that everybody should buy the land, the native people were not having any idea about land, the important of land...so they were not willing to buy the land. Some of them, they were not willing. But then the traveller, like the Mandingo...they know the process.³⁷

Jabateh's account, like other informants from Nimba, recognise the 'traditional' 'stranger-father' institution of Mandingos Gio and Mano neighbours. In the past, they expected to gain usufruct right, as opposed to possessory rights, by adding their labour to the lands they were given by hosts. But, when individual alienation of land was introduced under state land tenure they purchased land with their individual wealth, which demonstrated moral achievement in their community, with an expectation of gaining possessory rights. The 'taking' of their lands in the NPFL war is, therefore seen as a separation from wealth and dignity, and a moral grievance.

For instance, in the case of Jabateh, his father became a successful cash-crop farmer who owned multiple acres of land and employed labourers from other ethnic groups, including Gio and Mano to work for him. He had 18 wives and 43 children. As the first-born, Jabateh inherited all his father's properties, farms, houses, and

³⁷ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

children.³⁸ He increased household wealth by pursuing a career in business, particularly diamond mining, and married three wives and had 28 children of his own. He managed “250 acres of land” for cash-crop farming. With his success came the expectation to support all his dependents by facilitating their achievement of knowledge skills. It was an important means of gaining a reputation within the community. He recounted that: there was an expectation to, “send them [all his dependents] to school [and to] educate them.... I was having...great respect. The first thing I did, I built a school house for them and I educate them and majority of them graduate[d] from college.” Excluding Mandingo such as Jabateh from their wealth was, thus tantamount to, not only loss of material gain, but also loss of dignity, reputation, and trust.

In contrast to Jabateh’s account, informants from areas where Mandingos acquired land through conquest challenge the local account of the ‘stranger-father’ institution. They claim rights to property as a moral right derived from their status as ‘sons of the soil’ and suggest that outrage about their exclusion from these lands drove support for the LURD war in Lofa County because it was seen as a disruption to their ancestral patrimony.³⁹ The story about the establishment of the Quadu-Gboni chiefdom in Lofa (formed from the Quadu and Gboni clans), with Barkiedu as capital, is illustrative of the common ideas that were mobilized to organise the community for the LURD war. One Mandingo ‘Oldman’ from Lofa narrated that:

History mentions several powerful Mandingo paramount chiefs. Some of them were from Barkiedu, the biggest town in the chiefdom. Chief Varflay Kamara, for example, was a very powerful warrior. What nobody can contest up to today is that his “family”, the Kamaras, have always [had the right to and] been the paramount chief in the whole chiefdom because they are the uncles. This is our tradition.⁴⁰

³⁸ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

³⁹ This is corroborated in: Højbjerg, 2010, pp. 284-285.

⁴⁰ Interview, Ibrahim A, Monrovia, 29th May 2009.

Such accounts are not merely recalled to show pride in their past dominance, but to validate their claims to land in the region and their standing as ‘sons of the soil’ in Lofa. A number of significant themes are presented in this statement to validate Lofa Mandingo claims to territorial belonging and legitimate land ownership that shed important light on the moral ethnicity ideas, which were mobilised. First, they emphasise conquest and land use, over orders of arrival (as in the Gio and Mano case), in their narratives of ‘tradition’. This is “in the sense of having conquered [various areas from their] original settlers...[and] having founded new settlements and chiefdoms”.⁴¹ This suggests that that their original ancestors acquired the land through conquest, and since their political ascendancy in Lofa was not preceded by cooperation, in terms of an agreement of settlement as in places like Nimba, they had the right through conquest to assume autochthon privileges. It is on this basis that elites like Kromah also stress a history of past military conquest and entrenched political rule of previously inhabited territories in Lofa. Kromah himself situates his paternal Mandingo family history in Tusue Town, Quardu-Gboni District, Lofa County. Violent conquest appears to have been particularly concentrated in the Loma areas of Lofa because of the trade links between Bopulu, Liberia in the south and Musadu, Guinea in the north.⁴² As a result of this history of settlement through conquest, Lofa Mandingoes claim the status of legitimate owners of land on the basis of territorial belonging through conquest and subsequent ‘toil’. Therefore, it is of little consequence to them that “others”, particularly Loma, refer to Mandingo territories in Lofa as their prior chiefdoms.⁴³

Secondly, and much like the Kikuyu moral ethnicity described by Lonsdale, subsequent ancestors added their toil to the conquered lands by “clearing of the bush”

⁴¹ Højbjerg, 2010, p. 287.

⁴² Højbjerg, 2010, p. 281.

⁴³ Interview, Focus Group, Bonah Farm, 22nd April 2009.

for settlements and farming.⁴⁴ This finding is corroborated by a study of customary land tenure in Lofa conducted by the Norwegian Refugee Council. Similar to Kikuyu political thought, Mandingo discourse that links conquest and toil over land with autochthonous rights implies that land can be alienated through service, not just inheritance.⁴⁵ This is also similar to a Lockian kind of labour theory of land in which the ancestors obtained land when they added their labour to it after conquest—although such lands could not be individually alienated afterwards and passed into generational ownership. Adding labour to land brought property rights to descendants in the Mandingo moral economy and its loss implied a loss of dignity.

The third, and final, theme of Lofa Mandingo historical attitude supported by the ‘Oldman’s’ statement is: Mandingo prowess as powerful warriors in their settlement of the region. Oral history, which is confirmed by written accounts, suggests that leadership in pre-Settler Mandingo kingdoms depended on the ability to acquire fame through conquest and material resources through control of trade routes (Chapter 3). A ‘big man’s’ ‘fame’ and track record of support to community brought him a good reputation. The experience and perception of exclusion from their lands led ordinary Mandingos to mobilise the idea that their political patrons must “be heard speaking for the community. [Even if they were] doing it selfishly for [their] own selfish goals.”⁴⁶

In accounts of his oral history, Kromah has tried to demonstrate that he follows in the ‘tradition’ of heroic leaders of the past who were considered to possess great skills in knowledge. Not only does he trace his ancestry to “Kumazii Siryon, the religious companion and cousin of King Sao Boso”, he also boasts of extensive

⁴⁴ See: Corriveau-Bourque, 2010, p. 12.

⁴⁵ John Lonsdale, 1994.

⁴⁶ Interview, Idrisu, Congo Town, 27th May 2009. These ideas are also expressed on the listserv of the Liberian Mandingo Association of New York (E-mail exchange in the possession of the author).

knowledge skills, including a bachelor degree in economics, a bachelor degree in law, a Master Degree of Law in Intentional Legal Studies, a Doctor of Juridical Science Candidacy, a Master Degree in Journalism and Public Affairs.⁴⁷ Stressing a history of past military conquest and entrenched political rule of Mandingo in the interior, Kromah situates his paternal Mandingo family history in Tusue Town, Quardu-Gboni District, Lofa County:

I was born in the Tubman administration, precisely on February 11, 1953.... That day also constantly reminds me of the decision of my parents to send their first three sons to Lofa County, our paternal home.... Varmuyan Kromah, my father, wanted to expose his children to the land of his nativity, to the culture that guided his lineage and heritage. He had come to Monrovia himself from the Quardu Gboni Mandingo Chieftdom, now a district, in Lofa County. Elders, led by Clan Chief Moi Binyan Fofana, a few years ago presented to me a historical account of Tusue, my father's hometown, built some 420 years ago. The Elders also included in their presentation the history of the Kromah family in Tusue, descending from Fakoly Kumba Fakoly Daba, Jamajan Kollie, Doumboya, who was part of the administration of the ancient West African Empire of Songhai. The chiefs explained that my father's grandfather, Oldman Lansanah was a leading resistance warrior that constantly moved along the Makona River in northern Lofa, leading protective forces against suspecting encroachers from the French controlled Guinea Territory at the time. The Kromah's were not the only Mandingoes involved in the preservation of northern Lofa. They were led by Great Mandingo Chiefs like Varfley Kollie Kamara and Bongor- Moigbeh Kamara, who along with the famous Loma Chief, Degei Korvah, placed northern Lofa under the administrative Jurisdiction of the Monrovia government in 1916 at a conference also attended by the French. President Daniel Howard decorated the three chiefs with the silver medal of honor and commissioned them the first Paramount chiefs of the Republic of Liberia.⁴⁸

Contemporary Mandingo leaders like Kromah have tried to incorporate the narrative of the communities past prowess in leadership into Liberia's history by casting themselves as state-builders.⁴⁹ They also draw on such histories to try to legitimise their authority. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Mandingo moral economy of the past asked how leaders measured up with the heroes in Manding history, a history that combines knowledge, war and trade with ethics of Islamic accountability.

⁴⁷ TRC statement, Alhaji Kromah, Monrovia, 11th August 2008.

⁴⁸ TRC statement, Alhaji Kromah, Monrovia, 11th August 2008.

⁴⁹ Højbjerg, 2010, p. 291.

The call for action by elites such as Kromah was incentivised by bottom-up complaints about returning to recover lost properties and moral rights. LURD elites publicly justified their call for rebellion against Taylor's government and its associated ethnic militias on the grounds that they had been refused to resettle on their lands in Liberia.⁵⁰ The re-organisation of ULIMO fighters as LURD rebels in the Guinea forests acquired some legitimacy and appealed to those seeking action to recover what they had lost.⁵¹ They were able to mobilise the support of many returnees and 'youths' who wanted to return to claim lost properties. People were not just fighting for lost resources; the loss of their dignity—through alienation of the profit of their labour—triggered collective 'self-defence', as their external exclusion interacted with their dignity.

Loss of their former position of privilege affected many returning Mandingos' ability to recover resources, particularly land, that had been taken by members of neighbouring ethnic communities during the NPFL war, in counties like Nimba, Bong and Lofa. Taylors actions had contributed to altering the balance of power between Mandingos and 'ethnic' others who were obstructing the resettlement of Mandingo returnees to prevent them from reasserting their former economic dominance in the Counties. From below, these 'others' were contributing to the felt political exclusion of Mandingos by undermining their cultural status as indigenous Liberians on the basis that they were 'strangers' from Guinea and did not belong in Liberia. Mandingo informants recounted several areas where former Mandingo residents could not return to because of threats of physical violence against them.⁵² For example, Loma vigilante groups in Lofa accused Mandingos of allegedly desecrating Loma shrines and religious artefacts in the region during their operations as ULIMO-K fighters in the

⁵⁰ Højbjerg, 2010, p. 280.

⁵¹ Interview, Kamara, Tubmanburg, 28th April 2009.

⁵² Interview, Focus Group, Guthrie, 28th April 2009.

NPFL war.⁵³ The next section will show that the interaction of grievances over horizontal exclusion from properties with internal dynamics within the Mandingo community served as a significant factor that contributed to the violence generated by horizontal inequalities under Taylor.

Moral ethnicity demands and Mandingo mobilisation for ULIMO

This section traces the internal demands that contributed to Mandingo ethnic mobilisation and support for the ULIMO counter-rebellion. Mandingo informants commonly describe the community as “not very political” before the civil war; they were mainly involved in the commercial sector.⁵⁴ As one informant put it: “For the Mandingo people, most of our people were involved in business. Private business and stuff like that...we were trained by our parents to do everything for ourselves.”⁵⁵ Individual achievement in trade brought recognition within patriarchal households and the broader diaspora. It was not uncommon for a, “Mandingo with high school diploma or college degree [to] still want to work for his father in business to turn [it] into success.”⁵⁶ Since the Tubman era they had enjoyed relatively more co-optation into the state that had brought numerous business opportunities to the community and contributed to their success as a dominant minority in the market (Chapter 4). Evidently, members of the community did not play a significant role in the student political mobilisation of the 1970s that led to the overthrow of the Settlers.⁵⁷ Political alliance with the Doe regime had maintained Mandingo access to the state and increase in economic activities within the community (Chapter 5).

⁵³ JPC, 1999, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Interview, Moses T., Monrovia, 29th May 2009. This is corroborated by: A. Konneh, 1992.

⁵⁵ Interview, Hassan, ULIMO General, Philadelphia, 15th March 2014.

⁵⁶ Interview, Kamara, Lakpazee, 18 March 2008.

⁵⁷ A. Konneh, 1996a, p. 15.

In the mid-1980s, popular ‘apathy’ to external politics appeared to be changing within the Mandingo diaspora. The high profile Mandingo politician, Alhaji Kromah, commented that: “It was during the 1985 multiparty era that Mandingoes again began actively developing interest in politics. A number of them joined Doe’s NDPL party while the vast majority of them enlisted with the Unity Party of Dr Edward Binyan Kesselly, a Christian Mandingo” from Lofa County.⁵⁸ But, the general interest in politics did not lead to “compelling reason” to join the NPFL rebellion against the Doe regime.⁵⁹ Some prominent Mandingo politicians, such as Kesselly, had been jailed by Doe, “Mandingoes in the NDPL were angry but not enough to join a rebel war” as this had not led to a sense of severe exclusion by the regime. There were still many prominent Mandingos in high profile state positions. Moreover, many in the community perceived Kesselly as somewhat of an ‘outsider’ because he was not a Muslim.⁶⁰ When the NPFL war broke out in December 1989, however, the diaspora “Mandingo was targeted [by the Gio and Mano supporters of the NPFL] as much as Samuel Doe and his followers were targeted”.⁶¹ They were labelled as ‘strangers’ that did not belong to the soil in Nimba, and allies of the incumbent regime. Mandingos perceived that they, “were targeted through their identity, their culture, their beliefs, through their structures;” the experience and perception of violent exclusion on the basis of identity provoked collective organising and mobilisation of Mandingo political identity.⁶²

All the Mandingo informants in this study traced their exclusion to pre-existing tensions. They suggest that during the 1980s, tensions surfaced between Gio/Mano communities and the Mandingo community over Mandingo ownership and

⁵⁸ TRC statement, Alhaji Kromah, Monrovia, 11th August 2008.

⁵⁹ TRC statement, Alhaji Kromah, Monrovia, 11th August 2008.

⁶⁰ Interview, Sherif, Philadelphia, 15th March 2014.

⁶¹ Interview, Kamara, Lakpazee, 18 March 2008.

⁶² Interview, Fofana, Allen Town 15th September 2014.

control of land in the area, and alleged support for the regime.⁶³ Mandingo informants, such as Abu who was a resident in Saclepea at the time, traced the tensions to Gio and Mano grievances over their socio-economic dominance:

There was a personal grudge on Mandingo even before the arrival of Samuel Doe as a president. The reason was Mandingo was highly successful in Liberia because these people does not concentrate on the government. Each Liberian see government as a springboard to success. Mandingo look at their own personal energy as a springboard to success and they put it into use for small business, small trading...So Mandingo was controlling local economy of Liberia so that created some kind of resented against the Mandingo by the rest of the tribes. They sold their properties to Mandingo so therefore they were ready to take these properties back.⁶⁴

Several informants recalled how this grievance surfaced in Gio and Mano aggression after Quiwonkpa announced on the radio that he had overthrown Doe on November 12, 1985. For instance, Konneh III recalled that it was a market day in Saclepea, and he had gone to the market, as his custom was, when he heard a Mano youth whom he knew personally, threatening that now that Quiwonkpa had won they were going to expel Mandingo to Guinea. Similar accounts were reported from Bahn involving “mad jubilation [where] a group of excited Gio folks were going around actually issuing threats to Mandingos”. In Ganta, it was also reported that Gio and Mano were “harassing the Mandingos and issuing the same threats.”⁶⁵ Jabateh similarly reminisced that: “Now those days during the Quiwonkpa events that happen 1985...what was not in the mind of Quiwonkpa it was in the mind of some people, the Mano, the young people...as soon as they say Quiwonkpa win, problem started.... That time I was still in position. [I] became Commissioner [of Nimba in] 1985, after the election.”⁶⁶

⁶³ Interview, Toure, Tubmanburg, 28th April 2009.

⁶⁴ Interview, Abu, Monrovia, 30th May 2009.

⁶⁵ N. Konneh, 2013, p. 39.

⁶⁶ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

The threats subsided after the capture and murder of Quiwonkpa until the NPFL rebels entered Nimba in December 1989. Konneh III recounted that when:

The war started in Nimba County...the Mano and the Gio who were predominantly NPFL supporters decided to drive Mandingo out of Nimba County saying that you guys are not gonna come back here. Meaning if Mandingo people have houses, they have cars...they were all taken by the NPFL rebels. Of course the only thing most Mandingos could move out of the country were the cars because they have most of the cars, driving as transporters. So they just moved their cars across the border to Guinea. For the houses and all other properties that they were not able to move everything had to stay. So Mandingos some went to Ivory Coast, some went to Guinea, some came to Monrovia.⁶⁷

Narrative accounts of Mandingo informants suggest that it was the perception that Mandingo were losing their ‘human dignity’—not only through the physical victimisation, but also through the alienation of their commercial resources—that provoked popular support for the counter-rebellion against the NPFL.⁶⁸ Mandingo moral economy taught them a form of ‘possessive individualism’, where an individual was expected to benefit from using their particular capabilities to succeed in commerce.⁶⁹ This was qualified by ethics of Islam, which required those with wealth to give back to their brotherhood of faith and family in return for a good reputation. The account of Donzo, a reputed Mandingo businessman in 1970s and 1980s Saclepea, is illustrative of a Mandingo ‘big man’ who gained reputation in the community by adhering to these expectations.⁷⁰ Donzo was a trader in Saclepea whose family owned what was considered as the largest provisions store in Saclepea. As the store’s manager he was involved in its success in outdoing Lebanese competitors in the 1970s. Donzo gained a good reputation in with the Mandingo community in Saclepea for sponsoring the education of many of the youths with

⁶⁷ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 29th January 2014.

⁶⁸ Interview, Focus Group, Bonah Farm, 22nd April 2009. Interview, Focus Group, Guthrie, 28th April 2009.

⁶⁹ See: Macpherson, 1962.

⁷⁰ Interview, Focus Group, Bonah Farm, 22nd April 2009. Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 8th March 2014. The account of Donzo is corroborated in: N. Konneh, 2013, pp. 25-26.

scholarships, and providing educational implements such as uniforms, notebooks, pens and pencils to their schools. These actions were considered instrumental in helping youths to gain knowledge skills to achieve self-mastery in the community and to compete with ‘others’. The Donzos were also credited with community development. For instance, they supported a successful football team and the first video club in Saclepea in the early 1980s. He was seen as a successful trader who lived by the ethics of Islam, rising to the position of muezzin for the local mosque in Saclepea. Another example is Jabateh (above).⁷¹

But when the NPFL rebellion broke out, many Mandingo ‘big men’ such as Donzo lost their properties. Those who protested they were killed or expelled.⁷² Similarly, Amara Jabateh was a Mandingo businessman in Kahnplay before the war. He described widespread violence against Mandingo in Kahnplay and as well as the targeting of their properties by Gio and Mano NPFL rebels that had been their neighbours.⁷³ Mandingos were labelled as “collaborators” and people who were “not true sons and daughters of the soil”. Massacres of Mandingo were reported around the countryside. One of these occurred on July 12, 1990 in Barkiedu, a prominent Mandingo town in Quardu Gboni District, Lofa County, where NPFL soldiers killed a reported 500 Mandingos. In this context, there was agitation for the Mandingo diaspora to organise in “self-defence”.⁷⁴ Fofana, a Mandingo ex-combatant from Saclepea who was twenty years old at the time recalled that, “Mandingo came together in Monrovia from all over Liberia”.⁷⁵

Nvasekie Konneh writes in his memoir that: “For the Mandingoes, the stated interest was to come back home to bury their folks who had died, reclaim their homes

⁷¹ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

⁷² Interview, Focus Group, Guthrie, 28th April 2009.

⁷³ TRC testimony, Amara Jabateh, Sanniquellie, 15 May 2008

⁷⁴ Interview, Focus Group, Guthrie, 28th April 2009.

⁷⁵ Interview, Fofana, Allen Town, 17th Sep 2014.

and properties, or re-establish their businesses.”⁷⁶ Their expulsion had had a major blow not only on their livelihoods, but also their means of community and esteem; many in the Mandingo community felt that “there was a need to do something in order to restore their sense of human dignity.”⁷⁷ Other informants echoed a similar connection between loss of live, properties and dignity.⁷⁸

In April 1990, Alhaji Kromah who had been a member of the Doe government in the 1980s made a public call to the Mandingo community during their annual Ramadan prayer activities at the Antoinette Tubman Stadium in greater Monrovia. The public call was preceded and followed by a series of meeting in Monrovia. Konneh III recalled that:

I remember during those early days of the war, you have two prominent Mandingo officials Ansumana Kromah who was the Internal Affairs Minister and Alhaji Kromah who was the director of the radio broadcasting system.... These were the two high-ranking officials in government, and I know there were series of meeting that were held in different places. One of the meetings was held at the Antoinette Tubman stadium, which happened to be...when the Moslems had gathered for the Ramadan prayer at the Antoinette Tubman stadium. There were a lot of people that spoke including Imams talking about what was happening to the Moslems in Nimba County and something gotta happen, and Alhaji was one of the speakers on that very day who stood up and said they are attacking our people for no justifiable reason in Nimba County and our people who have been killed, whose blood has been shed are not gonna go in vain.⁷⁹

There was an expectation within the diaspora that high profile Mandingo would lead the community in “self-defence” against the NPFL:

All Mandingo were meeting, but most of the meeting used to be taking place at Alhaji Kromah house. We used to meet. We all used to go to Alhaji. At the time, we were now young we didn’t have any voice in the whole discussion. But we’ll go there sit down and listen to all the conversation, but it was people like Ansumana Kromah and Alhaji Kromah were very instrumental in those early days. And the whole concern was what are we gonna do? We are being chased out of Nimba County. They are chasing our people everywhere and we have to

⁷⁶ N. Konneh, 2013, p. 142.

⁷⁷ N. Konneh, 2013, p. 119.

⁷⁸ Interview, Focus Group, Guthrie, 28th April 2009.

⁷⁹ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 29th January 2014. This is corroborated by: Interview, Fofana, Allen Town, 17th Sep 2014, and several others.

do something in self-defence.... Since Alhaji Kromah, Ansumana Kromah were high ranking government officials there was series of meetings held in Alhaji's house. Basically, Alhaji house was the meeting point for all Mandingo people and every time we went there we talked about the condition that we faced.⁸⁰

Mandingos expected those with wealth and power to create conditions for political protection and good order because of their moral economy (Chapter 3). The war displaced the diaspora from their places of worship and religious learning, where they promoted a common culture of trust and literacy skills.⁸¹ For instance, many Mandingos in Saclepea-Mah district either attended 'traditional' Quranic schools or 'union' schools that combined English-based study with an Islamic education, such as the Liberia Moslem Union School.⁸² They were key institutions for passing on both literacy skills and religious learning in the community. However, the NPFL fighters destroyed these during the rebellion. Ellis corroborates this. He observed that within a year of the war, charges were made against the NPFL for "burning down more than 1,000 mosques and Islamic schools."⁸³ Mandingo expulsion also displaced the network of traders that supplied the public goods of market expertise and knowledge resources.

For high profile Mandingo elites like Alhaji Kromah, the expulsion threatened not just their marginalisation from power, but also within the community. The diaspora had become displaced and they could no longer ensure the provision of public goods such as political protection and opportunity for their families and the wider community to carry out commerce. Kromah's pronouncements suggest that he felt the need to act because of the demands from the community for 'self-defence' to protect their way of lives and way of living. He justified the formation of the counter-

⁸⁰ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 29th January 2014.

⁸¹ Interview, Toure, Tubmanburg, 28th April 2009. Interview, Focus Group, Bonah Farm, 22nd April 2009.

⁸² Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 8th March 2014.

⁸³ Ellis, 1999, p. 94.

rebellion against the NPFL in his TRC statement in terms of community protection: “There was no protection for most Liberians, especially Mandingos, Krahns and anyone looking like a Muslim. That is when we decided to organize an anti-rebel and resistant movement to rescue our people and defeat the objective of the NPFL.”⁸⁴ This suggests that he was motivated by moral ethnicity, and not just driven by an attempt to get back power. Prior to the war, Kromah had enjoyed a good reputation in the Mandingo community.⁸⁵ Ordinary Mandingos perceived him as a respectable Mandingo politician in high profile state power that had kept his religious commitment as a Muslim.⁸⁶ It was, therefore, not surprising that it was elites such as Kromah that initiated the first call for Mandingos to mobilise to defend their community’s interests.

Kromah travelled around the sub-region to spread the call to mobilise among the Mandingo refugee community. He gained much support among educated “intellectual” Mandingo youths as well as ordinary people who felt “dispossessed” and “victimised” and complained about returning to their “homes”.⁸⁷ These included Kabineh Janneh whose father had lost “all his property in Bahn”, where Mandingo had had a prominent presence as business people, but were driven out during the war. Another example is Ansumana Kromah whose father had lost prime real estate on the main road in Ganta. These were more likely to respond to Kromah’s call to organise the community in pursuit not only of material losses, but also security and dignity. Jabateh recounted that: “these [then young people] are the people who introduce Kromah to their parents that this man, he is our leader. We want you to support him,

⁸⁴ TRC Statement, Alhaji Kromah, Monrovia, 11th August 2008.

⁸⁵ His accomplishments include: serving as Minister of Information, Vice Chairman of the Council of State or the Collective Presidency, Director General of the Liberia Broadcasting System, Assistant Minister for Public Affairs at the Ministry of Information, Press Secretary to the Vice President Liberia, professor of communication and international law at the University of Liberia.

⁸⁶ N. Konneh, 2013, pp. 142-143.

⁸⁷ Interview, Focus Group, Guthrie, 28th April 2009.

to make sure to get Taylor out. And the people accepted it...In Nimba County, the whole entire Nimba county elders was in support of Kromah based on their request.”⁸⁸ Support for Kromah was “unanimous” wherever he called the community to mobilise: “To all these people that had been driven away from their homes and made refugees in foreign countries, Alhaji Kromah represented the hope of their returning to Liberia to regain their sense of dignity and properties.”⁸⁹

But before they could forge an armed organisation, the displaced members of the community that had gathered in Monrovia were forced to flee the country when NPFL and the splinter INPFL rebels overrun Monrovia. Many fled to Sierra Leone and Guinea as refugees. Guinea hosted the majority of the refugees partly because of historical ties and partly because of it was located near the border regions where the war had broken out. Mandingos in Liberia as well as refugees from Sierra Leone, Guinea and Ivory Coast formed the Movement for the Redemption of Liberian Moslems (MRLM or MRM in short) in February 1990, with Kromah as spokesman.⁹⁰ Kromah is credited with founding the MRM.⁹¹ The MRM was based in Guinea. It tried to mobilise financial support from the Middle East. An informant who was present in Guinea as a refugee at the time recalled that: “In Guinea they came together to go outside to get outside support. Saudi Arabia was one of the countries. Kuwait was one. Many of our brothers were in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. They were able to get few money.”⁹² N’Zérékoré, Guinea’s second largest city, became a rallying base for Kromah.⁹³ Konneh III explained that:

We identified ourselves as Moslems. Everything was done in the context of Moslem or Islam. That’s why the first reaction of the Mandingo community to

⁸⁸ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

⁸⁹ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 8th March 2014.

⁹⁰ Interview, Hassan, Philadelphia, 15th March 2014. See also: Ellis, 1999, p. 94.

⁹¹ See for example: Jaye & Alao, 2013, p. 17.

⁹² Interview, Sherif, Philadelphia 16th March 2014.

⁹³ See for example: Florquin & Berman, May 2005.

all the attack in Nimba County was the formation of the Muslim Redemption Movement (MRM). So it was not Mandingo redemption movement from the beginning, it was Moslem Redemption Movement because Mandingo have always seen everything [moral ethnicity] through the prism of the Islam religion... It is the need for *self-defence* that Mandingo came together and formed ULIMO with Krahn people.⁹⁴

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the ethics of Islam was an important part of identity. But, the designation of the movement as a Muslim organization prevented them from gaining wider appeal to oppose Taylor's NPFL. Kromah called on Muslims to mobilise to launch a *jihad* against the NPFL.⁹⁵ Hassan recalled, that:

He said if Mr Taylor does not stop killing our people we are going to fight in *Jihad* [against the NPFL]... that speech was received by all Mandingo even though the international community had problem with that speech.⁹⁶

However, the call to jihad unsettled many international actors, particularly the United States and forestalled external support for the MRM. A former ULIMO General opined that:

There was no active movement because when he said they going to fight *jihad* that became another pressure by itself. That time United States government, through its embassy, they begin to interview him because they didn't like the word *jihad*. At the time the Mujahidin that was fighting in Afghanistan had become a problem. They had turned to terrorism in Yemen, in Sudan, many countries. So they didn't want anymore jihad group especially in that part of Africa.⁹⁷

Kromah travelled to Freetown, Sierra Leone Liberian United Defence Force (LUDF) movement. A Krahn dominated movement that emerged in May 1991 under the leadership of Major-General Albert Karpeh. Karpeh, A United States trained Special Forces officer and former defence minister, had been Doe's last Ambassador to Sierra

⁹⁴ My emphasis: Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 8th March 2014.

⁹⁵ Interview with Alhaji Kromah in *West Africa*, 4082, 15th January 1996, p. 65-67. See also: Ellis, 1999, p. 94.

⁹⁶ Interview, Hassan, Philadelphia, 15th March 2014.

⁹⁷ Interview, Hassan, Philadelphia, 15th March 2014.

Leone.⁹⁸ Under pressure from the United States Ambassador in Sierra Leone, Karpeh declined to join forces with Kromah. The MRM waned and declined.

However, Kromah came under increasing pressure from members of the Mandingo community to lead them in a counter-rebellion against the NPFL. The account of Fofana is illustrative of demands for leadership action from Mandingo in Sierra Leone:

We forged tribal alliance with Alhaji Kromah...we [Mandingo youths in Sierra Leone] said look this is the time to speak out otherwise when we get to Liberia we will be a second-class citizen for the second time...it is time that we go for Alhaji Kromah. So I was selected [with] a delegation to go to Alhaji Kromah in Conakry. We came together we have secret meeting. We were all Mandingo. Money was put together. 70 US dollar was given to me for me to pay my way along with three other person to go meet Alhaji Kromah in Conakry. We went to meet Alhaji Kromah and he put everybody together all of our refugee community together to receive us. We explained to him that look we are tired, the similar problem we saw in Liberia, we are beginning to see [again]...so this is time that you step forward. We heard about you, we listened to your speech, definitely we need a leader. It was around 1991. We said we don't want you to go to Freetown, you are not a leader for Freetown, you are a leader for us and we are not in Liberia, the motherland...to be a leader you have to be principle minded and that principle was [what led to] the formation of [Mandingo mobilisation for] ULIMO. He could have lost his respect [if] he [was] not a leader of ULIMO.⁹⁹

Accounts like Fofana's suggest that bottom-up demand for action, based on their moral economy expectations, was a decisive factor that led to the formation of the ULIMO movement, which subsequently merged with the Krahn LUDF. This suggests that the widespread account that predatory elites were using "ethnic appeals" to manipulate support from ordinary people is not completely reflective of events on the ground.¹⁰⁰ The complainants were all united by common ethnic identity. They incentivised elites like Kromah to act by challenging their legitimacy. Ordinary people seeking action were, therefore, willing to respond to make collective action along ethnic lines possible. With the various movements to oppose Taylor launching

⁹⁸ Ellis, 1999, p. 94.

⁹⁹ Interview, Fofana, Allen Town, 17th Sep 2014.

¹⁰⁰ See for example: Ellis, 1999, p. 96.

simultaneously, ULIMO emerged in 1992 as a Mandingo/Krahn alliance involving former LUDF and Mandingo fighters, backed by ECOMOG soldiers to counter the NPFL violence against Krahn and Mandingo.¹⁰¹ Kromah publicly declared himself as leader of the Mandingo contingent in ULIMO.¹⁰² In the following section, I discuss the leadership competition that engulfed ULIMO and how internal demands for accountability contributed to the emergence of LURD.

Leadership competition in ULIMO and ethnic mobilisation for LURD

This section argues that even though international actors—particularly, Guinean and Sierra Leonean authorities—played a role in providing logistical support to political elites who underwrote the ULIMO and subsequent LURD violence,¹⁰³ internal conflict over moral economy of leadership and legitimacy played an equally, if not more, important role. Mandingo organisation to counter the NPFL war became an internal ethnic competition that contributed to the emergence of LURD. Informant accounts suggest that there were conflicts within the Mandingo community that centred on the sources of political leadership and its accountability. Their debate, which is locally referred to as ‘palava’, occurred between an older politico-military leaders who wanted to hold on to political power and a younger ‘intellectual’ cohort that sought to be included in the leadership of the Mandingo community. Increased leadership competition within the Mandingo community was an important factor that contributed to the continuation of violence in the form of the LURD rebellion against Taylor.

¹⁰¹ For more on the formation of ULIMO see: Ellis, 1999.

¹⁰² Ellis, 1999, p. 95.

¹⁰³ For more on international support, see for example: JPC, 2000, p. 3.; and Milner, 2005.

From its inception, the ULIMO alliance was marred by power struggles between Krahn and Mandingo elite. It split into ULIMO-J (under the Krahn Roosevelt Johnson) and ULIMO-K (under the Mandingo Alhaji Kromah) factions in March 1994.¹⁰⁴ Two accounts have been provided for the split. The first suggests that the disagreement arose over “Kromah’s discriminate distribution of jobs allotted the faction by the Cotonou Peace arrangement to his Mandingo kin at the disadvantage of the Krahns, who along with the Mandingos, dominated the movement.”¹⁰⁵ Raleigh Seekie, the Krahn opponent of Kromah who replaced Karpeh after he was killed, accused him of “trying to import an Islamic fundamentalism into Liberia through *jihad*.”¹⁰⁶ Second, this was prompted by disagreement on ethnic representation in the new Council of State that was to be established as part of the peace process. The Mandingo alliance with Krahns dissolved after intense pressure within the community for action over the perceived public betrayal of Krahn leadership in the interim government in a vote for the chairmanship of the Council. The Mandingo representative on the Council, Dr El Mohammed Sheriff was voted lost his bid for the chairmanship and his position as the vice chairman to the Krahn representative on the council, Thomas Zia.¹⁰⁷

The popular sentiment among many ordinary Mandingos was that this was the nearest “the Mandingos had come close to power and the Krahns had betrayed them...ULIMO chairman Kromah was urged by his support base to take action.”¹⁰⁸ This culminated in the creation of the splinter ULIMO-K (under the leadership of Kromah). Following the ULIMO split, the Krahn/Mandingo alliance to oppose the NPFL rebellion had ended in a series of violent attacks against themselves when the

¹⁰⁴ Højbjerg, 2010, p. 277.

¹⁰⁵ JPC, 30 June 1995; January-December 1996, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ N. Konneh, 2013, p. 120.

¹⁰⁷ N. Konneh, 2013, p. 141.

¹⁰⁸ N. Konneh, 2013, pp. 141-142.

Mandingo-led ULIMO-K joined forces with Taylor and the NPFL against Krahns in the April 1996 battle in Monrovia that left over 3,000 dead.¹⁰⁹ However, power struggles among political and military patrons in the ULIMO movement were not limited to inter-ethnic struggles between Krahn and Mandingo elites, as some analysts suggest.¹¹⁰

During the NPFL war, the members of ULIMO and ULIMO-K engaged in a debate over leadership that straddled a generational divide. The internal debates between them are recounted below, not only because they are important in their own right, but also to provide context for the subsequent discussion of how internal struggle contributed to the emergence of LURD. The Mandingo rank-and-file of ULIMO and ULIMO-K had a moral ethnicity expectation that they would be rewarded for defending the community.¹¹¹ Narratives of common brotherhood provided ordinary ‘youths’ with a basis to ask for patronage from elites. They wanted opportunities that would enable them to achieve knowledge skills in order to answer to the moral demands of self-mastery after the war. As such, they were not challenging the generational power or inequality or the oppression of their leaders; they did not dare to openly defy the elders under a moral economy shaped by the ethics of Islam. Informant accounts suggest that lack of respect for elders incurred the wrath of the wider community. Rather, ‘youths’ demanded social accountability of political authority. They felt that their resistance of ‘others’ and combat action in collective ‘self-defence’ for the Mandingo community gave them a right and expectation to sponsorship in acquiring knowledge skills and property.¹¹² The dispute was between the Mandingo politico-military leadership and rank-and-file supporters

¹⁰⁹ HRW, 1997.

¹¹⁰ See for example: HRW, 2002. International Crisis Group., 2003.

¹¹¹ Interview, Focus Group, Guthrie, 28th April 2009.

¹¹² Interview, Focus Group, Bonah Farm, 22nd April 2009.

of ULIMO and ULIMO-K. They commonly identified as Mandingo, most of them were from Lofa, Nimba and Bong Counties, and their common moral thought shaped their views.

The main contention of these ‘youths’ was how regaining public power to be included in high profile state leadership would translate into their future rights as moral citizens. It touched on the community’s concept of ‘possessive individualism’, the notion that an individual is the proprietor of their abilities. They were fighting to protect their community’s dignity and wanted to know how the gains of collective action would be redistributed by their leaders to ‘open doors’ for them.¹¹³ These expectations resonate with past moral economy of leadership and legitimacy, in which ethnic thought looked to successful merchants to create opportunities for upstarts to gain self-mastery and esteem. As Konneh put it:

The greatness of leaders and leadership does not depend on how much the leader get for himself but how much he or she is able to build the capacity of others and how many ladders he or she can build for others to climb up from the bottom. They will never get enough money to satisfy everyone’s money hunger, but those in power or close enough to power can use the power and influence to open doors for others. Leaders who do these things are the leaders who earn the respect and admiration of their people.¹¹⁴

However, people felt that Kromah was pursuing his own self-interest and stifling debate about their expectations. Konneh III who was a ‘youth’ at the time appraised the internal political situation as follows:

[W]hen the fighting men debated among themselves as to what would be their future after the war, some were accused of wanting to “overthrow Alhaji Kromah.” Once Alhaji had the elders on his side, his leadership could not be challenged by any debate. Simple disagreement with him on any issue would incur the wrath of the elders of the community. Such was the nature of political activity in the Mandingo community in general and the ULIMO organization in particular.¹¹⁵

¹¹³See: Macpherson, 1962.

¹¹⁴N. Konneh, 2011.

¹¹⁵Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 26th January 2014.

The ‘youth’ critics, such as Konneh III, accused Kromah of abusing the scope of his power with the support of the elders. They contended that:

Alhaji Kromah didn’t favour any debate...there was an Elder Committee and whatever decision Alhaji wanted to make, he would consult the elders and usually whatever he wanted the elders on his side. These elders were very important in ULIMO because the fighters were their children. Mandingo culture is heavily influenced by Islam and no child, no matter how powerful he was in the movement could defy what the elders said.¹¹⁶

The account of Kamara also illustrates that their dispute had much to do with moral economy of leadership and legitimacy:

In the early days of the war, the young Mandingo groups that were in Guinea they wrote a petition to Alhaji that this war that is going on is not going to be [forever] we need to prepare our people educationally so they listed more than 100 people that they expected Alhaji to talk to, in some of the governments in the sub-region, so that they can help to educate those people, give them scholarship to go to Nigeria and other places. But none of those were honoured by Alhaji and that’s one of the reasons some people feel that he did not achieve what people expected of him.¹¹⁷

These perceived leadership faults exacerbated intergenerational tensions. As Konneh put it, Kromah could rely on “getting the solid backing from the elders whose children were fighting...to maintain his grip on power. As long as he enjoyed the backing of those old people, the children could not rebel against him. They were organised into an elder committee that ‘advised’ him from time to time”¹¹⁸

From the outset, imams or Muslim clerics played an important role in organisation of Mandingo support. Prior to the war the National Moslem council of Liberia was considered to be the moral head of the Mandingo Muslim community. They legitimised their authority by providing opportunities for knowledge advancement with the community. Kamara, a former Mandingo youth who participated in the war, recalled that: “[I]f you look at National Muslim Council the only relevance was that they used to help to bring scholarship to Mandingo people, in

¹¹⁶ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 29th January 2014.

¹¹⁷ Interview, Kamara, Tubmanburg, 28th April 2009.

¹¹⁸ N. Konneh, 2013, p. 148.

fact all Moslems in Liberia that were desiring of studying Islam or going to Saudi Arabia, going to other Arab countries.”¹¹⁹ Kromah won the support of many of these community ‘elders’.

Kromah’s reaction to demands for accountability weakened his legitimacy. Rank-and-file Mandingo ex-combatants like Fofana accused him of pursuing a selfish agenda to enrich himself:

We saw him as the only solution to our problem; we didn’t know at the time that he had different agenda...But Alhaji Kromah had different agenda. That agenda was to enrich himself. We had a very good support from ECOWAS countries, but everything was blown due to Alhaji personal greed. He was not interested in the military struggle. He just want to enrich himself like any other African leaders. That was the factor that ULIMO [-K] descended, it collapsed.¹²⁰

Apart from the rank-and-file combatants, a younger Mandingo ‘intellectual’ elite that wanted to participate in the political leadership of the community also opposed Kromah. Leadership struggles between Kromah and the youthful ‘intellectuals’ emerged that centred on how to represent the community in the national arena to struggle for high profile power. This intellectual stratum felt that Mandingo would benefit from alignment with the interim government, as a means to achieving public power against their opponents. They critiqued Kromah’s failure to turn ULIMO over to the interim government of Amos Sawyer and ECOMOG. A Mandingo ‘intellectual’ informant who was closely involved in the movement expressed that:

What is apparent is that most of the Mandingo intellectuals that were initially active in the movement were side-lined by Alhaji Kromah.... Some Mandingo intellectuals like Ansumana Kromah, Kabineh Janneh, and the late Dr Bangalee Fofana... [Felt that] ULIMO should have turned over to the interim government territories it captured from Charles Taylor’s NPFL.... but they could not convince Alhaji and the elder council about that. It became one of the major debates within the movement.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Interview, Kamara, Tubmanburg, 28th April 2009.

¹²⁰ Interview, Fofana, Allentown, 17th Sep 2014.

¹²¹ E-mail exchange, KL, 29th January 2014.

This conflict is noted in the memoir of N. Konneh who writes that: “While there were thousands and thousands of people who adored Alhaji Kromah, there were many critics.... His critics were mostly the Mandingo intellectuals.”¹²² Jabateh also recounted that:

[W]hen they enter in Liberia...even the Kromah camp was divided...some went behind Kromah, some went behind [the young intellectuals]. Then beside that the older people say, we will not change, you all already tell us what to do and we have done it. If anything, you try to iron it out. The reason is, Ansumana wanted position. Kabineh Janneh want position [to lead the Mandingo people] and now the way they organize their self you know what type of agreement they came up to, and now the other party find out, the other party find out that this man, he don't want be sincere. Who telling Kromah that he don't want to be sincere, that he alone want be everything.... [T]hey always telling people that this man is not a good leader. Well, our Mandingo policy, Mandingo policy, when we say one, we mean one. I mean to say, to say it today then we change tomorrow, we don't like it. Kabineh Janneh, Ansumana Kromah was the one that took Kromah hand, carry it to the elderly people say “we want him.”¹²³

Their dissatisfaction with Kromah generated a leadership debate that raised the issue of leaders scope of authority. One observer at the time noted that:

Kabineh Janneh and others they felt Alhaji behaved like he was superior to everybody. He holds seven university degrees, and he thinks that nobody should tell him anything, he dictates and he was not giving opportunity for a new leadership of the organisation. Most of the time he took the decisions. Decisions were not made through discussion. Some accused him of being too dictatorial. His decisions were not based on *consensus* [my emphasis]. He wanted those guys—because their prominence and their political positions were results of his preferences—to always be subservient to him despite the recognition they have in the society and the education they got over the years he still wanted them to be like some boys to him so the guys couldn't support that.¹²⁴

This suggests that the ‘intellectual’ opponents felt that their opinion counted because they were also educated, and leaders in their own right, but he was stifling debate. He wasn't allowing other people in the community to be promoted. This is reminiscent of past moral economy of leadership where enforceable decisions required consensus

¹²² N. Konneh, 2013, p. 143.

¹²³ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

¹²⁴ Interview, Ibrahim M., 25th January 2014.

among the elders of the relatively autonomous Mandingo settlements in the diaspora (Chapter 3).

It brought the reputation and legitimacy of Kromah into question. In Mandingo moral thought (Chapter 3) a leader's political authority is largely based on his 'fame' (reputation). The intellectuals levelled two main assaults on Kromah's authority. The first concerned his reputation since he had become a polarising figure in the community. The source of Kromah's authority was in mainly in his reputation. But, they called Kromah's accountability to the rules of reputation into question. The second focused on his ability to use his position to benefit the community, the intellectuals "charged that he was arrogant, too selfish and very dishonest and wanted everything for his own glorification".¹²⁵ In other words, he was suffering from selfish ambition and the way in which he pursued his ambitions did not always show accountability to Islamic ethics. Therefore, he was using his 'fame' to pursue self-interest at the expense of the community's long-term interests in public power.

In response, Kromah tried to rely on his pre-war reputation among the Mandingos as state leader, which had been further solidified in public activities such as national sporting events in which he was seen to be publicly representing Islam and Mandingo culture. For instance, he reportedly participated in a football game between the Mighty Barrolle and the Invisible Eleven, which was nicknamed "Quran versus Bible". When Mighty Barrolle won it increased Kromah's popularity within the community.¹²⁶ Such activities made Kromah popular with ordinary Mandingo and the elders of the community. The support of the elders brought community sanction to support his leadership. Kromah relied on another criterion of moral ethnicity—respect for elders to enforce unity on the community. As Konneh put it, this meant that:

¹²⁵ N. Konneh, 2013, p. 143.

¹²⁶ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 26 January 2014.

Not supporting ULIMO in the Mandingo community was tantamount to treason because it was seen as our way of liberation from the humiliation brought upon us by Charles Taylor. So for many people, it was hard to support ULIMO and be opposed to the chairman of the movement, Alhaji Kromah. Those who opposed him in any shape or form were ridiculed and ostracized by the community. They were labelled as “enemies of Mandingo progress”. Relatives and friends, who were bonded by family, religious and cultural ties over the years, saw themselves on opposite sides of this divide, and it was often acrimonious...His supporters were overzealous, fanatic and did not take kindly to any criticism of their leader.¹²⁷

The ‘intellectual faction within’ started to be labelled as ‘dissidents’. For example, Ansumana Kromah (former Internal Affairs Minister, Dr Bangalee Fofana (a lecturer at the University of Liberia) Anthony Kesselly and Kabineh Janneh (political activists) were all labelled “enemies of Mandingo progress”. ‘Dissidents’ were also labelled ‘konapers’ from a corruption of the word ‘connivers’.¹²⁸

Similarly, clerics from the National Muslim Council who wanted an alternative style of leadership were perceived as ‘traitors’ and opponents of Kromah.

A good example is the account of Sheik A. Konneh:

Sheik A. Konneh the National Muslim Council Chairman and Secretary-General before the war, he was a District Commissioner in Ganta during Tolbert time. He was the last district Commissioner in Ganta before Tolbert was killed. When the war started as the most prominent Mandingo Moslem leader he joined the Christians to found the Inter-faith Mediation Committee. So he has been involved in the peace process from the early days of the war. He was trying to find help through peaceful means. Sheik A. Konneh was accused by the Mandingo community for being a traitor for not supporting the Alhaji because everyone that was not supporting the war in the Mandingo community.... there was only one voice in the Mandingo Community or the Moslem community that made it clear that he was for peaceful purpose, which was Sheik A. Konneh. But his action of calling for peace at that time was seen by lot of people to be like he’s against Alhaji. He’s against the effort of our people to come back to the country.¹²⁹

The forceful reaction to Kromah’s opponents created an atmosphere of discontent within the community. Kromah was able to enforce unity among rank-and-file members of the community with the support of the elders. Nonetheless the damage

¹²⁷ N. Konneh, 2013, pp. 143-144.

¹²⁸ N. Konneh, 2013, pp. 144-145.

¹²⁹ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 29th January 2014.

done to internal relations weakened his legitimacy. His alliance with Taylor prior to the ending of the war was perceived by some as further proof of his selfish ambitions and a betrayal of the community. It was in this period that the youthful “elite members of the tribe who fell out with Alhaji’s style of leadership broke away”.¹³⁰ He remained leader of a disintegrated ULIMO-K and became a member of the ‘collective presidency’, which was established in transitional power-sharing arrangements before the ending of the NPFL war.¹³¹

After the NPFL war, Kromah formed the All Liberia Coalition Party (ALCOP) to contest in the 1997 elections, but he won a mere 4 percent of the votes, mostly from supporters in his home county, Lofa. In the context of Mandingo marginalisation by Taylor, they perceived that they had virtually no chance for unarmed opposition against Taylor.¹³² They could not rely on a future general election for regime change because of Taylor’s sway over state institutions like the military apparatus, and the widespread perception that they are ‘foreigners’ from Guinea. Kromah went to exile in Guinea within thirty days after Taylor’s inauguration, and then subsequently left for the United States. While in exile he tried to restore his legitimacy by attempting to rally his former supporters for action against Taylor. Fofana recalled that,

After he [Kromah] did not win the election he had already lost many confidences...Alhaji lost all of his support...after the inauguration [of Taylor] he went to Guinea [but] he could not do anything in Guinea because he had already lost his support...his life was threatened so he went to the United States] he was given humanitarian asylum in the [United States] and the conditions was that not to be involved in politics. He was talking secretly not publicly...I was still in Monrovia...Mr Kromah was no longer in Guinea; he already left for United States. But he wanted to use some of the boys to bring some confusion. Even me he contact me. At that time there was no LURD. But because I don’t trust him anymore, I never listened to him. He called me three, four, five times when I was in Liberia. He contacted me, he explained some things to me, but I said I never trusted him. But he has some supporters who

¹³⁰ Interview, Sherif, Philadelphia, 16th March 2014.

¹³¹ For more on the power sharing arrangements see: Aboagye & Bah, 2005; Ellis, 1999.

¹³² Adekeye Adebajo, 2002, pp. 70-71.

will be with him for the rest of his life and who may like to see him in a leadership position.¹³³

The leadership struggle was invigorated by Kromah's attempt to seek leadership in the context of Mandingo exclusion under Taylor. Kromah's former opponents had also become exiled in Guinea. Konneh III recalled that: "There was vigorous debate as to who should lead the movement. Since LURD was the reincarnation of ULIMO the question was who to lead the organization. As such, Alhaji Kromah wanted to be the head".¹³⁴ But the issue of leadership accountability to supporters resurfaced, and "a lot of them felt that Alhaji did not do right when he was ULIMO leader."¹³⁵ He was accused of selfish ambition, moral economy failings, demonstrated by an inability to use his power to construct a single mosque or school to benefit the Mandingo Muslim population, since the days of the MRM.¹³⁶ A former participant in the movement recalled that his ability to provide the public good of protection was also called into question:

I met Dr Kanneh in Conakry in 1999 and the LURD fighting forces at the time were saying that Dr Kanneh should be the leader of LURD, but there was counter-force to that, Alhaji also wanted to lead. But Vamba Kanneh argument was, Alhaji fled the country and left our people unprotected. He went to America so those of us that are here wish to be leading the movement not Alhaji who is in America. It was competition for power. People felt that how can Alhaji lead when Alhaji all the way in America and there was also mistrust of Alhaji [from the previous war.]¹³⁷

Against this background, Kromah's opponents tried to outmanoeuvre him by remobilising his former rank-and-file supporters on the promise that they would do a

¹³³ Interview, Fofana, Allen Town, 17th Sep 2014. This is corroborated by: Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 29th January 2014. Interview, Focus Group, Bonah Farm, 19th May 2009. Interview, Focus Group, Factory Camp, 11th April 2009.

¹³⁴ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 30th January 2013

¹³⁵ Interview, Konneh III, Lansdowne, 30th January 2013. This is corroborated by an e-mail exchange on a Mandingo Community listserv in the possession of the author.

¹³⁶ Jaye & Alao, 2013, pp. 17-18.

¹³⁷ Interview, Sam, Congo Town, 27th May 2009

better job of representing the community as a “second generation of leaders”.¹³⁸ Those who initially gained the mandate to lead LURD were considered to be neutral elites from the previous power struggles. They mainly won on the basis of their wealth and connections. Mohammed S K Jumandy was elected national chairman of LURD in 1999, in part because he was perceived as neutral and in part because of his wealth. He pledged to finance LURD with US\$1 million. However, he did not have much ‘fame’—sufficient reputation to instil trust in the rank-and-file—and, thus, did not win popular backing.¹³⁹ A former member of the movement recalled that: “He did not stay long in power because all the fighters were not in favour of him.”¹⁴⁰ Consequently, his inability to fulfil this pledge was publicly used as a basis to remove him from office:

After him Sekou Damate Conneh emerged as the head through the influence of his ex-wife, Aisha Keita who was an adopted daughter of the late President Lansanah Conte of Guinea. While Sekou might have not been the ideal candidate, he was accepted because of his ex-wife's relationship with President Conte.¹⁴¹

In December 2001, Sekou Damate Conneh Junior was elected by LURD’s National Executive Council to become the new national chairman and commander-in-chief of the movement because of his wife’s connections with Lansanah Conte. He was then a 42-year-old businessman from Bong County, and former civil servant in the Liberian Ministry of Finance. Like Jumandy, Conneh he was chosen in part because his connections with Conte would bring financial and logistical assistance to the movement, and in part because of his lack of direct involvement in the NPFL war. It

¹³⁸ Interview, Focus Group, Bonah Farm, 19th May 2009.

¹³⁹ Interview, Focus Group, Bonah Farm, 19th May 2009.

¹⁴⁰ E-mail exchange, KL, 30th January 2014

¹⁴¹ E-mail exchange, KL, 30th January 2014

was intended to bring unity, and a level of impartiality that would enable him to mediate between the former ULIMO factions.¹⁴²

The main opposition to Sekou Damate was Kabineh Janneh [a lawyer and key member of the ‘intellectual’ group that opposed Kromah’s leadership.] So there was very acrimonious debate in LURD that resulted into changing of leaders [for a neutral candidate] as the movement fought against Taylor.¹⁴³

However, Conneh was accused of rivals as neither “sophisticated nor overly intellectual” enough to lead the organization.¹⁴⁴ Throughout his leadership of LURD, conflict continued at the elite level between the military wing and the political wing of LURD. The British journalist, Brabazon, noted the elite struggle in LURD in a report.

According to Brabazon:

[C]onflict between LURD’s political representatives in Conakry and their military command in Liberia [was] a source of considerable mistrust and instability within the organization. All levels of LURD command personnel actively involved in frontline duties in Liberia either openly or discreetly criticize their compatriots in Conakry, correctly suspecting them of financial and diplomatic intrigue.¹⁴⁵

Similarly, Jennifer Hazen notes the division the political leadership of LURD that was based in Conakry and the military leadership that was under Conneh’s command and based in Voinjama, Lofa.¹⁴⁶ Yet, Conneh remained in power partly because of Conte’s insistence, and partly because he tried to make a ‘new deal’ with the rank-and-file. Conneh is said to have tried to win a support base of former ULIMO fighters by promising to redistribute educational opportunities to the fighters for their participation in the war.¹⁴⁷ Moral ethnicity pressures did not become a significant factor in the emergence of LURD as it did in ULIMO; it was mainly driven from the

¹⁴² Brabazon, 2003, p. 3.

¹⁴³ E-mail exchange, KL, 29th January 2014

¹⁴⁴ Brabazon, 2003, p. 3.

¹⁴⁵ Brabazon, 2003, p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ Hazen, 2013, p. 118.

¹⁴⁷ Interview, Focus Group, Bonah Farm, 19th May 2009. This is also confirmed by: UN Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) Africa, Liberia, 19 April 2004, *Bitter LURD fighters say their leaders betrayed them*.

elite struggle for legitimacy. This can be attributed to the severity of their marginalisation under Taylor as compared to the NPFP war period discussed above.

Consequently, Mandingo support for LURD was mainly from the former Mandingo fighters that took part in ULIMO. These became central to LURD's mobilisation efforts rather than mass mobilisation of the broader community.¹⁴⁸ The local population referred to the rebels as ULIMO because of the Krahn and Mandingo that dominated its membership and leadership. They were seen as a re-united ULIMO, which had emerged under the new name LURD. According to James Brabazon, the British war reporter who covered LURD in the field during the war, "around 90% of the LURD command structure is former ULIMO, and by their own estimates at least 60% of their fighters are also from a ULIMO background" who share common histories and fighting experience.¹⁴⁹ Thus, even though LURD gained the support of some of their former Krahn allies, the rank-and-file that launched the first incursion in Lofa County were predominantly Mandingo.¹⁵⁰

On 21 April 1999, rebels launched an armed incursion, generally considered as the first attack of the organised LURD movement, from neighbouring Guinea against government forces and militia in the northern Liberian city of Voinjama.¹⁵¹ It was initially dismissed by the Taylor administration as the work of disgruntled members of the security forces.¹⁵² About 6,000 people in the County reportedly fled to neighbouring Guinea to escape the violence.¹⁵³ GOL soldiers were subsequently able to repel the first LURD attack in Voinjama, with the support of Loma militia organised as single barrel groups. LURD officially emerged in July 1999 in Freetown,

¹⁴⁸ This is confirmed in: Utas, 2005b, p. 151.

¹⁴⁹ Brabazon, 2003, p. 7.

¹⁵⁰ HRW, 1997.

¹⁵¹ Reported in: *The Inquirer*, Volume 8, Number 62, Monrovia, 21st April 1999. *The News*, Volume 10, Number 4, 29 April 1999. JPC, 1999, p. 4.

¹⁵² JPC, 1999, p. 5.

¹⁵³ *The News*, Volume 10, Number 4, 29 April 1999.

Sierra Leone. They began to take credit for the violent attacks in Lofa in July 2000.¹⁵⁴ Much like the NPFL rebellion, their stated goal was the overthrow of Taylor and recovery of lost lands and property. In mid-2000, approximately 70 LURD fighters crossed into Liberia from Guinea to launch a second attack on Voinjama. This time they succeeded in capturing the city and making it their headquarters in Liberia.

Even though LURD launched with Mandingo support, community support was not as significant as ULIMO. This was in part because it was borne out of leadership competition over who had the authority to lead rather than significant bottom pressures for elite action, as one informant put it: “LURD was an elite war, ULIMO was a grassroots and elite war. The Mandingo support was there. But it was not as strong as the ULIMO support [and so] LURD’s military strength became ethnically diverse.”¹⁵⁵ They mainly relied on remobilising disgruntled former fighters. When the LURD fighting spread from Lofa into Nimba, Bong, Gborpolu, and Bomi counties, recruitment of child soldiers became common. This was largely attributable to fluid territorial control in these counties as GOL forces fought to counter the rebellion.¹⁵⁶ The rebels gained control of Sawmill, an area fifty miles away from the capital Monrovia, in January 2002. But, GOL forces repelled them three days later. By early February 2002, LURD was fighting on the outskirts on Monrovia. The rebels were able to gain control over Gbarnga in May 2002. Taylor complained unsuccessfully against UN sanctions, which were preventing him from obtaining arms for his forces. He was unable to convince ECOWAS to send a peacekeeping force to

¹⁵⁴ Levitt, 2005, p. 218.

¹⁵⁵ Interview, Abu, Monrovia, 30th May 2009.

¹⁵⁶ Amnesty International, 22 November 2002 .

intervene in the conflict, but he recruited RUF mercenaries from Sierra Leone to support his forces.¹⁵⁷

In early 2003, LURD gained control over strategic locations in the counties surrounding Monrovia, such as Tubmanburg and Klay Junction in Bomi County, Robertsport in Cape Mount County, and Gbarnga, the former NPFL stronghold in Bong County, and the Saint Paul River Bridge area in Montserrado County where Monrovia is located. In June 2003 LURD gained control of western suburbs of Monrovia, Duala and New Kru Town.¹⁵⁸ By July 2003 they were attacking Monrovia. Taylor relinquished power and went into exile in Nigeria on 11 August 2003 following successful peace negotiations in Accra, Ghana that culminated in the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.¹⁵⁹ LURD played a significant role in peace negotiations setting the terms for them to be included in high profile positions in the transitional government that followed the ending of the civil war in 2003. Thus, while international support played a role in providing political elites with logistical support to call for mobilisation, bottom-up demands for accountability shaped elite strategy in underwriting the continuation of violence, and the response to remobilisation.¹⁶⁰

Conclusion

Under Taylor's regime, a reversal of the pre-war configuration of horizontal inequalities occurred in which Gio and Mano benefited from the ethnically biased leadership of Taylor while Mandingo and Krahn were excluded and marginalised.

¹⁵⁷See "ECOWAS: Cross Border Peace-Keeping only?," May 31, 2002. "West Africa's Rebel Recruits," November 15, 2002.

¹⁵⁸ Levitt, 2005, p. 225.

¹⁵⁹ See Aboagye & Bah, 2005.

¹⁶⁰ Interview, Focus Group, Paynesville, 21st March 2008.

Prominent Mandingo and Krahn elites, such as Alhaji Kromah and Roosevelt Johnson, suffered high profile exclusion from Taylor's government while their supporters were excluded from the military apparatus. Mandingo also suffered severe socio-economic losses in property, which they in part attributed to the lack of political will in the Taylor government to help returnees recover properties lost in the war and simultaneous empowering of 'others' by Taylor forces. High profile political exclusions and simultaneous socio-economic dispossession of property and land created a perception of severe horizontal inequalities against diaspora Mandingos, particularly in Lofa and Nimba, where Mandingos felt that their socially embedded norms and values surrounding property had been violated. This contributed to grievances that made Mandingo support for LURD possible.

However, internal moral debates within the Mandingo diaspora community show that even though people fought for political power and lost resources, the ULIMO violence was in part a response to the pressure building from below and an attempt by politico-military elites like Kromah to enforce unity on the community as leader. They had been driven by a sense of moral duty to fight for 'self-defence' against the NPFL. As Kromah struggled to maintain his legitimacy and rank-and-file sought leadership accountability, internal moral argument created incentives and motives for remobilisation of former ULIMO fighters in the LURD violence. It was led by a second generation of leaders that sought to outmanoeuvre Kromah. The concluding chapter will examine the transition from war to peace.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the relationship between ethnicity and violent group mobilisation in Liberia. The introduction suggested that explanations of violent group mobilisation in the Upper Guinea Coast have usually drawn on two main themes that tend to avoid or downplay ethnicity: the trope of ‘youth’ and elite predation. First, the mobilisation to launch the war is often written about in terms of youth rebellion. But my research suggests that civilians were not mobilised primarily with an agenda to fight on the basis of being young. Rather they were mobilised as members of ethnic groups with age and other differences. Second, mobilisation has been written about in terms of resource predation by greedy elites. From this vantage point, ethnic support for violent conflict is reduced to inter-group hatred, provoked and manipulated by self-interested elites competing for power and resources. But my research suggests that the instrumentality of ethnicity is not just an issue of elite manipulation; it can also involve widely held normative standards that constrain elites.

The approach I have taken in this thesis (discussed in Chapter 2) is to pursue a more nuanced explanation of ethnic mobilisation that illustrates how bottom-up pressures about moral economy of leadership motivated and incentivised the actions of key politico-military elites. I also sought to show how the perception of moral communities experiencing external attack—as well as dissolution from within—made ordinary people respond to elite calls for collective action at the beginning of the NPFL rebellion, and the ULIMO counter-rebellion that subsequently transformed into the LURD rebellion.

I have argued that historical horizontal inequalities (traced from Chapter 4) became severe and generated an external crisis that led to violent group mobilisation, not only because ethnic publics perceived that they had suffered a severe decline in the political power, which they had previously enjoyed and simultaneous socio-economic loss of property, but also because of the way these inequalities related to their socially-embedded norms and values (traced from Chapter 3). These norms and values, which legitimise internal inequalities and prescribe how good citizenship can be achieved, provide (i) legitimacy for the authority of elites and (ii) social insurance and esteem for non-elites. Consequently, the perception that the relationship between the elites and non-elites of ethnic groups was being undermined created a set of internal dynamics that made violence more likely.

Chapters 5 and 6 showed that people were aggrieved about the inability of their leaders to perform their obligations to, for instance, support them by obtaining and redistributing largesse. People felt insecure and that their leaders could not protect them. Ethnic elites were more likely to pursue violent strategies to outmanoeuvre potential political rivals and maintain their legitimacy within their communities. Internal pressures that brought on the ethnic elites by their ‘constituents’ because of moral ethnicity (the relationship between leaders and their supporters) shaped their decisions. At the same time, their supporters were more likely to respond to calls for violence because their leaders could not meet their obligations to protect them. Internal dissent and tensions were resolved through violent strategies, to assert rights to resources. For instance, Gio/Mano mobilised identity to assert rights and access to state resources controlled by Krahn elite and ancestral patrimony acquired by Mandingo ‘others’. Violence was not simply driven by the desire for resources, but

also by a desire to rectify a perceived violation of norms that enable people to cultivate images of self-dignity (the core of moral ethnicity) in society.

This concluding chapter provides further reflections on the wider implications of the study. It draws on a variety of sources, including secondary literature, newspaper archives and the results of the Fourth Round of Afrobarometer surveys. This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section focuses on the political transition from war to peace. This has been inclusive at the high profile political level to the point where horizontal differences between culturally defined groups are not considered to be particularly severe against the elites of any specific group by the Liberian public. Inclusivity at the top has made it more feasible for political competition to be managed through the democratic process. Post-war political affinities and alliances drawing on human rights discourses—such as women’s rights and solidarity—have emerged that straddle the ethnic divide. However, if the past is a good guide, elite power-sharing (as in the case of Doe) does not guarantee patrimonial redistribution or peace.

The second section in this chapter examines the rhetoric and strategies of political campaigns for post-war elections, as well as the way political leaders are selected at the regional level. It suggests that ethnic politics and moral ethnicity continue to be salient features of Liberian politics. In the Mandingo community in particular, a sense of exclusion by ethnic ‘others’ on the basis of belonging and national citizenship has enlivened internal debate about political leadership of the community. Historically the most socio-economically successful indigenous group in Liberia, loss of property in the war and post-war contests over Mandingo citizenship have impacted their spheres of influence. More crucially, the contestation of Mandingo status as autochthons by indigenous groups, such as the Gio and Mano, has

continued in the post-war. Contestation has not been limited to their rights to own land, but also extends to their rights to participate in the political process. For instance, in the 2005 and 2011 elections, the Mandingo's status as 'citizens' became a matter of dispute in the voter registration process. Liberians with Mandingo names were reportedly asked to prove their identity or face exclusion on the grounds that they are not Liberians. Mandingo elites have tried to form ethnic alliances to access political power in the post-war. This is similar to practices in neighbouring Cote d'Ivoire where the concept of 'Ivorite' (Ivorianess by birth) has been deployed since the 1990s to prevent 'foreigners' from occupying key political positions.¹

Liberia's post-war elections suggest that identity politics, and ethnic alliances in particular, will become even more central to national politics as multi-party politics takes root. These coalitions will represent contested moral communities that have the potential to pursue violent strategies to resolve internal dissent and tension. Understanding how moral communities evolve, and the role of violence, is therefore crucial to maintaining peace. The third, and final, section draws on the historical examples of Vai and Mandingo interaction in Liberia to analyse how moral communities change. This analysis has wider resonance in countries such as Cote d'Ivoire and beyond. The aim is to highlight the ways in which boundaries and contents of ethnicities were non-violently negotiated between Mandingo and other ethnic communities, such as the Vai in Liberia.² This constitutes a useful point of departure for further research into the evolution of ethnicities and their political thought.

¹ See: Ceuppens & Geschiere, 2005; Peter Geschiere, 2009; P. Geschiere & Nyamnjoh, 2000.

² See for example: Lynch, 2007b.

Horizontal inclusion in transitional and post-election governance

This section examines Liberia's political stability in the last ten years, focusing on policies of inclusivity and how these have been prioritised in both post-conflict governance.³ The emphasis on inclusive governance, participation and access to security institutions—in the presence of a large international peacekeeping force and under the scrutiny of the international community⁴—has re-enforced stability and broken with past patterns of political exclusion. Prioritising inclusion originated with the CPA, which officially ended the civil war in 2003. The CPA mandated two important features of inclusivity: First, it called for a comprehensive power-sharing arrangement in both the transitional government and legislative assembly in a manner that had never occurred in Liberia's long history, and bolstered civil society involvement in governance and economic management. Second, it called for the national security sector to be restructured not only to reflect the socio-political diversity of Liberia, but also in accordance with human rights norms. The International Contact Group for Liberia (ICGL)—with ECOWAS, the US and the EU as its lead actors—was established to ensure that the applicable provisions would be implemented.⁵ The post-war government of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (2005-present) has continued to prioritise inclusivity to the point where the presence of horizontal inequalities are not deemed to be pronounced against any specific ethnic community.⁶

³ See for example: Call, 2010.

⁴ For more on the international community's role in the peace process see for example: Aboagye & Bah, 2005; Jennings, 2007.

⁵ "Comprehensive Peace Agreement Between the Government of Liberia and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and Political Parties," 18 August 2003, p. 33.

⁶ For an overview of the principal members of her first cabinet see Table 1 in: Gerdes, 2011, pp. 38-39.

The peace talks that led to the ending of organised violence in Liberia were initiated by ECOWAS, in Accra, on 4 June 2003.⁷ President Charles Taylor expressed his intention to step down from office to bring peace to Liberia. However, the talks were interrupted when the UN Special Tribunal in Sierra Leone served a warrant for the arrest of Taylor, allegedly through the Government of Ghana. The negotiations moved to Akosombo, and back to Accra, before an agreement was reached between the Government of Liberia, LURD and MODEL to cease fire and cessation of hostilities on 17 June 2003.⁸ Following the agreement, LURD and MODEL placed two conditions in the way of the signing of a CPA. First, they insisted that Taylor had to abdicate office and leave Liberia. Second, they demanded to head a transitional government to be organised after Taylor's departure.

Taylor agreed to resign upon the arrival of peacekeepers to facilitate his smooth transfer of power. He accepted an offer of asylum in Nigeria on 6 July 2003. ECOWAS deployed a Vanguard Force into Monrovia on 4 August 2003. Taylor stepped down on 11 August; the vice president, Moses Blah, became interim president until a transitional government could be established. Following Taylor's departure, and before the signing of the CPA in Accra, LURD and MODEL leaders insisted on taking the chairmanship and vice-Chairmanship of the transitional government that was to be established. However, the African Union negotiators prevented them on the grounds that it would violate their principles on unconstitutional changes of government.⁹ An agreement was reached to allocate the positions to political parties and civil society, and to give LURD and MODEL leaders a say in the selection. The warring factions eventually signed the CPA in Accra on August 18, 2003, less than a week after Charles Taylor's resignation from the presidency. Through the signing of

⁷ Essy, 29 August 2003, p. 1.

⁸ Essy, 29 August 2003, p. 1.

⁹ Essy, 29 August 2003, p. 2.

the CPA organised violence ended in Liberia. This was in large part because the fighting elite agreed to give support to an accord that called for the formation of an inclusive transitional government giving them access to state power and patronage resources.

The National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) was comprised of an executive, a legislative assembly, a judiciary, and a number of commissions. The CPA mandated that senior officials of the NTGL should be selected among armed groups, political parties, and civil society to form a power-sharing executive. On 20 August 2003, Charles Gyude Bryant, a businessman, and Chairman of the Liberian Action Party, was selected to head the NTGL. He was given the mandate to rule until the inauguration of an elected government in January 2006. The NTGL was officially inaugurated on 14 October 2003 with 21 cabinet ministers including, LURD and MODEL leaders, members of the former Taylor regime, and members of political parties/civil society. Each of the factions was asked to name five ministers in Bryant's cabinet.¹⁰

In addition to the cabinet, the CPA mandated that political parties and civil society representatives be included in a power-sharing arrangement in the transitional legislative assembly. The total membership of the legislative assembly was 76. Of this membership, 12 came from LURD, MODEL and Taylor's government, 18 came from political parties, 7 came from civil society organizations, and 15 represented each of the country's counties.¹¹ The CPA called for a Governance Reform Commission to be formed, with its members appointed from a list provided by civil society

¹⁰ For more on the composition of the cabinet under Bryant see: Executive Mansion, Office of the Advisor on the Scrupulous Implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Liberia, and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), and Political Parties.

¹¹ "Comprehensive Peace Agreement Between the Government of Liberia and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and Political Parties," 18 August 2003, p. 24.

organizations and including their representatives. It also established a Contract and Monopolies Commission, including civil society representatives that were 'independent of the commercial sector'.¹² These measures were established with the goal of including while simultaneously preventing LURD or MODEL or Taylor's government from dominating high profile political power and controlling national resources in Liberia. It helped to reduce inter-ethnic political rivalry as no single warring faction could control political power. The power-sharing arrangement helped to foster a perception of political inclusion.¹³

Apart from elite power-sharing arrangements, internationally led Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) programs contributed to the perception of equal access and socio-politically inclusive participation in security institutions. The CPA mandated the demobilisation and disbanding of the rebel groups and government militias. The international community was called upon for the "provision of adequate financial and technical resources" to achieve these tasks.¹⁴ The UN was tasked with the DDR of all rebels and militia, as well as police reform, while the US was tasked with leading the reform of the national armed forces.

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was established in September 2003 under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. It was initially provided with 18,000 peacekeepers. The United Nations passed a Security Council resolution on September 19, 2003 tasking UNMIL with the implementation of a comprehensive DDR program. Due to the large amount of irregular troops, the number of fighters

¹² "Comprehensive Peace Agreement Between the Government of Liberia and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and Political Parties," 18 August 2003, p. Articles 16 and 17 .

¹³ Interview, Fofana, Allentown, 17th Sep 2014.

¹⁴ "Comprehensive Peace Agreement Between the Government of Liberia and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and Political Parties," 18 August 2003. See also: Ansorge & Antwi-Ansorge, 2010, p. 271.

actually requiring the DDR process was unknown at the time. UNMIL would also take responsibility for the reform of the Liberia National Police.¹⁵ The DDR process was highly popular and a significant part of the disarmament and demobilisation operations concluded in October 2004.¹⁶ This was partly attributable to the power-sharing political settlement, which led various leaders in the transitional government to call upon rank-and-file supporters to demobilisation.¹⁷

The CPA called for the AFL to be restructured to include LURD and MODEL forces, with the US in a lead role.¹⁸ The AFL's demobilisation was total, it involved retiring all forces. Guided by the CPA, an arrangement between the United States and the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) regarding SSR was undertaken on 17 May 2005. The arrangement specified that:

Service in the reformed AFL shall be open to qualified citizens of Liberia. Applicants will be screened with respect to education, professional, medical and other fitness qualifications, including prior history with regard to human rights abuses. The AFL will reflect the national character of Liberia in terms of ethnicity, gender and religion.¹⁹

Significant ethnic diversity was achieved because the most qualified applicants to the AFL were ethnically diverse.²⁰ But many ex-combatants failed to meet the educational and human rights threshold established for recruitment into the reformed AFL. The non-recruitment of former fighters and soldiers from the security sector was not based on criteria of ethnicity, therefore, while there have been demonstrations and skirmishes, these have not resulted in perceptions of ethnic marginalisation.²¹

¹⁵ Ansorge & Antwi-Ansorge, 2010, p. 271.

¹⁶ Ansorge & Antwi-Ansorge, 2010, p. 272.

¹⁷ Ansorge & Antwi-Ansorge, 2010, p. 273.

¹⁸ "Comprehensive Peace Agreement Between the Government of Liberia and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and Political Parties," 18 August 2003, p. Article 7.

¹⁹ Arrangement between the Government of the United States of America and the National Transitional Government of Liberia Concerning Security Sector Reform in the Republic of Liberia, (2005), 1a.

²⁰ Ansorge & Antwi-Ansorge, 2010, p. 278.

²¹ Ansorge & Antwi-Ansorge, 2010.

International oversight of the DDR and SSR process has created the perception of a fair process that is hard to delegitimise.

On 11 October 2005, Liberians voted in their first post-war elections, followed by a presidential run-off on 8th November 2005.²² Twenty-one political parties and one independent candidate contested the presidency.²³ The main contenders for the presidency were George Weah, of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC), and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, of the Unity Party (UP). Weah was a newcomer who had been raised in a slum in Monrovia, but had amassed wealth as a successful international footballer. Despite his popularity as the local favourite, he was seen as an oddity on the political scene because he did not have a college degree. Johnson-Sirleaf, a career politician raised in the Settler establishment, had had a long history in Liberian politics. Educated in the United States, Johnson-Sirleaf was a finance minister under Tolbert, and former ally of Charles Taylor until they fell out. Johnson-Sirleaf has tried to avoid being seen as a ‘former warlord’ by testifying at the TRC that she had initially backed his war effort because she was “fooled about the real intentions of Mr Taylor”.²⁴ With a background as employee of the World Bank and the United Nations, she was seen as the international favourite.²⁵ Weah came in first in the first round of the 2005 elections, while Johnson-Sirleaf came in second.²⁶ However, he was defeated in the run-off by Johnson-Sirleaf.²⁷

²² David Harris, 2006.

²³ Republic of Liberia National Elections October 11, 2005 and November 8, 2005, Election Observation Mission Final Report, The International Republican Institute, Washington D.C., 8.

²⁴ The BBC also reports this: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7887117.stm> (last accessed 3 March 2015).

²⁵ For more on Johnson-Sirleaf’s background see: Johnson-Sirleaf, 2009.

²⁶ NEC, 11th October 2005 .

²⁷ NEC, 11th October 2005 .

Since coming to power in 2006, President Johnson-Sirleaf had stressed the need for “freedom, equality, unity and individual progress.”²⁸ Although, she does not explicitly speak of ethnic rivalries, she has highlighted past horizontal inequalities between groups as a source of conflict in her speeches to the nation, and made national unity a goal of her administration.²⁹ For instance, in a 2011 speech entitled “There is more that unites us than divides us”, presented on Unification Day³⁰, she employed the words of the national anthem to call for unity:

My Fellow Liberians: ‘In union strong success is sure, we cannot fail ... we will over all prevail.’ We utter these words every time we sing our National Anthem – a song that proclaims our allegiance to this Land of Liberty, this Liberia. In it, we profess of that we are a people united, regardless of tribe, clan, religion, gender or economic status. We bear witness that, as a people, we shall not stand for divisions and hatred.³¹

In an extraordinary move towards national unity, that marks a departure from her predecessors, Johnson-Sirleaf declared that:

On the national level, Ramadan is a reminder that Islam has always been a part of Liberia and that Liberian Muslims have made extraordinary contributions to our country. The contribution of our Muslim brothers and sisters in advancing peace, tolerance and progress is essential for Liberia’s national renewal.³²

This is particularly significant because of the association of Mandingo identity with Islam (discussed in Chapter 3). In light of on-going ethnic debates by groups such as the Gio and Mano about the status of Mandingos as national citizens of Liberia, when their local territorial belonging in the countryside is contested, this is seen as an attempt to bridge the inter-ethnic divide.³³ Gio and Mano in Nimba have refused to

²⁸ Inaugural address of H. E. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, 16th July 2006.

URL:http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/inaugural_add_1.pdf. (last accessed 26th September 2014.)

²⁹ See for example: Kaufmann & Ammann, 2013, pp. 13-15.

³⁰ Unification Day is a national holiday in Liberia that was originally created by President Tubman, and reinstated by President Johnson-Sirleaf in 2009.

³¹ Marking the Observance of National Unification Day, 2011, <http://www.emansion.gov.lr/> (last accessed: 26th September 2014). See also: Kaufmann & Ammann, 2013.

³² Statement of H. E. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf <http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/President-Message-to--Muslims-at%20the-end-of-Ramadan.pdf> (last accessed 26th September 2014)

³³ Interview, Jabateh, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

return lands to Mandingos previously resident in the County on the grounds that they are ‘strangers’ from Guinea.

Johnson-Sirleaf’s practice has not always followed her speeches in attempting to stress Mandingo inclusion. For instance, prior to the 2011 elections, a disputed market area in Ganta was declared eminent domain and appropriated by the government, even though Mandingos claiming ownership to the land were able to produce title deeds issued by the state to parts of the land. It was seen as an attempt to gain Gio and Mano votes to the former I-NPFL leader and fellow presidential candidate Prince Y. Johnson.³⁴ Such actions contribute to the sense of mistrust that many ordinary people feel towards the state, in connection with their rights and interests.

Apart from her speeches and practices, President Johnson-Sirleaf has tried to pursue an ethnically inclusive governance strategy, which is aimed at establishing a balance between different ethnic groups and regions within the state. Although Settlers dominate her administration representing approximately 50 percent of the total political elite, all indigenous ethnic communities in Liberia are represented in the main state institutions. In forming her government and other state institutions, President Johnson-Sirleaf considered the educational and professional attainment of nominees. Many indigenous appointees were selected from those who led the student movements in the 1970s.³⁵ She allocated high profile cabinet positions to elites associated with warring factions. For instance, a senior LURD figure was appointed Transport Minister; former Taylor government officials were also appointed as Minister of National Security and Interior Minister. Some rebel elites were also offered less high profile positions. However, inequality in high profile representation

³⁴ Kaufmann & Ammann, 2013, p. 16.

³⁵ See for example: Sawyer, 2008.

persists. Despite their relatively small size, Settlers are overrepresented and more advantaged in political representation, in part because of their historically disproportionate access to higher education. In the absence of severe exclusion of any particular group, this bias has not been particularly problematic.

Johnson-Sirleaf's regime has been heavily criticised for increasing corruption. Hensell and Gerdes have observed that, "practices of patronage and clientelist inclusion [have been] a central element in the [administration's] politics of accommodation. Building personalized networks by putting trusted confidantes [including family appointees] in senior political positions or by co-opting elite members influential in segments of society [remains] an essential strategy" for the presidency.³⁶ As a consequence, the administration has had difficulty controlling practices of revenue appropriation by patrimonial elites. The administration's critics charge that patrimonial activity has worsened under John-Sirleaf.

The unprecedented inclusion of various elites in her regime may have contributed to aggravating patrimonial practices, but it has also served as an important break with past patterns of severe political exclusion of culturally defined groups. The analysis in previous chapters has demonstrated that this was an important condition that contributed to creating the context for violent group mobilisation. In the popular imagination, horizontal inequalities persist in the post-war in the absence of proportional representation in state power.³⁷ The policy of inclusive governance contributes to an environment in which political competition can be managed through the democratic process. However, if the past is a good guide, elite power-sharing (as in the case of Doe discussed in Chapter 5) does not always result in patrimonial

³⁶ Hensell & Gerdes, 2012, pp. 165-166.

³⁷ Interview, Focus Group, Ganta, 18th March 2014. Interview, Jabateh, Ganta 20th March 2014.

redistribution, and lasting peace. As the next section will show, ethnicity remains a salient feature in post-war politics.

The salience of ethnicity in post-war democratic processes

The emergence of non-ethnic bases of support in post-war politics, the absence of rebel groups transformed into political parties, and the lack of an incumbent has prompted analysts, such as David Harris, to suggest that the 2005 elections were the ‘freest and fairest’ elections in Liberia’s political history.³⁸ However, evidence that Mandingo status as ‘citizens’ was widely contested in the voter registration process with some voters excluded on the grounds that they are not Liberians, suggests that this was not the reality for all groups.³⁹ Events in the 2005 elections show that ethnic appeals and support remains a salient factor in post-war democratic processes in Liberia. This section investigates why, and what impact this has on the Liberian political landscape.

An important factor that contributed to Weah’s popularity in the 2005 elections was the Settler-indigenous ethnic cleavage. There was a general opposition to the possibility of a Settler president among many indigenous Liberians.⁴⁰ For instance, political movements such as the Heritage Movement emerged with the aim of ensuring that a person of Settler origin would not win the presidency. According to Amos Sawyer, the group comprised “die-hard tribalists who see the establishment of a retaliatory hegemonic regime as the most effective way to prevent Congo [that is,

³⁸ See: David Harris, 2006, p. 377.

³⁹ See for example: Tiawan Gongloe, ‘Questioning Mandingoes Alone For National Identity Is Unfair’, *The Perspective*, Atlanta, 16th May 2005.

⁴⁰ Sawyer, 2008, p. 187.

Settler] resurgence.”⁴¹ The group underscored a popular concern about the political resurgence of previously dominant Settler elites. Even though the group fragmented, many of its leaders went on to throw their weight behind Weah.

In the 2005 elections, both Weah and Johnson-Sirleaf appealed to diverse constituencies to try to mobilise support. Weah was able to mobilise support, particularly among youths, through a campaign that emphasised the failings of the educated elite and the economic and social rights of the marginalised poor.⁴² Johnson-Sirleaf’s campaign tried to appeal to female voters by aligning with a ‘new’ post-war peacebuilding agenda for women’s empowerment that emphasised the rights and issues of women.⁴³ International and local peacebuilding in Liberia has popularised the discourse of human rights—especially women and children’s rights—in the aftermath of the war. Women’s organisations emerged that straddled ethnic and class divisions. Many of these endorsed Johnson-Sirleaf’s campaign for leadership.⁴⁴ Attempts to mobilise non-ethnic bases of support have prompted some scholars to underplay the salience of ethnic factors in the democratic process.⁴⁵ However, there were several occurrences in the lead up to, and including, the 2005 elections that suggests that ethnic factors played a salient role in the democratic process.

The Weah campaign emphasised his ‘authentic native citizenship’ as an ethnic Kru. By contrast, Johnson-Sirleaf had to overcome a widespread public perception that she is of Settler origin because of her background in the Settler establishment and membership in the TWP. Her campaign went to great lengths to articulate her native roots and self-identity as an indigenous Liberian, against an opposition that tried to

⁴¹ Sawyer, 2008, p. 187.

⁴² See for example: Sawyer, 2008.

⁴³ See for example Bauer’s analysis of Ellen’s mobilisation of women: Bauer, 2009.

⁴⁴ See for example: Kwanue, C. Y., ‘Women endorse Ellen candidacy’, *Liberian Observer Newspaper*, 26th October 2006. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200510260304.html> (last accessed 29th September 2014)

⁴⁵ See for example: Bauer, 2009.

highlight her connections with the Settler establishment. Throughout her election campaign, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf articulated a self-identity based on Gola and Kru ethnic heritage. She spoke at length about her Gola and Kru grandmothers and her background as the granddaughter of an indigenous chief.⁴⁶ After winning the elections she continued to express this identity in public speeches such as her inaugural address.⁴⁷

Events surrounding the election results in Nimba suggest that ethnic factors, such as the use of ethnic appeals by party leaders, played an important role in Johnson-Sirleaf's run-off win against Weah.⁴⁸ An important factor that contributed to the significant turn around in the run-off was Johnson-Sirleaf's ability to overturn Weah's initial lead in Nimba County. Johnson-Sirleaf progressed from less than 6 percent of the first round vote to 77.1 percent of the run-off votes in Nimba, Liberia's second most populous county.⁴⁹ This has been partly credited to local endorsement by Adolphus Dolo (NPFL General Peanut Butter) and Joseph Korto (seventh place presidential candidate in the first round). It has also been attributed to "a belated backlash in Nimba" following Weah's campaign pronouncement in Doe's home town in Tuzon, Grand Gedeh County.⁵⁰ He stated that he was an indebted 'son' of Doe who gave him a start in his footballing career. This visit was followed by newspaper reports that Weah had promised high profile positions to Krahn politicians, including former AFL general of Doe, Charles Julu. Weah support in Grand Gedeh increased in

⁴⁶ Sirleaf, 2009.

⁴⁷ Inaugural address of H. E. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, 16th July 2006.
[URL: http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/inaugural_add_1.pdf](http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/inaugural_add_1.pdf) (last accessed 26th September 2014.)

⁴⁸ Bauer, 2009, p. 204.

⁴⁹ National Elections Commission: <http://www.necliberia.org/results/> (last accessed 30th September 2014).

⁵⁰ This account is obtained from: David Harris, 2006, p. 389. and corroborated in Sawyer, 2008, p. 190..

the run-off, but his support in Nimba (with a population six times larger than Grand Gedeh) dropped.

Apart from the presidential elections, regional factors, particularly ethnic considerations, played a significant role in the selection of many Senators and local representatives. For instance, in Nimba County the NPP part that was formed from the NPFL did not win any seats. However, ethnic-based representation played an important role in the selection of Prince Y. Johnson (commander in NPFL and leader of the I-NPFL) as senator from the Gio community, and Adolphus Dolo (commander of the NPFL) as Senator from the Mano community.⁵¹ Johnson stood as an independent candidate and Dolo stood for the Coalition for Transformation of Liberia (COTOL). Sawyer has observed that the senatorial race in many parts of the country in the 2005 elections was based on “prearranged formulas among local people for sharing representation among locally demarcated regions or among ethnic or sub-ethnic communities within the county.”⁵² Despite the emergence of non-ethnic bases of support, particularly gender that draws on human rights discourses, ethnic discourse and bases of support was an important factor in the 2005 competitive elections.

Moral ethnicity norms, especially around leadership, played an important role in the choice of particular candidates in the 2005 elections. This was remarkably evident in ethnic communities that mobilised for war—notably the Gio, Mano and Mandingo. Mandingo informants suggest that a sense of marginalisation by ethnic ‘others’ on the basis of belonging and national citizenship has enlivened internal debate about political leadership of the community in the aftermath of the war.⁵³

⁵¹ Sawyer, 2008, p. 191.

⁵² Sawyer, 2008, p. 191.

⁵³ Interview, Focus Group, Ganta, 20th March 2014.

At the regional level, a key consideration in the choice of candidates like Dolo and Johnson was their standing as patrons and record of past adherence to norms of leadership moral economy, as well as likelihood that they would meet anticipated patronage expectations in the future.⁵⁴ In particular, a candidate's reputation for providing protection to their local community, development assistance, and benevolent redistribution of resources shaped their endorsement and ability to gain ethnic support to win a position. Johnson and Dolo were considered exceptional local leaders of armed groups in the war.⁵⁵ They were also seen as "true sons of Nimba" who would represent Gio and Mano interests in the Liberian senate.⁵⁶ They in turn based their campaign for the senate on their past record as 'defenders' of the Gio and Mano communities, promising that properties taken from Mandingos during the war would not be returned.⁵⁷ Liberian political analysts such as Sawyer note that: "Long-standing rules rooted in local traditions are being revived and applied, and new rules necessitated by new realities are being negotiated."⁵⁸

Similar to the war period, post-war discursive construction of ethnicity among the Gio and Mano is done in opposition to the Mandingo 'strangers'. In part, it forms a basis for justifying continued occupation of lands that had been previously acquired by Mandingo businessmen. But the focus has extended beyond exclusive claims to autochthonous belonging and ownership of land in Nimba, to include excluding Mandingos from standing for public office in the post-war period.⁵⁹ This is similar to conflicts in Côte D'Ivoire analysed by Geschiere, where these debates tend to focus on issues of eligibility for high profile state office; Geschiere refers to this as a 'crisis

⁵⁴ Lynch, 2011, pp. 23-29.

⁵⁵ Interview, Focus Group, Lakpazee, 17th April 2009.

⁵⁶ Interview, Zawolo, 11th February 2014.

⁵⁷ Interview, Zawolo, 11th February 2014. This is corroborated by: Gerdes, 2013, p. 201.

⁵⁸ Sawyer, 2008, p. 198.

⁵⁹ Interview, Cooper, Ganta, 18th March 2014.

of citizenship'.⁶⁰ Similar accounts of Mandingo exclusion from their lands have been found in Lofa, where ethnic Loma dispute Mandingo territorial belonging in the County.⁶¹ Disputes about belonging turn on the issue of who should be considered as an authentic citizen of a particular territory.⁶²

The general emphasis on 'authentic native citizenship' against the Mandingo can be attributed to continuing suspicion among ethnic groups that were previously marginalised from access to high profile state power and socio-economic resources about the monopolistic and exclusionary propensities of previously dominant 'others'. In this sense, memories of historic horizontal inequalities provide critical background to post-war political competition.⁶³ This energises post-war politics of territorial belonging, which is considered one of the main security problems in the aftermath of the war. According to the results of the Fourth Round of Afrobarometer surveys conducted in Liberia, struggles for land and other properties between, as well as within, communities constitute the leading source of tension and intermittent violence in the post-war: 62% of Liberians rank land ownership and distribution as the most important cause of violent ethnic conflict.⁶⁴ The TRC report warned of a likelihood of serious violence if the issue of land ownership and distribution was not sufficiently addressed.⁶⁵ The absence of group mobilisation has not prevented sporadic, low-level violent skirmishes in some parts of the countryside over the issue of land ownership and control.⁶⁶ But the land issue has not been the only source of tension.

⁶⁰ See for example: Peter Geschiere, 2009.

⁶¹ For more on Mandingo exclusion as 'strangers' without belonging see for example: Bøås, 2009; Boas & Dunn, 2013; Højbjerg, 2010.

⁶² Bøås, 2009, p. 20.

⁶³ This resonates with the idea of ethnic pasts as moral lens in: Lynch, 2011, pp. 23-29.

⁶⁴ Afrobarometer, 2008.

⁶⁵ TRC, 2009.

⁶⁶ Gberie, 5 October 2010, p. 7.

Crucially, events on the ground suggest that Mandingo participation in the democratic process has not always been inclusive. In Counties where Mandingos maintain a sizable population, such as Nimba, Bong, and Lofa, their indigenous neighbours have historically questioned their citizenship as Liberians on the grounds that they lack a ‘homeland’, but it has become a particularly controversial political issue in the post-war. Two areas of contestation have featured in the 2005, and continued in the subsequent 2011, elections. First, the status as Mandingos as national ‘citizens’ became as a matter of dispute in the voter registration process for the 2005 presidential and parliamentary elections. Liberians with Mandingo names were reportedly asked to prove their identity or face exclusion on the grounds that they are not Liberians.⁶⁷ Local human rights groups condemned it as discriminatory and in violation of Mandingo civic and human rights.⁶⁸ An example is that of Siddiq Konneh who recounted that: “During the 2005 general and presidential elections, there were several attempts by some voter’s registrars to deny me my fundamental right to register and vote” because of his identity as a Mandingo.⁶⁹ Johanna Söderström recounts similar circumstances that occurred in the 2005 elections in her doctoral thesis.⁷⁰

Similar allegations were made about the 2011 elections. Members of COMASL reported that the eligibility of some Mandingos to vote in the 2011 elections had been challenged by National Election Commission staff because of

⁶⁷ See for example: Tiawan Gongloe, ‘Questioning Mandingoes Alone For National Identity Is Unfair’, *The Perspective*, Atlanta, 16th May 2005.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*

⁶⁹ Siddiq Konneh, “The Liberian Elections: Stop The Disfranchisement of The Mandingo People.” 17th January 2011.

http://www.limany.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=776%3Athe-liberian-elections-stop-the-disfranchisement-of-the-mandingo-people&catid=66%3Anews&Itemid=28 (last accessed 27th September 2014).

⁷⁰ Söderström, 2011, p. 214.

“sentiment and prejudice”.⁷¹ The Federation of Liberian Mandingo Association of the United States of America (FELMAUSA) also complained about “Discriminatory Practices in Liberia’s Voter Registration Process” against Mandingos.⁷² An alleged 400 voters were denied registration in Bong County.⁷³

Second, Mandingo participation as candidates in regional elections has also been contested. Regional opponents have drawn on exclusionary political themes against Mandingo candidates, particularly around the issue of land ownership and ethnic belonging. For example in the 2011 senatorial race in Bong County, Ansu Sesay, a well-known Mandingo businessman from Gbarnga was condemned when he sought to contest against the incumbent Kpelle lawmaker George Mulbah, in Gbarney, Jorquelleh district. Local Kpelle “chanted anti-Mandingo slogans” against Sesay’s campaign because it would “betray the norm” of the community and the “true sons and daughters of the land”.⁷⁴

Consequently, political representation of the Mandingo community and its interests has become an important issue of debate. In the 2005 elections, Mandingo candidates with weakened legitimacy did not win substantial ethnic support. This was particularly evident among the fractured Mandingo politico-military leadership. For instance, Alhaji Kromah was not able to mobilise substantial ethnic support across the diaspora, despite significant support for ALCOP in the regional elections in Lofa.⁷⁵ Similarly, Sekou Conneh of LURD was also not able to galvanise ethnic support in

⁷¹ See for example: ‘Several Mandingoes Denied Registration’ in *The Analyst Newspaper*, 27th January 2011; Kaufmann & Ammann, 2013, p. 18.

⁷² FELMAUSA Statement: “Register All Mandingoes who were unjustly denied” Mandingo Group Calls on NEC”, *the Liberian Journal*, 2nd February 2011. <http://theliberianjournal.com/index.php?st=news&sbst=details&rid=1856> (last accessed 27th September 2014)

⁷³ “Over 400 Denied Voters’ Registration In Bong Co.”, Public Agenda, LIMANY, 17th January 2011. http://www.limany.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=777:over-400-denied-voters-registration-in-bong-co-&catid=66:news (last accessed 27th September 2014).

⁷⁴ Interview, Saye G., Cuttington, 7th March 2014.

⁷⁵ David Harris, 2006, p. 385.

his bid for the presidency as leader of the Progressive Democratic Party (PRODEM).⁷⁶ Kromah gained 18 percent of votes in Lofa placing 8th in the national vote, while Conneh gained only 1 percent placing 15th in the national vote. Their opponents, comprising many of the former youthful ‘intellectuals’ who opposed Kromah’s leadership of ULIMO and Conneh’s leadership of LURD, did not run for office partly because of participation in the NTGL. They organised the National Mandingo Caucus (NMC) under the leadership of Musa Bility, a businessman from Nimba. In the 2005 presidential elections, the NMC consisting of less than 20 members declared Mandingo support for the Unity Party of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, rather than Conneh or Kromah or their parties.⁷⁷ But this was opposed by a “grassroots” Mandingo organisation calling itself the Concerned Mandingo Society of Liberia (COMASL) on the grounds that the NMC had failed to consult with ordinary people, and was attempting to impose their leadership on the community.⁷⁸ This is reminiscent of the expectations within Mandingo moral economy that public opinion would be incorporated into leadership decision-making that impacted the diaspora network (Chapter 3). It also shows continuity in debated from the war in which rank-and-file levelled accusations against Kromah for being “dictatorial” in his leadership (Chapter 6).

When many of its members gained prominent positions in the Johnson Sirleaf administration and in the business sector, they were expected to adhere to moral economy norms of providing political protection and creating opportunities for members of the community as a way of legitimising their authority.⁷⁹ NMC’s most

⁷⁶ Hensell & Gerdes, 2012, p. 159.

⁷⁷ See column by: Nyei, 2009.. Johnson-Sirleaf herself was previously married to a Mandingo and considered to have links with the community’s elite.

⁷⁸ See for example: Gibson Jerue, ‘Liberia Mandingos Debate Support for Ellen’ in *The Analyst Newspaper*, 19th August 2005.

⁷⁹ Nyei, 2009.

important contribution to the community has been attributed to setting up scholarship projects to sponsor Mandingo students at the University of Liberia. But they have been criticised for not seeing the student through to graduation and employment in jobs that would make them “become resourceful in giving back to the community”.⁸⁰

According to N. Konneh, there is an expectation for leaders in the NMC to:

Expand the circle of successful middle class; help provide scholarship for our young people to expand the professional pools of Mandingoes that will function as health care providers, administrators, security, personal, judges, in various parts of the country, particularly in those places where our people are in high numbers.⁸¹

These expectations resonate with past moral economy of leadership and legitimacy, in which people looked to successful merchants to create opportunities for upstarts and provide the public good of political protection. Their rivals in COMASL, which claims to represent “disaffected Mandingo youths” and “grassrooters” have been very vocal in accusing NMC members of selfish ambition.⁸² COMASL tried to increase Mandingo political representation at the local level in the 2005 elections by negotiating with prospective Mandingo representatives in predominantly Mandingo areas in Montserrado County to support the election of one aspirant. The focus was on the identity of the candidate rather than their party affiliation with UP, CDC, ALCOP or PRODEM.⁸³ For instance, the election of a Mandingo candidate as one of the two senators of Lofa County was based on the consolidation of the Mandingo vote in support of the Mandingo candidate against 15 opponents.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Nyei, 2009.

⁸¹ N. Konneh, 2011.

⁸² Nyei, 2009.

⁸³ See for example: Manyou MAS Bility, ‘The Liberian Mandingoes Community: 2005 in retrospect, A way forward for 2011’, 7th January 2011 on mandingonations.com: <http://www.mandingonations.com/January2011/2011electionsinLiberia.htm> (last accessed 1st October 2014).

⁸⁴ Sawyer, 2008, pp. 193-194.

There have been bottom-up calls for leadership agenda within the Mandingo community to increase their ethnic sphere of influence in high profile state power and to address “land disputes [and provide] social services, development activities, cultural affairs, or political activism and mobilization in the community”.⁸⁵ Post-war political representation of the Mandingo community comes with an expectation that leadership will increase their comparative political and socio-economic influence in the state arena in order to protect the community. Their deliberations suggest that moral ethnicity continues to be an important feature of political competition in Liberia. But, intra- and inter-ethnic negotiation of ethnic identity by Mandingos and their neighbours has not always occurred through violent strategies.

Negotiating ethnic change: lessons from the Vai-Mandingo past

The previous section showed that Mandingo’s existence as an ethnic group in Liberia is currently contested. While they received official recognition as a community under Settler rule (Chapter 4), various indigenous groups challenge their belonging. A discourse of ethnic belonging that depicts them as ‘strangers’ has fuelled violent outcomes in Nimba and elsewhere, and remains a source of tension. This is partly because Mandingo migrant-traders kept their belonging ambiguous to prevent control by host populations.⁸⁶ Most importantly, local narratives of shared history and notions of morality and social justice, associated with the construction and negotiation of changing ethnicities, served to frame Mandingos as people who do not deserve the successes they have achieved, because they have not followed accepted norms and

⁸⁵ Nyei, 2009.

⁸⁶ This is noted by: A. Konneh, 1996a.

values.⁸⁷ For instance, Gio and Mano violence against the Mandingo was motivated by a general perception that they were a threat to moral community resources because they had not followed accepted stranger-father norms, and therefore had to be excluded. But the converse is also possible.

The negotiation and renegotiation of changing identities are not always resolved through violent strategies. The relativity of ‘belonging’ means that concepts of the ‘other’ “can be renegotiated at ever closer range ... with the possibility, for example, of debates between and within groups” about “who is who” and who really belongs where.”⁸⁸ A case in point is the Vai community’s historical integration of Mandingos and vice versa, which occurred through a renegotiation of shared ethnic history and notions of morality and social justice. Vai and Mandingo communities have become so close that many claim both identities. The idea that Vai are also Mandingo is a common assertion. As one informant, who identifies as both Vai and Mandingo, put it: “My grandfather was a Mandingo, but my father grew up with the Vai.”⁸⁹ The Vai example shows that there are—and have been—avenues available for intra- and inter-ethnic negotiation and transition of identity in contemporary Liberia that involve ethnic amalgamation. The Vai developed inclusive narratives of belonging refashioning relevant ethnic content that forged an alliance with the Mandingo community. This is particularly significant because the Mandingos are generally perceived as a group that moved from their ancestral lands in Guinea, but are not totally embedded in any territory in Liberia.

The Vai are a Mande-speaking ethnic community straddling the north-western border between Liberia and Sierra Leone. They are concentrated in an area extending

⁸⁷ This is similar to occurrences in Cote d’Ivoire, Kenya, and elsewhere: Peter Geschiere, 2009; Lynch, 2011.

⁸⁸ Lynch, 2011, p. 10.

⁸⁹ Interview, Ibrahim M., 25th January 2014.

from the Atlantic coast into the interior forest of Grand Cape Mount County and Bomi County, Liberia.⁹⁰ Similar to the Gio, Mano, Kpelle and Mandingo, their origins can be traced to the old Sudanic empires. They began to migrate towards the coast more than 500 years ago.⁹¹ Their exact numbers are unknown. Based on the 2008 census they constitute less than 4 percent of the population.⁹²

The Vai's existence as a distinct ethnic group can be traced to the 17th century.⁹³ The pre-Settler Vai economy was based on agriculture and trade. Ordinary Vai were produce-oriented.⁹⁴ They grew produce (such as rice and kola) as labourers and transported them along the trade route as porters. The Upper strata were mainly involved in trade. They acted as middlemen between European traders on the coast and the interior people. This marked contrast between those who sold trade commodities and skills and those who gave their labour power was key to their self-concept.⁹⁵ Wealth was primarily defined in terms of the number of people whose services a person could control.⁹⁶ As with all ethnicities, what belonging meant had many layers—including gender, occupation, age, as well as a dichotomy between those who are *manja den* (literally a chief's child) or freeborn and those who are *jonnu* (in servitude).⁹⁷ *Jonnu* were excluded from kinship belonging, but they shared sodality belonging with *manja den* through initiation into membership of power associations, notably *Poro*. Authority was legitimated through patron-client exchange,

⁹⁰ S. E. Holsoe, 1967, p. 6; A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 50.

⁹¹ For more on the history of the Vai see for example: S. Holsoe, 1979; S. E. Holsoe, 1967, 1987; Jones, 1981.

⁹² This is based on 2008 census data: http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/Population_by_County.pdf and more recent estimates: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/li.html>: (last accessed 12th May 2013).

⁹³ See for example: Jones, 1983b.

⁹⁴ S. Holsoe, 1979, p. 293.

⁹⁵ S. Holsoe, 1979.

⁹⁶ S. Holsoe, 1979, p. 287.

⁹⁷ S. Holsoe, 1979, p. 288.

and institutions such as the *Poro*.⁹⁸ Servitude in Vai society differed from that in agrarian communities such as the Gio and Mano. Because the *jonnu* formed a legible stratum among the Vai, they could engage in conscious and collective group action as agrarian ‘slaves’ to defend their economic interests. Most internal tensions were generated by ambiguity in norms of social exchange brought on by changes in the external context.

Between 1680-1807, European demand for slaves increased. The Vai economy relied on servitude, as such they relinquished relatively low supplies of slaves for export.⁹⁹ They continued to conduct trade in export goods, relying on the manpower of their servants. Svend Holsoe notes a marked change in the economy of slavery after the practice was abolished by Britain in 1807.¹⁰⁰ The increased perils of clandestine slave trading raised the value of exportable slaves. The Vai economic priority shifted from accumulating slaves to obtaining and exporting them for ‘profit’. Around 1826, three-fourths of the estimated total Vai population of 12,000 to 15,000, were slaves or *jonnu*.¹⁰¹ The increased sale of exportable slaves subverted earlier relations between patrons and subjects. Some chiefs manipulated traditional system of fining adulterers to create prisoners for export.¹⁰² ‘Profit’ became more attractive than patronage in the competition for wealth and power. What mattered in the market was a *manja den*’s leader’s control over supply of slaves, rather than consideration for servants in whom his predecessors would have shared the ‘freedom’ of belonging in exchange for faithful service. The prospect of being sold foreclosed the possibility of achieving the self-mastery of one day controlling their own trade-generating slaves, the core of Vai moral economy.

⁹⁸ See for example: Warren D’Azevedo, 1970, p. 102.

⁹⁹ S. Holsoe, 1979, p. 293.

¹⁰⁰ S. Holsoe, 1979, p. 293.

¹⁰¹ S. Holsoe, 1979, p. 294.

¹⁰² S. Holsoe, 1979, p. 294.

The abuse of the trading system by ‘freemen’ created internal tensions and violence. Adam Jones describes the Zawo revolt as a long-lasting slave mutiny that occurred in Vai country in the 19th century (1825-1852).¹⁰³ The mutineers were instigated by Muslim students in rebellion to defend their expectations. They fled the communities of their Massaquois masters to settle elsewhere in the Vai country. Their flight and the protection they received from other Vai rulers became a source of tension and conflict.¹⁰⁴ Loss of servants brought economic loss as well as public humiliation to their masters.¹⁰⁵ However, Jones notes that the revolt was not against the system; the insurgents revolted to enslave others. Over time, Vai elites relied on the spread of Islam by Mandingo trader-clerics to mediate intra- and inter-ethnic changes in Vai society.

In 1850 the Settler regime intervened to stem the export of various forms of slaves weakening the wealth and power of chiefs.¹⁰⁶ By the late 19th century the Vai economy had returned to relying on servitude, particularly pawning, to producing and transporting agricultural goods. Unlike slavery, pawns were loaned for a specified period as labourers for the payment of debt. Vai responded to external demand for pawns in exchange for cash to meet their tax liability during Settler ‘colonial’ rule. Pawns were not only exported to the West Indies they were leased to Mandingo traders as porters and labourers.¹⁰⁷

Vais began forging links with Mandingos from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was prompted by the influx of Mandingo migrant-traders to settle in Vai country, particularly Bopolu. As in the Gio and Mano case, many of the traders were from Beyla and Musadu. Their primary motivation was to serve as middlemen

¹⁰³ Jones, 1983a.

¹⁰⁴ Sawyer & Center for Self-Governance., 1992, p. 127.

¹⁰⁵ Warren D’Azevedo, 1970, p. 103.

¹⁰⁶ Sawyer & Center for Self-Governance., 1992, p. 128.

¹⁰⁷ S. E. Holsoe, 1976-1977, p. 8.

between the coast and the interior trade routes. Like the Gio and Mano, the Vai initially served as hosts to Mandingo migrants. Originally, the main economic relationship was between Mandingo commerce and Vai agriculture. Mandingo traders served as middlemen to Vai cultivators in the kola trade.

Vai entered into trading to become middlemen to Mandingo suppliers of export slaves and raw material to European traders on the Atlantic coast.¹⁰⁸ Between 1885 and 1920, Mandingo traders settled and initiated the creation of market towns such as Misila, Sinni, Zogboja, and Manivolo.¹⁰⁹ The Mandingo gained socio-economic prominence through the establishment of markets. Vai chiefs reportedly encouraged the creation of the markets to meet their tax liability and for economic reasons in the Settler cash economy.¹¹⁰ Much like their interaction with the Gio and Mano, Mandingo traders advanced cash to Vai kola farmers.

An important factor that facilitated the forging of closer ties between Vai and Mandingo was renegotiation of the relevant content of their ethnicities. “Islamic principles, promoted by the traders, provided a set of expectations for trade practices and ethics.”¹¹¹ As discussed in Chapter 3, Mandingo traders doubled as proselytizers of Islam. When the traders and clerics entered Vai country, “they introduced Islamic religion, and its attendant web of norms and values, to the Vai people.”¹¹² A key factor in the spread of Islam among the Vai was the shared economic interest in trade. Mandingo and Vai traders relied on Islam to build economic associations. Islam was deployed to build trust and trading networks that incorporated members of Vai communities as brotherhoods of the Mandingo diaspora community. Extensive conversions to Islam facilitated inter-marriage between Vai men and Mandingo

¹⁰⁸ Jones, 1983a.

¹⁰⁹ S. E. Holsoe, 1987, pp. 136-149.

¹¹⁰ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 52.

¹¹¹ Monts, 1990, pp. 113-114.

¹¹² A. Konneh, 1996b, pp. 64-71.

women and vice versa, whereas Mandingo women were not permitted to marry Gio and Mano neighbours because of their Muslim faith. Marital alliance extended ethnic boundaries and membership. Vai became the closest regional allies of the Mandingo.¹¹³ They considered the Mandingo as relatives referring to them as “Western *Dyula*” (merchant).¹¹⁴ Mandingo Muslims were “proclaimed” as brothers.¹¹⁵ As Muslims, Mandingo traders were able to acquire land from Vai chiefs to establish their own settlements in places such as Misila, which was established in the 19th century.¹¹⁶ This was in part designed to placate non-Muslim Vais who belonged to the power associations, particularly the *Poro*.

The weakening of *Poro* authority in the period of Settler indirect rule was a contingency that facilitated the reception of Islam in Vai society. The Settler regime appropriated traditional powers held by leading lineages and *Poro* elders, including their judicial functions.¹¹⁷ It created moral tensions as ordinary Vai began to question the role of the power associations.¹¹⁸ This development, coupled with the abolition of pawning by the Settler government in 1930, challenged the basic framework of Vai society.¹¹⁹ It undermined the ability of elites to maintain power and wealth through control of manpower in servitude relationships. The abolition of pawning freed many labours in the Vai agrarian economy.¹²⁰ Vai elites tried to address social tensions through increasing their alliance with their Mandingo Islamic neighbours, and refashioning patron-client exchange on the basis of Islamic values.¹²¹ Islam encouraged Vai local practices such as polygyny, which had facilitated the pre-Settler

¹¹³ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 52.

¹¹⁴ S. E. Holsoe, 1987, pp. 135-137.

¹¹⁵ See for example, personal accounts in: A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 73.

¹¹⁶ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 72.

¹¹⁷ S. E. Holsoe, 1987, pp. 140-143; Jones, 1983b, p. 77; A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 71.

¹¹⁸ S. E. Holsoe, 1987, pp. 137-142; Jones, 1983b.

¹¹⁹ Warren D’Azevedo, 1970, p. 99.

¹²⁰ S. E. Holsoe, 1987, pp. 137-143.

¹²¹ Interview, Ibrahim M., 25th January 2014.

accumulation of wealth-in-people for agrarian cultivation. Narratives of shared histories were deployed to draw Mandingo ‘others’ closer as peoples with a shared Manding origin and linguistic similarities.¹²²

Mandingo commercial activities increased in the 1940s and 1950s as more traders migrated to settle in Vai areas. They established open stalls and stores in various market areas established by the Settler regime in places such as Nyagbaka, Tiene, and Cape Town.¹²³ Vai and Mandingo traders became competitors in the kola trade, but it was eventually monopolised by Mandingo traders.¹²⁴ The trade was conducted under the direction of a Vai chief or ‘big man’; these wielded influence over the traders through their endorsements of ‘good businessmen’ worthy of the favour of their subjects.¹²⁵ The chiefs received gifts and presents from the Mandingo traders in exchange for protecting their economic interests.¹²⁶ Gift exchanges was a means of creating social alliance between a diaspora trading community and local rulers.¹²⁷

Apart from kola trade, Mandingo competed with Vai farmers in bush-and-swamp farming from the early 20th century.¹²⁸ But, Mandingo had complete control in the rice trade in Vai areas; they had the capital to hire Vai labourers, purchase the rice from the farmers, and transport them to market areas.¹²⁹ Much like the Gio and Mano case, they were able to recruit Vai labourers to work on their farms. Mandingos were able to obtain land usage rights for farming through inter-marriage with Vai women. They were expected to give part of their yield to the landowners. Some of the traders

¹²² Interview, Ibrahim M., 25th January 2014. A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 71.

¹²³ For more on the markets see: Curtin, 1975, p. 289.

¹²⁴ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 52.

¹²⁵ A. Konneh, 1996b, pp. 58-59. Handwerker, 1980, pp. 6-10.

¹²⁶ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 59. Handwerker, 1980, pp. 6-10.

¹²⁷ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 59.

¹²⁸ A. Konneh, 1996b, pp. 52-55.

¹²⁹ S. E. Holsoe, 1976-1977, p. 8.

were able to gain ownership rights to land through marital alliances with Muslim Vai.¹³⁰ From the 1950s, Mandingo traders entered into the gold and diamond trade after these were discovered in the Bopolu area.¹³¹ The Mandingos also increased their social position as blacksmiths in Vai country. They made agricultural tools such as cutlasses for farmers and weapons for hunters and warriors.¹³² Mandingo ascendancy in Vai society was mediated through Islam. By the 1960s, Islam had become a major religion of the Vai. They shared Mosques, imams, and Islamic schools. Commercial towns such as Makbouma in Grand Cape Mount became a hub for training imams.

To conclude, Vai moral ethnicity was just as contested in its evolution as the Gio and Mano. The changes that affected the community created internal revolts at various points but maintained inclusive ethnic boundaries with Mandingos. Mandingos have integrated into Vai society through inter-marriage and absorption. More importantly, these distinct identities have interacted as ethnic allies by appealing to notions of shared ethnic content through religion in pursuit of common economic interests. The Vai were able to include Mandingos as allies through constructing shared Islamic norms and values that enable various strata to cultivate self-dignity. Thus, even though Mandingos became a dominant minority they were not perceived as a threat to moral community because they were subject to common norms and values that would theoretically permit Vais to benefit from Mandingo success. The ways in which the boundaries and contents of Vai ethnicity were negotiated with Mandingos illuminate how moral communities can evolve through non-violent strategies.

In contemporary politics, some of those who identify as Vai regularly participated in Mandingo community debates as members of a broader moral union

¹³⁰ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 60.

¹³¹ A. Konneh, 1996b, p. 60.

¹³² S. E. Holsoe, 1976-1977, p. 8.

rather than emphasising two distinct communities.¹³³ They have chosen to emphasise their linguistic and cultural similarity with Mandingos over belonging to particular territory in Liberia. They also draw on long-term memory to construct common descent from Manding. This transformation in ethnic consciousness, and inclusive boundary maintenance, was constructed using actual cultural similarities that developed from revisions in norms and values. But they were also enabled by the conscious strategies of Vai elites to increase the extent of cultural similarity between these communities to maintain legitimacy in response to changing historical contexts. This is similar to the Kalenjin identity in Kenya. It was constructed and popularised in the mid-20th century to unite ‘Nandi speakers’ as a way of preventing marginalisation in a multi-ethnic political context. Ethnic construction was initiated and shaped by elites in response to discursive frameworks, perceptions of threat and opportunity, which led Nandi-speakers to emphasise particular ethnic content over others.¹³⁴ The interaction of the Vai and Mandingo, and examples such as the Kalenjin, suggests that constructing bridges to integrate ethnic ‘others’ into a broader moral union is an important way to negotiate ethnicity in Liberia, and the region more generally.

Conclusion

To conclude, the previous chapters suggest that the language of ethnicity will continue to remain salient in Liberian politics, despite efforts to promote inclusivity through non-ethnic, human rights discourses.¹³⁵ Many ordinary citizens perceive Liberia as a country comprised of distinct moral communities, rather than a single

¹³³ See for example works of Vai-Mandingo columnists such as: Nyei, 2009.

¹³⁴ Lynch, 2011, pp. 31-50.

¹³⁵ Devon Curtis’s caution about the complex interplay between outside ideas and interests and multiple local ones in Burundi, resonates in the Liberian context: Curtis, 2012.

moral unit. Therefore, rather than argue against a perceived system of ethnic patronage, people continue to ask their representatives to live up to the norms and obligations recognized in their moral economy. To many of the urban and rural poor, invoking the venerated past ensures the continuity of relations of trust to facilitate their well-being and protect their dignity. Many ordinary Liberians feel vulnerable and unprotected without this moral ethnicity.

There continues to be a general mistrust of the state, which has been historically dominated by minority regimes that relied on coercive and legislative instruments, instead of legitimate moral authority, to main control. This misgiving is partly reflected in Liberians assessment of the Johnson-Sirleaf government in 2008 and 2012 Afrobarometer surveys. The results show a pattern of disapproval about the government's performance—measured through ratings of “very badly” or “fairly badly”—in areas such as managing the economy, improving standards of living (for which the government scored consistently scored 70% “very bad or fairly bad” in 2008 and 2012), creating jobs (which scored 75% in 2008 and 72% in 2012 for “very bad or fairly bad”), and ensuring everyone has enough to eat (which scored 76% in 2008 and 82% in 2012 for “very bad or fairly bad”).¹³⁶ These issues are typically part of moral economy expectations that ethnic constituents have of their local leaders. An important policy implication of mistrust about the state's ability to deliver on them is that, apart from inclusive governance, there is a need to build legitimate moral authority by developing an inclusive social arrangement that will foster a sense of national citizenship and belonging in a larger moral community. This will require more than just including ethnic elites in state power.

¹³⁶ Afrobarometer, 2008, 2012.

The findings and conclusions of the Liberian case carry important implications for the study of ethnic mobilisation for violence in the region. This thesis suggests that it is not the mere existence of hierarchies of inequality that generates ethnic mobilisation for violence in Africa. Rather it is the perceived lack—or threatened loss of—accountable, social relations within societies that drives mobilisation. This insight challenges key assumptions of existing explanations of the war as a ‘youth revolt’. Youths mobilised at the onset of violence as members of specific ethnic groups. Rather than a revolution, they sought to protect an ethnic order that gave them rights and supports connected to their social standing, and based on ethnic exclusion of ‘others’. Their narratives show that ethnic conflict has much to do with political thought and traditions of contestation. Recognition and further research into the evolution of ethnic groups and their political thought continues to be important and essential to understanding politics in Liberia and violent conflict in the wider region.

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Other sources:

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Inquirer Newspaper (Monrovia)
Analyst Newspaper (Monrovia)
Daily Observer Newspaper (Monrovia)

Appendix: Interview Reference List

A. Personal interviews¹

ID-Number/Name or pseudonym/Place/Date/Gender/Description of informant

1.	Methuselah	Paynesville, MO	15 Mar 2008	M	ULIMO-K, LURD ex-combatant
2.	Nicholas D.	Paynesville, MO	15 Mar 2008	M	Rtd. AFL militia
3.	Focus Group	Paynesville, MO	15 Mar 2008	M	NPFL, I-NPFL, ULIMO (-K & -J); and LURD ex-combatants
4.	Alfred	Paynesville, MO	16 Mar 2008	M	NPFL commander
5.	M. Nicholas	Paynesville, MO	16 Mar 2008	M	NPFL ex-combatant
6.	Emmanuel M.	Paynesville, MO	16 Mar 2008	M	I-NPFL ex-combatant
7.	Focus Group	Paynesville, MO	16 Mar 2008	M	ULIMO, LURD ex-combatants
8.	Alaric	Lakpazee, MO	16 Mar 2008	M	Politician, scholar, and former student activist
9.	Emmanuel G.	Lakpazee, MO	17 Mar 2008	M	Rtd. AFL soldier
10.	John - 1	Lakpazee, MO	17 Mar 2008	M	NPFL, ULIMO-J, LURD ex-combatant
11.	Momo	Lakpazee, MO	17 Mar 2008	M	NPFL and ULIMO-J fighter
12.	Francis	Lakpazee, MO	17 Mar 2008	M	Rtd. AFL soldier
13.	Edmund	Sinkor, MO	17 Mar 2008	M	Former PPP Chairman
14.	Matthias	Sinkor, MO	17 Mar 2008	M	Student activist
15.	Mark	Sinkor, MO	17 Mar 2008	M	Political activist
16.	Focus group	Sinkor, MO	18 Mar 2008	M	Political activists
17.	Kamara	Lakpazee, MO	18 Mar 2008	M	ULIMO-K, LURD ex-combatant
18.	M. Nicholas x2	Congo Town, MO	18 Mar 2008	M	
19.	Alfred x2	Congo Town, MO	18 Mar 2008	M	
20.	Focus Group	Congo Town, MO	19 Mar 2008	M	NPFL, I-NPFL, ex-combatants
21.	Mary	Congo Town	19 Mar 2008	F	NPFL supporter
22.	Focus group	Congo Town	19 Mar 2008	B	NPFL ex-combatants
23.	Joshua	Sinkor, MO	19 Mar 2008	M	Krahn AFL militia, ULIMO, ULIMO-J commander
24.	Zee	Lakpazee, MO	20 Mar 2008	M	AFL soldier
25.	Alaric x2	Lakpazee, MO	20 Mar 2008	M	
26.	A. Toe	Lakpazee, MO	20 Mar 2008	M	Activist
27.	Focus Group	Paynesville, MO	21 Mar 2008		LURD ex-combatants
28.	Jay	Congo Town, MO	22 Mar 2008	M	Civilian
29.	Mia	Congo Town	22 Mar 2008	F	Civilian
30.	Focus Group	Congo Town, MO	27 Mar 2008	M	NPFL ex-combatants
31.	Karen	Tema, GH	28 Dec 2008	F	ICRC-Liberia official

¹ MO = Monrovia + environs; BI = Bomi County; BG = Bong County; NI = Nimba County; GH = Ghana; USA = United States of America

32.	Kwaku	Accra, GH	28 Dec 2008	M	ECOMOG-Liberia peace-keeper
33.	Col. Darwo	Central, MO	20 Apr 2009	M	AFL officer
34.	Col. Darwo x2	Central, MO	21 Apr 2009	M	
35.	Col. Johnson	Central, MO	21 Apr 2009	M	AFL officer
36.	Faruk	Sinkor, Monrovia			ULIMO and LURD supporter
37.	Dot	Tubmanburg, BI, via tel.	05 April 2009	F	NPFL supporter
38.	Omarkson	Tubmanburg, BI, via tel.	08 April 2009	M	NPFL supporter
39.	Susan	Tubmanburg, BI, via tel.	08 Apr 2009	F	NPFL supporter
40.	Omarkson x2	Tubmanburg, BI, via tel.	09 Apr 2009	M	
41.	V. Johnson	Tubmanburg, BI, via tel.	13 Apr 2009	M	NPFL supporter
42.	Wilson	Bonah Farm, MO	22 Apr 2009	M	NPFL ex-combatant
43.	M. Nicholas x3	Bonah Farm, MO	22 Apr 2009	M	
44.	Alfred x3	Bonah Farm, MO	22 Apr 2009	M	
45.	Joshua	Bonah Farm, MO	22 Apr 2009	M	ULIMO, ULIMO-J commander
46.	Focus Group	Bonah Farm	22 Apr 2009	B	NPFL, INPFL, ex-combatants
47.	Jay x2	Congo Town, MO	23 Apr 2009	M	
48.	Mimi	Central, MO	24 Apr 2009	F	Civilian
49.	Sheriff	Bonah Farm, MO	25 April 2009	M	Civilian
50.	Samson	Johnson Farm, BI	27 Apr 2009	M	NPFL-ex-combatant
51.	Gray	Johnson farm, BI	27 Apr 2009	M	Village chief
52.	Paul	Guthrie Plantation, BI	27 Apr 2009		NPFL ex-combatant
53.	Esi	Guthrie Plantation, BI	27 Apr 2009	F	LURD ex-combatant
54.	Alpha	Guthrie Plantation, BI	27 Apr 2009	M	ULIMO and LURD ex-combatant
55.	Focus Group	Bomi HW, BI	27 Apr 2009	M	ULIMO supporters
56.	S. Toe	Bomi HW, BI	27 Apr 2009	M	ULIMO supporter
57.	Blama	Guthrie Plantation, BI	28 Apr 2009	M	ULIMO-J ex-combatant
58.	Focus Group	Guthrie Plantation, BI	28 Apr 2009	M	ULIMO, LURD ex-combatants
59.	Mamie	Guie Town, BI	28 Apr 2009	F	LURD supporter
60.	Toure	Tubmanburg, BI	28 Apr 2009	M	ULIMO and LURD ex-combatant
61.	Kamara x2	Tubmanburg, BI	28 Apr 2009	M	
62.	Dot x2	Tubmanburg, BI	28 Apr 2009	F	
63.	Tuago	Tubmanburg, BI	28 Apr 2009	M	NPFL supporter
64.	Susan x2	Tubmanburg, BI	29 Apr 2009	F	
65.	Focus Group	Tubmanburg, BI	29 Apr 2009	B	NPFL supporters
66.	Moses K.	Tubmanburg, BI	29 Apr 2009	M	NPFL ex-combatant
67.	V. Johnson x2	Tubmanburg, BI	29 Apr 2009	M	

68.	Omarkson x3	Tubmanburg, BI	29 Apr 2009	M	
69.	S. Toe x2	Bomi HW, BI	29 Apr 2009	M	
70.	Focus Group	Bomi HW, BI	29 Apr 2009	B	ULIMO supporters
71.	Tinnie	Gbartala, BO	30 Apr 2009	M	Town Mayor
72.	Wala	Gbartala, BO	30 Apr 2009	M	Civilian
73.	Jefferson	Gbarnga, BO	30 Apr 2009	M	NPFL supporter
74.	Esther	Gbarnga, BO	30 Apr 2009	F	Civilian
75.	Naomi	Gbarnga, BO	30 Apr 2009	F	NPFL supporter
76.	Focus Group	Gbarnga, BO	30 Apr 2009	M	NPFL supporters
77.	Jefferson x2	Gbarnga HW, BO	01 May 2009	M	
78.	Focus Group	Gbarnga HW, BO	01 May 2009	B	NPFL supporters
79.	Fred	Salala, BO	01 May 2009	M	NPFL ex-combatant
80.	A. Saye	Salala, BO	01 May 2009	M	NPFL ex-combatant
81.	Mulbah	Salala, BO	01 May 2009	M	GOL militia
82.	A. Saye x2	Salala, BO	02 May 2009	M	
83.	Jefferson x3	Gbarnga HW, BO	02 May 2009	M	
84.	Tiawon G.	Central, MO	07 May 2009	M	Former Solicitor-General and Labour Minister
85.	Junior	Congo Town, MO	07 May 2009	M	NPFL ex-combatant
86.	Jemima	Congo Town, MO	07 May 2009	F	NPFL ex-combatant
87.	M. Nicholas x4	Congo Town, MO	07 May 2009	M	
88.	Junior x2	Congo Town, MO	08 May 2009	M	
89.	Focus Group	Congo Town	08 May 2009	B	NPFL ex-combatants
90.	John S	Sinkor, MO	08 May 2009	M	TRC Commissioner
91.	Robert K.	Sinkor, MO	08 May 2009	M	Sr. Official at the NCDDRR
92.	John T	Sinkor, MO	09 May 2009	M	NPFL politician
93.	Colonel Boyd	Central, MO	09 May 2009	M	Rtd. AFL colonel
94.	Major Seton	Central, MO	09 May 2009	M	Rtd. AFL major
95.	Focus Group	Central, MO	09 May 2009	M	Rtd. AFL soldiers
96.	Abdulai	Central, MO	09 May 2009	M	UNDP-Liberia official
97.	Nimley	Central, MO	09 May 2009	M	INPFL, LPC, ULIMO-J and MODEL ex-combatant
98.	Moses S.	Central, MO	10 May 2009	M	War journalist
99.	Ade	Central, MO	10 May 2009	M	UNDP-DDRR official
100.	Alaric x3	Central, MO	10 May 2008	M	
101.	Eric	Camp Kesselly, MO	10 May 2009	M	AFL officer
102.	Oyango	Camp Kesselly, MO	10 May 2009	M	AFL officer
103.	Focus Group	Camp Kesselly, MO	10 May 2009	M	AFL officers
104.	John	Duport Road, MO	11 May 2009	M	Civilian
105.	Winston	Duport Road, MO	11 May 2009	M	Civilian
106.	Barbara	Duport Road, MO	11 May 2009	F	Civilian
107.	Alfie	Duport Road, MO	11 May 2009	M	Civilian
108.	Monica	Duport Road, MO	11 May 2009	F	Civilian
109.	Focus Group	Duport Road, MO	12 May 2009	B	ULIMO and LURD supporters
110.	Focus Group	Duport Road, MO	12 May 2009	B	Civilians

111.	A. Saye	Salala, BO via tel.	15 May 2009	M	NPFL ex-combatant
112.	Jefferson x4	Gbarnga, BO via tel.	16 May 2009	M	
113.	Naomi x2	Gbarnga, BO via tel.	19 May 2009	F	
114.	Focus Group	Tubmanburg, BI via tel	21 May 2009	M	NPFL supporters
115.	Ibrahim A.	Sinkor, MO via tel	29 May 2009	M	ULIMO, LURD ex-combatant
116.	Abu	Sinkor, MO via tel	30 May 2009	M	ULIMO, ULIMO-K supporter
117.	Moses T	Sinkor, MO via tel	29 May 2009	M	ULIMO-K, and LURD supporter
118.	Idrisu	Congo Town, MO via tel	27 May 2009	M	LURD supporter
119.	Kaakyire	Accra, GH	13 Dec 2010	M	Scholar
120.	Focus Group	Buduburam, GH	16 Dec 2011	M	NPFL ex-combatants
121.	Focus Group	Buduburam, GH	17 Dec 2011	M	ULIMO (-K and -J) and LURD ex-combatants
122.	Stanley	Buduburam, GH	29 Dec 2010	M	NPFL ex-combatant
123.	Thomas	Accra, GH	05 Jan 2011	M	Researcher
124.	Kwesi	Accra, GH	05 Jan 2011	M	ECOWAS expert
125.	Kwaku x2	Accra, GH	06 Jan 2011	M	ECOMOG-Liberia peace-keeper
126.	Siafa	Buduburam, GH	08 Jan 2011	M	NPFL ex-combatant
127.	Focus Group	Buduburam, GH	10 Jan 2011	M	NPFL ex-combatants
128.	Paul	Buduburam, GH	11 Jan 2011	M	NPFL ex-combatant
129.	Simeon	Buduburam, GH	11 Jan 2011	M	ULIMO ex-combatant
130.	Tukpah	Buduburam, GH	11 Jan 2011	M	NPFL ex-combatant
131.	Focus Group	Buduburam, GH	13 Jan 2011	M	NPFL ex-combatants
132.	Ibrahim M.	Washington DC, USA, via Skype	25 Jan 2014	M	ULIMO, LURD supporter
133.	Konneh III	Pennsylvania, USA, via Skype	26 Jan 2014	M	ULIMO, ULIMO-K supporter
134.	Konneh III x2	Pennsylvania, USA, via tel.	29 Jan 2014	M	
135.	KL	Pennsylvania, USA, via e-mail	29 Jan 2014	M	ULIMO, ULIMO-K supporter
136.	KL x2	Pennsylvania, USA, via e-mail	30 Jan 2014	M	
137.	Henry	Massachusetts, USA, via tel.	10 Feb 2014	M	Loma youth
138.	Zawolo	Maryland, USA, via tel.	11 Feb 2014	M	Scholar
139.	Henry x2	Massachusetts, USA, via tel.	13 Feb 2014	M	GOL militia
140.	Henry x3	Massachusetts, USA, via tel.	13 Feb 2014	M	
141.	Nya Taryor	Massachusetts, USA, via e-mail	12 Feb 2014	M	Mano scholar
142.	Nya Taryor x2	Massachusetts, USA, via tel.	15 Feb 2014	M	
143.	Saye G.	Cuttington, BO,	7 Mar 2014	M	Mano scholar

144.	John D.	via tel. Saclepea, NI, via tel.	07 Mar 2014	M	NPFL military leader
145.	Konneh III x3	Pennsylvania, USA, via Skype	08 Mar 2014	M	
146.	John D x2	Saclepea, NI, via tel.	08 Mar 2014	M	
147.	Saye G. x2	Cuttington, BO, via tel.	08 Mar 2014	M	
148.	Philip	New York, USA	10 Mar 2014	M	NPFL supporter
149.	Hassan	Pennsylvania, USA, via Skype	15 Mar 2014	M	ULIMO General
150.	Sherif	Pennsylvania, USA, via Skype	16 Mar 2014		ULIMO and LURD supporter
151.	Israel	Nimba HW, NI	17 Mar 2014	M	Civilian
152.	Nya Taylor	Ganta, NI	18 Mar 2014	M	Mano quarter chief and chief elder Electoral District 1, Ganta
153.	Focus Group	Ganta, NI	18 Mar 2014	M	NPFL supporters
154.	Dorr	Ganta, NI	18 Mar 2014	M	Ganta Town Mayor
155.	David Q.	Saclepea, NI	18 Mar 2014	M	Ex-parliamentarian and Nimba superintendent
156.	John D. x3	Saclepea, NI	18 Mar 2014	M	
157.	Focus Group	Saclepea, NI	18 Mar 2014	M	NPFL supporters
158.	Dahn	Dahn village, NI	19 Mar 2014	M	Village chief
159.	Bero II	Bahn, NI	19 Mar 2014	M	Town chief, Bahn
160.	Wadeazuwo	Bahn, NI	19 Mar 2014	M	Elder, Bahn
161.	Karzah	Bahn, NI	19 Mar 2014	M	Elder, Bero quarter, Bahn
162.	Thomas	Bahn, NI	19 Mar 2014	M	NPFL supporter
163.	Leco	Bahn, NI	19 Mar 2014	M	NPFL supporter
164.	Focus Group	Bahn, NI	19 Mar 2014	M	NPFL supporters
165.	Jabateh II	Ganta, NI	20 Mar 2014	M	Chairman, Nimba County Mandingo Community
166.	Focus Group	Ganta, NI	20 Mar 2014	M	ULIMO, LURD supporters
167.	Nya Taylor x2	Ganta, NI	20 Mar 2014	M	
168.	William T.	Kpein, NI	21 Mar 2014	M	Kpein Town Commissioner
169.	William B.	Kpein, NI	21 Mar 2014	M	Town Chief, Kpein
170.	Nyan Quoi	Kpein, NI	21 Mar 2014	M	Chief Elder, Kpein
171.	Paye	Kpein, NI	21 Mar 2014	M	NPFL supporter
172.	Joseph	Kpein, NI	21 Mar 2014	M	NPFL supporter
173.	Focus Group	Kpein, NI	21 Mar 2014	B	NPFL supporter
174.	Israel	Duport Rd, MO	22 Mar 2014	M	Civilian
175.	Fofana	Pennsylvania, USA, via tel	15 Sep 2014	M	ULIMO ex-combatant

176. Fofana x2 Pennsylvania, 17 Sep 2014
USA, via tel

B. Referenced TRC Testimonies

Number/Name/Place/Date/Gender/Description

1.	William Yeapoe	Sanniquellie	13 May 2008	M	Gio town chief, farmer and herbalist, Lapea No. 2, Gbehlay-Geh District, Nimba
2.	Matthew Montoe	Sanniquellie	13 May 2008	M	Gio farmer, Lapea No. 2, Gbehlay-Geh District, Nimba
3.	Layee Sedekee Konneh	Sanniquellie	13 May 2008	M	Mandingo businessman, Saclepea, Nimba
4.	Amara Jabateh	Sanniquellie	15 May 2008	M	Mandingo businessman from Kahnplay, Nimba
5.	Tarkpor Wotoe	Sanniquellie	15 May 2008	M	NPFL ex-combatant from Saclepea
6.	Gertrude Pajebo	Sanniquellie	16 May 2008	F	Ex-combatant from Sinoe County who joined ATU in the LURD/MODEL war
7.	Junior Duo	Sanniquellie	16 May 2008	M	Gio ex-combatant from Tappita
8.	Mamadee Kromah	Sanniquellie	12 May 2008	M	Mandingo witness from Nimba County
9.	Cllr. James W. Zotta	Sanniquellie	17 May 2008	M	Attorney from Nimba County
10.	Zawolo Z. Zuagele	Sanniquellie	17 May 2008	M	Mano witness from Nimba County
11.	Alhaji G. V. Kromah	Monrovia	11 Aug 2008	M	Mandingo politico-military leader of ULIMO, ULIMO-K
12.	Prince Y. Johnson	Monrovia	26 Aug 2008	M	Gio politico-military leaders of NPFL, I-NPFL
13.	Adolphus Dolo	Monrovia	10 Sep 2008	M	Gio politico-military leader of the NPFL
14.	Rev. Saizay Zubah	Voinjama	18 Apr 2008	M	President, Lofa Ministerial Council Of Churches

C. Referenced SCSL Testimonies

Number/Name/Place/Date/Gender/Description

1.	Anonymous Gio witness	The Hague, Netherlands	5 Nov 2008	M	NPFL ex-combatant
2.	Teman Edward Zammy	The Hague, Netherlands	6 May 2010	M	NPFL Brigade Commander