

A Black Republic: Citizenship and naturalisation requirements in Liberia

BERNADETTE LUDWIG*

Abstract

In 1822 Liberia was founded as a place where free(d) enslaved African Americans could find freedom and liberty. While many of them did, the indigenous African population was, for a long time, excluded from citizenry despite fulfilling one of the essential criteria to be eligible for Liberians citizenship: Being Black. This prerequisite remains part of Liberian law today, rendering non-Blacks ineligible for Liberian citizenship. Today, this mostly affects the Lebanese community who originally came as traders and entrepreneurs to Liberia. This article analyses why Liberians defend race-based exclusionary citizenship practices.

Keywords: Liberia; race; citizenship; Lebanese; national identity.

Introduction

Most research about citizenship and naturalisation requirements focuses on the Global North (for example, Alba & Foner, 2015; Brubaker, 1998; Kymlicka, 1996; Ong, 2003), and less on practices in the Global South. But as this paper and the other articles in this volume show, naturalisation and citizenship laws have been restrictive in both the Global North and the Global South. Since exclusionary practices in the Global North are well known, this study focuses on those in a country of the Global South: Liberia. Liberia is often referred to as “Little America” in Africa and, has a constitution that is -like other institutions and practices- modelled after the U.S. Like the original U.S. Constitution¹, Liberian Constitution limits citizenship to a particular group. The difference is that the U.S. Constitution favoured Whites and was later amended, whereas the Liberian Constitution continues to reserve citizenship exclusively for Blacks.

There is a long history of linking citizenship, nationhood, and race. A point also observed by Mariner (2003), “citizenship has often been restricted along racial or ethnic lines, with certain groups being excluded from the citizenry” (p. 65). It is thus not surprising, that race, ethnicity, and descent play important

* Bernadette Ludwig, Department of Sociology, Wagner College, Staten Island, NY 10301, United States. E-mail: bernadette.ludwig@wagner.edu.

¹ Article 1, Section 2, Paragraph 3 of the U.S. Constitution referring to “three fifths of all other Persons.”



roles in a number of nationality and naturalisation laws across the globe (Abdullah, 2003; Beydoun, 2013; Kaj, 2012; Mariner, 2003; Obi, 2008). Citizenship based on *jus sanguinis* -Latin for “right of blood”- is perhaps one of the most extreme versions of how nation, nationality, and race can be linked or can be construed as being linked (see also, Kaj, 2012). The ideology that only certain individuals are, because of their “blood”/descent/race (automatically), part of the nation-state, is a mechanism of exclusion since it limits citizenship by birth, and in some cases by naturalisation, to a particular group of people. Most, though not all, countries have provisions in their citizenship and naturalisation laws that allow for individuals who fulfil certain requirements to become members (citizens) of the particular nation state. International law, despite its commitment to limit ethnoracial discrimination, permits countries to discriminate in their citizenship and naturalisation laws based on race and ethnicity, provided that it does not exclude a specific nationality (Mariner, 2003). (See for example, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969))². Hence, Liberia’s constitution that limits citizenship -both by birth and naturalisation- to only Blacks comply with international conventions.

In this article, I focus on the barriers to Liberian citizenship and how they affect the Lebanese community; the largest non-Black population in Liberia. I argue that long-standing (cultural) belief systems linking Liberian identity to race obstruct movements to abolish race-based and exclusionary citizenship and naturalisation laws in Liberia. The origins of these belief systems are tied to the history of the U.S. and its racial exclusion and the creation of Liberia as a state to grant American Blacks freedom from racial oppression and place of redemption for those excluded in the U.S. and some Caribbean islands.

Data and methods

Data for this research were collected through longitudinal ethnographic research³ in the Liberian refugee and immigrant community in Staten Island, New York⁴ in the U.S. that began in 2009. The data include hundreds of hours of participant observation and in-depth interviews with 55 Liberian immigrants / refugees (29 women; 26 men), which were conducted in English and each lasted between 1.5 and 2.5 hours. The Liberian immigrants/refugees who participated in the in-depth interviews -some of them were interviewed multiple times- were all Black, from a variety of ethnic groups and educational backgrounds, and ranged in age from 16 to 79.

² Liberia’s accession was on November 5, 1976.

³ All interviewees were assured that their participation was voluntary and that their information and views would be kept strictly confidential. The research was approved by the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) of the Graduate Center, City University of New York and Wagner College.

⁴ Staten Island’s North Shore in New York City, and in particular the area around the Park Hill neighbourhood has the biggest per capita concentration of Liberians outside of Liberia (Ludwig, 2013).

The rationale for interviewing Liberians living outside of Liberia is twofold. First, Liberians living abroad have been very actively involved in debates regarding Liberian nationality law. In particular these exiled Liberians have been advocating to change the law so that they may hold dual citizenship, which is currently prohibited by Liberian law. Liberians living abroad, and in particular in the U.S., desire dual citizenship since both come with particular rights that are denied to non-citizens. For example, as naturalized U.S. citizens, their petitions to bring their relatives from Liberia to the U.S., receive preferential treatment compared to those of non-U.S. citizens. The Liberian citizenship on the other hand, is a prerequisite to own land in Liberia and to run for a political office. Second, Liberians living in Staten Island, New York, have experienced exclusion and racism in their new place of residence -because they are Black and foreign- first hand; and therefore could presumably relate to the exclusion Lebanese experience in Liberia.

In addition to more than 6 years of ethnographic research, I conducted content analysis of Liberian legal documents and public debates in Liberian newspapers.

Background: Origins of Liberia

Liberia was originally founded as a colony by the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1822. The ACS was established in 1816 in Washington, D.C. by members of the aristocracy of the Southern U.S. profiting from slavery and Northern Quakers. They agreed that it would be better for the U.S., and to some extent Blacks in the U.S., if (free) Blacks would be “repatriated” to Africa. Slave owners supported the ACS because they felt free Blacks threatened the institution of slavery in the U.S., Quakers joined the ACS because many were in favour of abolition but were not comfortable with the existence of free Blacks in the U.S. Although motivated by different convictions, both sides raised funds from U.S. Congress and state governments arguing for the “repatriation” of Blacks to Africa (Levitt, 2005). In addition to providing real freedom to free Blacks in the U.S., the ACS also saw this endeavour as an opportunity to Christianize and “civilize” indigenous Africans through Western education. Another, unspoken goal of founding the colony in Africa was to give the U.S. access to Liberia’s natural resources (Kieh, 2012). Liberia was not a colony like those of the British or French in Africa. Rather the relationship between the U.S. and Liberia was through the ACS, a private entity, and, as such, the U.S. did not have responsibilities for providing financial assistance to or military protection for Liberia (Dick, 2002).

Still, the main purpose of the colony was to offer a “potential solution to the problem” of free Blacks living in the U.S. (see also, Sanneh, 2001) at a time when the overwhelming number of Blacks were enslaved, and thus property, and regarded as inferior to (native) Whites. Some African Americans voluntarily made their way to Liberia to live a life free from the racial segregation, violence, and torture that shaped their life in the U.S. Additionally, these African

Americans argued that the “uplifting of Africans in Africa” would consequently “uplift[...] Africans in [the] diaspora as well” (Tyler-McGraw, 2007:153). Others migrated because their masters granted them (and their families) freedom under the condition that they would leave the U.S. for Liberia.

Not surprisingly, the U.S. has had a profound political, economic, educational, and social impact on Liberia. Even a glance at the Liberian flag also reveals the historical connection; it differs from the U.S. flag solely in the number of stars and stripes. Many Liberian cities and counties are named after U.S. presidents or locations in the U.S., two examples being Liberia’s capital, Monrovia, after the U.S. president James Monroe, and Maryland County, after the U.S. state of Maryland. Even though Liberia gained independence in the 1840s, the U.S. has continued to make significant political, military, and economic investments there. For instance, in 1942 the U.S. built the Roberts International Airport just outside Monrovia as a base for the U.S. Air Force, where the B47 bomber could refuel. After World War II, the airport more or less remained under U.S. control and was operated by Pan American Airlines until 1985. Another example of U.S. influence is Firestone. This U.S.-based company made an agreement with the Liberian government in the 1920s that has since given Firestone unprecedented access to rubber production while undermining the privileges and rights of both the Liberian government and the Liberian people in significant ways (Kieh, 2012; Levitt, 2005; Stanley, 2005).

Centrality of race and descent

Liberia as the place of redemption of the Black race

As mentioned priorly, Liberia’s foundation as a place where Blacks from the Diaspora could (be) repatriate(d) to is closely linked to the idea that Africa has been “romanticized as a black space” (Kaj, 2012:3; see also Brantlinger, 1985). Following this logic, only Black people are the rightful “owners” of the African continent or an African identity. It is important to point out that this idea of Africa “as the place where race, geography and polity overlap[s]” (Akyeampong, 2006:314) came as a response/reaction to racism, subjugation, and exclusion that Blacks experienced in places -like the U.S.- that have been (artificially) constructed as White (Basch, Schiller, & Szanton Blanc, 1994; Mamdani, 2001). Subsequently, when “Africa becomes the land of the black people” through the conflation of race and territory, “everything that is not black is out of place, and thus cannot claim any Africanity” (Mbembé, 2002:256).⁵

Black nationalists such as Edward Wilmot Blyden who supported the ACS in its endeavour to set up Liberia as a place for Blacks from the Diaspora were

⁵ This conclusion is, as scholars such as Anise (1974) have pointed out, in light of Africa’s ethnoracial diversity, problematic. There are, after all, a significant number of non-Black communities in the African continent, including but not limited to, Arabs, Berber, Tuaregs, and Sahrawis in Northern Africa, Indians in Eastern and Southern Africa, and Lebanese in West Africa.

motivated precisely by this ideology of Africa as “a Black space”. For Blyden (1856), the Black race could only be vindicated through the Liberia project (and the settlement’s success): “the object of Liberia was the redemption of Africa and the disenfranchisement and elevation of the African race, objects worthy of every colored man” (p. 27). In addition, Blyden argued for a separation of the races and as such the ideology of nation and nationality tied to race in the African context is one for which he fiercely advocated (Falola, 2004).

Since Liberia was conceived as the place for the “redemption of the Black race” and a place where Blacks had freedom, the constitution was written to safeguard present and future generations of Liberians from any non-Black control. They sought to accomplish this by restricting Liberian citizenship. Section 13, Article V in the Liberian Constitution of 1847 makes both the goal of the Liberian country and the limitations of the citizenship explicit:

The great object of forming these Colonies, being to provide a home for the dispersed and oppressed children of Africa, and to regenerate and enlighten this benighted continent. None but persons of color shall be admitted to citizenship in this Republic.

Since the Liberian Constitution is modelled after the U.S. Constitution, the decision to limit Liberian citizenship to “people of color” in 1847 reflected an inverse of the U.S. original. “Persons of color” was later amended to “Negroes or persons of Negro descent” in 1907 (Tannenbaum et al., 2009). This change was made because “persons of color” was seen as too ambiguous. While in the U.S., where norms and laws served as a model for Liberia, “colored person”/“person of color” was synonymous for “Black,” this was not the case in the African continent. This became evident when a number of North Africans of “pure Arab blood” and Jews from Morocco tried to become citizens of Liberia arguing that they were of African descent (Huberich, 2010 [1947], p. 1018; David, 2014). But perhaps more importantly, many Liberians feared that slave traders who had been operating in West Africa for decades could try to become citizens of Liberia challenging the very idea of Liberia as a place for the “redemption of the Black race” (David, 2014). In addition, limiting citizenship to Blacks only, was also intended to safeguard against European nations that were eager to bring the entire continent of Africa under their control (see also, Pailey, 2012). In many ways, Liberia can be seen as the counterpart/complement to the U.S., as it provided a space where Blacks could have citizenship, a right that was denied to them in the U.S. until the ratification of the 14th amendment⁶ of the U.S. Constitution in 1868.

⁶ The 14th amendment of the U.S. Constitution grants citizenship to all person born or naturalized in the U.S. Most importantly, this extended U.S. citizenship to African Americans who had been enslaved until 1865.

Different types of citizenship for Black Liberians: Americo Liberians, Congos, and indigenous Africans

The lofty goal of Liberia as a haven for a unified and redeemed Black race was far from reality. Liberia has never treated all its residents equally, and Liberian citizenship has historically been restricted along racial and ethnic lines (Gershoni, 1985; Levitt, 2005; Söderström, 2009). From the country's origins as a U.S. protectorate, Americo Liberians- the descendants of the first settlers from the U.S.- who make up 3 to 5 percent of Liberia's population and have been in power for much of Liberia's history and have subjugated all other groups to their rule. Americo Liberians, supported by the ACS, established a society in Liberia modelled after (Southern) U.S. plantations where they had rights and made decisions over the disenfranchised 16 indigenous ethnic groups (including Bassa, Krahn, Loma), the original inhabitants of the area that is Liberia. The exclusion and exploitation of indigenous groups were based on views that these ethnic groups were morally and culturally inferior. Many Americo Liberians regarded members of these ethnic groups as uncivilized pagans (Gershoni, 1985). It was the explicit goal that indigenous Liberians would become Westernized, by shedding their traditions in favour of a Western dress code, Christianity, and other Western customs and practices, including forsaking their native languages and names. Indigenous Liberians were not the only ones treated differently from Americo Liberians. There were also the "Congos"/"Congo people", who were individuals seized from slave ships that tried to cross the Atlantic after the slave trade was abolished. Congos who were preferred by Americo Liberians became part of the Americo Liberian community and not the indigenous ethnic groups (Liebenow, 1969). Most commonly Congos were assimilated in the Americo Liberian community through an apprenticeship program, or the "ward system" (Liebenow, 1969; Tannenbaum et al., 2009).

Laws regarding Liberian citizenship reflect how the unequal treatment of different groups -Americo Liberians and Congos on the one hand, and indigenous Liberians on the other - have been written into the social structure since the formation of the Liberian nation. Again, from the beginning there was no equality. The Liberian Commonwealth Constitution of 1839 (Article 9) limited citizenship "to all colored persons, emigrating from the U.S., or any district or territory thereof." These restrictive guidelines were also part of the Liberian Constitution of 1847, which distinguishes between the rights of citizens and the indigenous population.⁷ Ethnic Liberians were considered subjects and not citizens of Liberia, and subsequently, indigenous Liberians did not have access to the rights and privileges that Liberian citizenship brought with it. These rights include: the right to own land, to freely move within the country, to participate in government, and to vote. In 1904, under President Arthur

⁷ Given that the Liberian Constitution of 1847 was prepared by Simon Greenleaf, a White American Harvard Law professor, and was largely modelled after the U.S. constitution, this is not surprising and mirrors the U.S.' approach toward its indigenous population.

Barclay, the Constitution was amended. Liberian citizenship was extended to indigenous Liberians, but their rights and privileges- compared to Americo Liberians and Congos- remained limited (Ellis, 1999; Liebenow, 1969; Stanley, 2005). Only in 1947, under President William Tubman's "unification and integration policy," were indigenous Liberians (male and female) and Americo Liberian women granted the right to vote (Konneh, 1996:142; Moran, 2006). But Americo Liberians remained in power until April 1980 when Samuel Doe, a member of the Krahn ethnic group seized control in a coup d'état. He became the first indigenous Liberian to hold power in the country's history. Following Doe's ascent to power and the suspension of the Liberian Consitution of 1847, a new constitution that retained the "Negro clause," was drafted in 1983 and ratified in 1984.

Different rationales have been used to justify the exclusion of certain groups in Liberia. First with indigenous Liberians, who were considered not "civilized" (enough) to be worthy of Liberian citizenship; despite meeting the racial criteria of being Black. Second, Lebanese, as non-Blacks do not meet the racial requirements for Liberian citizenship. This is simplistic view; more complex reasons for the continued exclusion of Lebanese from Liberian citizenry will be discussed in more detail later in the article.

The Lebanese in Liberia

Lebanese migration to Liberia

90

Mass emigration from Lebanon to different global destinations started around 1850 because of poor economic conditions, religious conflicts, and political turmoil (Obi, 2008:233). The majority of Lebanese moved to the U.S. and Latin America, in particular Brazil (Winder, 1962), while a much smaller, but significant group migrated to (West) Africa.⁸ Most scholars (Akyeampong, 2006; Bierwirth, 1999; Obi, 2008; Winder, 1962) concluded that Lebanese migrants' preferred destination was the U.S., and their arrival in (West) Africa can be traced to a number of factors; it was considerably cheaper and easier in that there were no or few hurdles (e.g., health requirements, immigration controls) to overcome (Obi, 2008; Winder, 1962). Winder (1962) also suggested that some Lebanese migrants ended up in West Africa due to "unscrupulous Marseilles shipping agent[s]" (p. 297) who put the hopeful future Americans instead on a ship to a coastal city in West Africa rather than to New York or São Paulo (see also, Leighton, 1979). The vast majority of Lebanese migrants to West Africa were of lower socioeconomic status and did not have a lot of (monetary) wealth (Akyeampong, 2006; Beydoun, 2013).

While there is little information on the exact year that the first Lebanese immigrants arrived in West Africa, scholars tend to agree that this initially

⁸ There are no official numbers of Lebanese emigrants, however, iLouban (2009) estimated the Lebanese Diaspora to be around 2.5 million in the U.S., 8.5 million in Latin America, and around 82,000 in Africa in 2009.

happened in Sierra Leone and Senegal in 1890s (Akyeampong, 2006; Beydoun, 2013; Leighton, 1974; Winder, 1962). Winder (1962) cited 1899 as the year when Lebanese first arrived in Liberia. Since then, secondary migration - migration from a country of residence other than the country where the person was born (Urquia, Frank, & Glazier, 2010)- of Lebanese people has also occurred. This secondary migration often was spurred by violence, civil wars in the West African region. In addition, “trade laws aimed specifically at restricting Lebanese enterprise” (Bierwirth, 1999:87). The migration was often facilitated by extensive regional ethnic (trade) networks (Birke, 2011). Networks have also impacted settlement patterns. Regularly families from the same villages in Lebanon settled in the same area in the various West African cities (Akyeampong, 2006; Bierwirth, 1999). This practice has continued until today. While some scholars, including Akyeampong (2006) argued that the Lebanese settled in West Africa with the intention of finding a new “home and nationality,” and were willing to “embrace west [sic] Africa” (p. 303), the vast majority of research and anecdotes by Black West Africans assert that this is not the case (see for example, Beydoun, 2013).

Exact numbers of people of Lebanese descent, including those of mixed ancestry⁹, in the different West African countries are not available. Data that are presented tend to be very biased. For example, the 2008 Liberian Census (LISGIS, 2009) lists 4,000 Lebanese nationals whereas iLoubnan (2009) gives a number that is more than twice this (10,400).¹⁰ Similarly, the legal status of Lebanese in Liberia remains murky at best. The 4,000 Lebanese listed in the Liberian Census of 2008 are Lebanese citizens/nationals. In addition there are an estimated 100 individuals of Lebanese origins who have Liberian diplomatic passports, most acquired illegally through bribes (Grossman, 2010). Finally, there are ethnic Lebanese who are, due to Lebanon’s restrictive citizenship laws, stateless.

Liberians’ arguments for continued exclusion

Liberians give a variety of justifications for the continued exclusion of Lebanese nationals from Liberian citizenship. Liberians who favour limiting Liberian citizenship to only Blacks, thus excluding Lebanese, most frequently cited the Lebanese community’s economic status and activities in the country. Similar to their co-ethnics in other West African countries, many Lebanese are a middleman minority¹¹ -a group that occupies an intermediate position in society and mediates, frequently by providing particular economic functions, between the dominant and subordinate groups- in Liberia (Akyeampong, 2006; Beydoun, 2013; Bierwirth, 1999; Kaj, 2012; Leighton, 1974; Stanley, 2005;

⁹ One parent of Lebanese descent and one parent who is Black African.

¹⁰ Earlier research shows that these discrepancies always existed. For example, Winder (1962) shows that in 1960, the number of Lebanese was somewhere between 600 and 4,000. Liebenow (1969) cites the Liberian census of 1962 that listed 2,077 Lebanese nationals.

¹¹ See Bonacich (1973) for an in-depth theory and analysis of middleman minorities.

Winder, 1962). Due to their status as a middleman minority, Lebanese, like other middleman minorities across the globe (e.g., Chinese in Southeast Asia, South Asians in Eastern and Southern Africa, and Jews earlier in much of Europe (Stanley, 2005)), are easily vilified (Beydoun, 2013; Bierwirth, 1999; Bigo, 1993; Grossman, 2010; Obi, 2008; Winder, 1962) but also have had greater opportunities to be economically successful. While many Liberians who were hostile toward Lebanese have argued Lebanese' financial success is due to them being unscrupulous traders and exploiters of the indigenous Africans (see for example, Akyeampong, 2006; Beydoun, 2013; Falola, 2004; Kaj, 2012; Khuri, 1968), scholars have pointed out a number of other factors.

First, many of the initial Lebanese settlers in West Africa started as peddlers, a skill that they often had acquired before they emigrated (Bierwirth, 1999; Falola, 2004; Leighton, 1974; Winder, 1962). Second, Lebanese immigrant traders and their descendants could perfect their skill because others, such as the Krios¹² in Sierra Leone and Americo Liberians, did not venture into the hinterland, but needed somebody to conduct trade on their behalf (Leighton, 1974; Liebenow, 1969). At the same time colonial powers, such as the Americo Liberians, French, and British, gave preference to Lebanese traders (Levitt, 2005; Liebenow, 1969; Obi, 2008), which in turn enabled the Lebanese in West Africa to establish a trade monopoly (Beydoun, 2013; Winder, 1962). This monopoly was strengthened by the political leaders in the different countries in West Africa, exemplified by President Tubman. His admiration for the trading skills the Lebanese possessed was very transparent. He notably stated, "that the Liberian has not business acumen and should learn how to trade from the Lebanese" (Liebenow, 1969:93, citing "West Africa" from April 25, 1964). Finally, given that the Lebanese-like many other middleman minorities (see for example, Min, 2008)- "employ" their own family members, and subsequently do not pay wages, they are able to accumulate a higher profit (Akyeampong, 2006; Grossman, 2010; Stanley, 2005; Winder, 1962). Subsequently, the practice of hiring only family members, has strengthened Liberians' views of the Lebanese as aloof and racist (Akyeampong, 2006:300; Kaj, 2012:6).

While detailed figures are not available, it is undisputed that Lebanese in Liberia and other West African countries have accumulated significant economic power. Estimates show that up to 60 percent of Liberia's economy is controlled by Lebanese (Birke, 2011; Tarr, 2014). The percentage is even higher, up to 90 percent, in the commercial real estate market in Monrovia (Harmon, 2013) (see also, Grossman, 2010; Pailey, 2012). In light of these figures it is understandable why Mr. Garsuah Janjay,¹³ a Liberian immigrant in Staten Island concluded that, "the Lebanese rule the economy of the Republic of Liberia as it is" (see also, Akyeampong, 2006; Beydoun, 2013; Bierwirth,

¹² These are the Americo Liberians and Congos of Sierra Leone (same ethnoracial origins).

¹³ This name, like all others in this paper is a pseudonym chosen by the research participants themselves. All individuals cited in this chapter are Liberian refugees/asylees/immigrants unless otherwise noted.

1999; Harmon, 2013; Kaj, 2012; Obi, 2008; Winder, 1962). Many Liberians are convinced that if Lebanese were to be allowed to become Liberian citizens, and thus eligible to vote and to serve in political positions of authority, their influence and power would be limitless. Hence, this is why Pailey (2012) has argued that,

Liberia's Negro clause is not racist [...] [but] protectionary. The Negro clause [in the Liberian constitution] was instituted at a time when Liberia was trying to protect itself from foreign domination. But the threat to national sovereignty did not disappear just because the 19th century "Scramble for Africa" by European powers ended in the 20th (para. 8).

The fear of recolonization is almost omnipresent in Liberian society due to the country's founding motivation as a refuge away from a colonization and subjugation. This was also observed by Mr. Janjay, "the [Liberian] constitution is to safeguard Americo Liberians and indigenous Liberians from being colonized again."

This existential fear as a reason for the exclusionary race-based citizenship law in Liberia has also been mentioned by other scholars (Akyeampong, 2006; Beydoun, 2013; Bierwirth, 1999; Kaj, 2012; Liebenow, 1969; Mariner, 2003).

While Americo Liberians and indigenous Liberians share a collective memory of enslavement (at the hands of Whites), indigenous Liberians often also recalled their own or their ancestors' subjugation in their native lands by the Black American settlers. Thinking of the suffering that indigenous Liberians experienced then, Mr. Janjay fearfully said, "if Americo Liberians could treat their own kind," meaning those who share a common race/African ancestry, so terribly, he did not dare to envision what "a person [from a different race], a White" would do.

Another reason why Liberians believed Lebanese should continue to be barred from Liberian citizenship is related to what they perceived as an "unequal access to women" in the Lebanese and Liberian communities. Many Liberians, including Harmon (2013), felt that "Lebanese men have the freedom to do whatever they please with Liberian females [...] while "it is absolutely forbidden¹⁴ for a Lebanese woman to date a Liberian male" (para. 14). Mr. Baka Wehjay expanded on the notion of the "forbidden Lebanese women." He said that if he [as a Liberian man] dated "any of their [Lebanese] daughters" that this "would not go well with them" and would "be a big problem," and that he could ultimately be "hurt [...] and [even get him] kill[ed]." While there are no reports (e.g. newspaper articles or witness accounts) that would corroborate this assertion, scholars (Akyeampong, 2006; Bierwirth, 1999; Harmon, 2013; Kaj, 2012; Winder, 1962) have noted the much higher propensity of Lebanese

¹⁴ It is seen as a cultural taboo, but not against Liberian law.

men being involved with Liberian women compared to Lebanese women and Liberian men.¹⁵

Liberians' aversion to the Lebanese also stems from what they see as exploitive relationships that some Lebanese men enter with Liberian women. For example, many Liberians and scholars (Liebenow, 1969; Obi, 2008) reported that Lebanese men have used Liberian women to gain access to land, a privilege that is reserved for Liberian citizens (Liberian Constitution of 1847). There are two possible ways that foreigners, in this case Lebanese men, can indirectly become owners of land. First, a Lebanese man could have a child with a Liberian woman. Afterwards, any land or property would be put into the child's name who is a Liberian citizen¹⁶. Then the Lebanese father could obtain a power of attorney thereby controlling the land or property (Weah, 2013).

Another route to de facto landownership that a significant number of Lebanese men are said to have taken, is via marriage to a Liberian woman. Mr. Wehjay, whose aunt had been in a relationship with a Lebanese man described that "once they [Lebanese men] got a piece [of land] to plant rubber," they would give the Liberian women they "are fake married to [...] small money," and then "move on with their life [...] taking over the property [or land]." Once in control of the land, Lebanese men have been accused of either divorcing the Liberian woman or leaving them for a Lebanese woman (Bierwirth, 1999; Weah, 2013; Winder, 1962). Although legally these Lebanese men are not the rightful owners of the property, they can still act as such for two reasons; first, Lebanese, like native Liberians, can and have made use of widespread corruption to bribe politicians and others in positions of authority (see for example, Grossman, 2010); second, most of the Liberian women who enter these marriages are poor and illiterate and as such are in situations where they are unlikely to protest these injustices but appeased with small monetary sums (Weah, 2013).

There is, one could, say a precedent of poorer indigenous Liberian women having romantic and/or sexual relationships with men of higher socioeconomic backgrounds; this has happened between indigenous Liberian women and Americo Liberian men (Moran, 2012; Utas, 1999). As Ms. Gloria Adams described, such arrangements between (upper class) Americo Liberian men and indigenous Liberian women from lower socio-economic backgrounds, were often entered because "poor families need[ed] that financial support," and therefore encouraged their daughters to enter these types of relationships that required them "to give the man whatever he wants" in return.

¹⁵ There are certainly same-sex relationships, but these are not discussed in public since Liberian legislation criminalizes them.

¹⁶ However, the child must be born in Liberia as children born abroad to Liberian mothers are excluded from acquiring Liberian citizenship in accordance with the Aliens and Nationality Law of 1973.

In many ways these relationships that wealthier Americo Liberian men and Lebanese men have had with indigenous Liberian women are unequal in power distribution, and many women have often been exploited and abused (Harmon, 2013; Weah, 2013; Williams, 2013; Yates, 2013). There have also been cases when young Liberian women were trafficked by Lebanese men. Most recently this occurred in the spring of 2015, which greatly angered the Liberian population who demanded that the Lebanese population in Liberia condemn their co-ethnics who had abused and tricked Liberian girls and women (“Liberia,” 2015).

Finally, many Liberians felt Lebanese were not worthy of Liberian citizenship because they either has not “embraced Africa” enough or at all or, worse, had expressed disdain for Black Africans (Bierwirth, 1999; Kaj, 2012; Winder, 1962). If these charges were to hold up, this would be an affront against the nation founded for the “redemption of the Black race.”

Many Liberians also resent that Lebanese send much of their profits as remittances either to Lebanon or other places outside of the African continent, decrying that Lebanese are “constructing fabulous homes in their country that have never been built in Liberia” (“Liberia,” 2015, para. 5; Söderström, 2009; Tannenbaum et al., 2009; Harmon, 2013; Grossman, 2010).¹⁷ Some Liberians, including, Harmon (2013), a Liberian business man, even went as far as accusing Lebanese of only using Liberia, like a “parasite [...] [that] feed[s] on the [...] [Liberian] host, benefit[ing] at the expense of the host” (para. 11). Liberians have failed to acknowledge that these remittances to Lebanon are a direct consequence of the exclusionary Liberian citizenship and naturalisation laws. Lebanese, as non-citizens always have to be prepared to be expelled¹⁸ from Liberia.

Conclusion

The national motto of Liberia is “The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here,” however, the preceding analysis of Liberia’s historic and present-day citizenship and naturalisation requirements shows that neither this “liberty” nor Liberian citizenship has been available to all of the country’s residents equally. From the country’s beginning as a U.S. commonwealth, citizenship was limited to Americo Liberians. They were seen, unlike the indigenous population, as worthy of this citizenship. It took more than fifty years after the country’s independence for indigenous Liberians to obtain a second class citizenship, and 99 years for all Liberians to have equal citizenship, which included suffrage for all. But inequality has continued to dominate the country, to some extent still

¹⁷ World Bank’s (2015) data on remittances for 2014 show that much more money is remitted from Liberia to Nigeria (US\$ 74 million) and to Côte d’Ivoire (US\$ 49 million) than Lebanon (US\$ 9 million). The same trend holds true for previous years.

¹⁸ History shows that this fear is not unfounded as there have been numerous occasions when middlemen minorities were expelled; for example Indians from Uganda and Jews from different European countries.

between Americo Liberians and indigenous Liberians, but certainly among Liberians with citizenship and Lebanese residents living in Liberia. Latter are non-Black and, thus, on constitutional grounds ineligible for Liberian citizenship; only those with African ancestry are eligible. Liberians continue to these restrictive race-based citizenship and naturalisation laws as a means of protection from “foreign rule.” The analysis has shown that the collective memory of slavery that Liberia’s founding fathers escaped from shapes Liberians views until today.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Tobias Schwarz for the opportunity to participate in the “Naturalization Policies and Practices Worldwide” workshop and in this volume, and finally his constructive feedback. The author is also grateful for the helpful suggestions and comments from the workshop participants, Alexis Silver, Elizabeth Miller, and the anonymous reviewers.

References

- Abdullah, I. (2003). When does an Indigene/Immigrant become a Citizen? Reflections on the Nation-State in Contemporary Africa. *African Sociological Review / Revue Africaine de Sociologie*, 7(2), 113–117.
- Akyeampong, E. K. (2006). Race, Identity and Citizenship in Black Africa: The Case of the Lebanese in Ghana. *Africa*, 76(03), 297–323.
- Alba, R., & Foner, N. (2015). *Strangers No More: Immigration and the Challenges of Integration in North America and Western Europe*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Anise, L. (1974). The African Redefined: The Problems of Collective Black Identity. *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 4(4), 26–32.
- Basch, L. G., Schiller, N. G., & Szanton Blanc, C. (Eds.). (1994). *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. Langhorne, PA: Gordon & Breach.
- Beydoun, L. (2013). The Complexities of Citizenship among Lebanese Immigrants in Sierra Leone. *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, 3(1), 112–143.
- Bierwirth, C. (1999). The Lebanese Communities of Côte d’Ivoire. *African Affairs*, 98(390), 79–99.
- Bigo, D. (1993). The Lebanese community in the Ivory Coast. A non-native network at the heart of power. In A. H. Hourani & N. Shehadi (Eds.), *The Lebanese and the World: A Century of Emigration* (pp. 509–530). London, UK: I. B. Tauris.
- Birke, S. (2011, May 20). Lebanese in West Africa. Far from home. *The Economist*. Retrieved from http://www.economist.com/blogs/baobab/2011/05/Lebanese_west_africa (accessed June 11, 2015)
- Blyden, E. W. (1856). *A voice from bleeding Africa on behalf of her exiled children*. Liberia: G. Killian.
- Bonacich, E. (1973). A Theory of Middleman Minorities. *American Sociological Review*, 38(5), 583–594.
- Brantlinger, P. (1985). Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent. *Critical Inquiry*, 12(1), 166–203.

- Brubaker, R. (1998). *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- David, J. S. (2014). *The American Colonization Society: And The Founding Of The First African Republic*. Bloomington, IN: iUniverse LLC.
- Dick, S. (2002). *Liberians in Ghana: Living without Humanitarian Assistance* (New Issues in Refugee Research No. Working Paper 57). Geneva, Switzerland: UNHCR. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/3c8398f24.html> (accessed April 16, 2012)
- Ellis, S. (1999). *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Falola, T. (2004). *Nationalism and African Intellectuals*. Rochester, NY: University Rochester Press.
- Gershoni, Y. (1985). *Black Colonialism: The Americo-Liberian Struggle for the Hinterland*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Grossman, S. (2010). The Lebanese in post-conflict Liberia. In A. Awotona (Ed.), *Rebuilding Sustainable Communities for Children and Their Families after Disasters: A Global Survey* (pp. 239–258). Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Harmon, R. W. (2013, July 17). Liberia: Colonized From Within - the Liberian-Lebanese Dichotomy. *Front Page Africa*. Retrieved from <http://allafrica.com/stories/201307180992.html> (accessed June 16, 2015)
- Huberich, C. H. (2010). *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia*. Clark, NJ: The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd.
- iLoubnan. (2009). Geographical DIstribution of the Lebanese Diaspora. iLoubnan. Retrieved from <http://theidentitychef.com/2009/09/06/lebanese-diaspora-worldwide-geographical-distribution/> (accessed June 11, 2015)
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969). Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CERD.aspx> (accessed June 17, 2015)
- Kaj, N. (2012). *Why a non-black identity - the Lebanese - as part of Nigeria's national polity has been problematic*. CERS Working Paper, University of Leeds. Retrieved from cers.leeds.ac.uk/files/2013/05/Lebanese_and_Nigeria_Nisreen_Kaj.pdf (accessed April 15, 2015)
- Khuri, F. I. (1968). The African-Lebanese Mulattoes of West Africa: A Racial Frontier. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 41(2), 90–101.
- Kieh, G. K. (2012). Neo-Colonialism: American Foreign Policy and the First Liberian Civil War. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 5(1), 164–184.
- Konneh, A. (1996). Citizenship at the Margins: Status, Ambiguity, and the Mandingo of Liberia. *African Studies Review*, 39(2), 141–154.
- Kymlicka, W. (1996). *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Reprint edition). Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Leighton, N. O. (1974). The Lebanese in Sierra Leone. *Transition*, 44, 23–29.
- Leighton, N. O. (1979). The political economy of a stranger population. The Lebanese of Sierra Leone. In W. A. Shack & E. P. Skinner (Eds.), *Strangers in African Societies* (pp. 85–104). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Levitt, J. (2005). *The Evolution of Deadly Conflict in Liberia: From "Paternalitarianism" to State Collapse*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.
- Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS). (2009). *2008 Population and Housing Census. Final Results*. Monrovia, Liberia. Retrieved from <http://ecreee.dyndns.biz/sites/default/files/2008%20Population%20Census.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2011)

- Liberian Commonwealth Constitution of 1839. Retrieved from http://www.onliberia.org/con_1839.htm (accessed June 13, 2015)
- Liberian Constitution of 1847. Retrieved from http://www.onliberia.org/con_1847.htm#a514 (accessed June 13, 2015)
- Liberia: The Lebanese Community Must Speak. (2015, March 27). *The NEWS (Monrovia)*. Retrieved from <http://allafrica.com/stories/201503271275.html> (accessed June 16, 2015)
- Liebenow, J. G. (1969). *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Ludwig, B. (2013). Liberians: Struggles for Refugee Families. In N. Foner (Ed.), *One out Of Three: Immigrant New York in the 21st Century* (pp. 200–222). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Mamdani, M. (2001). Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 43(4), 651–664.
- Mariner, J. (2003). Racism, Citizenship and National Identity. *Development*, 46(3), 64–70.
- Mbembé, A. (2002). African modes of self-writing. *Public Culture*, 14(1), 239–273.
- Min, P. G. (2008). *Ethnic Solidarity for Economic Survival: Korean Greengrocers in New York City*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Moran, M. H. (2006). *Liberia: The Violence of Democracy*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Moran, M. H. (2012). Uneasy Images. Contested Representations of Gender, Modernity and Nationalism in Pre-War Liberia. In T. Mayer (Ed.), *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation* (pp. 113–136). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Obi, I. U. (2008). Immigrant - Host Relationship: A Review of Anti-Lebanese Attitudes In Twentieth Century West Africa. *IFE Psychologia*, 16(3), 232–247.
- Ong, A. (2003). *Buddha is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, the New America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Pailey, R. N. (2012, October 21). The Negro Clause in Liberia's Constitution Is Not Racist; It Is Protectionary. Retrieved from <http://www.newnarratives.org/stories/robtel-pailey/the-negro-clause-in-liberias-constitution-is-not-racist-it-is-protectionary/> (accessed December 4, 2015)
- Sanneh, L. (2001). *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Söderström, J. (2009). Demos Conceptions in Liberia. The Limits of Citizenship among Ex-Combatants. Presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Toronto, Canada. Retrieved from <http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1452224> (accessed June 13, 2015)
- Stanley, W. R. (2005). Background to the Liberia and Sierra Leone implosions. *GeoJournal*, 61(1), 69–78.
- Tannenbaum, J., Valcke, A., McPherson, A., Mueller, L., & Conté, S. (2009). *Analysis of the Aliens and Nationality Law of the Republic of Liberia* (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. ID 1795122). Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network. Retrieved from <http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1795122> (accessed June 12, 2015)
- Tarr, A. G. (2014, November 27). Transforming Liberia with a Post-Epidemic Agenda: What Now? *Monrovia Inquirer*. Monrovia, Liberia. Retrieved from <http://monroviainquirer.com/2014/11/27/transforming-liberia-with-a-post-epidemic-agenda-what-now/> (accessed December 4, 2015)

- The World Bank. (2015). *Bilateral Remittance Matrix 2014*. Washington, D.C: The World Bank. Retrieved from <http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTDECPROSPECTS/0,,contentMDK:22759429~pagePK:64165401~piPK:64165026~theSitePK:476883,00.html> (accessed June 16, 2015)
- Tyler-McGraw, M. (2007). *An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Urquia, M. L., Frank, J. W., & Glazier, R. H. (2010). From places to flows. International secondary migration and birth outcomes. *Social Science & Medicine*, 71(9), 1620–1626.
- Utas, M. (1999). Girls’ “loving business”: Sex and the Struggle for Status and Independence in Liberia. *Antropologiska Studier*, (64-65), 65–76.
- Weah, J. (2013, April 28). Lebanese Men and Liberian Women. Retrieved December 5, 2015, from <http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/old/op-ed-editorial/letter-comments/5854-lebanese-men-and-liberian-women.html> (accessed 4/12/2015)
- Williams, W. C. L. (2013, April 24). Liberia: Rape Fury in Liberia - Families of Underage Girls Abused By Lebanese Speaking Out. *Front Page Africa*. Retrieved from <http://allafrica.com/stories/201304240677.html> (accessed December 4, 2015)
- Winder, R. B. (1962). The Lebanese in West Africa. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 4(3), 296–333.
- Yates, C. B. (2013, April 19). Lebanese Charged With Rape. *Monrovia Inquirer*. Monrovia, Liberia. Retrieved from <http://monroviainquirer.com/2013/04/19/lebanese-charged-with-rape/> (accessed December 4, 2015).