AFRICA AND LIBERIA IN WORLD POLITICS:
AN ANALYSIS OF LIBERIAN FOREIGN POLICY DURING 20TH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes Liberia’s puzzling shift from a reflexive allegiance to the United States (US) to a more autonomous, anti-colonial, and Africanist foreign policy during the early years of the Tolbert administration (1971-1975) with a focus on the role played by public rhetoric in shaping conceptions of the world which engendered the new policy. For the overarching purpose of understanding the Tolbert-era foreign-policy actions, this study traces the use of the discursive resources *Africa* and *Liberia* in three foreign policy debates: 1) the Hinterland Policy (1900-05), 2) the creation of the Organization for African Unity (OAU) (1957-1963), and finally, 3) the Tolbert administration’s autonomous, anti-colonial foreign policy (1971-1975). The specifications of Liberia and Africa in the earlier debates are available for use in subsequent debates and ultimately play a role in the adoption of the more autonomous and anti-colonial foreign policy. Special attention is given to the legitimation process, that is, the regular and repeated way in which justifications are given for pursuing policy actions, in public discourse in the United States, Europe, Africa, and Liberia. The analysis highlights how political opponents’ justificatory arguments and rhetorical deployments drew on publicly available powerful discursive resources and in doing so attempted to define *Liberia* often in relation to *Africa* to allow for certain courses of action while prohibiting others. Political actors claimed Liberia’s membership to the purported supranational cultural community of *Africa*.

After the widespread use of the rhetoric of the independence struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, including “Africa for the Africans”, a discourse that had previously been marginalized
within Liberia’s public space now began to be used to yoke Liberia to the new African states. The national discourse of an African continental identity became part of the Liberian rhetorical landscape in the 1970s; newspapers and other publications frequently exposed Liberian audiences to the African nationalist discourse of the anti-colonial independence movements taking place at their borders and across the continent. However, the discourse of traditional Liberian conservatism also competed for prominence in shaping policy. Liberia as an African state, that is being, belonging to and fundamentally connected to the land and peoples of Africa, that can be traced to the beginnings of the polity in debates and discussion in the US during the 19th century. Liberian state leaders justified their policy choices in the early 1970s by asserting Liberia’s African identity. This move also simultaneously served to recast Liberia as an African state, which in turn had implications for Liberia’s allegiances, alliances, alignment, and actions in international politics. Thus, Liberia was nested within Africa; this new identity produced certain foreign policy actions and produced Liberia in its new manifestation as an African state. The study argued that the shift in Liberian foreign policy can be adequately explained by the Liberia’s claim to be an African state, specifically part of a supranational community called “Africa” with associated commitments and responsibilities any member of a community would presumably have. Without the specifications of “Liberia” and “Africa” that became salient in the 1970s but originating from those earlier debates, Liberia might not have implemented the more autonomous, anti-colonial, and Africanist foreign policy that it adopted. Since these terms, with their contemporary discursive significance, were rhetorically deployed specifically to legitimate Liberia’s new policy direction, without those cultural and discursive resources such actions would seem to have been unlikely.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the use of the concept of identity as a critical explanatory category in International Relations (IR) has proliferated, especially with the emergence of new states in the world, numerous prolonged conflicts throughout the 1990s, and additionally the global processing of the events of September 11, 2001. Seemingly endless debates have taken place over whether or not the conflicts of our era are indeed reflective of a world of clashing civilizations, as has been asserted by scholars such as Samuel Huntington (1993; 2003). How can we explain world politics in terms of identity and not only with regard to how the resources of the world are distributed or who has a larger arsenal? The intersection of identity and the conduct of foreign relations serve as the broader intellectual context for this investigation into a puzzling shift in the 1970s foreign policy of a small nation on the west coast of Africa: Liberia.

At the beginning of the 1970s, Liberia shifted from a reflexive allegiance to the United States (US) to a more autonomous and anti-colonial foreign policy. This shift was remarkable considering that Liberia’s relationship with the US had preceded even its existence as a state. African-American repatriates from the US had founded Liberia in 1847. The settlers, imbued with the ideas of the 19th century American society in which they had spent their lives, established a republic that reflected American institutions (Liebenow 1969, 1987; Beyan 1991; Claude NC 2004). In succeeding years, strategic interventions by the US at critical historical moments helped the Liberian state maintain its sovereignty and protect its territory (d’Azevedo 1969: 53; Gershoni 1985; Normandy 1993; Agyeman-Duah 1994: xvii). In communications and interactions over those years, high-level Liberian and American state officials regularly referred to the “special relationship” between the two states. During World War II, Liberia provided
troops and resources and allocated land for a military base for the Allied effort (Siklo 2000). In the Cold War that followed, Liberia unequivocally supported the US’s policy of containment. Unswervingly, Liberia sided with the US in international forums (Dunn 1979; Kieh 1982; Sesay 1985). Extensive economic ties included Liberia’s use of US currency, frequent US loans to Liberia, the US’s status as Liberia’s major trading partner, and the advantages that elite Liberians enjoyed as a result of US multinational corporations operating within Liberia’s borders.

In view of all these benefits that had accrued to Liberia from its connection with the United States, the shift in Liberian foreign policy during the Tolbert administration seems almost inexplicable. Twenty-five years into the Cold War, the Tolbert administration (1971-1980) established full diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, several Eastern European states, Cuba, and North Korea. It entered into a defense pact with the communist state of Guinea. It broke ties with Israel and established relations with Arab states, taking up the Palestinian cause. It sought to renegotiate concession agreements with US and European businesses, which had strongly benefited foreign interests over Liberian ones. Additionally, Liberia turned from its US orientation to provide leadership, financial assistance, and support to African liberation movements, particularly in international forums like the United Nations (UN), the non-aligned movement (NAM), and the Organization of African Unity (OAU). All of these moves risked Liberian relations with the US and its allies, which Liberia had doggedly cultivated for decades. How can we account for these changes in Liberian foreign policy?

Although a few studies on Liberia mention this shift in Liberian foreign policy, none has offered an adequate account of why or how the shift occurred (Lowenkopf 1976; Carlisle 1981; Sisay 1985; Kieh 1992; Dunn 2009). This study will investigate why the Liberian state moved toward a more autonomous, anti-colonial foreign policy during the early years of the Tolbert
administration (1971-1975). Questions that have been largely left unanswered by both scholars of international relations and African studies will guide the inquiry: Why did Liberia, a small and undeveloped nation, distance itself from the US, its most powerful ally? Why did Liberia shift from its pattern of crafting foreign policy positions in line with the foreign policies of the “West”? Why did Liberia choose not to defend the positions of the “West”, sometimes even taking opposing stances in international forums? Why did Liberia pursue a policy of nonalignment in that phase of the Cold War? Why did Liberia, “a small power,” pivot from a close relationship with the US, “a great power,” to a closer relationship with nascent underdeveloped states and liberation movements in Africa? After over a century of existing on the African continent with few or no close relationships with Africans in the region, why did Liberia suddenly claim a leadership position for itself in international forums such as the UN to champion the total liberation of Africa? How can this dramatic and consequential shift in Liberian foreign policy be explained?

The terms “Africa” and “Liberia” are central to the process of explaining the historic policy shift of the Tolbert administration. Like the United States itself (as well as the Soviet Union), Liberia had been founded on a specific system of ideas that had implications for state foreign policy. In many ways those ideas regarding what Liberia was (or was not) were defined in relation to what Africa was (and was not) at any given time. This study aims to account for this shift in Liberia’s foreign policy during the 1970s by examining how state officials used the terms “Africa” and “Liberia” in speeches, debates, and discussions in the post-decolonization, post-World War II domestic and international contexts, allowing for certain policies and excluding others.
As we shall see, Liberian national identity was constructed in an ongoing process of defining what the terms “Liberia” and “Africa” meant to Liberians who were engaged in foreign policy debates. We will see how the contemporary meanings of these terms shifted over time and appear to have been inextricably linked to the production of policies used to legitimate certain state actions at certain times.

In fact, conceptions of “Africa” and “Liberia” have a lineage that stretches back to important historical and social processes involved in the creation and maintenance of the state from its very beginnings. For the overarching purpose of understanding the Tolbert-era foreign-policy actions, this study traces the rhetorical use of the terms “Africa” and “Liberia” in three historic foreign policy debates, in particular those surrounding 1) the Hinterland Policy (1904-05), 2) the creation of the Organization for African Unity (OAU) (1957-1963), and finally, 3) the Tolbert administration’s autonomous, anti-colonial foreign policy (1971-1975). Without the particular collective meanings of “Liberia” and “Africa” that had survived the earlier debates and become even more salient in the 1970s, could Liberia have implemented the more autonomous and anti-colonial foreign policy that it adopted? Since these terms were rhetorically deployed in debates specifically to legitimate Liberia’s new policies, it seems unlikely.

Up to the early part of the 20th century, the meanings, associations and broad understanding of the conceptual terms “Liberia” and “Africa” encouraged Liberia’s pro-US policies, but by the 1970s, the terms had changed associations to the point so that they could be used in policy debates to preclude Liberia’s adherence to its more US-centric positions of the past, and to reorient Liberia toward Africa and away from the US. This had the productive effect of requiring Liberia to fashion a different identity for itself within the regional, continental, and global contexts. The deployment of “Africa” and “Liberia” in public discourse legitimated
certain policies and are central to explaining the Liberia’s shift to a more autonomous and anti-colonial foreign policy.

The foreign policies of African states in general and Liberia remain under-researched. While a few studies have described the dramatic changes in Liberia’s policy (Clapham 1976; Lowenkopf 1976; Carlisle 1981; Sisay 1985; Kieh 1992; Dunn 2009), none has suggested why they occurred. African foreign policy is viewed in this dissertation not, as traditionally understood, as a directive of autocratic individuals but as a social product in which identity and discourse play an important role. This project will contribute to the body of IR research at the intersection of the politics of identity construction¹, the use of language, and the production of international policy.²

Social and Historical Background

The Republic of Liberia occupies an area of 99,067 square kilometers on the West African coastline. Former British colony Sierra Leone abuts Liberia to the north, and former French colony Côte d’Ivoire borders it to the east. The Atlantic Ocean lies to the south and west. Liberia was established as a colony in 1822 by the American Colonization Society (ACS), a group that represented a coalition of distinguished US citizens from across the spectrum of American society. In the 1820s, 1840s, and 1860s, successive waves of free and manumitted African-Americans emigrated to West Africa under the auspices of the ACS (Barnes 2004; Burin 2005; Reef 2002; Tyler-McGraw 2007). The ACS saw the establishment of a colony in West Africa as part of a solution to the “national problem” of the increasing number of freed blacks in the United States, as well as hope for a better future than free blacks could expect in the United States.³ Various segments of American society supported colonization for different reasons: indeed, among the relatively distinguished US citizens who founded the ACS were racists and
racial separatists who saw colonization as a means to rid the United States of all African Americans (see Chapter 4, “Imagining Liberia and Africa” for an extended discussion).

For their part, the African-American settlers chose to focus on building an “America” for themselves on the west coast of Africa (Clegg 2004; Huffman 2004). These settlers formed the state of Liberia, declaring the colony’s independence in 1847. The worldview of the settlers had implications for their relationship with the indigenous people of the region (see Chapter 5, “Enacting Liberia”). The settlers and their sponsors imagined Liberia as an outpost of Christianity, republicanism, and Euro-American capitalism, and they modeled their government and constitution closely on those of the United States (Beyan 1991). However, a distinct hierarchy was created, with Americo-Liberians occupying positions of power and indigenous African Liberians having no role in the activities of the new state.

From its inception to the 1960s, Liberia did not take the opportunity to claim a connection to African cultural identity and chose instead to emphasize its connection to “the West.” From the early days, some Liberian thinkers and leaders argued for an alternative to the creation of a “Little America” in West Africa. Edward Wilmot Blyden wrote and spoke extensively on the subject but was largely ignored. The African-American settlers had been socialized in 19th century American ways of life and brought with them a zeal to “Christianize, commodify and civilize” their African brethren, whom they perceived as family by way of shared race but not cultural identification.

The settlers soon abandoned their initial expansive missionary zeal and confined their settlements largely to the coast due to wars of resistance waged by some of the territorially-bound human collectives in the region and the settlers’ fear of the physical and moral threat the heathens posed to their fledgling state. This civilizing mission was part of Liberian leaders’
When a foreign journalist wrote about Liberia’s governing class in 1946, then Liberian President William V.S. Tubman (1944-1971) responded, “The facts are, that had it not been for the intrepidity of the forebears of this ‘governing class’, there would have been no nation, and the territory and people constituting this nation would have been British, French, or Belgian” (Dunn & Tarr 1981: 62).

However, in the 1970s, Liberia shifted from its traditional allegiance to the United States to a foreign policy that was more autonomous, clearly anti-colonial, and decidedly Africanist. Given the absence of literature attempting to explain the foreign policy changes during the Tolbert administration, this brief review takes note of texts that discuss Liberian foreign policy and mention the changes without providing an explanation. In 1972, for example, the William R. Tolbert administration (1971-1980) established full diplomatic relations with the Communist world, including Soviet Union, several Eastern bloc states, Cuba, and North Korea and entered into a defense pact with the avowedly socialist state of Guinea. Additionally, during the 1973-1974 Yom Kippur War, Liberia prohibited US vessels registered under the Liberian flag from supplying arms to Israel (Sesay 1985: 155-170; Carlisle 1981). In the 1970s, Liberia intensified its military, financial, and administrative support not only to newly independent African states but also to ongoing liberation struggles in southern Africa. In the international forums of the United Nations (UN), the non-aligned movement, and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Liberia advocated Africa-related rather than US positions. Lastly, in a provocative move, the Tolbert administration initiated talks to renegotiate concession agreements with US and European businesses to arrive at more favorable terms for Liberia, upsetting American business and diplomatic partners and incurring noticeable negative consequences related to the provision
of US aid and assistance (Sesay 1985; Kieh 1982; Dunn 2009). This change in Liberia’s
traditional close, even deferential, posture towards the US is curious. How was it that Liberia,
informally referred to as “Little America” by neighboring West African states, prioritized
cultivating relationships with newly independent African states? Why did Liberia shift from a
US-centric to an Africa-centric foreign policy orientation? Why did Liberia seek to assume a
leadership role concerning African issues in world politics? Was the Tolbert administration
attempting to “Africanize” the American-Liberian settler-ruled state?8

The shifts in Liberia's foreign policy were notable because of Liberia’s origins as a
colony and later a republic that reflected American social and political institutions (Liebenow
1969, 1987; Beyan 1991; Claude 2004). In the years before and after Liberia declared its
independence, strategic interventions by the United States at critical moments had helped the
Liberian state protect its territorial sovereignty (d’Azevedo 1969: 53; Gershoni 1985; Normandy
1993; Agyeman-Duah 1994). During World War II, Liberia had provided troops and resources
and allocated land for a military base in support of the United States and its allies (Siklo 2000).
In the Cold War period that followed, Liberia had unequivocally supported the US policy of
containing the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence. Liberia had unswervingly sided with the
United States in international forums through the 1950s and 1960s (Dunn 1979; Kieh 1982). By
the 1970s, extensive economic ties connected the United States and Liberia, including Liberia’s
Multiple prosperous US multinational corporations had operations in Liberia that benefited
Liberian corporations and individuals as well as their counterparts in the United States. Over the
years, high-level Liberian and American officials had regularly referred to the “special
relationship” between the two states.9 In light of this close relationship, the shift in Liberian
foreign policy during the early years of the Tolbert administration presents a puzzle requiring explanation. However, extant accounts of Liberian foreign policy do not adequately account for the change in Liberian foreign policy during the Tolbert era. This study seeks to fill that gap in the literature.

Chapter Outline

In the next section of this introductory chapter, I review possible theoretical explanations for the shift in Liberia’s foreign policy during the 1970s, enumerate relevant theoretical perspectives, and note their limitations. As seen in the brief discussion of the literature on Liberian foreign policy presented above, existing studies of Liberia have generally been empirically focused and have lacked any explicitly foregrounded analytical framework. Hence, in the following section, I address the gaps in scholarship by identifying the specific challenges that the Tolbert era poses for the major theoretical approaches commonly used to analyze Liberian foreign policy. I describe what might be expected to happen within the parameters of each approach and why those approaches have difficulty explaining what actually transpired.

In the third section, I sketch the theoretical orientation of this dissertation, which is aimed at constructing an explanation of Liberian foreign policy during the early to mid-1970s. I present my argument that the Tolbert administration’s shift to an autonomous, anti-colonial and Africanist foreign policy can be accounted for by language, particularly Liberian leaders’ use of a potent discursive and cultural resource, the word “Africa” with its connotations, in their speeches, debates and discussions. In that particular post-independence, post-decolonization, post-colonial context, the term “Africa” came to signify an African collective identity along with feelings of pride and commitment to that identity group. I contend that the rhetorical deployment of “Africa” in policy discussions and debates legitimized certain policy actions and ruled out
others. Furthermore, I believe that the context in which the term was deployed allowed for the seemingly dramatic shift in Liberian foreign policy orientation to be received by domestic and international audiences as not only acceptable but natural. The last section outlines the structure of the dissertation, including a brief description of subsequent chapters.

Principal Theoretical Approaches and Their Limitations

The field of International Relations typically considers issues like the 1970s-era shift in Liberia's foreign policy from two principal perspectives, the realist approach and the global economic approach. Hence, this discussion focuses on what is missed when the Liberian foreign policy of the time is viewed through the analytical lens of these two dominant approaches. Firstly, the policy shifts would be explained by a focus on the weak position of Liberia relative to the material capabilities in the international system or to Liberia’s marginal position in the global economy. Explanations offered within the realist and the global economic approaches would focus on material factors and how structural considerations relating to the international system determined Liberia’s foreign policy during the 1970s.

The problem with both of these models for understanding and explaining these foreign policy changes is that they fail to make the distinction between the contributing factors and the actual sources of a given international phenomenon (see Janice Bially Mattern (2005), Patrick Jackson and Daniel Nexon (1999)). "Factors" here are understood as material and physical things while "sources" are the complex sets of relatively stable relations and publicly shared understandings that give meaning to those things. The failure of these approaches to distinguish between material factors and the shared understandings that give rise to the creation of meaning results in only a partial account; focus on the significance of material factors impedes a deeper
understanding of how state actions were shaped and the limitations of material factors in explaining why the state acted as it did.

One way in which the factors and explanations based on material factors are incomplete is with regard to identifying the causes of a particular phenomenon. Material and physical factors require a source in order to be made intelligible and meaningful. Hence, causal explanations that identify contributing factors as causes fail to meet the test of causal sufficiency. For example, Liberia’s material wealth and physical armament did not change immediately before or after the Tolbert administration changed policy directions. Causal sufficiency requires that wherever something exists, the outcome should also exist (Ragin 2000: 90-96). However, what changed was not so much material factors as the shared understandings of the nature of Liberia’s international relations with the states of the African continent. Without the specific constellation of signs that produced socially shared meanings of “Liberia” and “Africa” in the 1970s being rhetorically deployed in speeches, debates, and policy discussions, it is unlikely that this new policy path would have been taken. Necessarily, the form of causality emphasized in this kind of analysis is constitutive as opposed to causative.

The power-political and global economic approaches as noted earlier largely focus on material factors. The following section presents a review of these two prominent IR theories most used to explain foreign policy and considers their potential usefulness in addressing this puzzling shift in Liberian foreign policy.

*Power-political approach*

Foreign policy analyses from the power-political perspective tend to focus on the distribution of material wealth and military power as contributing factors in determining state action. According to realist theories, international politics is a “recurring struggle for wealth and
power among independent actors in a state of anarchy” (Gilpin 1981: 7). In the realist model, policy decisions can be explained by state leaders making rational decisions according to the unchanging rules of the international system (Verba 1969: 225). Military strength is the key factor determining the relative influence and power of states. Foreign policy has as its goal national security, which is achieved by increasing military strength (usually by means of wealth) (Donnelly 2000; Rose 1998). Conceptualized as equivalent units within an anarchical self-help system, units that differ only in terms of wealth and military capabilities, states are the main actors in a world where power politics is “the only game in town” and thus power politics is central to a state’s existence (Legro & Moravscik 1999; Walt 1998; Waltz 1979). Power politics systems are “strategic threat systems that states deploy in order to boost their competitive position in the quest for power and interest (Bially-Mattern 2005: 34). In order to survive in an anarchical international system, according to realists, states seek to increase their power at any given opportunity even when cooperating for mutual gain. A state’s power relative to other states in the international system is a central concern given that other states in the system are necessarily either actual or potential threats. Foreign policy from this view, then, involves ensuring the survival of the state against external threats (Herz 1951; Morgenthau 1978; Grieco 1988; Mearseimer 1995).

Liberia, a small power in the world, had and retains the need to form alliances greater powers in order to survive. However, Liberia’s decision to establish relations with the Soviet Union and states of the Eastern bloc fails, on its face, to confirm a basic assumption of the power political approach, that due to the anarchical nature of the system, states pursue security. Instead, in the bipolar world of the Cold War, little Liberia jeopardized the military backing of the US, a superpower, by pursuing a foreign policy that conflicted with US goals. In this
approach, the shift in Liberian foreign policy can be explained by the bipolar power-political structure of the international system during the Cold War.

Two possible arguments emerge from this system-level perspective. The first is that the United States’ domination of Liberian foreign relations in the 1950s and 1960s may have led to its taking Liberia’s allegiance for granted. Liberia’s establishment of ties with the Socialist world can be seen as an attempt to counter the superpower of the US in the interest of Liberia’s national security. Perhaps US failure to respond to Liberia’s requests for increased military assistance in a manner deemed adequate by Liberia prompted Liberia to attempt to improve its security situation by moving away from the United States towards the Soviet Union. A second possible explanation from the realist viewpoint is that the shift was Liberia’s attempt to improve the terms of its relationship with the United States. Both of these explanations reflect a presumptive preoccupation with relative gains on Liberia's part. State foreign-policy goals and choices should be, in this view, rationally determined based on an analysis of the cost and benefits. The pressures of surviving in anarchy should be so strong that states would exercise non-survival-oriented agency at their own peril.

Within the parameters of realism, a possible explanation of Liberia's shift to a more autonomous, anti-colonial, and Africanist foreign policy from its historically closer relationship with the United States might be that it was a strategic move to improve the terms and conditions of its relationship with the United States. That is, Liberia as a rational power-maximizing actor would have initiated a closer relationship with the Soviet Union in order to spur the United States to increase its security assistance to Liberia and thus to increase Liberia’s military power. For instance, Liberia would have been able to request more security and development assistance by playing on then US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s concern that Liberia would be corrupted.
by association with the “radical” and “socialist” African states that had aligned themselves with the Soviet Union. Given the US aim to contain Soviet influence and expansion, this move would have improved Liberia’s relative power position and permitted Liberia to use that leverage to press the United States to address certain priorities of the Tolbert administration. If Liberia’s foreign policy reorientation had been an attempt to balance against the United States and the West for the purpose of securing better opportunities for investment, technology transfers, terms of trade, military and financial assistance, then from the realist perspective, Liberia would have been a rational actor behaving strategically in order to maximize its relative power position. Realists would explain the shift in Liberian foreign policy in terms of changes in material incentives, to which Tolbert rationally responded.

The question is whether either scenario provides an adequate account of the shift in Liberian foreign policy during the early 1970s. If Liberia is taken as a more or less rational power-maximizer, how do we explain the instances of proactivism, reactivism, and downright incoherence in the Tolbert administration’s foreign policy? Even a cursory examination of Liberia’s actions during the period reveals that elements of Liberian foreign policy behavior simply did not conform to realist assumptions. For example, Liberia took a non-aligned stance in the Cold War but at the same time remained dependent on the United States and the West for protection and sustenance. During the 1973 Arab-Israeli conflict, Liberia stood with the Arabs, on the opposing side of the two countries from which it received military assistance. In the campaign against apartheid South Africa, Liberia took a leadership role in the UN, and then in an apparent about-face, Tolbert invited South African Prime Minister Vorster to Monrovia even though South Africa was subject to sanctions by the OAU at the time. The South Africa-Liberia “summit” was then, curiously, followed by the Tolbert administration’s reinvigorated
condemnation of the policies of apartheid South Africa in the UN. All of these examples of Liberia’s foreign policy during the 1970s lack a cogent explanation within the theoretical framework of realism because they fail to conform to the rationalist premise of the realist model.

Thus, although realism is a useful approach when explaining why Liberian leadership chose a close relationship with the United States in the immediate postwar period, realism does not adequately explain what happened in the 1970s. First, Liberia under the Tolbert administration did not exhibit typical balancing behavior. Although Liberia pivoted away from the United States, it did not seek a close Soviet alignment even though that would have been the expected behavior in a bipolar world. There is no evidence that Liberia entered into discussions with the Soviet Union for military aid and protection. The realist approach would predict that Liberia sought the procurement of weapons, military upgrades, a more comprehensive security pact, or economic support from the Soviet Union. However, this Liberia did not do. Instead, Liberia’s engagement with the Soviet Union was limited to the opening of diplomatic embassies and intermittent diplomatic exchanges. During the Tolbert era, Liberia also did not covertly or overtly make reference to these new diplomatic relations and potentially productive relationships in the context of negotiations with the United States in a way that would signal that Liberia was vying for additional support.

Another example of realist expectations failing to square with the facts in this particular case is Liberia’s non-aligned policy. Along with several other developing states in the Cold War period, Liberia attempted to stake out a space for itself outside of Cold War dynamics by publicly committing to a non-aligned policy. While the non-aligned path might have provided a position from which it could then play one superpower against another, Tolbert did not actually exploit the superpower rivalry. While the United States became increasingly uneasy with
Liberia’s new policy orientation, it tolerated that shift. After all, the United States needed Liberia to continue its role as a US proxy for the execution of its Cold War agenda on the African continent. And Liberia continued to depend on the United States for aid. Initially, the United States saw Liberia's non-aligned stance as an important part of Liberia's achieving a level of legitimacy with African states in order to more successfully advance the US agenda. However, as the Tolbert presidency went on, it became clear that Tolbert was indeed actually committed to Liberia’s Africanist agenda, putting those commitments before Liberia’s support of the United States’ goals.

According to realists, the anarchical nature of the international system causes states to be primarily concerned with maximizing political power, including their own security. However, important characteristics of Liberia’s foreign policy are difficult to reconcile with a view of Liberia as a rational power-maximizing actor. The Tolbert administration devoted time and resources to the country’s African agenda to the point where the costs to Liberia’s coffers outweighed the benefits. Liberia, a small relatively weak state, failed to seek security in alliances with great powers and engaged in an activist foreign policy that distanced it from its most active protector. Thus, Liberia pursued a foreign policy that did not reflect the expected concerns of a small state in the international system as conceptualized in the realist model.

This incoherence in Liberia’s state actions highlights a general problem with state-centric approaches. Specifically, in systemic approaches, international political factors, not domestic factors, have a significant effect on the foreign policy choices of state leaders. As such, the realist approach precludes the exploration of the impact of domestic politics. Liberian society was not immune to the lure of the international social and economic justice movements and the democratic transitions taking place on the continent and around the world. With the end of the
27-year authoritarian, autocratic Tubman rule and the initial political liberalization of the Tolbert era, a political space opened that allowed for more freedom of the press, more toleration of government criticism and the formation of new organizations—from student organizations to trade unions—with diverse aims. These organizations protested abuses of human rights, civil rights, political rights, and constitutional rights. They advocated for social equality among Liberia’s various ethnic groups, especially between the American-Liberians and African-Liberians. Several newspapers and other periodicals were widely distributed, and national and international issues were publicly discussed. Critical examinations of Liberian social and political life found their way into sermons from pulpits across the country. Liberia’s domestic politics was alive with publicly expressed and politically relevant competing narratives and identities.

The analytical lens of realism, which focuses on distributions of military power and wealth on the systemic level, does not consider the important interactions between the political discourses of Liberians and their state leadership, as well as the effects of those discourses in shaping the bounds of legitimate policy construction and implementation during the 1970s. Does the global economic approach better explain the new directions in Liberian foreign policy?

*Global economic perspective*

The basic premise of the global economic perspective is that inequalities built into the structure of the global economy constrain the options available to some states in pursuing their interests internationally. A central assumption of the international political economic model is that politics flows from economics and that the global power structure is firmly established through ownership of the means of production and division of labor, ownership which generally benefits a privileged few while marginalizing the disadvantaged many (Frank 1966; Wallerstein
2011, 2004; Cox 1987:253-254; Cox and Sinclair 1996). This problematic global arrangement is historically produced: since the 16th century, capitalist expansion has been achieved through armed conquest and the subsequent establishment of durable patterns of inequality through continued violent, exploitative extraction of the resources, labor and wealth of subjugated lands and peoples (Wallerstein 1979: 87-107; Frank 1966: 9; Dos Santos 1971: 226). Foreign policy and international politics are generated by the pursuit of economic interests in a contentious relationship between those who benefit from the prevailing capitalist order and those who are marginalized by it (Strange 1996: 3-14; Taylor & Williams 2004). The structure of the global political economy and key external actors’ interaction with states are also critical factors in determining a state’s foreign policy.

Considered from the global economic approach, Liberia’s shift to a more autonomous, anti-colonial, and Africanist foreign policy could be explained by Liberia’s marginal position in the structurally unequal global economic system. As a primarily export-oriented economy, Liberia experienced the negative effects of commodity price fluctuations in world markets, adverse terms of trade, and constraining effects of debt incurred as the result of seeking revenue to fund the national budget. It can be argued that Liberia’s foreign policy was determined by its international economic commitments and that Liberia used its foreign policy in order to secure economic benefits and improve its overall economy. For example, the shift might be explained as an attempt by Liberia to distance itself from both superpowers in order to gain leverage in negotiations for better terms in foreign investment contracts from American and Soviet businesses seeking to operate in Liberia (e.g. the Firestone contract), including improved terms of trade and taxes collected from transnational corporations operating within the country. Liberia would then have been able to open a bidding war for its natural resources, with Liberia’s
allegiance as the prize in return for an increased price for Liberia’s resources. Additionally, Tolbert’s publicly declared non-aligned stance could have made him more desirable to both superpowers as an advocate of their respective sides because of his perceived legitimacy and influence among world progressives.

In short, Liberia’s new relations with the Soviet Union could have been used as leverage in its negotiations with the United States regarding its existing bilateral agreements. Liberia could have used this leverage to renegotiate its agreements with American businesses such as Firestone, which had accrued significant profits from rubber extraction without any capital restraints or any real commitment to developing the region. Additionally, Liberia's establishment of relations with Eastern bloc countries could have been part of a strategic effort to counter US domination of the rubber extraction industry and seek out other consumers of its rubber, thereby beginning a bidding war to increase the price of Liberia’s rubber. The move away from the United States and the adoption of a more autonomous foreign policy would, according to this theoretical perspective, have given Liberia the space necessary to exercise greater bargaining power.

That in fact was the response of some developing states to the rivalries of the Cold War. In order to advance their interests in economic development through cooperation and growth, this group of largely less developed, newly independent states joined together as a group of neutrals in relationship with rival blocs of the Cold War to form the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). As neutrals, they tried not to get embroiled in the web of US and Soviet alliances in the Cold War by adopting foreign policies that rejected participation in military alliances with either “the West” or “the East,” hoping to avoid involvement in war. In answering the question of why Liberia shifted to a more autonomous, Africanist foreign policy in the early 1970s, critical IPE
suggests that Liberia, a poorer, less developed state, united with similar states to counter or check the control of affluent, industrialized states. Although Liberia was present at the creation of the NAM in 1955, it was not until the 1970s that Liberia became significantly active in the movement and began to demonstrate a commitment to its principles in Liberian foreign policy. A few examples demonstrate this point. As noted above, in 1972, Liberia established full diplomatic relations with the Communist world. In 1973, in a surprisingly bold move, Liberia prohibited US vessels registered under the Liberian flag from supplying arms to Israel and severed ties with Israel, potentially jeopardizing its steady support from the US. Numerous American-owned ships flew Liberian flags, including ships used for military purposes. Since the founding of Stettinius Associates in 1948, the US had been able to count on Liberia to act in an expected manner with regard to its ship registry. The private corporation of former US Secretary of State Edward Stettinius had written the Liberia Maritime Code, establishing the Liberian maritime registry. The Liberian president and legislature had accepted the Code with little modification, and the Stettinius group had proceeded to promote Liberia internationally as a registry to ship owners, offering them lower fees and less regulation to register their vessels. As part owners of tanker corporations, Stettinius had benefited from the operations as Liberia remained in the top ten maritime nations in the world during this time. But in October 1973, Tolbert exercised control over the Liberian naval registry in a manner that had never been tried since the beginning of the ship registration enterprise. At the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, he prohibited Liberian-registered vessels from supplying weapons to Israel through Executive Order IV. This act demonstrated Liberia’s independence of US policy and the alignment of Liberia with the African, Islamic, Eastern bloc, and Asian states supporting Egypt and Syria in the war (Carlisle 1981: 212-213). In the same year, Liberia made moves to strengthen its
relationship with Arab states (Sesay 1985: 155-170; Dunn 2009: 87-137). Does the global-economic approach satisfactorily account for these actions?

From a global-economic standpoint, these moves were likely made in order to get the US to increase Liberian benefits in agreements where traditionally US interests had been promoted over Liberia’s. For example, Liberia may have established relations with the Soviet Union in order to seek out another consumer of its rubber, the country’s primary export commodity. Alternatively, Liberia may have been establishing a platform from which to counter the US domination of the rubber extraction industry in Liberia and perhaps to increase the revenues Liberia received from the American operation within its borders. However, going contrary to the US foreign-policy goals offered no real benefits for the advancement of Liberia’s economic interests. A move away from the US would put Liberia in a less advantageous political-economic position. For example, the American business operations of Firestone Rubber Company, Pan American World Airways, and a Lend Lease Agreement between the US and Liberia, had led to Liberia’s adoption of the US dollar as its currency. Liberia was forced to purchase the currency on the US market, subjecting Liberia to the US Federal Reserve System but without power to affect decisions or the market (Dunn and Tarr 1988: 164). In response, the Tolbert administration initiated discussions to remove the burden of the “weakest economy using the strongest currency,” to improve the competitiveness of Liberian exports and to increase state revenues with profits from the extraction of natural resources. The US declined either to allow Liberia to have some input into the Federal Reserve system or to let Liberia revert to using its own currency, so Tolbert told Finance Minister Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to explore the possibility of joining the CFA monetary zone with the French government. The French were expected to be amenable to this, as they were seeking to increase their power in the region; however, unlike the
former French colonies, which were expected to receive subsidies because of the enormous profits the French had gained through colonial rule, Liberia’s deal likely would not have been the same. The deal never materialized, but the shift to the CFA would simply have accomplished the transfer of money destined for American coffers to French ones without significant benefits to Liberia. Thus, the foreign policy shift cannot easily be explained by focusing on Liberia’s efforts to counter US exploitation. Although it may have been a contributing factor, the source, that is the web of relations and meanings that allows the factor to have significance, must be explored.

Whereas the power political approach emphasizes the pursuit of military power in the international system, the global economic focuses on the pursuit of economic power, where power differentials provide the scope of options available to a particular class grouping or group of states. To illustrate, Scarlett Cornelissen (2004) describes a group of middle-income states having elements of both the Global North and the Global South, including viable manufacturing sectors and limited economic capabilities and influence. Cornelissen’s analysis of the foreign policies of the IBSA group, which consists of India, Brazil and South Africa, suggests that instead of adhering to more common client-patron relationships with their former colonizers, former colonial states of the Global South can take alternative paths to integrating themselves into the global political economy. This “trilateral relationship” breaks with the strictures of the core-and-periphery paradigm in two ways, first by allowing for fairer if not more advantageous trading agreements, thereby increasing each country’s control over its economic production. Secondly, it allows for the IBSA group to limit the North’s control over laborers in the South. Instead of the African states’ foreign policies being dominated and determined by the foreign policies of OECD states, which are aimed at promoting the industrialized first world’s economic
interests, the state foreign policies of developing states can be crafted in a manner that benefits them more. So the question is, in moving to a more autonomous, Africanist foreign policy, was Liberia trying to establish relations with other African states to establish more beneficial agreements? This is unlikely, as the grounds on which such relations would have been profitable were not available in this case because Liberia did not have a manufacturing sector at the time, and the newly independent states’ economies were even sicker than Liberia’s. There would have been no opportunity for Liberia to benefit from.

While Liberia’s ideal situation might have been independence from both the East and the West, during the Tolbert era Liberia was still economically dependent on industrialized capitalist states and on the United States in particular. As a developing country with outstanding external debt, Liberia could not have survived without foreign aid. Lumumba-Kasonga (1999) explains Liberia foreign policy throughout the 20th century in terms of material considerations, arguing that the Tubman regime was a prototypical client regime of the United States. Christopher Clapham (1976) noted the ways in which the international system influenced Liberian state power. By liberally granting concessions to foreign corporations, political leaders were able to provide lucrative contracts for the elites and economic support for the state. This system served to ensure the elites’ political support and needed funds for the state to function. While it is often the case that transnational corporations and their governments have conflicting agendas in developing states, Liberia is an exception in that American private and diplomatic interests in Liberia were often coordinated. George Kieh (1992) has argued that Liberia was a prototype of a neo-colonial and dependent state given that, since its inception, the country has been “economically and politically dependent on the advanced industrialized capitalist states.” As a result of these ties, Liberian foreign policy was (in the Tubman era) distinctively pro-Western,
anti-communist and conservative, maintaining an unswerving “diplomatic quarantine around socialist states as a preventive measure against contracting the ‘communist disease.’” The Tolbert administration may have begun to view the weak national economy as an impediment to a foreign policy that would advance Liberia’s economic interest. Thus, a shift in orientation away from industrialized capitalist states could have been a strategy to strengthen Liberia’s economy by pursuing potentially productive relationships with other developing economies. Again, there is no evidence that Liberia did this. So the question remains, what can account for this shift in policy direction?

A second possible global-economic explanation of Liberia’s policy is that the shift in orientation was part of a strategy to establish productive relationships with new partners in order to better serve Liberia’s economic interests. The empirical situation presents a serious challenge for this argument. Throughout this period, Liberia remained economically dependent on the United States. While Liberia had abandoned its previous uncritical support of the United States and other capitalist powers and was now participating actively in global forums advocating international social and economic justice, the Liberian economy was not diversified or strong enough to allow it to be delinked from the United States, and thus it remained deeply dependent on the United States and Europe (Tarr 1988). Between 1970 and 1979, Liberia depended on foreign aid to finance imports, and economic activities (whether income-generating or building infrastructure) continued to rely on foreign investment. Additionally, the economies of post-colonial states were intimately connected with those of their mother countries in ways that presented a challenge to any truly strong bilateral, trilateral or multilateral agreements apart from the primary ones. The United States responded to Liberia’s non-aligned approach by decreasing and delaying food aid and other assistance. During the mid-1970s, Liberia experienced
increasing debt, deteriorating terms of trade, and a decline in the prices of its primary exports (Tarr 1988). If the move away from the United States was a strategic one to limit the constraints of dependency, the Tolbert administration clearly did not consider thoroughly the outcomes of such a move, nor did Liberia plan to cushion itself from the effects of such actions. The fact that Liberia did not position itself to counter the negative consequences of making such a strategic move weakens any explanation of Liberian actions from the global economic perspective.

Using the global economic framework to explain the shift in Liberian foreign policy, then, presents some empirical and analytical challenges. First, little or no available evidence supports the argument that Liberia tried to use its new relationship with the Soviet Union and other socialist states to renegotiate its economic relationship with the United States or other sources of economic aid and investment. Liberia did not seek favored trade agreements with Soviet Union or encourage Soviet investment in Liberia’s natural resource extraction industries. Of the more than 20 registered transnational companies operating in Liberia during the entire Tolbert era, none were from the Soviet Union or other socialist states. Additionally, there is no evidence that Tolbert attempted to leverage Liberia’s new relationship with the Soviet Union by negotiating with the United States for aid or assistance, or by renegotiating existing bilateral agreements.

Hypothesizing that Liberia moved to a more autonomous, Africanist foreign policy because it benefited the country economically does not sufficiently answer the question of why Liberia did not adopt these policies before the 1970s. All the evidence suggests that it was to Liberia’s disadvantage to adopt a foreign policy that departed from the goals of the US foreign policy at the time. The presupposition that a desire to increase financial wealth is a sufficient explanation for the kinds of changes in Liberia foreign policy is problematic. Before money is
viewed as valuable, it is an idea, a concept, a thing without substance. To attribute foreign-policy changes to money, a substance, is to posit greed as a motive, but that does not provide a sufficient explanation. It does not provide the source, that "something" that alters or provides the contours to the meaning of factors. In order to explain the changes in Liberian foreign policy during the 1970s, an examination of the context and the ideas that informed Liberian foreign policy during this period is required, as is a look at the justifications that were offered for certain policies.

Despite the insights they provide, the two perspectives discussed here do not sufficiently account for the shift in policy. Both the realist and political economic approaches seek to explain foreign policy in terms of the pursuit of interests rationally calculated at the level of the international system. The main explanatory factors—an increase in relative power or an increase in economic benefits—cannot fully explain why Liberian political leaders, with the support of significant segments of Liberian society, repeatedly articulated that pursuing an aggressive pro-Africa foreign policy was the appropriate policy path for Liberia in the early 1970s. A different framework is needed to account for the cultural and discursive resources involved in Liberia’s fundamental shift in policy, which I believe to be the sources of this foreign policy change.

So far, I have discussed two theoretical approaches to explain the puzzling shift in Liberian foreign policy during the 1970s. The relatively small body of academic literature on Liberian foreign policy, and the limited extent to which scholars have explicitly applied the major theories of foreign policy analysis and international relations to their analyses, have made this a challenging exercise in review, but the review has also provided context for the approach I use in this study. One issue with the approaches discussed here is that the analytical tools they offer allow only partial explanations; alternatively, the premises of those analyses simply do not
hold. In fact, what they suggest to be explanatory factors do not actually fit what happened in the particular case. For example, "rationality," as conceived in the approaches discussed above, does not explain the conflicting and contradictory path taken by Liberia, expressing solidarity with African and nonaligned progressives while also attempting to continue its traditional relationship with the United States. In order to gain insight into how this shift in orientation came about, it is necessary to take into account the particular cultural context and certain discourses on “Africa” that politicians used to justify Liberia’s foreign relations. Lastly, with these approaches, the emphasis on the structure diminishes the role of actors’ agency in the analytical narrative. Consequently, I have chosen an approach that avoids some of these pitfalls while offering a solution that the other approaches cannot.

The Politics of the Making of Meaning

While realists and political economists depend on the explanatory weight of material factors, other scholars emphasize that we must also inquire into the “politics of meaning-making.” That is, social and political actors, populations, and leaders ascribe meaning to material factors. Specific interpretations of material factors by state actors shape interests and lay the framework within which policies can be justified. For example, in his monograph Identity, Interests and Action (1996), Erik Ringmar explains why Sweden went to war in 1630 in defense of its national identity. Ringmar demonstrates the centrality of meaning-making in political action when he writes,

…[I]f we do not fight for who we are nothing else will ever make sense. Hence, as long as we are loyal to our communities and identify ourselves in relation to them, we may have no other choice and very little bargaining power vis-à-vis our political and military authorities. We act, not in defence of our interests, but in defence of our identity (1996: 4).
That is, a state’s national interests and the means of advancing those interests is the product of who or what the state is, which is in turn generated from social processes including the attribution of meaning to material factors. Social constructivists have noted that this negotiation of meaning takes place in the social process of collective conversations and activities related to those conversations. Politicians, state officials and policy-makers' careful articulations of what state interests derive from existing ideas are then brought to bear in the process of justifying a particular policy path. For example, Tolbert’s assertion that Liberia was committed to its African “brothers” and “sisters” in southern Africa is an example of a rhetorical commonplace in which a popularized Pan-Africanist narrative was used as a tool to construct the notion of what was "in the interest" of Liberia: supporting the southern Africans in their liberation struggles.

If we take discourse as the medium through which identities are socially constructed and from which interests are formed, we must examine how certain articulations of what "Liberia" was opened up space for new and legitimized policy directions. A focus on the role of rhetoric in Liberia’s foreign policy outcomes complements other analyses rather than providing a “truer” account of why the shift in orientation occurred. For example, it may be the case that the structure of a bipolar system required that Liberia tie itself to a superpower to survive; however, the bipolar structural view does not stipulate how Liberia should carry out its relationship as a proxy for the United States among African states. Alternatively, it may be the case that as a peripheral state, Liberia was in a relationship of dependency with the United States; however, dependency does not mean that no exercise of autonomy was possible. The question remains: Why did Liberia and a significant portion of Liberian society support a more autonomous, anti-imperialist, Africanist foreign policy, given Liberia’s and its leaders' historical orientation towards the West and the United States in particular? Why did Liberia commit to supporting
liberation struggles in southern Africa and to serving as an advocate for African issues in global forums, even at great cost? Answers to these questions are rooted in notions of what Liberia claimed itself to be; that is, how Liberia acted in the world had a lot to do with how Liberia viewed itself.

In their exploration of why the United States pursued multilateralism in Europe and chose to operate bilaterally with Southeast Asian partners after 1945, Katzenstein and Hemmer consider the causal significance of ideas on self and other that shaped US intentions and interests. Katzenstein and Hemmer suggest that the US’s ideas about itself as belonging to an in-group with Europe based on shared religion and democratic values in part accounts for the US policy of working multilaterally within Europe after 1945. In contrast, US ideas about the people of Southeast Asia as inferior and not sharing any history or civilizational traits with the US contributed to the latter’s decision to work in a bilateral manner with separate partners in Southeast Asia. Katzenstein and Hemmer use what they describe as an eclectic explanation. They refuse to choose the primacy of identity as the only important causal factor; considerations of the role of material capabilities and institutions also feature prominently in their analysis. They argue that “[t]o liberalism, constructivism adds consideration of the effects identities have on both formal and informal institutions. To neorealism, it adds consideration of the effects of ideational rather than material structures, specifically the effects of identity on actor interests” (Katzenstein and Hemmer 2002: 577).

Where neorealistic and liberal explanations fail to address puzzling aspects of the origins of NATO and SEATO, Katzenstein and Hemmer apply a constructivist lens. The creation of a North Atlantic region in the world is a political construct rooted in the US’s self-identification.
with Europe. They note that prior to the period in which NATO was established, there was no reference to a North Atlantic region of the world in official government writing or in print media. In a move to tie US to the destiny of Europe in a way that justified intense US involvement militarily and economically, the concept of the “North Atlantic region” came into being by way of politicians. However, Katzenstein and Hemmer argue that there were strong feelings among politicians and the public that the US came from Europe and shared history and ways of life, including democracy, that played a part in the creation of NATO. These feelings were not associated with Southeast Asia, hence the US lack of material commitment to the region and the creation of SEATO with the explicit purpose of serving as a framework for the US to operate bilaterally in the region.

The Katzenstein and Hemmer piece offers useful insights for this project. First, the authors begin with a puzzle that needs to be explained, as this project does. Secondly, Katzenstein and Hemmer demonstrate that there is room for constructivist analyses in explaining foreign policy actions. Their position, that one analytical lens does not necessarily preclude insights that can be generated from others, is appropriately humble. However, it is also arguably confusing and conflicted. In particular, in the section in which the authors discuss the founding of SEATO, they explain that only two of the partners in the organization were Asian. The others were European colonial masters. Instead of explaining the US' reluctance to engage multilaterally as being based on US ideas about itself as not a colonial power, the authors maintain that this is an instance in which identity did not have causal importance. The eclectic approach applied by Katzenstein and Hemmer requires choices about what can be explained by way of ideational, material, and institutional considerations; however, the need for those choices compromises to the point of undermining the tenets of different theoretical approaches. The
position of this study is that ideas about self are not secondary but primary and integral to any explanation of causality. In order to explain an issue adequately, the analysis needs to maintain its integrity by adhering to the precepts that uphold the theoretical approach.

The authors’ recognition that regions are “political creations and not fixed by geography” is also a position shared in this study. The fact that Liberia exists on the African continent makes it seem natural that the regional affiliation would be African or at least West African. However, for most of Liberia’s history, its regional affiliation (from the perspective of the state elite) was oriented toward North America, specifically the US, and not Africa. Katzenstein and Hemmer (2002: 575) suggest that “[l]ooking at specific instances in which such constructions have occurred can tell us a great deal about the shape and the shaping of international politics.” The works discussed in the liberalism section above largely criticize or ignore the constructivist or “reflectivist” research for its failure to provide rich empirical research. This study fills that gap by providing both evidentiary and descriptive material to support the arguments made regarding the impact of ideas on Liberian foreign policy. Similarly, the works above regard the explanatory value of ideas as secondary to the value of interests and rationality. However, investigations into the causal import of ideas, in order to explain what realism and liberalism do not explain are part of the development of constructivism in the field of international relations.

It may seem obvious that Liberia’s policies towards Africa in the 1970s can be explained by Liberia’s self-identification as part of “African civilization.” After all, Liberia was an African state. However, that simple recognition conceals the dynamics and implications of identity and world politics. As noted in the previous section, for most of its existence, Liberia had failed to claim an African civilizational identity, choosing instead to emphasize its cultural connection to the West and the early African-American settlers’ “civilizing” mission on the continent. It must
be noted that even competing discourses, such as those of slaveholders and those of abolitionists, had both advocated that Liberia claim an African civilizational identity (see Chapter 4, “Imagining Liberia and Africa”). In reorienting its policy towards African states by emphasizing a cultural connection to “Africa,” the Tolbert administration built on a familiar narrative in Liberia’s political history while embarking upon new territory, in which Liberian leaders’ policy choices were justified by claims of Liberia's being culturally an African state and part of African civilization.

The discipline of IR has seen a significant increase in studies on identity and world politics, yet few of these studies have focused on Africa. Politicians, scholars, political organizers and many others have regularly referenced an African collective identity, but have rarely paid analytical attention to how notions of "Africa" have shaped world politics. Still less have scholars considered how identification with a collective African identity may have played a role in the Back-to-Africa movement in the United States by disseminating the belief in an African "supra-nation" (that is, a claim to belong to an identity group transcending mere citizenship in any particular country) in the course of battles for equality and against economic exploitation. Similarly, the idea of a collective African identity may have required a call for unifying disparate African states under one continental nation-state or common intergovernmental institution.

To be sure, some analyses do link Pan-Africanism to African foreign policy. For example, Adibe (2001) has argued that Pan-Africanism (the perception by people of African origin that they have interests in common based on a common racial identity and history of enslavement and colonialism) “has been at the center of African foreign policy decision-making.” However, the complex processes that mediated between the effects of Pan-Africanism
discourse and policy outcomes have not yet been explored. By focusing on the role of ideas expressed through language in the social construction of identity and how that process shaped public debate about the range of acceptable policy options (in addition to garnering audiences’ approval of certain courses of actions over others), I explain the shift in Liberian foreign policy in the 1970s in ways that scholars using other approaches have not. In the following section, a review of existing studies on the nature of the state, interests, and identity, as well as their intersections, sets the stage for a discussion of the approach taken in this study.

Identity and Discourse in Social Constructivism

Within IR, the field of social constructivism has the most to say about the dynamics of Self-Other relations in world politics and the socially constructed nature of foreign policy. The central assertion of social constructivism is that states’ interests are not simply derived from physical or material objects but are shaped by states’ identities, which are constructed through social interaction (Wendt 1992; Finnemore 1996; Risse-Kappen 1996). Mainstream constructivism focuses on how states’ identities and interests are formed through inter-state interaction at the systemic level (Wendt 1999). However, mainstream constructivism does not deal with internal domestic, social and political processes that can help to explain how a particular identity or interest discourse comes to prevail over another or how specific cultural and discursive resources prevail in a competition among different policy perspectives.

The national discourse of an "African" continental identity became part of the Liberian rhetorical landscape in the 1970s; newspapers and other publications frequently exposed Liberian audiences to the African nationalist discourse of the anti-colonial independence movements taking place at their borders and across the continent. However, the discourse of traditional Liberian conservatism also competed for prominence in shaping policy. How these
discourses were constrained, undermined and redefined by political actors to advance certain goals cannot be explored from within a mainstream constructivist framework, which treats the state as a "black box" whose social dynamics and political processes do not contribute to the social construction of a state’s identity and interests. Thus, mainstream constructivism does not posit mechanisms to explain how certain cultural constructs can win out over others in the determination of domestic and transnational politics.

This study, in contrast, is concerned with tracing how different notions of the national “Self” are produced, achieve primacy, and are deployed in national and transnational debates, ruling out certain courses of action for that "Self" while making others appear legitimate, even natural. Focusing on how states' identities are formed through social interactions with each other is not useful in explaining how collective identities are formed through common domestic social constructs. Social constructivism has provided groundbreaking insights into the socially constructed nature of foreign policy, but it does not offer an account of how one socially produced account of a state’s interest is legitimized, thus making other policy options seem unacceptable or inappropriate. A broader analytical framework is needed to account for how some social constructs, for example, “Liberia” as belonging to a supranational cultural community of “Africa,” came in the period under scrutiny to be dominant over others. Of value in this discussion is constructivism's focus on Self-Other conceptions, which, when deployed in public rhetoric, influenced foreign policy in Liberia during the 1970s.

Constructivism's insight, that foreign policy is socially constructed, is part of a larger movement in the social sciences arguing that reality itself is socially constructed (Hacking 1999; Berger and Luckman 1966; Searle 1995). Thus, identity and discourse, as central concepts in social constructivism, have become increasingly central in explanations of world politics. This
study argues that the shift in Liberia's foreign policy can be explained by a focus on how public rhetoric regarding Self/Other conceptions legitimized certain policy options and made others unacceptable. Specifically, it looks at the role of the concept of “Africa,” which is understood here as a discursive resource whose meaning was made by and through the context in which prominent political actors deployed it (particularly President Tolbert, Minister of Foreign Affairs Cecil Dennis, and others, including the media, who shaped the rhetorical landscape). In this particular case, it is remarkable that in general, the public opponents of Tolbert and his government, on the one hand, and Tolbert and his government itself, on the other hand agreed about Tolbert’s foreign policy. The point of contention between the two sides was the implementation of policies aimed at more inclusive governance within Liberian society. That is, opponents of the Tolbert administration challenged the continuation of settler minority rule, which excluded rural African-Liberians from political and economic life, but they supported Tolbert’s Africanist foreign policy.

Identity has been a common concern of IR for the past twenty years. Studies from the identity perspective have helped the discipline gain a fuller understanding of world politics, in part by giving ontological status to subjects or “actors” such as “Western Civilization” or “Africa” in world politics and how they relate to each other (Katzenstein 1996). Generally speaking, identities are understood to be produced by human activities and social interactions (Checkel 1998; Finnemore 1996; Wendt 1992, 1999). The concept of identity and how to study it remains the source of fruitful discussions (Berenskoetter 2010; Onuf 2003:26). Whether or not there is a core stable identity from which an actor acts, however, remains a topic of debate (Laffey 2000; Bozdaglioglu 2003; Campbell 1998). As discussed above, the different ways in which identity forms around conceptions of Self and Other (Wendt 1999; Neumann 1999) and
how the social construction of identity affects political life (Hopf 2005; Solomon 2015; Jeeperson, Wendt and Katzenstein 1996) are being explored by IR scholars drawing from fields as diverse as sociology, anthropology, psychology, social theory and philosophy. Such mechanisms of collective identity formation and processes of identity politics as bonding, boundary-drawing, and discrimination inform these analyses of identity in world politics. Another area of inquiry in IR identity studies concerns how the politics of identity construction affects a range of social phenomena, including foreign relations.¹⁴

This study builds on the tradition of constructivist scholarship in IR, but it takes a poststructuralist turn in focusing on the role of language in the social construction of identity and foreign policy, which is understood here to be a locus for identity politics.¹⁵ In this view, essential features of a Liberian identity can only be highlighted using language; and discourses on “Liberia” and “Africa” represent, not a permanent objective reality, but rather meanings that fluctuate depending on historical and social context. The task for an analyst, then, is to trace the cultural and discursive resources that are brought together in a specific way to affect a particular political outcome at a particular time and place. For example, the Tolbert administration’s move to an Africanist foreign policy occurred in the context of the post-independence, post-decolonization, early post-colonial period, and also in the context of the Pan-Africanist-inspired social and political movements on the continent and across the world.

In order to avoid the danger of being too vague or imprecise in an analysis that links popular discourses of Africa and Liberia’s identification with “Africa” to particular policy outcomes, I employ the causal mechanism of legitimation (see Chapter 3, “Methodology”) in this study to explain how Liberia’s public claims to an African identity contributed to those policy outcomes. The definition of “who We are” as opposed to “who Others are” was central to social
and political life and therefore is integral to this explanation of why Liberia aligned itself with African progressives and the Arab world and why it opened relations with the Soviet Union and other socialist states. It is difficult to provide a fuller account of the shifts in Liberian foreign policy in the 1970s without considering the role of the notion of an African collective identity, as expressed in political rhetoric.

Identities are created through language and as such can only be temporarily stabilized within a particular discursive context. Roxanne Doty (1996: 6) offers that “[a] discourse delineates the terms of intelligibility whereby a particular ‘reality’ can be known and acted upon. When we speak of a discourse we may be referring to a specific group of texts, but also importantly to the social practices to which those texts are inextricably linked.” Starting from Campbell’s (1998: 4) pithy premise that “there is nothing outside of discourse,” this study agrees with the position that “every object is constituted as an object of discourse” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:108). Whether or not there is an objective reality “out there” is irrelevant because reality can only be known to us through the words, phrases and narratives we use to make sense of the world and our place in it. In other words, comprehending human reality requires mediation through language (Kratochwil 1989; Kubalkova 2001).

Scholars who have taken a linguistic approach to studying the world raise two important points: the first is that identities are inherently unstable, and the second is that language is political. Identities have no permanent locus and are thus always in the process of being articulated. Cynthia Weber (1998: 78) rejects the notion of pre-given subjects, highlighting the process nature of identity construction and stating that “all subjects in process (be they individual or collective) are the ontological effects of practices which are performatively enacted.” Social practices, performances, and articulations are part of the process of an individual or collective
becoming and belonging; that is, such practices are part of an ongoing, continuous process of constructing identity. The incomplete status of identities is captured by David Campbell (1998: 12) as he notes that states “do not possess prediscursive, stable identities…[W]ith no ontological status apart from the many and varied practices that constitute their reality, states are (and have to be) always in a process of becoming.” Both Weber and Campbell rightly reject mainstream constructivism’s base materialism, which begins its discussion of identity in the international system with each individual state as a discrete unit. In the poststructuralist approach used in this study, the state itself is recognized as a product of discourse; thus, there is no prediscursive ground on which to claim an identity.

The notion that language is political is foundational in poststructuralist studies of the relationship between the Self and the Other. Language is the means through which actors attempt to stabilize their identity. “Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty” (Connolly 1991: 64). Descriptions of self, peoples, places and objects in the world simultaneously ascribe meaning and declare what a person or thing is not; that is, “discourses often draw their power through their constructions of others” (Solomon 2015: 14; see Weldes 1999; Connolly 1991; Epstein 2008; Neumann 1999).

While language is used to describe human reality, it is also a locus in which power is exercised. Michel Foucault highlights this interplay of discourses when he urges us to conceive of discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies (1978: 100).
Bially Mattern (2004, 2005) has shown that because identities are radically incomplete and riddled with conflicting and contradictory narratives that political opponents can exploit, there are points where internal cohesiveness breaks down through “representational force—a nonphysical but nevertheless coercive form of power that is exercised through language.” Opponents can use inconsistencies in language against an interlocutor to advance their political aims.

Making a similar point, Ronald R. Krebs and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson (2007) demonstrate how the political dynamics of language work in the concept of “rhetorical coercion,” which describes the process of maneuvering one’s opponent onto one's rhetorical landscape in order to shut down avenues for disagreement with one’s policy position. In *Civilizing the Enemy* (2006), Jackson developed a set of theoretical terms to analyze the way public discourse produces “rhetorical commonplaces” that were used to legitimate certain policy options and make others unacceptable in debates regarding the United States’ involvement in German reconstruction after World War II. Jackson (2006: 19) describes a rhetorical commonplace as “some form of specification of a vague, weakly shared notion” capable of being used in a specific policy debate to legitimatize a course of action. An example is the notion of “Western civilization,” which was invoked repeatedly to justify the provision of aid to post-World-War-II Germany. It is important to note here that the rhetorical commonplace “Africa” is understood in this study to be historically contingent and thus unstable. In this particular case, political actors in the course of policy debates have repeatedly attempted to stabilize Liberian identity by associating it with other commonplaces, including “Africa”, to create a stable constellation of commonplaces. In the pages that follow, I examine how actors used the ideas of
“Africa,” “African civilization,” or an African collective identity to advance a particular policy position and cause it to be accepted by various audiences.

In any account of how a rhetorical commonplace contributes to a particular political outcome, two mechanisms are identified by Jackson as particularly useful: "breaking" and "joining." "Breaking" describes a situation in which a speaker commandeers a commonplace and thus de-links that commonplace from others with which it had been closely connected. In contrast, the mechanism of "joining" involves a speaker’s linking a “commonplace to others in such a way as to point in a determinate policy direction” (Jackson 2003: 44-45). Unlike imagining, inventing, or specifying a commonplace such as “Liberia” or “Africa,” breaking and joining take place when claims are advanced as to why a political action is the correct one to follow. The effectiveness of breaking and joining in achieving the desired outcome involves 1) the history of the commonplace; 2) the stated connections among commonplaces arranged by the speaker; and 3) the opponent’s alternative arrangement of connections between the commonplace. The commonplace is used as the grounds for pursuing a particular political path instead of another; thus, the meaning of each commonplace must be explored in context. This study examines the role of public rhetoric and rhetorical strategies, and particularly the use of those mechanisms to explain the shifts in Liberian foreign policy. In doing so, it offers a causal account of the role of language in forming the social constructs of “Africa” and “Liberia” and their use in political discourse to legitimize certain policy paths.

**Conclusion**

Scholarly studies of Liberia have noted the policy shift that is the subject of this study; however, none has offered an adequate account of why or how the shift occurred (Lowenkopf 1976; Carlisle 1981; Sisay 1985; Kieh 1992; Dunn 2009). To address this gap in the literature,
this study will investigate why Liberia shifted from its traditional practice of reflexively aligning with the United States and its allies in international affairs to a more autonomous, anti-colonial and Africanist foreign policy during the early years of the Tolbert administration (1971-1975). Questions that have been largely left unanswered by scholars of international, African and Liberian studies will form the basis of the inquiry: After over 130 years of the country's existence during which there had been limited interactions with local inhabitants, and during which interactions with African neighbors had been largely characterized by avoidance, suspicion, and, in some cases, violence, why did Liberia take a leading role in advocating for the liberation of southern Africa in international forums? Why did Liberia intensify its support for newly independent states, particularly on the continent? Why did Liberia assume a leadership role on issues related to African affairs in global forums such as UN, the OAU and the Non-Aligned Movement? Why did Liberia choose to adopt stances in opposition to its traditional Western allies? Why did Liberia move toward a non-aligned position? How can we account for these changes in Liberian foreign policy?

This study aims to provide an account for this shift in Liberia’s foreign policy during the 1970s by examining how the rhetorical use of “Africa” made possible other subsequent actions. Here, Liberian identity is understood as constructed in, through and by the ongoing process of defining the conceptual boundaries of both “Liberia” and “Africa.” However, the process of defining a Liberian Self or an African Self does not take place in the abstract. Rather, in foreign policy debates throughout the 20th century, this boundary-drawing process was arrested as political actors used these terms to legitimate certain state actions. I argue that Liberian policy can be explained by the deployment of rhetorical commonplaces (widely held notions) about what “Liberia” was or was not in relation to what “Africa” was and was not in the context of
political debates at different historical moments. In order to adequately grasp their role in shaping policy outcomes, we must explain the function of these commonplaces in terms of their specific histories. Conceptions of “Africa” and “Liberia” and their interplay must be explored in order to fulfill the overarching purpose, which is to understand Tolbert-era foreign-policy actions.

This study traces the historical development and rhetorical deployment of the terms “Africa” and “Liberia” within the confines of historic foreign-policy debates, in particular those surrounding 1) the Hinterland Policy (1900-1905), 2) the creation of the OAU (1957-1963), and finally, 3) the Tolbert administration’s Africanist, autonomous, and anti-colonial foreign policy (1971-1975). Speakers in, roughly, the early, mid- and late 20\textsuperscript{th} century were able to deploy the terms “Africa” and “Liberia” as grounds for pursuing particular policy directions. Without the particular specifications of “Liberia” and “Africa” that became salient in the 1970s, Liberia might not have implemented the more autonomous, anti-colonial, and Africanist foreign policy that it adopted. Since these terms, with their contemporary discursive significance, were rhetorically deployed specifically to legitimate Liberia’s new policy direction, without that rhetoric such actions would seem to have been unlikely.

Structure of the dissertation

This study is divided into eight chapters. This first introductory chapter has sought to situate the study in the context of IR theories and other approaches that have been used to explain state actions in general and foreign relations in particular.

Chapter 2, “Why ‘Africa,’” discusses concepts including civilization, civilizational politics and analysis that are central to this study and its arguments. It provides an overview of the study of civilizational identity and world politics. Specifically, it seeks to place this analysis
of the shift in Liberia's foreign policy within the broader context of civilizational analysis research.

Chapter 3, “Methodology,” discusses the causal mechanism of legitimation and its role in accounting for how the rhetoric of “Africa” engendered the departures in Liberian foreign policy in the 1970s. The chapter also outlines the theoretical foundations of this study by way of a brief review of key perspectives and issues in the philosophy of social sciences. Throughout the discussion, specific methodological directives for the research design will be highlighted. A discussion of the causal mechanisms that allowed for the impact of African civilizational politics on Liberian policy is also presented.

Chapter 4, “Imagining Liberia and Africa,” traces the history of the two rhetorical commonplaces “Africa” and “Liberia.” Special attention is paid to how the two commonplaces became available to politicians and policy makers to legitimate specific policies at key moments in Liberia’s history. This chapter focuses on the moments in the invention process of the rhetorical commonplaces “Liberia” and “Africa” as well as how those commonplaces, which are understood to be a specific constellation of commonplaces, were disseminated. This chapter, explaining the specific histories of the commonplaces, is necessary to understand their function as they were used in public discourse. Without this background, the meaning and weight of the terms would be lost. These rhetorical resources were also used in the policy debates that are the subjects of Chapter Five, “Enacting Liberia,” Chapter Six, “The Liber(ianiz)ation of Africa,” and Chapter Seven, “The Africanization of Liberia.”

Chapter 5, “Enacting Liberia,” analyzes the discussions surrounding the Hinterland Policy of 1904-05, in which the ideas of “Liberia” and “Africa” were used to legitimize the extension of the state’s control over the interior of the country. Liberian elites claimed
membership in “the West” and in “Africa” in justifying Liberia’s existence and its continuance as a state against the colonial encroachment of the British and the French in West Africa. The analysis of this first debate provides rhetorical grounds for analyzing subsequent policy debates. Additionally, this chapter analyzes the discursive shifts that enabled the use of “Liberia” and “Africa” in subsequent debates, showing how they came to be associated with different commonplaces such that the terms themselves came to exercise rhetorical power.

Chapter 6, “The Liber(ianiz)ation of Africa,” discusses how the justification of the liberation struggles in the 1950s and 1960s in Africa-centric terms, as well as the use of Africa-centric language to fight colonial rule, laid the rhetorical groundwork for the subsequent formation of the OAU. In the context of ongoing independence struggles on the continent and of decolonization, Liberia’s fear was that the spread of powerful commonplaces such as “Africa for the Africans” would challenge the very concept of Liberia. In fact, Liberia's initial policies towards newly independent states were characterized by fear and distrust, reflecting continuity with its early history of relationship with the 16 different ethnic communities living within the territory claimed by the Liberian state. Just as the returning Liberian settlers had seen the indigenous communities as threatening their status and survival during the pioneer years, President Tubman and his administration saw many of the newly independent states as threats. It was imperative to Tubman and his administration that they controlled the rhetorical landscape, both on the continent and in the world, as well as dismantling and problematizing notions that would jeopardize Liberia’s security. Tubman effectively managed the rapid changes taking place on the continent: he won the debate over the future form of African political organization by commandeering the notion of “Africa” as a transnational community with only limited commitments. Chief among these commitments was protecting the hard-fought freedom and
equality of the new states as well as their sovereign authority as new members of the international state system. In this way, Liberia’s foreign policy protected it from potential political instability stemming from the threat of “radical African nationalism.” The chapter demonstrates the use of the mechanisms of breaking and joining in the formation of the OAU by tracing the way in which two political actors, Ghanaian Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah and Liberia’s President Tubman, both attempted to use the rhetorical resource “Africa” to legitimate their chosen approaches to African unity and its organizational form. The commonplace “Africa” as deployed in these debates provides important resources for explaining the fundamental shift in orientation that took place during the Tolbert administration.

Chapter 7, “The Africanization of Liberia,” analyzes how the commonplaces of Africanist discourse were deployed in policy arguments and how their use served to legitimize Liberia’s course of action in pursuing an Africanist, anti-colonial and autonomous foreign policy in the 1970s. Under the administration of President Tolbert (1971-1980), Liberia began to claim membership in “Africa,” broadly understood as a transnational cultural community. Liberia also began to establish policies that were justified by Liberia’s commitment to that community. An important effect of the legitimation process is that it bound “Liberia” to “Africa,” in turn “making” Liberia an African state with subsequent commitments to that community. Hence, the shift in policy can be explained by way of the legitimation process.

Chapter 8, “Conclusion,” discusses the relevance of some of the insights presented in this dissertation to the practice of IR and the study of African and international politics.

The three empirical chapters present ideal-typical accounts of three policy debates in which specific commonplaces were used in context-specific ways to bring about particular policy outcomes. The chapters proceed chronologically, each debate offering resources and strategies
The aim of the study is to account for Liberia’s autonomous, anti-colonial, Africanist foreign policy in a way that moves beyond materialist considerations and foregrounds discourse, identity, and rhetoric in its analysis.

The goal of this social scientific inquiry is to produce a sufficient explanation for why Liberia shifted to an autonomous, anti-colonial, and Africanist policy. In order to understand the rhetorical power of referencing a collective African identity, this study traces the use of those terms in policy debates in the early and mid-20th century, as well as the 1970s. The question is approached genealogically, focusing on how different configurations of discursive relations came together at different moments in time and how the terms “Africa” and “Liberia” developed, both separately and with relation to each other, and how they enabled the justification of Liberia’s autonomous, anti-colonial and Africanist policies as integral to Liberian identity. In the next chapter, a brief discussion of the African cultural and civilizational identity in world politics is provided in order to understand its role in the shift in Liberian foreign policy during the 1970s.
CHAPTER 2

WHY “AFRICA”?

The argument advanced in this work is that the rhetorical appeals used by Liberian politicians around the term “Africa” were instrumental in a significant shift in Liberian foreign policy during the 1970s. The question is then, "Why the term 'Africa'?" How can we understand the discursive power of the simple act of referencing an African civilizational identity, and how did that power translate into action?

This chapter does not give a historical analysis of the shifts in meaning of the concept of “Africa” (that will be done later in Chapter 4); instead, using the tool of civilizational analysis in world politics, this chapter situates the problem within the context of IR literature, focusing on how actions in world politics can be explained in terms of claims to a particular civilizational membership and its resonance with audiences. This rest of this chapter is organized in the following manner: in the next section, there is a brief discussion of the concept of civilization, civilizations in world politics, and civilizational analysis in the field of International Relations as well as the broader social sciences. Following that section is a discussion of the rise of the notion of an African civilizational identity, particularly in the period after the liberation struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, which were characterized by African nationalist claims. Lastly, a brief sketch of the central place of civilizational identity politics in Liberian politics and foreign policy since its inception is presented. The discussion in this chapter of the term “Africa” with its implied “African civilizational identity” serves two purposes: first, to explain the importance of the term in the context of this study and its relevance to this specific case, and secondly, to lay the groundwork for the methodological approach taken here.

*The Concept of Civilization*
The concept of civilizational analysis as a tool in IR has enjoyed marked attention since the publications of Samuel Huntington’s 1993 article the "Clash of Civilizations" and subsequent 1996 book of the same name. Previously, civilizational analysis was limited to scholars of the Annales historical school (Braduel 1995) and world system theorists who were interested in the political economy of civilizations and how relationships among various economic networks throughout the world resulted in certain patterns of wealth distribution (Wallerstein 1974). However, Huntington’s conceptualization of "civilization" placed it within the part of International Relations that focused on culture and identity.16

Writing soon after the end of the Cold War, Huntington offered a new framework for analyzing world politics. Instead of the ideological and economic conflicts that had characterized international politics prior to the end of the US-Soviet rivalry, in the post-Cold War era conflicts, he said, would be cultural clashes between "civilizations."

Huntington’s conception of civilizations has become one of the most prominent strands of social scientific thinking on civilizations and their interplay and interactions. His notion of civilizations begins with the idea that civilizations are real human groupings, based on loosely defined fundamental criteria “involving history, language, culture, tradition and, most importantly, religion” (Huntington 1993). In this view, civilizational differences are real, the “product of centuries” and different civilizations have different views of relations ranging from the relations between God and man, to those between the citizen and the state, parents and children, liberty and authority, and equality and hierarchy. Civilizations, then, reflect the most fundamental blocks of human communities, with ways of life that extend beyond the borders of nations and territorial states. A civilization, in this view, is the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity they have.
In Huntington’s words,

...civilizational identity will be increasingly important and the world will be shaped in large measure by the interactions among seven or eight major civilizations. These include the Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilizations. The most important and bloody conflicts will occur along the borders separating these cultures. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future. (Huntington 1996:26).

In the aftermath of the Cold War's end, world political dynamics would be characterized by conflicts between several different contemporary civilizations (Huntington 1993: 1). In Huntington’s framework, civilizations were conceived of as “mutually exclusive communities characterized by deep-essential differences”; because of those differences they [would be] opposed to one another (Hall and Jackson 2007: 1).

More recently, Robert Cox has asserted that a civilization rests on "continuities in human thought and practices through which different human groups attempt to grapple with their consciousness of present problems" (Cox 2002: 157). In short, civilizations are real social entities with dynamics that come to bear in addressing practical political issues of the day.

According to Fabio Petito (2011: 767), moreover, civilizations are “defined in a fundamentally culturalist-religious sense.” However, Petito situates an understanding of the concept of civilization in terms of “frames of reference” and not necessarily real social groups acting as “direct protagonists” in international politics. Gregorio Bettiza (2014: 4) offers that we should think of “civilizations as “imagined communities” of a particular kind—transnational, inter-human, and de-territorialized cultural communities—that act as salient identity markers in, and as strategic frames of reference to make sense of, a globalizing and ever more complex and multilayered international system.” The argument is that civilizations are “civilizational
imaginaries” but “[they] are turned into social facts because of the way they are embedded into world politics.” Bettiza explains his view in the following manner:

[S]ocial and political actors frame international politics in civilizational terms, so actions, institutional arrangements, and practices structured around managing inter-civilizational relations are emerging as well. These changes are empowering those very same people and organizations that claim to speak in the name of civilizations. In the process, a positive feedback loop is generated between civilizational narratives: the (re)orientation of actions, institutional arrangements, and international practices around civilizational categories; and processes of recognition bestowed on actors claiming a civilizational identity and voice. This process is contributing to socially and materially constructed civilizations as meaningful and real entities in world politics. (2014: 2)

Civilizational identity in Bettiza's framing is a creation of political and intellectual elites used to justify specific institutions, practices and social action. Bettiza critiques the essentialism of Huntingtonian notions of civilization by asserting that civilizations exist mostly in the discourses and deeds of social and political actors and not as ontological realities.

In line with Weber, Patrick Jackson has commented that there is a crucial difference between using a term like "civilization" to make sense of empirical material as opposed to treating the empirical material as the way the world actually is. He also notes that the social sciences are prone to conflating the two. The reason for this conflation is complex, but it lies in this particularly challenging aspect of social scientific studies: "The concepts with which they [such concepts] operate are often plucked out of the world of everyday practice and transformed into ideal-typical analytical tools” (2006). He uses an example from Weber's 1904 essay, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy." In it, Weber explained that

The ideal typical concept will help to develop our skill in imputation in research: it is no "hypothesis" but it offers guidance to the construction of hypotheses. It is not a description of reality but it aims to give unambiguous means of expression to such a description. It is thus the "idea" of the historically given modern society, based on an exchange economy, which is developed for us by quite the same logical principles as are used in constructing the idea of the medieval "city economy" as a "genetic" concept. When we do this, we construct the concept "city
economy" not as an average of the economic structures actually existing in all the cities observed but as an ideal-type.

To relate Weber’s "ideal-type" to discussions of the concept of civilization, analysts who specify the essence of a civilization or even a perspective on a civilization run the risk of blurring the line between science and politics. Claims about the essence of a particular identity are best understood as an argument about what that particular human collective is and also as an attempt to convince audiences of the veracity of that assertion. For example, an analyst positing that an array of values or practices constitutes the essence of “Africa” or “African civilization” is similar to a politician proclaiming “African” values. Both the civilizational analyst and the politician are making an intervention in order to affect policy while asserting the essential values they have empirically identified. The difference between the two is that social scientists are assumed to have expert knowledge for their characterizations of civilizations and politicians are not. Hence, it is particularly problematic for social scientists to make claims regarding the essence of a particular civilization.

Jackson offers a definition of "civilization" that aims to give unambiguous expression to a description of reality while reflecting the concept of civilization as an ideal type. “Civilizations,” in this view, are analytical tools used to capture a set of interrelationships, not to reveal the true essential nature of a particular group or groups of peoples. This assists in combating the tendency to outline the essential core of the civilization that is being discussed by the analysts. Huntington notes,

[c]ivilizations have no clear-cut boundaries and no precise beginning and endings. People can and do redefine their identities and, as a result, the composition and shapes of civilizations change over time. The cultures of people interact and overlap. The extent to which the cultures of civilizations resemble or differ from each other also varies considerably (1996: 43).
However, Huntingdon goes on to make the very same conceptual error in declaring that
“[c]ivilizations are nonetheless meaningful entities, and while the lines between them are seldom
sharp, they are real” (1996: 43). Analyzing world politics in terms of civilizations can be useful.
However, analyses are more accurate and scientifically valid when performed from a non-
essentialist standpoint.

Understanding the term “civilization,” then, as a tool for making sense out of a mass of
empirical material and not as a definition or description of how the world really is, allows for a
focus on social relations and processes. Civilizational analyses that emphasize the fluidity and
interdependence of social groups such as civilizations offer an alternative to the reification errors
of other approaches to civilizational identity.

For analysts who choose "civilization" or "civilizations" as a subject of social scientific
inquiry, the challenge remains how to examine a civilization without defining an essential core
or the essence of the particular civilization that is being examined. Most analysts accept that
social identity is fluidity and flux; however, these same analysts retain an essential continuity
with Huntington inasmuch as they continue to insist that civilizations are objects with essentially
continuous core features. To engage in civilizational analysis is to treat a civilization as a discrete
object, as a "thing-like entity" with "an enduring essence." This remains the case even when
analysts qualify their specification of a civilization's essential qualities with reference to the
ambiguity and internal complexity of civilizations; in the end, they return to the position that
civilizations are essentially different from one another.

This study avoids these pitfalls by focusing instead on how the boundaries between
civilizations are established and maintained through the use of language. Instead of analyzing
“civilizational identity,” e.g., Western, Islamic, African, etc., as real social entities, the spotlight
is directed to the claims of belonging to a particular civilization as well as the consequences, both political and social, of those claims (O'Hagan 2002: 11-14). The argument regarding the notion of what a particular core civilizational identity consists of is set aside in order to see more clearly how the notions of “Africa” and “African” came to affect social and political outcomes and the various processes involved. Thus, the concern is neither with the best description of a civilization, nor with defining what a specified civilization is. This avoids the pitfalls that Weber warned against, specifically the error of taking the analytical conceptual tool created to understand or explain a social phenomenon and to mistake it for social life itself, which is constantly changing.

Civilizations in World Politics

The practice of thinking of world politics in terms of civilizations is frequently reflected in the speech of politicians. Countless references to "African" values and identity have appeared in public political discourse since the 1990s. Africanists, scholars, journalists, and politicians continue today to make references to the existence of an "African" civilizational identity and to its relevance to world politics. A brief survey of the 1990s and 2000s yields some examples. Shortly after the liberation of South Africa, former South African President Thabo Mbeki began to advance the notion of an African civilizational identity through his advocacy of the concept of an “African Renaissance.” Officially launched by then-Deputy President Mbeki in 1997, the term “African Renaissance” was first articulated by Nelson Mandela at an Organization of Africa Unity (OAU) conference in 1994. Mbeki, however, is more closely associated with the “African Renaissance” idea and has also established an institute located in South Africa in its name. In a 1998 speech at the United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan, Deputy President Mbeki presented the contours of the concept:
And as we speak of an African Renaissance, we project into both the past and the future. I speak here of a glorious past of the emergence of homo sapiens on the African continent. I speak of African works of art in South Africa that are a thousand years old. I speak of the continuum in the fine arts that encompasses the varied artistic creations of the Nubians and the Egyptians, the Benin bronzes of Nigeria and the intricate sculptures of the Makonde of Tanzania and Mozambique. I speak of the centuries-old contributions to the evolution of religious thought made by the Christians of Ethiopia and the Muslims of Nigeria. I refer also to the architectural monuments represented by the giant sculptured stones of Aksum in Ethiopia, the Egyptian sphinxes and pyramids, the Tunisian city of Carthage, and the Zimbabwe ruins, as well as the legacy of the ancient universities of Alexandria of Egypt, Fez of Morocco and, once more, Timbuktu of Mali…Unless we are able to answer the question “Who were we?” we will not be able to answer the question “What shall we be?” This complex exercise, which can be stated in simple terms, links the past to the future and speaks to the interconnection between an empowering process of restoration and the consequences or the response to the acquisition of that newly restored power to create something new. (“The African Renaissance: South Africa and the World,” address of Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, April 9, 1998, at the United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan)

Mbeki’s program for an African Renaissance, an effort to unite African countries to advance Africa’s renewal and to restore Africa to the center of world politics from its relegation to the margins, required an articulation of African civilizational identity. The answers to the question ”Who are we?” would, according to Mbeki, foster the unity of African countries necessary for forging a brighter future for Africa. This is remarkably in step with Huntington’s suggestion that civilizational ties must be strengthened as a means of ensuring the security of member states of the different and discrete civilizations that engage in world politics.

Mbeki’s building blocks for a shared continental identity were, it is important to note, so-called civilizational achievements, i.e., art, fine arts, contributions to the evolution of religious thought, architectural monuments, ancient universities, etc., as opposed to African states’ shared traumas: slavery, imperialism, neocolonialism, and the common postcolonial experiences of political instability and oppression, crippling indebtedness, self-serving elites, and a steady decline in living standards throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In order to address some of those
issues and challenges for states and populations on the African continent, U.S. President Bill Clinton similarly made reference to African values and identity by way of the language of renewal and regeneration encapsulated in the “African Renaissance.” In a speech to the South African Parliament in March 1998, Clinton stated,

I also hope we can build together to meet the persistent problems and fulfill the remarkable promise of the African continent. Yes, Africa remains the world’s greatest development challenge, still plagued in places by poverty, malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, and unemployment. Yes, terrible conflicts continue to tear at the heart of the continent, as I saw yesterday in Rwanda. But from Cape Town to Kampala, from Dar Es Salaam to Dakar, democracy is gaining strength; business is growing; peace is making progress. We are seeing what Deputy President Mbeki has called an African Renaissance.

In coming to Africa, my motive in part was to help the American people see the new Africa with new eyes and to focus our own efforts on new policies suited to the new reality. It used to be when American policy makers thought of Africa at all, they would ask, what can we do for Africa, or whatever can we do about Africa? Those were the wrong questions. The right question today is, what can we do with Africa?...

As Africa grows strong, America grows stronger through prosperous consumers on this continent and new African products brought to our markets, through new partners to fight and find solutions to common problems from the spread of AIDS and malaria to the greenhouse gases that are changing our climate, and most of all, through the incalculable benefit of new ideas, new energy, new passion from the minds and hearts of the people charting their own future on this continent. Yes, Africa still needs the world, but more than ever it is equally true that the world needs Africa. (Address to the Parliament of South Africa in Cape Town. March 26, 1998. Administration of William J. Clinton, 1998. United States Government Printing Office.)

Clinton’s view of working with Africa as equal partners aligns with Huntington’s policy recommendation for achieving understanding and coexistence with an increasingly modernizing non-Western world made up of different civilizations whose values and interests differ significantly from those of “the West.”

International institutions like the World Bank have also made use of the framework of civilizational analysis, celebrating Africa’s trajectory toward economic growth and democracy. In June 2000, the World Bank published a report titled “Can Africa Claim the Twenty-First
Century?” in which it asserted the brightness of Africa’s future: "Africa has been experiencing its own Renaissance, in the true sense of a rebirth of thought on governance and development policies, particularly in the context of an increasingly globalized and competitive world" (Zeleza 2009:157).

Not only politicians have made use of an African civilizational identity; modern media have also referenced this identity. A *Time* magazine cover story by Johanna McGreary and Marguerite Michaels, published during the last week in March 1998, spoke of “Africa Rising,” stating that

...academics, diplomats and bankers who do business there talk seriously these days about an African renaissance. A grand word, it turns out, for the slow, fragile, difficult changes that are giving the continent a second chance. But the description fits. Out of sight of our narrow focus on disaster, another Africa is rising, an Africa that works.

However, not all the press coverage has been so positive. In May 2000, an *Economist* magazine cover story entitled “Hopeless Africa” described an Africa of threatened natural environments, nominal states, predatory and pathological despots, and pre-modern tribalism. The story garnered widespread criticism. For our purposes here, the *Time* article serves as a popular example of the numerous references to specifically African values and identity as separate and distinct from other civilizations in public discourse. In October 2008, the *Economist* reconsidered the assertions of its article from eight years before in its lead story, entitled “There Is Hope”:

Once described by this newspaper, perhaps with undue harshness, as ‘the hopeless continent,’ it [Africa] could yet confound its legion of gloomsters and show that its oft-heralded renaissance is not just another false dawn prompted by the passing windfall of booming commodity prices, but the start of something solid and sustainable. Despite its manifold and persistent problems of lousy governments and erratic climates, Africa has a chance of rising.

Here, again, the reference was to “Africa” as one civilization amongst others in the world and the need for each civilization to strengthen itself on its own and if possible establish good
relationships with other self-contained civilizations in order to avoid conflict. The acceptance of Huntington’s classification of the cultural divisions of the world can thus be seen reflected in an increasing number of references in academic and formal political discussions of African values and identity.

**African Civilizational Identity in Academe**

Since the rise of African Studies as an academic field in the 1960s and 1970s, the analytical activity of numerous Africanist scholars has been focused on outlining the contours of what African civilization is and on providing the criteria by which we can judge whether or not a civilization is actually African at its core. The analytical mistake that is being made is that when we refer to an "African" identity, it is a temporary arrangement of a set of relations that can effect social change, but it is not a thing whose contents can be enumerated. When analysts talk about a civilization like Africa or the West, they presume there is an entity called "Africa" to which they are referring and that it has an essence that can be identified and delineated. Jackson (2006) notes that “taking the referent object of a set of social practices over into one's theoretical and conceptual apparatus” will not provide a solution since the analyst’s delineation of Africa forecloses, both formally and publicly, the ongoing dynamic social process of identity construction and thereby actively involves the analyst in the production and reproduction of the object under investigation. In this case, a civilization or set of dynamic social relations through the work of the analyst gets fixed in the analytical discussion and appears as an object, thing, or entity. The way to avoid this kind of reification is to study the causal effects of the use of civilizational language, i.e., that is to study the use of “Africa” in a way that does not consider whether Africa exists or not.
The appearance of “Africa” in Huntington’s framework and in the examples of political discourse above perpetuate the notion of Africa as a real thing-like entity similar to the Africa identified in the work of African studies scholar Molefi Kete Asante. In his time as professor and chair of the Department of African American Studies at Temple University from 1984 to 1996, and after, Asante has advanced answers to the question, "What is Africa?" He has argued that the characteristics and history of Africa have been obscured by the Eurocentric writing of world history.

Asante, who was born Arthur Lee Smith but changed his name in order to reflect his African heritage, edited The Journal of Black Studies for 23 years and has published more than 200 articles. Under Asante’s leadership, one of the largest African-American studies programs in the US (at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) has been dominated by the Afrocentric approach. In three of his books, Afrocentricity (1980); Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge (1990); and The Afrocentric Idea (1998) Asante has emphasized the need for a reorientation to an African-centered knowledge of the world. In the Afrocentric view, Africa and its descendants must be at the center of black historians' and social-scientists' studies in order to increase appreciation of the contributions of people of African descent in world history. For example, Asante declares that ancient Egyptians were black-skinned Africans, and that subsequent civilizations such as the ancient Greeks owed a great deal to ancient Africans. Similarly, Martin Bernal’s book, Black Athena, has challenged the idea that Greece preceded Africa, particularly Egypt, in human civilization. What Bernal did in relationship to the origin of Greek civilization, the Senegalese Cheikh Anta Diop did with regard to civilization in general. Diop demonstrated that the African origin of civilization was a fact, not a fiction. He has
further shown that the ancient Egyptians were black-skinned people, using evidence from written texts, scientific experiments, and cultural analysis. (2007: 45)

For Asante, there is a distinct African civilization derived from black African ancient Egypt.

An African at the basic level is a person who has participated in the 500-year resistance to European domination of the African continent. At another level we speak of Africans as those individuals who argue that their ancestors came to the Americans, the Antilles, and other parts of the world from the continent of Africa during the last half of the millennium. There is an internal African connection as well as an external African connection. Those who live on the continent at the present are the internal connection and those who live on other continents are the external connection (Asante 2007: 47).

African civilization has thus been defined in a coherent manner with a narrative that has its origins in ancient Egypt and extends into the present. Like Huntington, Asante accepts this cultural division of the world, and both the scholar Huntington and the politician Mbeki equate African civilization with the term “Africa” in its traditional geographic usage as a name for an entire continent.

Asante goes on to argue for the protection and defense of African cultural values and elements as part of the human project. “Given the arguments against African values, habits, customs, religion, behaviors, and thought,” Asante argues, the authentic African understanding must be discovered without the imposition of Eurocentric or non-African interpretations. All linguistic, psychological, sociological and philosophical measures must be applied “to defend African cultural elements.” Civilizational analysis for Asante is about recovering and reclaiming African traditions that have been obscured by the Eurocentric biases of the American academy and the American traditions and institutions that oppress Africans. The story of African civilization must be told on Africa’s terms and without “imposing Europe on everything” in order to empower Africans psychologically and philosophically. In addition, telling the new
African narrative is necessary in order to refute assertions of African cultural inferiority. An African social identity must be reconstructed historically and politically for the purpose of replacing a negative with a positive depiction of Africa on the continent and in the diaspora in order to unite people of African descent to lift up Africa -- both the place and its peoples.

In a recent book, *Facing South to Africa* (2014), Asante applauds Thabo Mbeki’s African Renaissance as “the idea that we were back on the public stage of human history and that Africans intended to be the definers of what is African and neither Ibn Khaldun nor Hegel would constitute our being” (102). Held in particularly high esteem is Mbeki’s The African Union School, whose curriculum focuses on the “diversity and richness” of the African continent. Asante himself has been arguing for this kind of education for Africans for decades. In the *Afrocentric Manifesto* Asante proclaims

Classical Africa must be the starting point for all discourse on the course of African history or else scholars have not grounds for a coherent understanding of events on the continent. Kemet is directly related and linked to the civilization of Kush, Cayor, Peul, Yoruba, Akan, Congo, Zulu, and Bamun through languages, rituals, and art. This much we know. There is still much more that we do not know because our focus of study has only recently turned to the study of Africa for its own sake. In the past we studied Africa as it related to Europe, not as African cultures related to each other, and certainly not as Africa related to Asia. This was the colonial model of research. It was perfected by the French and English explorers, missionaries, and adventurers of the nineteenth century at the height of the imperial moment. If the English studied West Africa and looked at the Akan, they examined the people of Ghana as if they had no relationship to the Baule people of Cote d’Ivoire. The French did the same; they studied the Baule but not the Asante-Akan. This has produced a kind of direct beam research that does not permit the researcher to understand the interrelationships with adjacent and contiguous cultures (2007: 46).

Asante expresses the notion that communities found on the continent are connected by a common culture and comprise a civilization. It is not surprising, then, that Asante has recently advocated “prospects and possibilities of world peace inherent in Nkrumah's vision of a United States of Africa” (2012: 1), which included practical arguments for “an Africa, freed from the
vestiges of colonialism in all of its dimensions; economic, philosophical, and cultural, [that] would lead to stability on the continent and remove it, especially in its fragmented reality as nation-states, from being a hotly contested region for international political maneuvers”; Asante has also argued that “the resources of Africa are best preserved by a common external policy and an integrated continental market” In his 21st century plea for the realization of Nkrumah's vision, Asante notes that while Nkrumah’s vision was political; perhaps more importantly, it was cultural and philosophical. It is this civilizational identity that presumably provides the power to achieve a more stable, peaceful, and prosperous Africa and world.

Africanist scholars who delineate an “African” civilizational identity support their arguments with a substantial amount of empirical evidence. However, the problem of essentialism arises in both civilizational politics and civilization analysis, as discussed before, when it comes to defining the contents of a civilization. Hence, Asante identifies classical Africa as the origin of modern African identity and draws a direct line between Kemet (Ancient Egypt) and other communities on the continent: Asante goes on to say that

...[t]here is an internal African connection as well as an external African connection. Those who live on the continent at the present era are the internal connection and those who live on other continents are the external connection. Whites on the continent of Africa who have never participated in the resistance to white oppression, domination, or hegemony are indeed non-Africans. Their outlooks, attitudes, rituals, holidays, and missions are often at odds with those of the people who do call themselves Africans (2007: 46-47).

Thus the logic goes: the essence of African civilization is this; those peoples and movements do not conform to this; hence they are not African. The result is unsurprising given that peoples and movements being excluded are considered so based on the definition of what it means to be part of the community that has and shares African values and ways of being. As noted in the beginning of this section, this kind of reification is problematic in that it presents an essential
core to an African identity that is dynamic and constantly changing. Scholarship should avoid such pitfalls. How can we study African civilizational identity in a way that avoids this kind of reification?

Civilizational Analysis

Civilizational studies are marked by a wide range of perspectives on and analyses of civilizations. While Huntington is credited for bringing the concept of civilization into mainstream IR analyses of the world, many who are engaged in such analyses disagree with Huntington’s depiction of the world as being constituted by large, clashing, culturally cohesive human collectives called civilizations. Indeed, Huntington’s premises, thesis, and evidence have been critiqued on empirical, theoretical, and philosophical grounds (Walt 1997; Ikenberry 1997; Gress 1998; Said 2001; Schafer 2001; Halliday 2002; Chiozza 2002; Fox 2002; Tucker 2002; Arnason 2003; O'Hagan 2004; Sen 2006). Critics of Huntington have charged that the clashing cultures thesis is simplistic, dangerous, malicious, theoretically flawed, and empirically wrong, as well as inconsistent in its application of different paradigms, inferences and methodologies. Most of these analysts are quick to emphasize that "clashing" is not an intrinsic characteristic of civilizational transactions. Discussing the expansive literature critiquing Huntington’s conception of civilization falls outside of the scope of this study; however, it is safe to say that Huntington’s thesis has been generally rejected by many as oversimplified, seriously flawed, and dangerous. Nonetheless, Huntington’s thesis has proved to be valuable in that it has instigated a reconsideration of whether the civilizational analysis was a meaningful way of carving up the world and understanding the dynamics of world politics. It has provided an opening to think about whether world political dynamics were in any way connected to civilizational affiliations and classifications.
As with the concept of civilization, there is a wide range of analytical frameworks for studying civilizations. In this section, some of these frameworks are discussed in relation to this present study of how civilizational language, such as the use of “the West” and “Africa” in political rhetoric, is involved in the generation of world political actions.

Civilizational analyst Bettiza borrows Benedict Anderson’s notion of imagined communities. In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson defines a nation as an “imagined political community – imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (1991: 6). Anderson emphasizes the importance of social context in the creation and maintenance of a nation. The nation is not located in the bodies or minds of individuals; nor is it fictitious. Viewed as a process, the "nation" is constructed through the use of historically produced and socially available resources. Anderson defined the nation as an imagined political community, one that is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. Individuals within a political community imagine that they belong to the same sphere with a kind of connectedness that in its sensibility can be characterized as primordial. Anderson remarks that the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each, they live out the image of their communion. What these individuals share is a similar idea of imagining that they belong to this community not because of language, religion, custom or because of blood ties but because they imagine sharing a common imagined space with them. Bettiza offers that his discussion involves the civilizational imaginaries found in the American foreign policy establishment. However, enumerating the contents of these civilizational imaginaries, if not carefully delineated as analytical construction, can be an essentialist exercise pointing to how foreign policy officials actually see the world.
In contrast, this study attempts to analyze civilizational identity more along the lines of how another theorist of nationalism, Brubaker (1996), thinks about the nation. Brubaker argues that the question is not “What is a nation?” but rather, "How is nationhood as a political and cultural form institutionalized within and among states?” Brubaker urges that we should think about a nation not as substance but as an institutionalized form, not as a collectivity but as a practical category, not as an entity but as a contingent event. Similarly, in this study, the question is not “What is Africa?” but rather "How is 'Africa' as a political and cultural arrangement of relationships used to generate policies, actions and institutions within and among the peoples and polities of Liberia and across the continent?” “Africa,” then, is not a thing but a set of discursive relationships, not a collective of people but a practical category that can be and often is used to invoke certain feelings and thoughts but most importantly to provoke actions and perpetuate certain practices. Indeed, “Africa” is in many ways a historically contingent concept. It is important to note that assertions and appeals using that concept in political discourse create that “African” identity. In other words, the concept of “Africa” is brought about by political fields (in Pierre Bourdieu's terminology) of particular kinds. This study analyzes the political outcome of Liberia’s Africanist policies of the 1970s by focusing on how civilizational language, including the use of the term “Africa” in the political rhetoric of Liberian politicians, created conditions in which certain policy actions were deemed as natural and even necessary.

Again, this study’s shift from an analytical focus on African civilization as a real entity to instead talk about African civilizational identity as grounds, means or justification for a particular action avoids the error made in most social scientific studies on civilizations, which is to treat the analytical tool or concept as the object to be studied. Hence, this analytical approach consciously attempts to avoid the reification of a non-Western Other and the reification of the
Western Self, a common pitfall of some postcolonial literature (see Spivak 1988; Bhabha 1994: 1-2). In traditional civilizational analysis, as discussed earlier, there is a tendency to treat civilizations as an ontological reality, an object in the social world to be studied, and as an analytical tool for understanding the social world. These sorts of analyses are prone to reification by mistaking the analytical concept for an empirical object. To avoid that, this study asks the question, "In what way is civilizational language, that is the use of “the West” and “Africa” in political rhetoric, involved in the generation of world political actions?" In this analytical framework, it is not necessary to outline the contents of “Africa,” which would require presenting an essence of Africa. Instead, the focus is on how the notion of “Africa” existing already in everyday language used by politicians played a role in the generation of policies. The approach employed by this study draws from, builds on, and is situated within the work of the civilizational analysts discussed below.

In Iver Neumann’s work, *Uses of the Other: The East in European Identity Formation* (1999), Neumann offers an analysis of the self/other nexus in collective identity formation, largely focusing on political discourses. Through a series of analytical case studies, Neumann explores the creation of European collective identity through the use of “the East.” He reveals how “the East” is defined in different ways in different periods to distinguish European identities from other territorially bound human collectives, including Turkey, Russia, Central Europe, Northern Europe, Russia and Bashkortostan. Neumann’s analysis importantly highlights the dialogical manner in which identities are created.

This study applies the latter aspect of Neumann's work, understanding Liberian identity as constructed through and in relation to the African "other." The area for analysis is not the relationship between the self and the other but rather the person-to-world relations situated
within a particular set of self/other relations (Neumann 1999; Shotter 1993). I explore the self/other nexus from the slash inward (that is, the “self”), not with the intention to catalogue traits but rather to identify processes through which the self is declared and the implications of those processes are understood (Neumann 1999: 21-22). In the case of Liberia, discourse about "civilization" in the singular is used, as well as discourse about “the West” and “Africa” as civilizational identities to which the Liberian settlers claimed membership in different ways--culturally with regard to the West and racially with regard to Africa. However, the challenge with civilizational analyses is that it can lead to the reification of social categories such as a Liberian “self” and an African “other.”

In Civilizational Identity (2007), editors Martin Hall and Patrick Jackson argue for non-essentialist analyses of civilizations in order to avoid the reification of social identities; that is, they believe that civilizations need to be studied in a way that does not mistake a set of attributes necessary to identifying the civilization as the actual particular civilization itself. The authors' central arguments can be summarized in the following manner: 1) analyses of world politics by using the concept of civilization are useful; 2) civilizations are dynamic and ever-changing; and perhaps most importantly, 3) civilizational analysis must be done in a way that avoids selectively or reductively presenting a civilizational identity as an integrated whole. Within any human collective, there are multiple social groups within the larger community as well as fundamental connections and significant transactions with social groups outside of the community. The challenge, then, for the non-essentialist civilizational analyst is to show how certain characteristics of the larger community are emphasized and often play a role in world politics without giving one single element of the larger group’s identity priority over all the others, as if
human collectives were one dimensional and one facet of the group’s identity could be entirely separated from the other diverse elements of its component parts.

The basis for Hall and Jackson’s argument for a non-essentialist approach to analyzing civilization is that “civilizations are contested, not consensual… [As] sites of contestation…civilizations are [in] states of flux; they are not static. Or at least, flux is the norm; stasis is the exception to be explained” (2007: 8). These analysts are not alone in their efforts to alter the prevailing practice of studying civilizations as a reified thing, instead of as a set of relations and processes that are not only loosely bounded and contradictory, but also fragmented and dispersed without a centralized authority. Peter Kazenstein also offers an understanding of civilizations as “internally highly differentiated and culturally [loose],” not fixed in space or time, and characterized by “intercivilizational encounters and transcivilizational engagements” within an integrated global context (2010; 2012).

The difference between these two approaches, outlined by Katzenstein and by Hall and Jackson, lies in the nature of civilizational identity. The latter clearly treats civilizational identities as a conceptual relational practice while Kazenstein and others approach the study of civilizations as real human collectives. For the latter, pointing out the diversity within and amongst monolithic civilizational categories is important. The former begins with civilizational identity as a concept that is characterized by multiple strands, including other civilizations like a set of entangled wires that cannot be easily separated. The analytical task then is this: How does one facet of civilization identity, or one strand of the story, or one wire, come to define the entangled bunch and then become active in the sense that it alone lights up certain paths of social action? This is the central question of this study’s analysis of Liberia’s Africanist policies during
the 1970s. How did Liberia’s claim to “Africanness” affect the state's policies so far as to shape policy?

In order to approach this study in a non-essentialist manner, as outlined above, the analysis must focus on the claim that Liberia was part of Western civilization, even an ambassador of Western way of life to the West Coast of Africa. In the 19th century environment in which the Liberian state was established, the declaration that Liberia was a Christian, capitalist, republican government was important not because Liberia actually was those things, but because of what that statement meant for Liberia's status in the international system. Specifically, that statement allowed Liberia to defend its existence among the other republics of the world, in particular states in North America and Europe. Focusing on claims of a civilizational identity avoids the analytical mistake of trying to evaluate whether or not Liberia really is an African state, which would require devising criteria against which one could judge whether a thing was African or not. Where could we find a list that would allow us to determine whether Liberia was truly African or not? More than likely, it would come from an analysis of a group of affirmed African states, as if there were an essential core to African civilizational identity. In this way, analyses that point to an essence of a civilization are a tautological exercise, for the process of identifying what Africa is would involve an analysis of peoples and states that had already been described as "African."

*Defining the "Self" in contrast to the "Other"

The problematic practice of essentializing purported civilizational differences was forcefully demonstrated in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). In his seminal text, Said investigates the construction of the Self by way of an Other that is presented as inferior, menacing, and deficient. Through his analysis of Western conceptions of the “Orient,” Said
identifies certain characteristics associated with the Orient, in particular institutional practices of the West that have been implicated in the colonial occupation and subjection of the Orient. Said highlights the centrality of identity claims in human existence and the difficulty for analysts of civilizational identity to engage in their work without repeating the patterns inherent in the language,

Can one divide human reality … into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions … and survive the consequences humanly? By surviving the consequences humanly, I mean to ask whether there is any way of avoiding the hostility expressed by the division, say, of men into ‘us’ and ‘they’…. When one uses categories like Oriental and Western as both the starting and the end point of analysis, research, public policy, the result is usually to polarize the distinction … and limit the human encounter between different cultures, traditions and societies (1978: 45–6).

Said observed that human identity is the “place” from which people go about living their everyday lives and interacting with the world around them. Identity is also constructed politically in the creation and maintenance of civilizational divisions (1978: 332). However, he warned that civilizational analyses that described civilizations as having an essential core, uniform and tightly bounded and distinct from other civilizations, are dangerous and potentially violent in the way they construct the Other. Said warned against the reification of civilizational identity by analysts, an error this study also seeks to avoid.

Situating his work within the dialogical approach of Iver Neumann’s typology of self/other theorizing, Mark Salter demonstrates how such a civilizational analysis may proceed. Salter’s (2007: 81-93) analysis of the discourse of the war on terror traces how the concept of civilization in the singular, that is, specific markers of achievements that are used to distinguish the economically, politically, socially or intellectually “civilized” from the “un-civilized,” are used to constrain or legitimate political action. In his book Barbarians and Civilization in International Relations (2002), Salter’s framework involves an analysis of the dynamics between
the identity of the group claiming to be “civilized,” in this case Europe, and a group that can be represented as “barbarians” against which the first group defines itself. The barbarians within this framework are colonial subjects. Salter notes, “the status of ‘civilization’ is meaningless without ‘barbarians’ against whom to compare one’s self in order to draw the limits of the political community” (2002: 12). The possession of “civilization” is then used as the justification for conquering “barbarism.” To this point, early 19th-century African-American settlers used the discourse on “Africa” as the Dark Continent, the home of savagery and barbarism, to justify their colony and the existence of their state. As possessors of “civilization” they not only had a right to take the land from the indigenous ethnic communities in the region, but a responsibility to “civilize” the barbarians.

Integral to the narrative of the Liberian state was that African civilization could be improved upon by the settlers' sharing the ways of “the West” with the inhabitants of the Dark Continent. In 1856, for example, Liberian statesman Edward W. Blyden described the coastal towns that made up the Republic of Liberia as “standing like a chain of light along the benighted shore and spreading their civilizing and recovering influences among the surrounding degradation and barbarism” (West 1970: 238). Two important points surface in reviewing contemporary civilizational analyses as they relate to this project, 1) the concept of civilization understood as the highest, most evolved and refined way of human existence, that is, “civilization” in the singular; and 2) the notion that there are multiple civilizations and a hierarchy that is maintained among them--that is, “civilizations” in the plural.

The specification of “Western civilization” as the standard-bearer of what it means to be civilized would be unnecessary if it did not have “African civilization” to compare itself against in order to determine the boundary of the cultural and political community and, significantly, its
responsibilities, duties, or commitments to that community. Salter’s analysis points to the necessity of “Africa” in defining “the West”; his analysis highlights that “the West” was already inextricably linked to “Africa” relative to its fundamental existence, that is in the articulation of what the West is and is not. Similarly, the African civilizational identity as articulated by politicians and scholars during the immediate post-colonial period was also forged in relation to the West; specifically that “Africa” was “not Western” culturally or politically, nor should it strive to be.

Distinct from these newly independent states on the African continent was Liberia. For most of Liberia’s history, the country explicitly claimed a connection to the West as opposed to Africa, not least because Liberia’s statehood afforded it membership to a world community largely comprising the states of Europe and North America. Both culturally and politically, Liberia viewed itself as having more in common with “the West” than with the peoples of Africa under colonial rule, and that commonality was justified by Africa’s “barbarism.” What was it that allowed Liberia to claim African civilizational identity, and for that claim to have enough traction to engender policies that reflected a commitment to “Africa”? The first two empirical chapters (Chapters 5 and 6) relate the historical background that laid the groundwork for why Africanist claims resonated in 1970s Liberia and carried rhetorical and practical power.

*African Civilizational Identity and Liberia*

Civilizational identity has historically played an important role in the politics of the Liberian state and its foreign relations. The establishment of Liberia itself can be viewed as the instantiation of different strands of discourse on distinctive civilizational identities and hierarchies that were maintained among them. Significantly, the move to create a colony by the American Colonization Society (ACS) was in part an attempt to rid the US of free African
Americans widely considered a potential source of future problems for the US. Other selling points to support the removal plan included that Africa would receive “partially civilized and Christianized” settlers, of which Africa was presumed to be in need and that the free African Americans could enjoy a “better situation,” one of self-rule and liberty that could not be afforded to them in the US (Alexander 1849: 78-79; Staudenraus 1961: 17).

Liberia’s founders’ justification for the existence of a black republic on the West African coast was rooted in Liberia’s claim to be the appropriate vessel to spread the universal virtues of “Western civilization” among Africans. Liberia’s 1847 Declaration of Independence stated,

In coming to the shores of Africa, we indulged the hope; that we would be permitted to exercise and improve those faculties, which impart to man his dignity – to nourish in our hearts the flame of honorable ambition to cherish and indulge those aspirations which a beneficent Creator has implanted in every human heart, and to evince to all who despise, ridicule, and oppress our race that we possess with them a common nature, are with them susceptible of equal refinement, and capable of equal advancements in all that adorns and dignifies man.

The appropriateness of the settlers’ role was based on shared race; thus, Liberia was innately “African,” that is the colonists’ ancestors had been taken from Africa to the Americas on slave ships. As African-Americans coming from the United States, the settlers stated their commitment to transforming the “heathens” and “barbarians” on the continent into civilized peoples by way of Christianity and commerce. For a brief period, when the existence of Liberia was challenged during European colonial usurpation of land in West Africa later in the 19th century, Liberian officials defended Liberia’s existence based on its uniqueness as a state that was a product of “Western civilization” yet also of “Africa” (see Chapter 5 “Enacting Liberia”) The settlers and their state project of Liberia were then uniquely equipped to spread the virtues of “Western civilization” to the inhabitants of the continent.
Liberian politicians claimed the state as emblematic of the universality of “Western civilization,” and also appropriated the notion of the "modern republic" for themselves. Liberia’s first president, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, in his third inaugural address delivered on December 3, 1851 to citizens and members of the legislature, declared that

[i]t is trumpeted by the enemies of our race, that Liberia, if left to herself will soon be added to the catalogue of proofs that the African race is incapable of self-government. Wonderful discovery! But, gentlemen, these are empty speculations: and as such, I am satisfied you will agree with me, deserves but little attention... The people of Liberia are unquestionably solving the greatest of political problems, the capacity of the African race for self-government. And I verily believe--indeed, I have not the slightest doubt--that, under God, Liberia is the chosen instrument of working out this problem, and restoring to Africa a government, a name, and the blessings of civilization and Christianity. And, gentlemen, by the Divine blessing, you have already accomplished much for down-trodden Africa; and you have every encouragement to persevere in your efforts to carry forward the work committed to your hands...[Y]ou have relieved thousands from innumerable distresses, consequent upon the ravages of cruel wars, instigated by heartless slave-dealers, and, with other thousands, brought them within the pale of civilization. And, above all, from Liberia has gone forth the light of Christianity, penetrating the very depths of heathen superstition and idolatry, so that in every direction may be seen the sons of the forest giving earnest heed to the story of the cross (Guannu 1980:12-13).

A principal point of President Robert’s speech was that Liberia was an example that Africans could, like everyone else, govern themselves. From its inception, Liberia’s performance of its statehood was an important way in which Liberian elites asserted their membership in the civilizational community of the West. At the same time, Liberian political elites historically and consistently acknowledged a duty to share the virtues of “Western civilization” with “Africa,” of which Liberia “naturally” was a part largely due to racial classification.

However, cultural and social cleavages between the settlers and the indigenous population opened up in the beginning and persisted over the course of Liberia’s history. The African-American emigrants who founded Liberia came from Georgia, New York, Mississippi,
Maryland, Pennsylvania, and other states in the US and were referred to as “Americo-Liberians,” “Americans,” “colonists,” “settlers,” and “citizens” by American Colonization Society (ACS) agents and by themselves; an important adjective applied to them was “civilized.” Conversely, the communities living on the land claimed for Liberia, including the Kpelle, Kru, Vai, Bassa, and other ethnic-linguistic groups, were known as “savages,” “heathens,” “aborigines,” “country people,” “natives,” and “uncivilized.” All the while, settlers were committed to a duty to share “civilized” Western ways of life with “Africa.” The settlers affirmed their membership in the cultural community of “the West” by creating institutions emblematic of “Western civilization,” including a modern state, a capitalist economy and churches, from which, it should be noted, the indigenous populations were excluded.

Mary Moran (2006: 78) comments further on the social cleavage between the descendants of the African-American settlers, the so-called Americo-Liberians, and the indigenous ethnic communities that existed in the region before the arrival of the settlers in the context of Liberia’s national identity.

Liberian nationalism, therefore, has always been, in the terms used by Benedict Anderson, “official” in that it is a projection of the state; no sense of nationhood predates the arrival of the settler minority. This official nationalism was closely tied to such identifying markers as literacy, fluency in English (the national language), employment in the wage sector, at least nominal membership in a Christian church, residence in urban areas, especially Monrovia, and the accumulation of Western products; in other words, with “civilization” as defined by the American settlers.

From its founding well into the 20th century, the Liberian state excluded indigenous segments of the population that did not conform to its estimation of “civilization,” which was equated with “Western” ways of life practiced by the settlers. Furthermore, the indigenous African populations were often perceived as a threat to the Liberian state and ways of life. Hence, although Liberia claimed to be a democracy from the moment of its declaration of independence, it was only
nominally democratic; indeed, it has often been described as an oligarchy (Jackson and Rosberg 1982; Lowenkopf 1995: 99). Fear and avoidance of the indigenous Africans and exclusion from social and political institutions of the settler elites within Liberia’s borders translated into Liberia’s foreign policy towards neighboring African communities and remained fairly constant elements in the state’s policy.

*Liberia in the Context of Emerging African Independent States*

In the early post-colonial independence period, Liberia found the changes taking place in its African context to be challenging. As the African territories surrounding Liberia began to win their independence in the aftermath of World War II, Liberia’s diplomatic partners, long identified as European and colonial political figures, were becoming African nationalist leaders. In this state of flux, Liberian state officials were initially apprehensive about what fervent claims of a new African identity might bring. They feared that the mobilized masses within the territories agitating for their freedom might ignite the indigenous ethnic communities within Liberia (a majority of the population) to rise up against the state. This political uneasiness was articulated in the following excerpt from Tubman’s Secretary of Defense E. Jonathan Goodridge’s Annual Report for 1960:

> With the attainment of independence of our African brothers contiguous to our borderline, problems which we never thought of are arising and have to be grappled with [using] every degree of efficiency and alertness. Not only are the problems of the crossing into our territories of citizens of other states involved but also the question of national ideologies, some of which are divergent to ours and destined to threaten and uproot the very foundations upon which our democratic institution was founded. To ensure that the situation just referred to will be averted and not permitted to take a foothold in Liberia we have to strengthen and increase our border control units and give more attention to border problems as they arise from day to day.

Liberia’s apprehension about the independence struggles that celebrated “Africa” as opposed to the colonial system of the West mirrored Liberian state elites’ own relationship with the
indigenous population, which they viewed as a potential threat to their republican, Christian, capitalist way of life.

At the same time, however, the Secretary’s remarks also reflected the widespread acceptance that the people of the continent were of the same “race,” almost a kind of extended family. This perception went all the way back to Liberia's founding. Indeed, Alexander Crummell, an early American-born Liberian, professor, and Episcopal priest, had articulated the very same perception in the 19th century, observing specifically that races were families and that not all family members were the same (Appiah 1992: 5). The creation of Liberia had in fact been justified in part by the “responsibility” of the “enlightened” and "civilized" members of the race - -the African-American settlers--to bring the inhabitants of Africa along toward civilization. As members of the same "family," the American-Liberian settlers were to love their African brothers and sisters in spite of their "faults." A steady fear prevailed among the early settlers that they might succumb to the "heathenism" and "primitiveness" of the Africans that surrounded their colonial settlements on the coast. Instead, the early African American settlers saw their mission clearly: to civilize native Africans as part of their duty to race and country.

The Tolbert administration policies of the 1970s can be seen as an attempt to “Africanize” Liberia by including Africans within Liberian society and to tie Liberia to African states within the international society. Tolbert responded to African Liberians’ demands for greater participation in the affairs of the country (Sisay 1985: 159) and he initiated incremental political liberalization. He executed a domestic policy called “Total Involvement” aimed at realizing a “wholesome functioning society,” which he described as “a Society which shall require the total dynamic, and individual involvement of every Liberian, and of all within our borders for an ever-spiraling advancement of productivity and achievement” (Guannu 1980 395-
Tolbert’s stated goal was to include those who had been alienated from Liberian political and social systems. In his words, Liberia as a “Wholesome Functioning Society” would...express concrete concern for the poor and underprivileged, and must ensure security and protection for its citizens, and their freedom from fear and intimidation. It must guarantee opportunities for all, with the corresponding responsibility that all must be equally dedicated, as a prerequisite, to enjoyment of the benefits to be derived therefrom (Guannu 1980: 396).

Throughout its existence Liberia had grappled with how to integrate the various collective identity groups within its border into a national collective. Tolbert offered a path forward.

Even at an early point in his administration, Tolbert sought to outline the elements of Liberia’s foreign policy, which included a focus on the security and welfare of its citizens; maintaining traditional friendships while embarking on new ones; and upholding ideals and principles including the “dignity of the mankind” and “dialogue among nations” as a means to settling disputes. Importantly, Tolbert’s foreign policy was to be an extension of domestic policy. Tolbert’s imperative of inclusive governance was extended to the pursuit of a foreign policy that not only viewed “national interest” as the interests of the repatriate core but also as demonstrating Liberia's common interests with African progressives. In his first inaugural address, January 3, 1972, Tolbert declared,

We are firm in the belief that Africa has the capacity to build a future to meet with ideals and aspirations of the African peoples; and we are committed to the proposition that our collective efforts and resources must be total harnessed, and a common will developed. Our Government, therefore, will use its full potential to strive in the direction of creating a future equal to the rising expectations and legitimate aspirations of our African brethren (Liberia 1972).

Tolbert’s stated commitment to “Africa” had implications for the policies enacted under his administration, and Liberia’s public claims of a connectedness to “Africa” opened the possibility of important policy actions, including supporting ongoing independence struggles in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa, as well as Liberia’s
advocacy in the UN against South Africa’s support of minority white settler governments in Southern Africa and armed groups aimed at suppressing liberation movements.

Conclusion

Jacinta O'Hagan in 2007 called for research and analysis on how discourses of civilization and civilizational identity are used in world politics; this study is in part a response to that call, since this study’s focus is on civilizational language and the deployment of the discursive construct “Africa.” Liberian politicians’ identification with Africa during the 1970s laid the rhetorical groundwork for Liberia to reflect the concerns of the states and peoples of the continent on which it dwelt; that policy direction served to move Liberia away from the global political preoccupations of “the West.” In civilizational politics, “Africa” remains an effective organizing tool that can reveal important dynamics of world politics. A methodology that allows for the study of the use of “Africa” in policy-making is outlined in the chapter that follows.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter, the argument was made that accounting for Liberia’s autonomous, anticolonial foreign policies during the early 1970s requires an examination of the discursive resources used to justify those policies. Realist, liberal, and critical IPE analyses of international politics generally fail to take into account the justifications that international actors use to describe their actions. This approach, in contrast to the foregoing, allows us to investigate the process of legitimation, or how state officials legitimize and justify their actions. The object of analysis here is the ongoing process of social transactions, social relations, and negotiation resulting in legitimation. Out of the general morass of public political debate, the process of legitimation contingently stabilizes the boundaries of acceptable action for a state, making it possible for certain policies to be enacted (Jackson 2006: 16-28). Legitimation, then, methodologically serves as a causal mechanism; that is, it allows for the telling of a compelling narrative about how one thing leads to another.

In order to trace how the legitimation process engenders an outcome, certain analytical tools are needed. One such tool is the “rhetorical commonplace,” which may be defined as a widely disseminated and discussed notion. Rhetorical commonplaces such as “Western civilization” or “liberté, égalité, fraternité” or “Africa for the Africans” are historically developed and socially available in everyday language. When they are linked to certain policies in the course of public debates, rhetorical commonplaces legitimate certain policy actions. Thus, legitimation involves a specific actor's linkage of the rhetorical commonplace to a policy as well as an audience amongst whom the rhetorical commonplace exists and is understood. The legitimation of policy through the deployment of rhetorical commonplace is one of potentially many ways in which a policy or course of action can be made acceptable to an audience.
This methodology chapter discusses the epistemological and ontological basis for the approach adopted in this study and how it can be useful in the production of knowledge on world politics. Highlighted throughout the discussion are specific methodological directives for this study’s research design. Specific problems and pitfalls are addressed and avoided by focusing on how relational discursive resources assist in an explanation of the shift in Liberian foreign policy in the 1970s. I intend to demonstrate how the analytical tools of legitimation and rhetorical commonplaces that were used can help to explain Liberia’s autonomous, anticolonial foreign policy. The next several sections of this chapter will explicate the philosophical-ontological commitments of this study while setting up the empirical arguments of Chapter 5, “Enacting Liberia”; Chapter 6, “Liberianization of Africa”; and Chapter 7, “Africanization of Liberia.”

If what a state does is tied to what state authorities say that state is, then the rhetoric that the state uses can engender action. Like those of individuals, states’ identities are constantly in flux, produced, and reproduced out of historical and presently available discursive resources. Foreign policy actions, as well as other state actions, help to construct a state’s identity. To illustrate, President Tubman asserted, in a 1957 speech on African leadership and African unity, that Liberia was helping African nationalists—such as Hasting Banda of Malawi, Joshua Nkomo, and Herbert Chitepo of Zimbabwe—who were engaged in fighting against the foreign occupation and repression of colonial rule. Liberia, he said, had “long upheld the principles that all men are born equally free and independent and entitled to the right of self-determination.” By the 1970s, Tolbert was justifying his support of newly independent African states and liberation struggles, but he was using an entirely different characterization of “Liberia” than had been used in Tubman’s 1957 speech. For example, when in January of 1973, Rhodesia closed its borders with Zambia in order to deny entry to a liberation group that was trying to bring down the
colonial government in Rhodesia from its base of operations in Zambia, Tolbert charged in his Annual Message, delivered that same month, that “African nations should not sit supinely…but should be prepared to face the challenges.” In a telegram dispatched immediately after the border closure to President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Tolbert declared,

We have heard the recent most distressing news of the unilateral action by the rebel colonialist Smith regime in Rhodesia closing its border with Zambia to blackmail your gallant country into abandoning the freedom fighters valiantly struggling to liberate their country from the oppression and repression of that racist regime stop we feel this is an affront not only to our sister state of Zambia but also to all the freedom loving peoples of the African continent we wish to assure you my friend and brother as well as the stout-hearted peoples of Zambia of the wholehearted support of the government peoples of Liberia and myself for your refusal to be thus intimidated we wish to register our solidarity with you and our unflinching support in your hour of trial we are sure that the wise policies you have undertaken will succeed to the chagrin and regret of the enemies of African freedom (Liberia 1974).

Tolbert characterized Kaunda as a “brother” and Zambia as a “sister state,” clearly identifying an in-group consisting of the countries that included Liberia, Zambia, and others engaged in the liberation struggles in the name of “Africa.” In the same speech, Tolbert went on to state, “I feel it also incumbent upon me to propose to the OAU that its members be called upon to give appropriate assistance to Zambia…this sister country.” In this instance, while both Tubman and Tolbert supported African liberation struggles, the rhetorical claims made to legitimatize essentially the same policies were vastly different. The two presidents’ speeches demonstrate rhetorical moves that were made in order to characterize Liberia’s actions in certain ways. Post-World War II, Tubman had been keen on cultivating “the closest possible friendly relations” with the US and its allies and aligning Liberia’s goals with “their [the US’] general national and international aims.” Hence, Tubman had justified Liberia’s actions in terms of American ideals. In contrast, when Tolbert justified supporting Zambia and the liberation movement in Rhodesia, he pulled from different discursive resources which, in his words,
committed him to engage and perform certain international political actions. In doing so, Tolbert engaged in a kind of boundary-drawing process in which Liberia was situated within the larger cultural entity of Africa thereby constructing Liberia as an African state. Similarly, during the 1970s, a new articulation of Liberian national identity emerged within the public arena, one that emphasized an identification with Africans within the its borders.

Liberian National Identity and Articulations of “Africa” and “Liberia”

The question regarding the shift in Liberian foreign policy during the Tolbert administration might be able to be addressed by a look at some of the literature on nationalism and national identity. From this analytical perspective, the rise and eventual dominance of a version of Liberian nationalism among politicians and the public—a version that saw African identity as a nested or complementary identity—may have been responsible for the change in Liberia’s foreign policy orientation. To be clear, this statement presumes certain things, first, that there were more than one "Liberian national identity" available to be deployed in the ongoing political struggles over legitimate policy measures. Second, that some of these Liberian nationalists may have regarded an African identity as contradictory or in opposition to who real Liberians were. Lastly, that there were different articulations of “Africa” and “Liberia,” with the associated questions of where they came from and why a particular version of “Liberia” became dominant when it did. This section explicitly considers key voices in the literature on national identity and nationalist domestic politics and provides some scholars’ answers to the question of how one articulation of national identity won out over others. The purpose here is to glean any useful analytical tools or insight from the nationalism literature that might inform the methodological approach of this project outlined in this chapter.
A longstanding debate within the field of nationalism study is that between the primordialists and the constructivists. The latter maintain that nations and nationalism are the products of the processes of modernization, including but not limited to economic transitions, free markets, and technological innovations, especially in the field of communications, print and news media, education systems, the development of the bureaucratic state, etc. (see Gellner; Anderson). The former holds that nations are natural, in the sense that they have been and remain a first-level, fundamental way for people to order their associations, feelings, and commitments. Broadly, constructivists agree that nations grow out of core ethnic groups facilitated by the structures of modernity. Nations and nationalism, for constructivists, are totally a modern phenomenon and thus must be analyzed in their modern context. While recognizing the importance of the structures of modernity to the trajectory of ethnic groups becoming nations, primordialists highlight the essential nature of these social groups. Hence, the study of ethnic groups and their essence allows for a deeper understanding of nations and nationalism.

In his seminal text *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson defines a nation as “an imagined political community,” a community imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. But how is a nation imagined? Stuart Hall (614-615) offers five approaches to narrating the national culture,

First, there is the narrative of the nation, as it is told and retold in national histories, literatures, the media, and popular culture. These provide a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols, and rituals which stand for, or represent, the shared experiences, sorrows, and triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nation. As members of such an "imagined community," we see ourselves in our mind's eye sharing in this narrative. It lends significance and importance to our humdrum existence, connecting our everyday lives with a national destiny that pre-existed us and will outlive us.

Secondly, there is the emphasis on origins, continuity, tradition and timelessness. National identity is represented as primordial ... The essentials of the national character remain unchanged through the vicissitudes of history.
A third discursive strategy is what Hobsbawm and Ranger call the invention of tradition: "Traditions which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented 'Invented tradition' means a set of practices, . . . of a ritual or symbolic nature which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviors by repetition which automatically implies continuity with a suitable historical past." For example, "Nothing appears more ancient, and linked to an immemorial past, than the pageantry which surrounds British monarchy and its public ceremonial manifestations. Yet . . . in its modern form it is the product of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, p. 1).

A fourth example of the narrative of national culture is that of a foundational myth: a story which locates the origin of the nation, the people, and their national character so early that they are lost in the mists of, not "real," but "mythic" time.

[Lastly] National identity is also often symbolically grounded on the idea of a pure, original people or "folk." But, in the realities of national development, it is rarely this primordial folk who persist or exercise power.

For the constructivists, national identities are made from available discursive resources and subject to rhetorical contestation in the process of advancing certain chosen political or social agendas. They are admittedly limited by material and institutional arrangements but they are also the source of material infrastructures and institutional arrangements. National identity is not a static narrative but part of an ongoing rhetorical project aimed at engendering and justifying a range of state actions. As such, national identity constitutes a field in domestic politics in which collective identities are negotiated through contradictory and conflicting discourses over domestic and foreign policy. Politicians may offer accounts of national identity however; the public may not accept a certain account because it is not consistent with the imagined community preferred by the public. By the 1970s, the Liberian public imagined a national identity in some way fused with a supranational African identity which had implications for the version of Liberian national identity that state officials could legitimately offer.
To both the primordialists and constructivists, nations and nationalism appear as a by-product of modernity. Liah Greenfeld (1992) reverses the order in her claim that it is nations and nationalism that produced modernity. In her comparative history of five nations' paths to modernity, England, France, Russia, Germany, and America, she argues that nationalism was invented by the English in the sixteenth century and then adopted and modified by subsequent groups as they asserted their nationhood for their own reasons. In the case of England, Greenfeld traces how the use of the word "nation" changes from meaning "elite" or a small group with authority in a religious setting to connoting the population, the people of England. This linguistic shift helped the new aristocracy make sense of their upward mobility, a shift which contradicted available conceptions of reality, including religious and feudal social reality. At the same time, it elevated the masses to the status of the elite and conveyed on them the authority of the ecclesiastic coterie initially denoted by the term. The people, the population, ordinary members of community were then conceived as having authority and being among equals. That is, the population was sovereign - it embodied authority within the group - and was a community of individuals who were equals.

Similarly, in the French as well as the other three cases, the adoption of a new national identity was triggered by changes within influential social groups, whether it was the aristocracy, the clergy, or the elite. The chief reason for the adoption of the idea of the nation of France was the fact that the French elite in the eighteenth century found themselves in a disadvantageous position and sought to use the idea of national patriotism as a way to improve their position. French nationalism came out of the grievances of aristocracy, frustrated with the Crown. The idea of the nation propelled the aristocracy in their selfish quest to protect their privileges and had the added benefit of transforming it in to a moral crusade. The basis of French social and
political solidarity - the idea of the nation - turned conservatives into revolutionaries and idealists while the ordinary little man was symbolically promoted to the position of an elite. These ideas, according to Greenfeld, were imported from England, where individual liberty and equality were respected.

Nationalism (national ideologies, national consciousness and national identities) is explained by Greenfeld as the prerequisite of industrial capitalism, the development of the state, and secularization. She justifies the assertion that nationalism is a cause of modernity, not an effect of modernity, by first pointing out that a nation is a made up of humans in the advanced stages of evolution. Human social reality is constructed by shared cultural practices and forms, including national identity, national consciousness, and nationalism. Therefore, a change in the conception of social order is the source of new forms of economic and political organization. For instance, the modern state as a political institution and the modern economy as social institutions require that individuals in society be conceived of as fundamentally egalitarian. Nationalism provided the egalitarian conception of the social order and the decentralization of political authority through the notion of popular sovereignty.

How does this relate to the Liberian foreign policy shift of the 1970s? Several aspects of the discussion come to the forefront. Importantly, Tolbert took office in the aftermath of the 1950s' dissemination and widespread acceptance of the nationalist conceptions of how to order social and political life. Nationalism had become central to the process of constructing a meaningful reality in a modern consciousness. The process of winning independence for African colonies had all involved appealing to some form of nationalism. African nationalist elites, some of whom had studied in Europe and the US, were providing leadership for popular national movements primarily aimed at ousting the colonial powers. A sense of national consciousness
was also forged by the experience of African soldiers who had returned home after World War II with a reinvigorated sense of civic duty, responsibility, and alive to the possibility that their legitimate aspirations for self-governance as outlined the Atlantic Charter might be realized. Like the English and French aristocrats of the sixteenth century, the Americo-Liberian elites in post-colonial environment of the 20th century could have sought to articulate a new Liberian national identity in an attempt to preserve their interests and protect their way of life. But how would tying a Liberian national identity to an African identity define the identities of Liberian people?

Since independence, most African states, Liberia included, had had to face the overwhelming challenge of nation-building. The difficulties of managing competition among ethnic communities and promoting common symbols and identities placed substantial demands upon new governments. Liberia as well under the Tolbert administration attempted to draw young people and African-Liberian groups into Tolbert's constituent base. For example, a recommendation in the report of the Executive Mansion National Conference on Youth in Monrovia suggested that

Being that the title “native and tribal affairs” of a position in the Ministry of Local Government suggests certain discrimination connotations that might be damaging and not in the best interest of the nation and its people, we hereby PROPOSE THAT the said title be changed. (Hlophe 1979)

This was a clear effort to de-stigmatize and draw in the African-Liberian population as part of the effort of nation-building. In February 1974, the Sedition Act was passed by the Legislature, banning public use of ethnic labels connoting racial inferiority and discussing the issue of the repression of the Hinterland.

In *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), Eric Hobsbawm argues that analyzing national traditions is central to understanding the nature and appeal of nations. An "invented tradition" is
a set of practices, governed by rules and usually of a ritual/symbolic nature, that are used to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior via repetition. Invented traditions harken to a historic past and seek to make the connection with the past without being limited by it. Invented traditions are different from custom and convention in the sense that they are continuously in the process of being revived in new environments for new purposes. Following Gellner (1964), Hobsbawm contends that nations are products of nationalism and that nationalism’s main characteristic is its drive to build a "nation-state." Thus nationalism is always a political project.

The Tolbert administration’s effort to recreate the Liberian national identity in a manner that diminished the cleavages in the society could be seen as an attempt to co-opt the African-Liberians, who were becoming conscious that they did not first need to become Americo-Liberian in lifestyle and name or part of their networks to advance in Liberian society. Tolbert’s imperative of inclusive governance through the creation of a new Liberian national identity that embraced Africans within Liberia’s border was being extended to the pursuit of a foreign policy. But Liberia’s national identity included not only the repatriate core but also the portion of the population that already identified itself as ethnically African. Tolbert’s Africanist, anti-colonial and autonomous foreign policy could be seen as a reflection of these nationalist commitments and Tolbert’s agenda.

In The Nation and its Fragments (1993), Chatterjee questions the imaginative capacity of post-colonial societies, asking whether their manifestations were scripted in “the West.” Chatterjee critiques the notion that the modes of nationalism found in the West were parroted by nationalist elites in newly independent post-colonial states in Asia and Africa. He argues that the dominant Indian nationalist discourse was influenced by marginalized groups. To some degree, as noted above, the Tolbert administration was indeed influenced by groups outside of the
traditional political system. For example, Tolbert's financial support to liberation movements in settler- or colonial power-controlled southern Africa was influenced by the work of Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA), a Monrovia-based, leftist pan-African non-governmental political organization. Previously, only administrative or moral support had been directly provided. The Tolbert administration's creation of the committee in the OAU to finance liberation struggles in southern Africa was a new development. The shift in Liberia’s foreign policy could then be explained, as noted above, as the result of the spread of Pan-Africanism in Liberian society by way of exposure to international media and by way of individuals travelling abroad being exposed to the concept of an African nation.

Rogers Brubaker (1996) offers a theory of nationalism that goes against the realist and substantialist way of thinking about nations (16). This is not a challenge to the realness of nations but recognition of “nationness” as a conceptual variable. He argues that nations should be thought of as institutionalized forms, not as a collectivity but as a practical category, not as entities but as contingent events. The challenge is to understand how nationhood as a political and cultural form is institutionalized within and among states. Brubaker argues that nationalism is engendered by political fields of particular kinds (17), and that the political fields may not be obvious or overtly stated. For example, to state that the proliferation of nations and nationalisms in the post-Soviet era is curious given the Soviet regime’s ruthless antinational policies runs the risk of missing the complex dynamics and consequences of nationalism. Instead of suppressing nationhood, the Soviet regime institutionalized it by dividing the state into more than 50 national territories, each defined as the homeland of an ethnonational group and by dividing the citizenry into rigid ethnic nationalities.
In order to make better sense of Liberia’s foreign policy reorientation, we must look at how Liberia and Liberians conceived of themselves by analyzing the cultural and discursive resources that state leaders used to claim “who we are” in the context of justifying their new policies. An analysis of identity claims in the language of Liberian leaders will help us to understand how a collective sense of self played a role in changing Liberia’s traditional foreign-policy position. Liberia’s fundamental shift in orientation from the West towards Africa is at least partially explainable by leaders' carefully formed use of the rhetorical commonplace “Africa” to make Liberia’s Africa-oriented policies appear to be a natural, even expected, course of action.

Knowledge, Discourse, and Language in Action

This study takes a stance on human knowledge, which is that we arrive at knowledge via the intersubjective phenomenon of language; “language” here is taken to mean a fluid system with contextualized meanings that can change over time (Foucault 1978, 1989; Wittgenstein 1953). If there is an objective, foundational, true reality “out there,” it is not knowable without human language (Wittgenstein 1974; Larsen 1997: 13; Fierke 1998:17). From this view, through an historical analysis of Liberia’s foreign relations, this analysis will trace and map the ideal type specifications of “Africa” and “Liberia,” used by historical actors that led to certain policy outcomes. “Africa” and “Liberia,” in this analysis, are understood to be configurations of discourse as composed by individuals in written and verbal communication; “discourse,” here, is not merely to be understood as talk or the written word, but also as the social practices, processes, and activities that provide resources from which one can say something about a topic (Epstein 2008: 2-8). By producing the set of relations between words from which meaningful articulations about a subject can be made, a discourse also limits what can be said. For example,
a piece of land on the west coast of Africa would still exist without language or representations, but whether that land is identified as “Liberia,” “an African state,” or “a client state of the US” is a function of discourse.

Epistemology (the nature of knowledge), ontology (what exists) and methodology (how we study a thing given a set of claims about human knowledge) are inextricably linked. Therefore, philosophical positions on epistemology, ontology, and methodology need to be dealt with ab initio in order to reveal the socially constructed nature of international politics and social-scientific knowledge (Lyotard 1984; Hacking 1999). For the purpose of presenting the approach to knowledge taken in this study, this section briefly discusses the following epistemological issues: What is knowledge? What is truth? How do we know? Included in the discussion are the following ontological questions: What is the nature of reality? What are the implications of stating that something exists? The section immediately following this one deals with methodological choices that are informed by stated positions on claims about knowledge and being. The last section outlines the method, specific practices, and/or operational techniques used in this study.

Scientific knowledge is a way of systematically organizing experience so as to produce valuable insights (Fierke 2001). Philosophers have tended to conceive of the natural and social worlds dualistically, in terms of “subject” (the observer) and “object” (the observed). This study, in contrast, takes the position that the observer is inseparable from the observed and knowledge does not exist completely separately from the knower. It was David Hume who made the distinction between what “is” and what “ought” to be; Weber took this further by cautioning us, when we are studying the world, to remain “value-neutral,” that is, to perceive the existing world accurately as it is rather than viewing it normatively, as it ought to be.19 Thus, the aim in this
study is not to describe what “ought to have been” but rather to give a compelling logical account of what in fact occurred.

**Philosophical Underpinnings**

Nietzsche (Kaufman 1989) instructs us that the world does not simply present itself to human beings; instead, the activity of learning about the world is a simultaneous process of formulating the world. It is through the act of knowing our world that we come to know ourselves. Nietzsche denies the possibility of an objective standpoint located outside of social life, including constructs of social interaction such as language. How we know our world, for Nietzsche, does not happen on any solid or true foundation. It takes place within a socially and historically produced space. For example, the early American settlers to Liberia came to know "Africa" through their use of commonplaces that were commonly linked to publicly understood concepts of Africa that existed at the time in American society. Would-be African American settlers to Liberia and advocates of the emigration of educated African Americans to Africa emphasized the value of “enlightened” African Americans returning to Africa as “civilizers” to share the benefits of Christianity and “Western civilization,” including republican government, with their pagan and barbaric African brethren. For many, “Africa” was imagined as a place of woe, disease, perpetual warfare conducted by primitive tribes, incomprehensible languages, customs and rituals.20

Within the philosophical field of post-structuralism, the work of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1974) provoked scholars to critically examine the structuralist view of language as a closed system with true and fixed meanings: that is, that the relationship between the signifiers and what is being signified does not change. Similarly, this project takes a Wittgensteinian approach to language as outlined by Fierke (1998): “Rather than understanding words as labels,
he [Wittgenstein] approaches language use as a form of action which cannot be isolated in the description of discrete objects; agents, actions and objects are given meaning within the context ….and are constituted in relation to one another” (17). Wittgenstein argues that we cannot get around our language to compare a word with that which it describes. Instead, our language is tangled up with other social practices that make our world. The focus here is on language-in-use or “symbolic technologies,” which are intersubjective representations “that have developed in specific spatio-temporal and cultural circumstances and that make possible the articulation and circulation of more or less coherent sets of meanings” (Laffey and Weldes 1997: 209). For example, when in his address to the 1972 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Special Commission, Tolbert claimed that “Liberia is the home of Africans – all Africans” and that “as brothers” they must keep with the true “African traditional approach,” this is not only an example of the politics of identification but an example of how the object being identified with, “Africa” was being constructed.

Obtaining certain, objective knowledge, accordingly, is an unrealistic intellectual endeavor not only because objective reality does not exist independently of the observer, but also because a scholar’s chosen conceptual apparatus is already suffused with his or her value-commitments, specifically, his or her personal beliefs about how the world works and how we know, all of which are contestable in the field of the philosophy of science and IR (Ashley 1983, 1984, 1988; Walker 1993; George 1994; Doty 1996). This study denies the possibility of external validity claims since there is not an “out there” to test claims against; knowledge is then in a sense unverifiable. 21 Thus, the point of social scientific research is not to search for laws or falsifying hypotheses. Instead, “truth” is sought for its explanatory utility as opposed to its
reference to an “objective” verisimilitude. Knowledge claims, then, are refined analytical constructions used to illuminate some significant aspect of world politics.

Philosophical ontology (a researcher’s conceptual map of what exists in that world and how) is a tool that excludes as much as it includes in its analysis of an international political phenomenon. As such, statements about the world cannot be evaluated as true or untrue in the classical positivist sense. In this study, the instrumental arrangement of sets of relations, processes and associated features of an empirical work so as to order and make sense of a set of facts about the world (see Campbell 1992; Klein 1994; Bartelson 1995) is one of the objects of interest. An analytical claim can be widely applicable, but it is not the same as a general empirical law. Its form of generalization materializes in its logic. The importance of a particular knowledge claim rests on whether or not it functions as stipulated in context. Therefore, articulating presuppositions and demonstrating a commitment to logical consistency is central to generating any valid social-scientific knowledge of international phenomena. Analytical statements and assumptions are specialized tools used to organize complex realities observed in the world, but they are not those realities. Thus, testing a hypothesis against a world that is not presumed to exist outside of the language that describes it is futile.

Knowledge and the tools used to gain knowledge are built from and upon our experience of a chaotic, messy world. What is important about substantive claims explaining Liberia’s foreign policy outcome is whether they usefully order a set of facts about the world. In this connection, ideal types can be helpful as they are a conscious and careful over-simplification of a complex empirical actual reality, but they are not a literal representation or a better understanding of it. The purpose of an ideal-typical depiction is a limited one, which is to
highlight certain aspects that are obscured by the ongoing activities of the real world. The process of legitimation is an example of an ideal type.

*Ideal types*

An ideal-typical analytical depiction is a model of the world, a conceptual tool crafted to make an analytical “cut” into ongoing social relations, negotiations, and processes in order to illuminate a particular state of affairs. As discussed in Chapter 2 “Why Africa?”, neither social nor economic models correspond to reality, but instead they are abstractions; for example, economic models do not constitute the economy itself. They are to be used for the value of their “givens” or presuppositions. The creation and application of ideal-typical accounts of international phenomena avoids the need to distinguish between which statements are analytically true and which are “really true.” Keeping the core commitments that inform a model when confronted with apparently contradictory empirical instances is an integral part of this methodology.

Weber’s notion of “ideal types” as interpreted by Ringer (1997: 111-112) is that they are “pure constructs of relationships” that we conceive of as “sufficiently motivated,” “objectively probable” and thus causally “adequate.” Ideal types are valuable as a cognitive means in that they lead to knowledge of “concrete cultural phenomena in their interconnections, their causes, and their significance.” In an ideal-typical explanation of foreign policy, analytical constructions such as categories and terms are treated as logical instruments (Hansen 2006: 52).

Ideal-typical claims are not hypotheses; thus, they cannot be verified or falsified. If an ideal-typical depiction fails to explain what it sets out to explain, it can be deemed useless but not false. Their purpose is only to assist in comprehending what has happened and why. An ideal type is classified as scientific insofar as it can assist in our understanding of empirical situations.
To evaluate whether an ideal type is good or not requires the application of the ideal type to the object of study to see whether it reveals interesting and useful things about the objects.\footnote{Analytical narrative}

Any valid account of Liberia’s Africanist policies during the 1970s must account causally for the success of the new policies, while preserving a central role for human agency. Why did Liberia intensify its support of newly independent states on the continent and ongoing liberation struggles in southern Africa, instead of continuing its previous policy of limited interaction and avoidance of most the inhabitants of the continent? In addition, why did Liberia discontinue its previously firm support of the US and almost automatic allegiance to the US in world political affairs? Similarly, why did the Liberian state become socially and politically bound to newly independent states and populations on the African continent after having resisted social and political ties to the "dark" continent since its inception in the early 19th century?

Liberia broke with policy positions that had historically been taken by the Liberian state, as well as rejecting other plausible positions. This analytical narrative will attempt to explain why Liberia did not pursue a US-centric or Western-centric or even an isolationist policy but rather one that was actively engaged in providing support in a variety of ways to the new and emerging states on the continent.

An analytical narrative presents situations that seem puzzling from a dominant perspective, advances an ideal-typical account of a process or setting, and then utilizes ideal types to organize empirical observations into “analytical facts” (not supra-empirical “truths”).

The methodology used herein proceeds from a set of analytical claims grounded in an empirical account that is explicitly and purposely a non-representational case-specific narrative.\footnote{Legitimation}
Legitimation is “the public pattern of justifications for a course of action” (Jackson 2006: 16-24). Analyses of the legitimation process begin from the transactional social practices within which agents and structures cohere. Transactional social practices are the social connections and repeated, regularized social exchanges that come to produce patterns of meaning. The claims of what “Africa” is or what “Liberia” is are examples of meaning-making. Instead of focusing on the Head of State and members of Tolbert’s cabinet, political party, class or their patterns of interactions, or investigating why they changed, the analytical focus is on the dynamic social activities out of which emerged the relatively stabilized meanings of “Africa” and “Liberia” that served as the causal mechanism for producing policy outcomes.

This approach avoids the pitfalls of reductionist explanations that equate motivation with cause. Because getting inside an actor’s head is not methodologically feasible, we cannot fruitfully study motivations. All we have is actors’ public pronouncements of why they do something; we can never actually or accurately understand their motivations. Focusing on a public pattern of justification for action seems at first to be a structuralist, or even neo-functionalist analysis, but instead, such an analytical approach is decidedly post-structural in that the focus is on the practical use of temporarily stabilized meanings that have been made possible by a specific relational discursive context.

Causality

This study offers a causal account of policy outcomes; however, the present notion of causality is not the classical philosophical understanding, in which a real thing exerts force on another discrete object to bring about an outcome (Wallace 1972; Clatterbaugh 1999). An important critique of classical causality has been that causation was maintained even in the absence of observations of real objects in causal relationship (Descartes 1997). Nor is the notion
of causality here based on Hume’s assertion that it is human psychology that attributes a
necessary connection between elements, giving rise to conclusions of causality rather than
merely empirical observations (Kurki 2006: 191-194). In contrast to realist claims that
unobserved causal mechanisms can be inferred to exist (Bhaskar 1978); to neo-positivist
causality, conceived of as ever tighter correlations (King et al. 1994: 77-87); to the interpretivist
notion of causes as systems of meaning that provide reasons for action (Geertz 1973), the causal
mechanism used here is an ideal type: legitimation.

Identity

“Identity” here is understood not as a real trait possessed by an actor and connecting that
actor with other actors. Instead, identity is a persistent and salient constellation of discursive
resources out of which an actor produces itself; for example, the use of “Liberia” and "Africa"
produces a range of possible actions in the world (Bulter 2006; Epstein 2008: 13-16). From this
perspective, what state officials claim Liberia or Africa to be in a historical context has
implications for the range of possible state actions. The specific dynamics of this process compel
the actor to act based on what it claims to be. This process can be studied by examining the
actor’s public justification of its actions.

Rhetorical commonplaces

Jackson (2006: 19) describes a rhetorical commonplace as “some form of specification of
a vague, weakly shared notion” capable of being used in a specific policy debate to legitimize a
course of action. An example is the notion of “Western civilization,” which was used in policy
debates to justify US involvement in Germany’s postwar reconstruction. An enemy that had been
defeated in the Second World War and was guilty of committing atrocious crimes against
humanity was claimed to be a part of “Western civilization” and as such deserving of US
assistance in profound ways, a kind of prodigal son that now needed to be welcomed back into the family.

Rhetorical claims made in the legitimation process both react to and create the world; that is, they reveal a new way of looking at the world that, in turn, gives rise to actions that now seem appropriate as a result of the changed circumstances. The three major policy debates investigated in this study marked moments in Liberia’s history when the state was forced to define itself and respond to the actions of other states.

A rhetorical commonplace is not one fixed notion authored by an individual. Rhetorical commonplaces are social and intersubjective, open to being joined with a variety of meanings or other notions. In that sense, rhetorical commonplaces used in legitimation claims are less like an “idea” and more like specific articulations that are inextricably related to the social and historical contexts within which they exist and which are exploited to advance a legitimation claim. Therefore, an empirical analysis of public debates can help explain why Liberia chose a certain course of action.

Investigating the use of rhetorical commonplaces in the legitimation process requires tracing the moment in which a particular commonplace was explicitly defined in order to have an impact on arguments in a given policy debate. That is, the arguments put forth about what “Liberia” was and what “Africa” was must be mapped out in each debate. These rhetorical commonplaces, “Liberia,” “Africa” are linked with other commonplaces that were current in the social environment. Their significance is in the effect they have on public debate. Arguments about which stock commonplaces make up a certain version of a rhetorical commonplace and how they are then used in legitimation claims define boundaries of action.

Legitimation Strategies
How does one legitimation strategy defeat another one? The notion of power as exercised through discourse enters into the discussion here. Certain conceptualizations of identity resonate more in particular settings or in a given context. If the speaker advocating for a policy deploys a commonplace to establish a sense of order, and it sticks that is it fits to the degree that a policy path appears as the only possible path forward, that legitimation strategy is victorious. The kind of power that comes into play here is not overt or covert power but rather what has been described as “capillaries of power” which are productive of producing the categories through which people have come to understand themselves, their everyday lives and language used to participate in the world. Conceived here, power does not have a central location but is dispersed and can be exercised through discursive practices. These practices may result in material or physical exchanges but they are initially ideational elements.

Models of how discursive power operates in crises situations or deeply disruptive transitions demonstrate the fragmentary nature of identities and the agency involved in claiming an identity while simultaneously drawing the boundaries of the identity group claimed through language. Bially Mattern (2005) offers the mechanism of “representational force” as the strongest form of language power used by former members of a now-dissolved identity to reproduce the status quo narrative. Representational force comes into play because of the multiple and contradictory narratives that make up any identity. Political opponents can exploit these political vulnerabilities by highlighting the inconsistencies in the narrative. However, representational force can neutralize these contradictions by presenting “a challenge so grave to a victim’s subjectivity that the victim ends up trapped in a position of either abandoning his dissent or complying with the demands of the force-wielder or suffering subjective death.” (Bially Mattern 2005: 14) In a sense, representational force is rhetorical in the everyday meaning of the
word given that there is no real choice but to linguistically agree with what the speaker has just said. Ronald R. Krebs and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson’s (2007) analytical tool of “rhetorical coercion” sketches the process through which one’s opponents can be drawn onto one’s preferred rhetorical terrain which limits the opponent’s ability to draw on disputes from the language with which they are more familiar and adept are wielding in arguments to produce certain effects. In these models, actors not only have a choice with regard to what they say and how they advance their position, but they exercise also their agency with regard to which form of discursive power to wield -- authority, persuasion, or manipulation.

One form of language power aimed at achieving victory in a public debate is legitimation claims which are rhetorical in nature. An important feature of legitimation claims is that they are made up of available social, shared, cultural resources and not in any one individual’s head. Legitimation claims only exist in the social interaction that it takes place in and through. Legitimation claims are made from the vague pieces of language often taken for granted or for truth in our everyday conversations. What differentiates legitimation from post-facto justification is that while strategic it comes out of social interaction. Legitimation is also not simply post-facto justification because after the initial use there are certain “lock in” effects.

Similar to representational force, when legitimation claims are used to “restore” a dissolved identity, it demonstrates how self-other knowledge is shared. “Because it is forceful or mortally threatening to its victims, representational force fastens or cements the identity, so that members have no choice but to keep on instantiating that same status quo narrative over and again for as long as the threat lodged at them through representational force remains compelling.” (Bially Mattern 2005: 15). A legitimation claim makes use of rhetorical commonplaces in order to “makes sense” out of a novel and/or unfolding situation. To illustrate,
on the eve of decolonization, Liberian President Tubman gave a speech to representatives of African states and territories who had been invited to the Executive Mansion to celebrate Liberia’s 110 years of independence on Liberia’s Independence Day, July 26. The speech was entitled, “Leadership of Africa.” In the speech Tubman emphasized the “divisibility of Africa indivisible.” Tubman stated that “African States must remain independent, entering, of course, into pacts, treaties or international agreements.” (Townsend 1969: 186) Given that this was a speech, this assertion was not put together on the in the moment. However, this characterization of the path forward for post-colonial African international relations makes certain policy proposals for how African unity should take form and helps it to win over other courses of action. Once stated, such assertions are made available and can be embedded and connected to institutional arrangements.

*Genealogical Tracing*

Historical change as a result of social action is closely entwined with discursive practices. Opposing the notion that history should be seen only as the rational unfolding of events, the genealogical approach employed in this study emphasizes instead the unintended consequences of discursive changes in the meaning and use of the terms “Liberia” and “Africa.” Instead of imposing a teleological lens on the telling of the story or treating the present as if it emerged from the past in a fixed, frozen form, this genealogical account follows Foucault in treating history as text (Foucault 1977; 1978), and tracing the discursive formations, patterns, and variations that made new articulations of “Liberia” and “Africa” possible. As such, this analysis tells not the history of Liberia and Africa themselves, but the history of the concept of Liberia and the concept of Africa, pointing out the historical moments at which shifts occurred, bringing new possibilities and, at the same time placing new limits on the possible.
A genealogical account is almost always a critical intervention into the present in that it methodically produces a history in light of current concerns and commitments. This is the case because no written history of the past or historical period can be understood on its own terms. Genealogy does not obsess over identifying the putative origin of an event but rather, it is concerned with surveying the multiple causes involved in producing an effect. A genealogical account attempts “to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion ... to identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us” (Foucault 1977: 146). Indeed, the primary value of writing history is not to have it neatly lead up to the present in a causal chain but, rather, to examine how an effect or result in the present can be explored by including in a genealogical account the discontinuities and contingencies that themselves have been produced by human agency. In this case the “effect” is the rhetorical commonplaces of “Liberia” and “Africa.”

Employing a genealogical approach avoids the problem of reification discussed at length in the previous chapter, Chapter 2 “Why Africa?”. It explicitly rejects a fixed notion of “Liberia” and “Africa” but instead proceeds by tracing different conceptions used in the process of advancing certain arguments. These rhetorical commonplaces, “Liberia” and “Africa,” are made up of other commonplaces that were current in the social environment. As such, these two terms are shorthand for a set of commonplaces, a sketch of which is provided in the analytical narrative of each historical debate. The significance of those conceptions is evident in the actions that were made possible using “Liberia” and “Africa,” with the constellations of commonplaces that had come to delineate their meaning, in public debates. The task is not to define the substance to which these terms refer or to define their meanings for all times and in all places but to show the
effects of justificatory remarks in the production and temporary stabilization of notions of “Liberia” and “Africa.”

*Linking Rhetorical Commonplaces to Policy Outcomes through Legitimation*

An empirical study of rhetorical commonplaces focuses on these intersubjective negotiations or transactions. State agents speak on behalf of the state, but it is important to note that actors sometimes offer contradictory and ambiguous explanations for their actions (Foucault 1978: 102; Shotter 1993). How a rhetorical commonplace is linked to a policy outcome is historically and socially contingent on ongoing social processes, and the process is dynamic. As Shotter notes,

> We can think of every utterance as working, in terms of the speaker reacting to what others have said previously, in relation to whom or what the speaker is trying to be; that is, how he or she is trying to 'place,' 'position,' or 'situate' themselves in relation to the others around them" (1993: 121-22).

Thus, the notions connected to a rhetorical commonplace used by a speaker derive their meaning, importance, and identity from how they are used in that social action. Actors authorized to speak on behalf of the state, such as ambassadors and governmental officials, perform legitimation activities. The task of the analyst, then, is to empirically trace the patterns of rhetorical deployment and explain how they shape policy debates and engender policy outcomes.

*The Concept of Agency*

This framework, outlined above, offers a strong concept of agency. First, an actor using a specific rhetorical commonplace in making a legitimation claim is not necessarily tied to an action. Secondly, it is human agents themselves who use rhetorical commonplaces to normalize social arrangements from which courses of action now appear appropriate. Agency is not fixed or determined by structural imperatives, but is itself a consequence of the rhetorical deployment
of certain discursive resources. It is, thus, socially created from “sets of linguistic practices and rhetorical strategies embedded in a network of social relations” (Litfin 1994: 3). For instance, a state official’s attempt to define “Liberia” in relation to “Africa” in a public speech does two things: 1) it produces an actor, such as Liberia; and 2) it carves out a space within which an actor can then act. Moreover, agency is preserved in that legitimation claims can be made by different people: arguments about what constitutes “Africa” or “Liberia” are not exclusively linked to a social grouping. By extension, political power may be understood as not only as A’s ability to get B to do something (i.e. A’s power over B), but rather a network of diffused relationships among the various actors (Foucault 1978: 100-101). Neither "Liberia" nor "Africa" is understood as a naturally occurring object, but rather each is created and sustained by continuous human activities.

Agency can be seen in the creation of an efficacious rhetorical commonplace by an individual or individuals. For example, a speaker can commandeer a commonplace from his or her opponents, thereby disassociating the commonplace with them, or he or she can link a commonplace to others in order to shape policy debates and outcomes. An example of agency occurs when actors involved in the legitimation process “attempt to reconfigure received schemas by generating alternative possible response to the problematic situations they confront (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 984). Ian Hacking (1999:48) reminds us that a social entity, such as “Africa” or “Liberia,” comes into being by way of historically situated social interactions or causal routes. A constructionist approach addresses the agent-structure problem (that is, whether it is an agent or structural constraints that determine outcomes) by analyzing the ways in which social categories and language are used with either constraining or generative effects. In other words, human agency is recognized when we document the process by which categories are
made and deployed in continuous social activities that (re)produce our world (see Appiah 1992: 13-27). A good account of social phenomena must keep at the forefront that “societies themselves are nothing but pluralities of associated individuals” (Emirbayer 1997: 288).

**Legitimation in the Course of Three Historical Debates**

This study examines the legitimation process in three major policy debates: first, the Hinterland Policy (1904-05), second, the creation of the Organization for African Unity (OAU) (1957-1963) and lastly, the Tolbert administration’s autonomous, anti-colonial foreign policy (1971-1975). The following is a brief discussion of the three debates, noting the context of each debate, what was at stake in it, the policy outcome issuing from it, and each debate’s relevance to this study.

The questions that will guide this part of the analysis are these: What was the rhetorical landscape at each significant point in time? What were the specific discursive resources, and what were the relationships among them that were used to attempt to stabilize a particular meaning of "Liberia" and "Africa" during each debate? Which commonplaces were most successful in producing certain policies? What were the commonplaces associated with specifications of “Africa” and “Liberia” within given social contexts? What resources were present in the social arrangements to generate new specifications of “Africa” and “Liberia”? How were these rhetorical resources used in the public discussions and debate to allow for certain policies and disallow others? How did Liberian policy makers of the executive and legislative branch deploy notions of “Africa” and “Liberia”?

**Debate 1. Enacting Liberia: The Hinterland Policy (1904-05)**

Liberia is the oldest modern state on the continent of Africa. As has been noted, Liberia was established in 1847. It existed primarily as a string of coastal settlements for several years.
However, when European colonial encroachment on the continent began around 1850, Liberia would be forced to demonstrate its control over its territory. At the Berlin Conference of 1884-5, European representatives from Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, Spain, and Italy agreed upon an international procedure for dividing Africa up amongst themselves. The international European agreement stipulated that a European claim to territory in Africa required a demonstration that the land was “effectively occupied” in order for the European power to assert its control and to be recognized by other European states. As the only independent black republic in the region, Liberia was not invited to the conference; however, Liberia felt the effects of the conference proceedings, as its borders were significantly pushed back when European states later tried to commandeer lands initially claimed by Liberia.

The Liberian government’s Hinterland Policy of 1904-05 was a response to European encroachment and was intended to bring Africans of the interior under the control of the Liberian government in a systematic way for the first time. Under these circumstances, discussions began that would result in the Hinterland Policy of 1904-05, which did not extend constitutional rights and responsibilities to the members of the 16 different ethnic groups in the region, but instead governed from Monrovia through tribal chiefs.

In the speeches and writings of political and intellectual leaders during the Hinterland Policy debate can be found notions of “Africa” and “Liberia” that helped shape the policy. Particularly prominent were popular notions of “Africa” as a place that was valueless, uncivilized, and degenerate (Hegel 2001: 109-117). Liberia, on the other hand, in the words of its first president Joseph Roberts (1847-56), was the “light” of “civilization…science and Christianity.” The country was charged with “bringing up from darkness, debasement, and misery… the barbarous nations of this country” (African Repository, 1848: 120-126). Africa was
seen as the opposite inferior “Other” to a superior Westernized Liberia. Hence, the Hinterland policy stipulated that any African from the chiefdoms of the interior had to meet certain defined criteria before becoming a citizen, including relinquishing paganism, traditional customs, converting to Christianity and adopting the “Western” ways of life. However, other notions of Africa were also present, albeit marginalized. For example, Edward William Blyden, a contemporary public intellectual, political activist and diplomat, critiqued the government policies for

...attempting to rule millions of people, their own kith and kin, on a foreign system in which they themselves have been imperfectly trained, while knowing very little of the facts of the history of the people they assume to rule, either social, economic or religious, and taking for granted that the religious and social theories they have brought from across the sea must be adapted to all the needs of their unexpatriated brethren (quoted in West, 1970: 250).

In calling the people of the interior the “kith and kin” and “brethren” of the Liberian state officials who were crafting policy, there is the notion of Liberia as including these various ethnic groups of the region.25

An analysis of the discussions surrounding the Hinterland Policy of 1904-05 will, in Chapter 5, "Enacting Liberia," include an overview of how the rhetorical commonplaces of “Liberia” and “Africa” came into being in a way that allowed for their use in legitimating a policy. Specific intellectuals’ formulations of Liberia and Africa will be explored in conjunction with the processes of officials articulating the boundaries and borders of the Liberian state. The analysis of this first debate yields rhetorical resources for subsequent policy debates.


After the Second World War, a particular notion of Africa was disseminated as struggles for human, civil, and political rights proliferated throughout many parts of the world. These
international social movements did not happen in isolation. For example, the US Civil Rights movement was influenced by its participants’ knowledge of the Indian independence movement that had been led by Indian nationalist Mohandas K. Gandhi. In the movements for self-determination and self-governance taking place on the continent, an African self was being articulated in local and international newspapers and its rhetoric was being deployed in political arguments. At meetings of political groups, at protests, mass demonstrations, strikes, and boycotts, leaders of liberation movements were declaring that “Africa” had value, was capable, and was in fact good, as opposed to the dominant notion of “Africa” as deficient, incompetent, and essentially immoral, notions which had served as the rationale for colonial rule for about 100 years.

Over 25 states in Africa gained their formal independence during the late 1950s through the 1960s. The British colony of the Gold Coast, renamed Ghana, was the first. In his independence speech delivered on March 6, 1957, then Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah declared that Ghana’s “independence is meaningless unless it is linked up to the total liberation of Africa.” For Nkrumah, African unity necessitated a political federation of states governed by a continent-wide institutional authority, and it is from that seed that the Organization for African Unity (OAU) grew. From 1957-1963, Liberia participated in the international debates and discussions that helped shape the OAU, which became an intergovernmental regional organization comprising most, and ultimately all states on the continent of Africa.

The first conference held in order to discuss how African unity and subsequent relations would proceed in a decolonized and decolonizing Africa was the Sanniquellie Conference, led by Tubman of Liberia, Nkrumah of Ghana, and Sekou Toure of Guinea. This conference took place in the countryside of Liberia in 1959. By 1961, 20 African states were represented at the
Casablanca Conference, which was hosted by Liberia in its capital city of Monrovia. At the third conference, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1963, the OAU formally came into being with 33 African governments signing a charter with contents reflecting the foreign-policy actions of Liberian President Tubman and his Secretary of State, J. Rudolph Grimes.

In the debates preceding the creation of the OAU, Liberian leaders legitimated their policies by linking them to the rhetorical commonplace of “Africa” while deploying existing rhetorical resources associated with “Liberia” and adding new meanings to the terms “Africa” and “Liberia” in the process of helping to define the institutional form of the OAU. Nkrumah had argued for a “United States of Africa.” Tubman, concerned about Liberia’s national interests, which he saw as intimately intertwined with the national interests of the United States, succeeded in subverting Nkrumah’s vision of a united Africa. In the end, the OAU reflected Tubman’s vision of discrete states instead of Nkrumah’s hopes for unity. In short, Tubman’s “Africa” won over Nkrumah’s “Africa.” African nationalists were defeated in favor of Liberia’s model of an organization to facilitate coordination and cooperation among sovereign member states in their pursuit of economic and regional interests. In winning this war of words, Tubman’s Liberia solidified itself as a leader amongst African states. Because Tubman’s “Africa” aligned with the preferred position of Liberia’s most powerful ally, the US, Liberia secured US operations in Liberia, and the country was set up as a gate of entry for the US to get access to African states that had long been dominated by European interests and were increasingly coming under the Soviet “sphere of influence.”

Caught up in the rhetoric of the fervent independence movements of the late 1950’s and early 1960s, countries seeking to become independent from their colonial masters came up against Tubman’s very different idea of what the new Africa should look like; we may call this
the “Liberianization of Africa” (Chapter 6). In those exchanges of different conceptions of “Africa” put forth by Tubman and Nkrumah as they advanced their preferred policies, we see the rhetorical resources for the process of the “Africanization of Liberia.” Some important texts that will be examined include President Tubman’s and Ghanaian President Nkrumah’s speeches on the topic of African unity and the proceedings of the Accra Conference of 1958, the Sanniquellie Conference of 1959, the Casablanca Conference of 1961, and the founding conference of the OAU, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1963.


While Tubman did provide support to the newly independent African states and liberation movements (without disrupting Liberia’s relationship with the US and its allies), Tolbert’s leadership and support to the African states tested the cautious boundaries of his predecessor. During the early 1970s, President Tolbert executed a policy that was clearly independent from the US and its allies. In international forums, Liberia openly supported ongoing independence struggles in the Portuguese colonies of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, as well as the liberation struggles in Namibia and South Africa. For example, since Portugal was a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the US and its allies not only did not condemn, address, or even recognize Portugal’s brutal military suppression of the liberation movements, but instead they helped prop up the country's war-depleted economy of Portugal, which allowed the country to sustain its oppressive aggression in its colonies. Similarly, South Africa was largely allowed to continue its apartheid regime at home and in Namibia, as well as continuing to wage its campaign against liberation groups in the southern African region. UN sanctions against South Africa were not enforced; specifically, Security Council Resolution 366, which demanded
that South Africa withdraw, from Namibia and release political prisoners, received no support from the US or its allies.

Speaking to the OAU on January 3, 1974 regarding the struggles in Southern Africa, Tolbert asserted that

We are firm in the belief that Africa has the capacity to build a future to meet the ideals and aspirations of the African peoples, and we are committed to the proposition that our collective efforts and resources must be totally harnessed, and a common will developed. Our Government, therefore, will use its full potential to strive in the direction of creating a future equal to the rising expectations and legitimate aspirations of our African brethren (Liberia 1974).

Tolbert’s claiming the people of Southern Africa as “African brethren” was a rhetorical move to tie not only the people of Liberia to those of Southern Africa living under oppressive regimes, but also an effort to yoke together the peoples of the OAU member states. After the impassioned rhetoric of the international social movements that had been aimed at dismantling colonialism, the rhetorical landscape shifted toward the general notion that “Africa” or “the black man” was capable of managing his [its] own affairs and authentically striving toward political ideals like democracy. Tolbert used this specification of “Africa” to justify Liberia’s support of the remaining liberation struggles in Southern Africa. The following March, at a special committee meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement, Liberian Foreign Minister Cecil Dennis initiated the creation of a fund dedicated to provide military and financial aid to the remaining liberation struggles in Southern Africa.

The examination of the first two debates in the body of this dissertation will lead to a consideration of how the concepts “Africa” and “Liberia” changed over time and, by the 1970s, were stabilizing as a result of both rhetorical and political practices. An analysis of the rhetorical topography of the first two debates will identify the rhetorical resources that were used by state officials in foreign policy discussions during the Tolbert administration. The context of the
debates, speeches, and public writings of the key crafters of Liberia foreign policy will be examined.

Conclusion

Legitimation is here argued to be the causal mechanism that explains why certain policies were followed and others were overlooked. The causal analysis here proceeds by tracing or mapping how a particular configuration of commonplaces instantiating “Liberia” and “Africa,” came together in the legitimation process to produce certain foreign policy outcomes. These commonplaces, analytically expressed as ideal type specifications, are combinational factors that generate “adequate” causes, in the Weberian sense, of the effect (Jackson 2010: 146-149). Therefore, Liberia’s autonomous, anticolonial foreign policy could not have occurred without the historically and socially contingent specified rhetorical commonplaces of “Africa” and “Liberia” that were deployed in policy debates.

Given that legitimation processes take place in the public, intersubjective, social space between individuals, evidence for this study will be found in public documents. In order to investigate why Liberia executed an autonomous, anticolonial foreign policy in the 1970s, the public pattern of justifications for that course of action must, in this case, be traced in documents in which it can be seen that state officials themselves publicly offered reasons for the chosen course of action. Relevant to this analysis are documents within which state agents distinguished the chosen path from other options, ascribing responsibility or blame for failed or unpopular policies or actions, and undermined perceived adversaries’ efforts. Sources of data for this argument include contemporary government documents, newspapers, and pamphlets.
In this chapter, the term “rhetorical commonplace” will be defined and discussed, with special attention paid to how the rhetorical commonplaces “Liberia” and “Africa” became available for subsequent use to legitimate specific policies at key moments in Liberia’s history.

The concept of “rhetorical commonplaces” derives ultimately from Wittgenstein’s critique of philosophical problems of the 19th century, in which he observed that the terms in which a problem is normally posed are, in fact, often the source of the problem. He observed that words seem to take on a power of their own by imposing significant philosophical demands on what they describe. Wittgenstein argued that linguistic meaning is not subjective because language is public; there is no such thing as a private language. While we use language to express ourselves, he said, in a deeper sense we come to know ourselves through language. Knowledge by means of language comes from the outside into us through training. Thus, the early American settlers to Liberia came to know “Africa” through their exposure to a series of rhetorical commonplaces that were generally linked to publicly understood concepts of it.

Wittgenstein’s philosophical process was “to return words from their metaphysical to their everyday use” (Wittgenstein 1953: 116), questioning that which is taken as given to achieve clarity and to clear space for a better understanding of a particular social phenomenon. In this particular case, our task is to explore how people’s speech about “Liberia” and “Africa” shaped their conceptions of the world. Wittgenstein’s emphasis on the fact that we learn language highlights the role of education both as a source and as a means of spreading specific formulations of the concepts. While newspapers, pamphlets, and, later, other media played a role in presenting and disseminating a particular notion of “Liberia” and “Africa,” making them
appear as natural or primordial, perhaps the most enduring forms of the terms came from public lectures, speeches, and sermons of respected and renowned individuals as well as the academic writings and university teachings considered authoritative at the time.

As discussed in Chapter 3, “Methodology,” Patrick Jackson has defined a rhetorical commonplace as “some form of specification of a vague, weakly shared notion” capable of being used in a specific policy debate to legitimize a course of action (2006: 19). Investigating the use of rhetorical commonplaces in the legitimation process requires tracing the moment in which a particular commonplace was explicitly defined in order to have an impact on arguments in a given policy debate. Before a rhetorical commonplace can be used in a legitimation process, it must be created and distributed widely enough that its use in advancing an argument is effectual (Jackson 2006: 72-78). How such rhetorical commonplaces are then used in legitimation claims helps to define boundaries of action. For example, the terms “Liberia” and “Africa” themselves comprise largely familiar commonplaces that form a specific constellation of commonplaces; those, then, provide the meaning of the term. When the terms are deployed in various public situations, they are effectively shorthand for deploying a set of concepts. In this way, the invocation of “Liberia” and “Africa” provided grounds for action in a political debate, thereby making possible certain actions in the world.

Public officials tend to use the rhetorical resources that are widely available. This is largely for practical reasons: if a commonplace is unknown, or if the meaning of the commonplace, however vaguely understood, is not known by the target audience, the use of the commonplace in justifying a policy will be ineffective (Jackson and Krebs 2004). However, this is not indicative of a structural constraint on language, since the configuration of rhetorical resources can be altered by individuals who may attribute new meanings to certain pre-existing
commonplaces or may associate one commonplace with another to legitimate a policy. This chapter focuses on the moments in the invention process of the rhetorical commonplaces “Liberia” and “Africa,” as well as how those commonplaces, which are understood to be actually a specific constellation of commonplaces, were disseminated. The function of these two commonplaces as they are used in public discourse can only be explained in terms of their specific histories.

Discursive Shifts in the Use of “Africa” and “Liberia”

During critical moments of Liberia’s history, specific intellectuals and political leaders articulated the conceptual objects of “Liberia” and “Africa,” evidence for which can be found in various organizations’ official documents, newspapers, widely distributed or influential pamphlets, and contemporary scholarly literature that was aimed at producing knowledge on Africa throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The two commonplaces were prominently featured in debates taking place both in the US and in Liberia during the creation of the colony and eventually the state. These rhetorical resources were also used in the policy debates that are the subjects of Chapter 5, “Enacting Liberia,” Chapter 6, “Liber(ianiz)ation of Africa,” and Chapter 7, “Africanization of Liberia.” In each debate, conceptions of “Liberia” and “Africa” were integral to the policy outcomes. The central importance of these two commonplaces requires an explanation of how they became available for use in these policy debates. Additionally, this chapter will analyze development of the discursive shifts that enabled the use of these rhetorical commonplaces in the three debates outlined at the end of the previous chapter, showing how different commonplaces came to be associated with the shorthand terms “Liberia” and “Africa” such that the terms themselves came to exercise rhetorical power.

Discursive Configurations, Re-Configurations and Counter-Configurations
The rhetorical resource, “Africa,” was strategically deployed during three critical moments in the history of the Liberia: the period around its founding (1810s-1840s); the period during which it defined its place in the landscape of newly independent former colonies (late 1950s-early 1960s); and the period during which it re-oriented itself as an African state (1970s). Shifts in discursive practices in the US, Liberia and on the continent allowed for prominent individuals and organizations to draw on contemporary publicly available notions of “Liberia” and “Africa” to advance specific actions.

Some features of these commonplaces changed over time, but core pieces of each commonplace remained, demonstrating a kind of continuity over many decades. The notion of “Liberia” as we know it today—that is, as an African state—may be different from an older conception of Liberia as a “beacon of light,” clearly distinct from Africa, tied culturally and politically to the US and “the West,” and whose purpose was to enlighten the “benighted” continent of Africa. However, notions of “Africa” as the quintessential “other” to a civilized “West” still persist even today (Appiah 1992; Mudimbe 1988, 1994). Despite the closely connected links between various notions of Africa in the development of Liberia, for the purposes of this study, the emergence of the rhetorical commonplace “Liberia” will be analyzed as a separate entity and a conceptual object of study apart from the concept of “Africa.” The rest of this chapter deals first with the conceptualization of “Liberia” and then with that of “Africa.”

Again, the goal here is to provide a specification of two vague and weakly shared notions that were later deployed in policy debates to bring about a particular outcome. In this approach, “Liberia” and “Africa” are fundamentally analytical terms. Vital to the genealogical approach being undertaken here is the process of outlining the boundaries and contents of “Africa” and “Liberia” at specific historical moments.
Tracing discursive configurations and shifts first requires identifying where debates about a particular topic are taking place—whether in public forums, in institutions, or in the press—and then analyzing those debates in order to find the logical flow of arguments in addition to identifying the important moments of change. The process also requires an assessment of the rhetorical landscape around each of the periods within which the policy debates took place. The question then, arises: What rhetorical resources were available in the contemporary social arrangement that could generate new specifications of “Africa” and “Liberia”? The answer to this question can be found in the speeches of specific people who creatively reconfigured existing notions in new ways, thereby introducing novel conceptualizations.

A new configuration of discourse—or even of a concept or word--exists not simply as a name but as something that consists of the activities and the circumstances of expression; in Wittgenstein’s words, as “a name has meaning only in the context of a proposition” (Wittgenstein 1974: 3.3). In order to identify a moment in which the use of a term breaks with past discursive associations, the particular combination of elements constituting the new notion must be delineated. Evidence that a shift has taken place exists if that new configuration would not have made sense within the conceptual and rhetorical context immediately preceding the novel formulation.

A discourse is relational in the sense that it ties together linguistic expressions and social practices in a way that produces a limited number of conceptual and rhetorical resources and delineates what can meaningfully be said about a particular topic, which then makes possible a range of actions (Foucault 1977: 60-65, 100-101). While the purpose here is to identify a pattern of expressions that make up the particular discursive formation, it is also important to avoid the
structuralist trap of foreclosing other competing notions and articulations. Different arrangements of discursive resources by key individuals are significant. Identifying and including in the analysis the counter-configurations, variations, and reconfigurations of the commonplaces that make up the discursive formation is integral. This analysis identifies prominent discursive formations throughout the 19th and 20th century, focusing on how key individuals and organizations combined and concatenated these resources to bring into being the conceptual artifacts of “Liberia” and “Africa.”

For the purposes of this genealogical account, it is sufficient to describe the discursive shifts. Explaining why the discursive shift happened falls outside of the scope of this chapter, which is intended simply to provide an account of how these rhetorical commonplaces became available for use in subsequent policy debates, the outcomes of which are to be explained through an analysis of the use of these commonplaces. However, the discursive shifts are not explained in this chapter since, as Foucault asserted, a genealogical investigation is demonstrative, not explanatory in nature:

To describe a group of statements not as the closed, plethoric totality of a meaning, but as an incomplete, fragmented picture; to describe a group of statements not with reference to the interiority of an intention, a thought, or a subject, but in accordance with the dispersion of an exteriority; to describe a group of statements, in order to rediscover not the moment or the trace of their origin, but the specific forms of an accumulation, is certainly not to uncover an interpretation, to discover a foundation, or to free constituent acts; nor is it to decide on a rationality, or to embrace a teleology. It is to establish what I am quite willing to call a positivity. (Foucault 1989: 125)

The focus here is on describing what is produced, or what Foucault’s “positivity” can be used to demonstrate that a change has occurred and that the limits within which something intelligible can be said about the topic have been somehow altered. However, it should be noted that this genealogical investigation is only intended to lay the groundwork for the overall account of the
role of public rhetoric in shaping the conception of the world that helped to bring about particular Liberian foreign policy outcomes in the 20th century.

Providing an analysis of the imagining and dissemination of a commonplace is a necessary part of an overall causal account of specific policy outcomes. The commonplaces as they are deployed serve as shorthand for a specific constellation of commonplaces in policy debates that contributes to generating a particular effect. The rhetorical commonplaces “Liberia” and “Africa” appeared in discussions of Liberia’s foreign policy in the way that they did as a result of discursive formations and shifts in those configurations of discourse. A central facet of the explanation of Liberian foreign policy outcomes lies in the effective deployment of “Liberia” and “Africa” in policy debates.

This chapter, then, is an empirical observation of relatively successful attempts to “lock down” these terms in the ongoing process of defining social boundaries and of proclaiming one’s identity. This account is rooted in the understanding that identity is not the possession of a subject but instead is a way of talking about the self. Liberian or African identity was communicated to interlocutors and the world through social transactions but it did not naturally occur as a fixed thing within a subject. It was a shifting, temporary construction. From this perspective, what was asserted to be uniquely of Liberia or Africa in a particular historical context could be different in another context in large part because of shifts in discourse that allowed for new articulations about the self in relation to the world.

In characterizing the policy debates in terms of their component rhetorical commonplaces, the subsequent empirical chapters present the legitimation process of the debates as ideal-typical. Similarly, this genealogical tracing could be considered ideal-typical in character as it provides a series of formulations of rhetorical resources. A genealogical account
takes the position that “truth” is not something that is “out there” to be discovered but rather that in demystifying the processes involved in the production, regulation, and circulation of statements about the world, some hardened notions can be denaturalized.

*Imagining “Africa”*

Uses of the term “Africa” date back to antiquity, so a genealogical analysis of “Africa” and “Africans” has to be cautiously limited in its scope. “Africa” was the Roman name for Rome’s southernmost province, the region that is presently referred to as “North Africa.” A notable shift in the meaning of the term came in the course of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from the 1500s to 1800s. For European merchants engaged in the slave trade, “Africa” became identified socially with “Negro Africa and physically with sub-Saharan Africa” (Mamdani 2000:2). Importantly, prior to the trans-Atlantic slave trade African and European interacted, however, the justifications required for the practice of the trans-Atlantic slave trade involved a particular interpretation of the difference between skin color which precipitated racism (see Eric Williams 1994; Basil Davidson 1969).

Arab merchants, travelers, geographers, and writers referred to the land south of the Sahara as “bilad al-sudan” meaning “land of the black people.” European-Americans who travelled to the region during this period to acquire slaves adopted the use of the term “Africa” to refer to the place and the peoples. “Africa” was conceived of as the “land of the black people” and the source of slaves who were “black.” “Africa” became the referent of the natural habitation of black people; the place where “blacks” belonged.

In excavating how the rhetorical commonplace “Africa” became available for use in policy debates in the 20th century, it is important to reemphasize that the physical location of the boundaries of Africa is not the object of study but rather the conceptual boundaries of the
rhetorical commonplace. In other words, the assumption of the following analysis is that the continent of Africa is inhabited by diverse human beings who share traits and patterns common to all humans on the planet. The focus of the analysis is on intellectuals’ considerations and formulations of “Africa.”

*Early philosophical considerations of Africa: 1830s-1840s*

The notion of “Africa” as a bounded community came particularly from academics in both Europe and the US, and the educated African Americans who went to Liberia during the 19th century had also received training which included these conceptualizations of Africa. The conceptual object of “Africa,” then, not only informed the creation, maintenance, and preservation of “Liberia” as a bounded cultural community but as a state as well (see Moran). Most ordinary individuals would have come to know “Africa” through writings and speeches by individuals who had been trained by scholars who wrote on Africa. A selective survey of knowledge production on “Africa” during this period will thus be useful.

In his widely read text *The Philosophy of History* (1837), influential German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who had never travelled to Africa or studied the continent, offered a modified mapping of conceptual “Africa.” Hegel divided Africa into three parts. First, there was “European Africa,” which consisted of the North African lands of the Mediterranean region, including Carthage, which Hegel classified as a western Asian colony established by the Phoenicians, not as a product of the Berbers, who were the indigenous Africans of the region. Hegel viewed Carthaginian history as significant in the story of historical transformations in the region (e.g. Hannibal). Secondly came “the land of the Nile,” which consisted of the north and northeast regions of the continent, including Egypt, Nubia and Ethiopia; for Hegel, all three were intertwined with Asia, and were not really seen as being of Africa; as such, that region was
integral to the transition of the human consciousness from an Eastern mindset to a Western worldview. Any African historical movements that occurred in the northern part of the continent was seen as belonging to the Asiatic or European world.

Lastly, “Africa Proper” was the place where slaves came from for European-American consumption as property. This “Africa,” the “land of the black people,” was denoted by Hegel as “the land of childhood…lying beyond conscious history…enveloped in the dark mantle of night.” “Africa” was “unhistorical, undeveloped spirit,” still living in a state of nature (Hegel and Sibree 1956). Hegel claimed that there was no meaningful African world and that Africa was not part of world history because it lacked any serious movement or development (1956). If history was the steady progression of progress, then “Africa” had no history to speak of since there were no signs of technological advancements or innovations in Hegel’s view. “Africa” was in some way stuck in a prehistorical moment, poised at the beginning of any potential historical developments. Conceptually, “Africa” was perpetually not quite “there”—that is, where Europe was—yet. The Hegelian conception of “Africa” as a place and people devoid of meaningful, valuable human life worth learning from and studying for its own sake and on its own terms was an important and enduring commonplace, one that would be used repeatedly.

*Discourses on “Africa” during the 1850s-1890s*

The theory of evolution proposed by the English naturalist Charles Darwin in *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871), initially received with controversy because of its challenge to the creation story of the Bible and its “incredible” assertion that all humans had come from Africa, eventually became an integral organizing principle for social scientists from the mid-19th century onward and came to be known as “Social Darwinism.” Borrowing from the natural sciences’ observations of biological evolution, sociologists, including Herbert Spencer in
First Principles of a New System of Philosophy (1862) and William Graham Sumner, applied this theory to individuals, societies, and “races” around the world.

Darwin’s theory of natural selection in the animal kingdom, that certain species more fit for the environment will survive, was applied to life among individuals, societies, and “races.” As the fittest were able to survive in the animal kingdom, so Social Darwinism argued, the fittest would survive in modern industrial societies and would naturally come to rule over the less fit, which would inevitably become weaker, fail, and die off. Within this framework, societies advanced from the simple to more complex; the more advanced the society, the more advanced the “race.”

Theories within the paradigm of Social Darwinism provided pseudoscientific evidence and produced volumes of academic “scholarship” to put forth the argument that European-Americans, especially those of English and German descent, were culturally and racially superior to non-European-Americans and even to other Europeans. Although wrong and pernicious on many levels, these theories were enormously useful and important in forming 19th century conceptions of Africa.

Gaetano Casati, an Italian explorer, utilized the survival-of-the-fittest model as he described Central Africa in the mid-1880s:

The life of primitive nations is an incessant agitation for the attainment of progressive comfort, which leads to higher civilization. Ignorant of the future and careless of the present, the savage tribes instinctively attack and destroy one another. Sooner or later the weaker are reduced to impotence, the stronger fortifies itself, rules, and assimilates with the conquered, and in the end makes the weaker submit to its caprices (1891).

These notions were widely disseminated. In the 1870s, Georg Schweinfurth, the first European to record his visit to the region of present-day northeastern Congo, then inhabited by the Mangbetu, described the capital city of a politically centralized kingdom with a productive artistic culture
which he described using words such as “elegant,” “artistic,” and “masterpiece” (Keim 2014: 55-57). Yet Schweinfurth still saw the Mangbetu as savages, noting that in “Africa” one might speak of “culture, art, and industry but in a very limited sense” (Schweinfurth 1875: vii). He also described the king as “a truly savage monarch” whose eyes “gleamed with the wild light of animal sensuality.” Keim credits Schweinfurth with spreading the assertion (false) that the Mangbetu were cannibals, noting that,

Although all of the Europeans who visited the Mangbetu were impressed, they did not consider the Mangbetu their biological or cultural equals. Instead, they fit them into the evolutionist hierarchy, proclaiming the Mangbetu to be more evolved than their neighbors, who had not yet developed kingdoms. The Europeans perceived the Mangbetu rulers as having slightly more European physical features, such as lighter skin and longer noses, and they deemed this to be the reason for the higher level of Mangbetu culture. But they still considered the Mangbetu less evolved than the lighter-skinned Arabs who came to the region to trade in slaves and ivory. The Western evaluation of the Mangbetu and their neighbors is duplicated for African groups everywhere south of the Sahara. The more African culture resembled a Western culture, the more evolved its creators were supposed to be. The lighter an African people’s skin, the more Europeans found advanced features in their culture. In all cases, however, Africans were still deemed primitive (2014: 56).

The logic of Social Darwinism conflated “race” and the practices of a community in such a way that the superior “race,” Anglo-Saxon, naturally engaged in superior practices. Those peoples involved in practices similar to the superior “race” were considered less inferior. But more importantly, those with physical features similar to the superior “race”—lighter skin, narrower noses, thinner lips—were also considered less inferior. It is this measure that proved to be the irreducible lynchpin of the racialist hierarchy; by it, Africans and African Americans were never going to meet the physical requirements, hence their perpetual inferiority. However, by emulating the practices of the superior “race,” for example establishing an independent state, advocates of Liberia argued that Africans and African Americans could improve their racial
standing in the world, though they could never actually achieve equality. The underlying assumptions of this classification system were also used to justify the existence of “Liberia” as a sign of the potential of “the Negro race.”

The backward and primitive nature of “Africa” remarked on by Hegel could now be explained as a result of its peoples being biologically “unfit.” As the English entrepreneur and immigrant to South Africa Cecil Rhodes claimed while he was establishing a monopoly over southern African diamond mines in the second half of the 19th century, “I contend that we are the finest race in the world and that the more of the world we inhabit the better…just fancy those parts of the world that are inhabited by the most despicable of humans. What an alteration these would be if they were brought under Anglo-Saxon influence” (Flint 1974: 248-52). In occupying the position of the “most fit,” Europeans and Americans came to believe that they had a responsibility, an obligation, to introduce the political, economic, and religious benefits of the culture of “the West” to the less fit, less advanced, less prosperous peoples of the world. The English poet Rudyard Kipling famously called this responsibility to share “Western” cultural superiority with the rest of the world “the white man’s burden.” The notion of “Africa” was associated with primitiveness, backwardness, and biological inferiority, but also vacancy; “Africa” was a cultural tabula rasa, so Europe and America could benevolently seek to recreate Africans in their image, but only to a certain degree, given that their subservient role was biologically predetermined.

The inability of Schweinfurth and other European visitors to consider the Mangbetu civilized was in part due to the viewpoint that political scientist Timothy Mitchell (1988: 179) has referred to as “the world-as-exhibition.” In his description of an Egyptian delegation’s visit to a curated Egyptian exhibit in Paris in 1889, Mitchell captured the conundrum:
…despite the determined efforts with the exhibition to construct perfect representations of the real world outside, the real world beyond the gates turned out to be rather like an extension of the exhibition. This extended exhibition would continue to present itself as a series of mere representations, representing a reality outside. Thus, we should think of it as not so much an exhibition as a kind of labyrinth, the labyrinth which includes in itself its own exits. But then, perhaps the sequence of exhibitions became so accurate and so extensive, no one ever realized that the ‘real world’ they promised was not there. Except perhaps the Egyptians (Mitchell 1988:10).

Just as museum curators created a fabricated “Egypt” that visitors took to be the real Egypt, 19th-century writers created a fabricated “Africa” out of their European experience of it. Their readers, even those who traveled to Africa, referenced the fabricated “Africa” as the real Africa and perpetuated that particular notion of “Africa” in their travel accounts and reports.

*Anthropology and the African “Other”*

The founders of the emerging discipline of anthropology in the early 19th century were among the first to take Africa as an object of study. The primary insight of this discipline is that there are different “ways of life” practiced among various groups of people in the world; understanding the fundamental importance of culture, along with understanding various specific cultures, can illuminate, broaden and deepen our understanding of the way the world works. Since anthropology’s contribution to academic knowledge is premised on the existence of there being different ways of life, the notion of “Africa” is perhaps the best example proving the premise of the discipline. In other words, the infant discipline of anthropology in the 19th century cut its teeth on the most “different” way of life available: the study of Africa as a definitive “Other.”

In the US, anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan (1878) offered a widely used model for classifying the various peoples of the world: they were either *savage, barbarian, or civilized.* Savages were hunters and gatherers, barbarians were agriculturists, and the civilized lived in
cities, used writing, and had organized states. Africans were generally classified as savage, never as civilized, and their home, “Africa” was the land of wild things, whether in terms of nature, peoples, animals, or even plants. Morgan and others believed that progressive innovations facilitated human establishing societies and civilization. Africans were seen as mentally equivalent to children and therefore incapable of producing art, religion, language, writing, literature, or political structures as advanced as those of “the West.” Similar developments in Africa may be possible in the distant future but African societies were fundamentally basic. This presupposition form the basis of the paradigm of structural functionalism, developed in the 1930s and 1940s, which was instrumental in continuing colonial rule in Africa.

V.Y. Mudimbe (1988; 1994) and others have meticulously and methodically advanced the argument that the central conception of Africa produced by the academy and “the West” more broadly is that of essential difference. Specifically, “Africa” is different—even the opposite—of whatever “the West” claims itself to be. Mudimbe refers to the development of this phenomenon, which is akin to Edward Said’s Orientalism, as “Africanism.” Like Said, who was concerned with “the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority,” Mudimbe also notes the philosophical and historical tendency of the West to classify the “African other” as inferior, a conception that “depend[s] on a Western epistemological order” (1988: xv). In other words, the West comes to define and to know itself by defining what it is not, i.e., “Africa.” Mudimbe is particularly concerned with relating constructions of Africa’s difference produced by scholars studying and writing about Africa. He suggests that even when not intending to, scholars tend to practice “Africanism”—the notion of Africa’s fundamental inferiority in its difference from the West in questions of statehood and political practice—as opposed to identifying patterns of social activity that are practiced by all humans. Mudimbe
argues for a “polysemic” conception of Africa for analysts who agree with him that these “interpretations do not coincide with the complexity” of Africa (1994: 211).

Mudimbe (1988: 107) explains the scope of intellectual writings about the essential differences between Africa and Europe:

Nineteenth-century writers, focusing on differences between Africa and Europe, tended to demonstrate the complete lack of similarity between the two continents and attempted to prove that in Africa the physical environment, the flora and fauna, as well as the people, represent relics of a remote age of antiquity. Arthur de Gobineau's “Essai sur l' inégalité des races humaines” (1853), Darwinism, and the debate between polygenists and monogenists provided “scientific” and “social” categories for racial thinking (see Haller, 1971). Linnaeus's classification of types and varieties of human beings within the natural system (1758) was then modified. G. Cuvier, for instance, offered a hierarchy of human types in Animal Kingdom (1827); S. Morton, a table of races and their cranial and intellectual capacity in Crania Americana (1833); and G. Combe, A System of Phrenology (1844), in which he demonstrated the relationships between types of brain, racial differences, and degrees of spiritual and cultural development (see Curtin, 1965; Lyons, 1975).

Indeed, amongst Americans and Europeans alike during the 19th century, there was disagreement over which of the European “races” could be ranked from superior to inferior: were Southern Europeans, for example, superior or inferior to Eastern Europeans? However there was agreement that “blacks” were inferior to all European-Americans with regard to morality, cultural advancement, and intellectual capacity. As “Africa” was the natural home of “blacks,” “the African was, to many eyes, the child in the family of man, modern man in embryo” (Lyons: 1975: 86-87). On the spectrum of racial classification, the people of “Africa” were ranked at the bottom of this hierarchy. If all of humankind originated in Africa, and if homo sapiens migrated from “Africa” before building complex and more advanced societies, the people of “Africa” were seen as in a “frozen state in the evolution of humankind” (Mudimbe 1988: 108). Biologically, these human beings were “primitive” and “archaic.” Scholarly works during the
19th century began from this premise as they sought to explain humankind’s evolution, placing “Africa” at the bottom of the hierarchy and always, irredeemably, in humankind’s past.

While anthropologists arguably focused more on Africa than any other disciplines did, archaeologists also began studying Africa in the 1850s. Archaeological methods, including the search for artifacts and other physical evidence for recording history, applied interpretative approaches that had been developed in Europe. The discipline similarly worked out classifications that associated “Africa” with a separate “race” that was biologically inferior and primitive. For example, the reconstruction of African history was often presented in comparative terms to European history; where the latter was “complex,” “literate,” and “civilized,” the former “simple,” “illiterate,” and “savage.” European American notions framed the data analysis and interpretation of the archaeological record. For instance, early European surveyors insisted that the imposing structures of Great Zimbabwe had not been built by the Shona-speaking peoples of the region but by settlers who had migrated from the Mediterranean region, establishing a great kingdom that reflected deep understanding of architecture, mathematics and astronomy and then mysteriously disappearing.

In the 20th century, in addition to these tropes in both anthropology and archaeology, studies of Africa from almost every other discipline contributed to commonplaces producing the enduring formulation of “Africa” as savage, backward, and separate that was used in policy debates eventually culminating (for the purposes of this study) in Liberian foreign policy.

Another example of the primitive and ignorant commonplaces associated with “Africa” during the 19th century was Joseph Conrad’s widely read novel, *Heart of Darkness* (2006 [1899]). Based on Conrad’s personal travels, the story’s main character Marlow, describes his trip up the Congo River to find a fellow European trader who had “gone native” in the rain
forest. Marlow encounters “African” savagery, cannibals, loud, incoherent babbling natives who clearly lack a language. Hence, Conrad’s depiction of “Africa” is one of deep human depravity, lying beyond human consciousness and mired in a state of nature. The commonplace of “Africa” as dark spiritually, morally, and ethically was reasserted in this popular novel and in popular imagination. As Marlow travels up the river, he is not simply moving in space; he is moving back in time. "Going up that river," says Marlow, "was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings." "We were wanderers," he recalls, "on a prehistoric earth!" “Africans” were considered literal biological specimens of what European-Americans once had been.

In Achille Mbembe’s seminal work On the Postcolony (2001), he attempts to outline the otherness of “Africa”:

It is in relation to Africa that the notion of "absolute otherness" has been taken farthest. It is now widely acknowledged that Africa as an idea, a concept, has historically served, and continues to serve, as a polemical argument for the West's desperate desire to assert its difference from the rest of the world. In several respects, Africa still constitutes one of the metaphors through which the West represents the origin of its own norms, develops a self image, and integrates this image into the set of signifiers asserting what it supposes to be its identity ... whether in everyday discourse or in ostensibly scholarly narratives, the continent is the very figure of "the strange .... In this extremity of the Earth, reason is supposedly permanently at bay, and the unknown has supposedly attained its highest point. Africa, a headless figure....quite innocent of any notion of center, hierarchy, or stability is portrayed as a vast dark cave where the rift of a tragic and unhappy human history stands revealed: ... in short, a bottomless abyss where everything is noise, yawning gap and primordial chaos (Mbembe 2001: 2-3).

Mbembe finds the purported mysteriousness of “Africa” puzzling given that the work of Africans speaking and writing about Africa can easily be translated. He argues then that the perpetuation of this notion of inaccessible “Africa”

...must flow not from the difficulty of the undertaking, not from what therein is to be seen and heard, not from what is dissimulated. It flows from there being hardly any discourse about Africa for itself. In the very principle of its constitution, in its
language and in its finalities, narrative about Africa is always pretext for a comment about something else, some other place, some other people…Thus, there is no need to look for the status of this discourse; essentially, it has to do at best with self-deception and at worst, with perversion (2001: 3).

Mbembe rightly goes on to note that the “theoretical and practical recognition of the body and flesh of ‘the stranger’ as flesh and body just like mine, the idea of a common human nature, a humanity shared with others, long posed, and still poses, a problem for Western consciousness” (2001: 2). However, his assertion that there is no need to look for what is going on is both incorrect and contrary to the aim of this genealogical analysis. Mbembe’s assumption is that there is a position outside of the technologies or training through which we know Africa. The problem is that social life rarely if ever allows us that place outside. The point of genealogy is to expose the way in which discourses are involved in constructions of the Self. In this case, the subject of inquiry here is how the discourse of “Africa” produced a Liberian Self.

*Imagining “Liberia”*

Multiple “Liberias” existed in 19th century discourse. This section explores how American politicians, slave owners, abolitionists and evangelicals imagined “Liberia” in the period surrounding its inception. How were people talking about “Liberia”? What did “Liberia” mean and represent to different key individuals and groups? What places and ways of living did the concept of “Liberia” refer to? What were the discursive developments that produced “Liberia” as a conceptual and rhetorical object? Key individuals articulated the rhetorical commonplace “Liberia,” using a pool of commonplaces; as will be seen, the form of the concept would change over time while core pieces remained.

Karl Mannheim has noted that the persons who are relevant for the imagination of a new commonplace are those exercising the function of intellectuals, formulating what he refers to as a "total ideology" or worldview of a group. In effect, they create the discursive raw materials out
of which people "make sense" of their daily lives (1936: 58-59). The generation of a new commonplace involves combining, recombining, and detaching different concepts in such a way that space is created for previously unuttered articulations. This action is typically performed by individuals who are somewhat detached from the “micro” activities of everyday life and who instead consider a phenomenon from a broader viewpoint. In this particular case, the individuals responsible for the formulation of the notion of “Liberia” were an amalgamation of religious leaders, slaveholding politicians, and abolitionist activists.

The concept of “Liberia” is unique in the sense that in its formative stages, it served as a tool to begin addressing, however clumsily, the effects of slavery, including racism and the issues of free African Americans (this term is used here to refer to people of African descent in the Americas, including the Caribbean). Unlike any other states in Africa, its beginnings are not to be found in pre-colonial African state formation, like Ethiopia, nor in European colonialism, but across the Atlantic Ocean in the lives of residents of the United States.

Inventing “Liberia”: Early Conceptualizations of the Back-to-Africa Movement: 1800s-1830s

A fundamental precondition for the notion that free African Americans should be removed to a colony located outside US borders was the concept of racial separateness, the idea that people of different “races” could not coexist as equals. From the 1690s, there had been various indications that many British North Americans were uneasy with the inhumanities of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the practice of slavery; this discomfort was expressed in sporadic proposals for abolition or colonization or a combination of the two. In 1691, the Virginia legislature enacted a law that required the deportation from the colony of any emancipated slaves (Harris 1982: 29). Moved by fellow Quaker George Keith’s antislavery tract An Exhortation and Caution to Friends Concerning Buying or Keeping of Negroes, a group of Quakers in
Germantown, Pennsylvania in 1713 outlined a colonization plan to transplant African Americans to Africa in order for them to bring “civilization, Christianity and legitimate commerce” to Africans. The Reverend Samuel Hopkins of Rhode Island spearheaded a 1773 missionary project in Africa that was to be executed by properly trained African Americans (Dunn 1988:17).

Concern about America’s “original sin” of slavery even makes an appearance in the 1776 American Declaration of Independence and again at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787. Taking the opportunity to blame “execrable commerce” on King George III, Thomas Jefferson wrote the following, which was ultimately edited out of the Declaration: “[H]e has waged cruel wars against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the person of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither” (Cumming and Wise 1981: 30). The Philadelphia convention decided on a date on which the US Congress would outlaw the slave trade, which it did in the 1807 Congressional Abolition Act (Becker 1966). Although the trade was banned, however, the institution of slavery continued and an illegal trans-Atlantic trade continued to flourish.

*No Longer Jew or Gentile, Neither Slave nor Free*

The notion of racial separateness was made problematic within the framework of Christian revivals of the 18th century. During the 1730s and 1740s, the evangelical religious revival known as the first Great Awakening inspired the conversion of men and women of all colors, as they were called to receive Jesus and reform their lives in accordance with the moral laws of the Bible. Within this Christian framework, African American slaves were to be considered brothers and sisters in Christ; “no longer Jew or Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). African Americans
also participated in the Second Great Awakening (1790s-1830s), which consisted of a series of large public meetings that typically took place over several hours, days, and sometimes weeks during which thousands were converted through preaching and hymn singing. In the aftermath of these transitory camp meetings, African American churches and communities were established that would play a pivotal role in disseminating notions of “Liberia.”

It is out of their powerful conversion experiences in the Second Great Awakening that Richard Allen and Absalom Jones of Philadelphia were moved to work diligently to achieve their freedom from their bondage as slaves and to found churches in Philadelphia in the 1790s with the express aim of reaching the unsaved and unreformed. Jones’ St. Thomas African Episcopal church charter stated that the purpose of the church was

...to organize ourselves for the purpose of promoting the saving health of all, but more particularly our relatives…We are now encouraged through the grace and divine assistance of God…to throw off that servile fear that the habit of oppression and bondage trained us up in, and in meekness and fear we would desire to walk in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free (Whitehall 1810, quoted in Ulle 1986: 46).

In the 1820s, Charles Finney, a Euro-American Presbyterian, reportedly preached and converted thousands of African Americans and European-Americans at a days-long camp meeting. These popular revivals democratized access to a spiritual life in God in important ways, as lay leaders replaced established clergy and were energized to spread Christian moral values.

These evangelicals emphasized living out the Christian faith as a sign of true conversion. This kind of practical Christianity meant that the saved had to actively combat recognized sin in the world in addition to participating in the work of seeking and saving souls. Subsequently, during the early 19th century, largely in affiliation with Protestant churches throughout the United States, evangelicals formed, joined, and participated in a plethora of so-called
“benevolent organizations” aimed at reforming and restoring moral order in society. These voluntary associations were called to various missions, some of which included discouraging prostitution and the sale and consumption of alcohol, distributing Bibles and tracts, funding missionary activities, and encouraging self-improvement in the areas of education, healthcare, economic livelihood, and, eventually, civil and political rights.

African American evangelicals were, along with their churches in the urban areas of the northeast, particularly concerned with causes of temperance, self-improvement and missionary activities in the formation of their associations. In a January 1, 1808 sermon to his congregation at St. Thomas African Episcopal Church that was widely distributed as a pamphlet, Jones explicitly tied the affliction of the Israelites in Egypt and God’s deliverance of His people to the experiences of the “Africans,” a term which referred to both African Americans and the inhabitants of the African continent, as he proclaimed that

…[God] has heard the prayers that have ascended from the hearts of his people; and he has, as in the case of his ancient and chosen people of the Jews, come down to deliver our suffering country-men from the hands of their oppressors. He came down into the United States, when they declared, in the Constitution which they formed in 1788, that the trade in our African fellow-men should cease in the year 1808: He came down into the British Parliament…He came down into the Congress of the United States (Jones 1969).

Jones went on to say that true Christianity required a daily preoccupation with relieving the oppressed and the abolition of slavery. Voluntary reform associations in many churches responded by taking up the issue of African American bondage. These associations were influenced by the practical Christianity of the Great Awakenings, and their concern with the abolition of slavery was related to the perception that slavery was a sin that had been committed against those who had been enslaved. The members of these organizations were abolitionists,
that is, people who promoted abolishing slavery in their states and across the United States. By the 1830s, these kinds of benevolent societies were known as antislavery societies.

In the sermon cited above, which was delivered the very day that the Congressional Act of 1807 took effect to abolish the slave trade, Jones spoke to his African American congregation to call for sobriety, frugality, justice, and education. He also voiced the hope that education might inspire some African Americans to return to Africa to lead Africans to Christianity (Ulle 1986: 61-62). Jones preached to his congregants,

> It has always been a mystery, Why the impartial Father of the human race should have permitted the transportation of so many millions of our fellow creatures to this country, to endure all the miseries of slavery. Perhaps his design was, that a knowledge of the gospel might be acquired by some of their descendants, in order that they might become qualified to be the messengers of it, to the land of their fathers. Let this thought animate us, when we are teaching our children to love and adore the name of our Redeemer. Who knows but that a Joseph may rise up among them, who shall be the instrument of feeding the African nations with the bread of life, and of saving them, not from earthly bondage, but from the more galling yoke of sin and Satan. (Jones 1969)

In part as a result of the evangelical movements in America, African Americans, as well, had come to look forward to the prospect of bringing Christianity to the peoples of Africa. Knowledge of Africa was limited to the commonplaces through which all Americans had come to know “Africa,” as a pagan, barbaric, lawless land in need of both Christianity and an American-styled republican government (an account of the invention and dissemination of these commonplaces is the subject of the next section). One of Jones’ parishioners and vestrymen, James Forten, would become a famous public advocate for the idea of a return to Africa before renouncing the idea later. These churches and associations would later be sources of emigrants to a colony for free African Americans as well as functioning as a forum for debates about colonization efforts, in particular in Liberia.
As conceptual schemes tend to do, this Christian narrative generated certain anomalies. The churches that were formed, while preaching the universal appeal of Christianity, were strictly segregated. In the preaching and activities of evangelicals influenced by the Great Awakenings, several important strands for the invention of the concept of “Liberia” intertwined: the notion of racial separateness (even separate houses of worship), the notion of going to Africa for missionary purposes, and the question of what to do about free African Americans.

“Back-to-Africa” Plans: Captain Paul Cuffe

Studies of 18th and 19th century “Back-to-Africa” migration activities generally use the term “colonizationists” to refer to European American-led efforts, while the term “emigrationists” usually refers to African American-initiated actions. They are used interchangeably in this account of how Liberia was imagined because for the purposes of this study, the phenomenon was the same. Both movements had begun as early as the 1770s. The first systematic effort at African American migration back to Africa was organized by an African American Quaker, missionary and ship, Captain Paul Cuffe (1759-1817), who was also a successful businessman and entrepreneur from Massachusetts. Based on his personal experience of prejudice in the Quaker and business communities, Cuffe, along with numerous other African Americans, supported African American migration to Africa believing that African Americans would never achieve full citizenship, equal protection under the law, or sustained economic success in America. Hence, he argued, African Americans could only achieve equality in the land from which their forefathers had been taken. This argument also served as a justification for the creation of Liberia.

In 1815, Cuffe had organized a group of 38 African American emigrants to settle in the British African colony of Sierra Leone. To secure these recruits, Cuffe had embarked upon a
lecture tour in Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, and Boston in 1812. In these meetings, hosted by various African American associations, Cuffe had discussed his trips to Africa and his plan to improve the commercial development of Sierra Leone by establishing regular trade between Africans in the colony and Africans in America and England, and to transplant “industrious” and “morally upright” African American Christians to Sierra Leone (Miller 1971: 49). Cuffe was emphatic that these African Americans had to be dedicated to uplifting African peoples who had been degraded by their participation in the slave trade and by their “heathenism.” Cuffe’s meetings with these groups of African Americans in large Eastern cities resulted in the establishment of emigration societies. The Africa Institution of Philadelphia is an example of one such organization. In fact, in a letter to the African Institution of London printed in the London Society’s Report (1816), James Forten was listed as one of the officers in the Philadelphia organization. In this manner, Cuffe contributed to the dissemination of the notion of establishing a colony in Africa amongst African Americans and the form of engagement with Africa it would undertake.

However, Cuffe’s plan to relocate African Americans and to cultivate trade relations between Africans on both sides of the Atlantic would require engagement from the US government because the Non-Intercourse Act of 1809 barred American ships from trading with England or British colonies. Cuffe petitioned the US Congress to allow for a circumvention of the Act. He also requested from Congress the licensing of a vessel to continuously sail between America and Africa to transport the produce of each in order to render “aid to the civilization of Africa.”

In his memorandum, introduced in both the House and the Senate in early January 1814, Cuffe had emphasized that the settlement of “morally upright” and property-owning American African Americans in Africa to teach Africans the religious and commercial practices
of the West “[might] ultimately prove beneficial to his brethren of the African race within their native climate.” As a result of their experience in the New World, Christianized and civilized African Americans would be uniquely equipped “to promote habits of industry, sobriety, and frugality, among the natives of that country [Africa].”

The Senate had duly approved a bill authorizing the president to allow Cuffe’s vessel to leave the US with cargo for Sierra Leone and return with cargo; however after conferencing, the bill had been defeated in the House of Representatives by 72 to 65 (Miller 1975: 39). The wealthy Cuffe had to use his own money to fund his missionary-emigration plan, which in the end consisted of a single trip, as poor health prevented him from further implementation of it.

The American Society for Colonizing Free People of Colour of the United States

Perhaps the most well-funded and well connected of the benevolent societies of the early 19th century was the American Society for Colonizing Free People of Colour of the United States, later named the American Colonization Society (ACS). Their cause was attending to the controversial issue of free African Americans in the US. In 1790, there had been less than 60,000 free African Americans in the US, but by 1820 there were 250,000. In several northern states, the free African American population had almost quadrupled over that 30-year period (Staudenraus 1961: 15).

In 1816, while distributing Bibles and tracts among the poor in his area of Basking Ridge, New Jersey, the Reverend Robert Finley found that many free African Americans were illiterate and therefore could not receive the written word of God. Finley began to consider ways to improve the perceived “depravity” of free African Americans in his region. He observed, “Their number increases greatly and their wretchedness too…everything connected to their condition,
including their color, is against them” (Brown 1819). He came to the conclusion that removal from the US was the only solution to improving the lives of these individuals.

Finley committed himself to establishing a benevolent society for colonizing free African Americans in Africa. Subsequently, he called the first public meeting to discuss African colonization in a Presbyterian church in a suburb of Princeton. In attendance were professors from the college, the Theological Seminary, and leaders from the Presbyterian church of New York and New Jersey. The Presbyterian Church had already established a training school for African American preachers and teachers to correct the “morals and manners of their brethren in our cities and large towns” (Staudenraus 1961: 20). The school directors agreed to train missionaries and teachers for the proposed colony in Africa. Eventually, Finley sought support among prominent individuals with whom he was acquainted to varying degrees in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC. While Finley was seeking to sharpen his ideas about establishing an African colony, he also contacted Paul Cuffe.29

In preparation for a December 1816 public meeting on the topic in DC, Finley published his Thoughts on Colonization and distributed the pamphlet among congressmen and senators, also delivering sermons on colonization in Georgetown and Alexandria, Virginia. This pamphlet, distributed to members of Congress, the Cabinet and President Madison as well as citizens on the street, is reported to have “excited much attention, and [to have] had considerable influence on the public mind” (Brown 1819: 96). Finley presented various reasons why the US should remove free African Americans from its territory. First, he said, they were a potential source of future problems for America; secondly, if the scheme took place, Africa would receive “partially civilized and Christianized” settlers, of which Africa was in need; thirdly, the African Americans
could enjoy a “better situation,” one of self-rule and liberty that could not be afforded to them in the US (Alexander 1849: 78-79; Staudenraus 1961: 17).

The strands of discourse connected to the notion of a colony for free African Americans included the idea of replicating the US in Africa for African Americans, that is, creating an African American Christian republic vigorously committed to the development of commercial enterprises. While the founding vision of the US had not included African Americans as full citizens, this colony was envisioned as being rooted in the same liberal ideals of self-rule and liberty as the US, but exclusively for African Americans to govern and for them to oversee the spread of civilization and Christianity to the inhabitants of the continent. Conceived of as an American colony, it would be in some sense an extension of America in Africa.

On the 21st of December, 1816, the American Colonization Society (ACS) was formed in Washington, D.C. to found and maintain an African colony for the settlement of “free blacks” outside of the physical borders of the US. Among ACS members were prominent politicians and slaveholders, including, eventually, US Supreme Court Justice Bushrod Washington, nephew of George Washington and US Senators Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, US Congressmen John Randolph, and Francis Scott Key, as well as US Presidents Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Andrew Jackson, James Monroe, John Tyler, and Abraham Lincoln. While the ACS was a private organization, it was founded and run by men who had been or were contemporaneously involved in US political leadership and the formulation of US government policies.

The ACS membership included a rather peculiar coalition of abolitionists and slave owners. Quaker and other abolitionists supported the ACS’ proposal for the gradual emancipation of slaves by recompensing slaveholders for their loss of “property” with some form of compensation (Burin 2005; Gray 2012). Initially, abolitionists such as Gerrit Smith and
William Lloyd Garrison supported colonization, believing that soon-to-be free African Americans would be allowed to choose whether to remain in the US or to leave; in either case the bondage of slavery would be eradicated. Evangelicals within the ACS supported the program to send emancipated slaves and free African Americans back to Africa because they claimed African American settlers could more effectively reach the unsaved in Africa with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Africa was presumed to be the best place for such a colony given that the emancipated slaves and free African Americans’ ancestors (and in some cases they themselves) had come from Africa. These two tropes—that African Americans were best suited to evangelize Africa, and that African Americans should “return” back to Africa regardless of whether they had been born there or not—were tightly connected to the invention of the commonplace “Liberia.”

Plantation owners also joined in the ACS’ effort to remove free African Americans, whom they viewed as instigators of slave discontent and agitation for liberty. Some politicians, like Senator Clay, saw this project to relocate freed African Americans as the beginning of the end of an economic institution that had stalled economic development in the Southern states and kept them dependent on the industries of the Northern states. In addition, the 1807 Congressional Acts prohibiting the importation of slaves and the abolition of the slave trade had stipulated that the US government must return back to Africa any Africans that had been illegally captured and sold; however, a way to do this had not yet been offered. The invention of an African colony as imagined by the ACS provided a way.

At the first meeting of the ACS, Senator Clay explained that the purpose of the organization was to advocate and oversee the existence of a colony in Africa, in part because free African Americans could not enjoy the “immunities of freemen,” nor were they “subject to the
incapacities of slaves….” He argued that “…from their condition, and the unconquerable prejudice resulting from their color,” free African Americans could never be integrated with “free whites of this country” (West, 1970: 98). Clay continued,

    ....while it [the ACS] proposed to rid our own country of a useless and pernicious, if not dangerous portion of its population, [it] contemplates the spreading of the arts of civilized life, and the possible redemption from ignorance and barbarism of a benighted quarter of the globe (West, 1970: 99).

Founders of the ACS asserted that the removal of free African Americans was critical, as slaveholders’ resistance to emancipation was rooted in the notion that if they freed the slaves, they would be unleashing into the society an ever-increasing number of indolent and dangerous elements. Not only was the principle of racial separatism at work in this particular vision but the notion that civilized life as practiced in the US had universal application and was inherently a better form of existence. This characterization of African Americans, connected to the notion of settlers of this colony redeeming Africa, demonstrates the complexity and contradictory logic at work in the imagining of the colony. The settlers, who were seen as useless to the US, were paradoxically envisioned as the ideal agents to transform an entire continent of peoples by spreading the civilized life that they had learned in the US to an ignorant, anarchic, and unenlightened part of the world.

*Dissemination of the Novel Commonplace, “Liberia”*

The ACS had been strongly supported in the upper Southern states, particularly by slaveholders, but by the mid-1820s, the organization had branches in every Northern state, as well. Auxiliary or concomitant societies of the ACS included the Indian colonization Society; the Young Men Colonization Society of Pennsylvania; the New York, Virginia, Maryland, and Mississippi colonization societies (Tyler-McGraw 2007; Huffman 2004; Barnes 2004 Reef 2002). Finley had hired a clergyman, Samuel John Mills, to raise funds. In order to gather
support for the project, Finley and Mills spoke to church groups, missionaries and Bible societies, explaining that the organization sought to improve the deplorable conditions of free African Americans, to expand missionary work, to rid American society of distasteful persons and potential malcontents, to prevent slave insurrections, to emancipate with as little disruption as possible, and to pursue commercial relations that would benefit US government and business (Staudenraus 1961: 22; Cason 1962: 25-30). With each different audience, the ACS representatives used the arguments that it presumed would have the most impact.

Of course, the dissemination of the ACS project could not move forward without African American leaders participating to recruit would-be settlers from the African American communities within the US. On their fundraising tours, Finley and Mills also sought out free African Americans who were interested in migrating “back to Africa.” Paul Cuffe, as mentioned earlier and later Henry Edward Garnet, Wilmot Blyden, and Alexander Crummell (who will be discussed in the next section) as well as numerous others served as vocal advocates of the emigration of educated African Americans to Africa. These well-educated men emphasized the value of “enlightened” African Americans returning to Africa as “civilizers” to share the benefits of Christianity and “Western civilization,” including republican government, with their pagan and barbaric African brethren.

While he was aware that African Americans themselves, limited by insufficient resources, would not be able to provide much of a spur for colonization, Cuffe also recognized what the white colonizationists would never acknowledge: that only African American leaders and organizations could reach large masses of African Americans. He suggested to Mills that the colonizationists draw upon the African American societies he had helped form in New York and Philadelphia (Miller 1971: 47-49). The African Institutions founded and run by African
Americans, however, were forced to confront many African Americans who saw African
colonization as simply a deportation scheme directed by whites and designed to further oppress a
rejected and abused people. In Georgetown, District of Columbia, in early January, 1817, free
African Americans condemned the Colonization Society and simultaneously asked Congress to
grant them “a territory within the limits of our beloved Union” (Miller 1971: 50). A more direct
attack upon the American Colonization Society came from a reported 3,000 African Americans
meeting at Richard Allen’s Bethel Church in Philadelphia in early January. The leaders of the
participated actively at that meeting.

The inclusion of slave owners within the ACS membership and the characterization of
African Americans as an evil that should be excised from the US made the ACS suspect in
African American communities. Some viewed the colonization project as a way to circumvent
freeing African Americans from the bondage of slavery. In 1817, shortly after the founding of
the ACS, a group 3,000 African Americans in Philadelphia opposed back to Africa colonization
at a meeting presided over by James Forten, who as noted above had previously been a supporter
of African colonization. At a subsequent mass meeting in Philadelphia at Richard Allen’s
African Methodist Episcopal Bethel Church, a resolution was drafted with Absalom Jones:

Whereas our ancestors (not of choice) were the first cultivators of the wilds of
America, we their descendants feel ourselves entitled to participate in the
blessings of her luxuriant soil, which their blood and sweat manured…
Resolved, That we view with deep abhorrence the unmerited stigma attempted to
be cast upon the reputation of the free people of colour by the Promoters of this
Measure, “that they are a dangerous and useless part of the community,”…
Resolved, That we will never separate ourselves voluntarily from the slave
population of this country; they are our brethren by the ties of consanguinity, of
suffering, and of wrong; and we feel that there is more virtue in suffering
privations with them, than fancied advantages for a season…That without arts,
without science, without a proper knowledge of government, to cast into the
savage wilds of Africa free people of color, seems to us the circuitous route through which they must return to perpetual bondage…

Resolved, That having the strongest confidence in the justice of God, and philanthropy of the free states, we cheerfully submit our destinies to…Him who suffers not a sparrow to fall without his special Providence (Cason 1962: 36).

Mass resistance to the project of establishing an African colony occurred in other cities as well, including Boston, New York, Richmond and Baltimore.

In 1819, the US Congress appropriated $100,000 for the repatriations to Africa of persons who had been brought to America (Boley 1984: 13). The ACS successfully lobbied the US Congress for money to establish a colony for “free blacks” for the purpose of “obtaining a territory on the coast of Africa, or at some other place, not within any of the States, or territorial government of the United States, to serve for an asylum of such persons of color as are now free, and may desire the same, and for those who may hereafter be emancipated within the commonwealth…” (Alexander quoted in Gershoni, 1985: 7). With the approval of President James Monroe (1817-1825), the US government worked with the ACS for an expedition that sailed from New York Harbor on January 31, 1820 to establish a colony on the Grain Coast of West Africa. The ship carried 88 free African Americans and emancipated slaves under the auspices, authority, and instruction of ACS agent Samuel Crozer and US government agent Samuel Bacon with the support of the US government (Dunn and Tarr 1988: 20). The ship initially landed in Sierra Leone, where many of the would-be settlers died from disease and privation as well as hostile encounters with indigenous groups. Eventually the survivors made their way to Cape Mesurado (now Monrovia) to establish a permanent colony in 1822. These emigrants were committed to the ACS’s stated goals of civilizing the Africans through the spread of Christianity and commerce (Beyan 1991: 149-164).
Two years later, at an annual meeting of the ACS in Washington, DC, in February of 1824, General Robert Goodloe Harper made the following proposal, which was unanimously accepted,

Names are at all times matters of convenience, and sometimes of advantage. Our colony has at present no name. It is situated, indeed, near a Cape called Mesurado, and has hitherto taken its name and designation from this circumstance; but that is not a name appropriate to its object; a name that means nothing. In reflecting on this circumstance, I have thought of a name that is peculiar, short, and familiar, and that expresses the object and nature of the establishment. It is the term, Liberia, and denotes a settlement of persons made free; for our colony may with truth be called the home and country of freedmen, in contradistinction to those slaves, of whom they once formed a part. This name, if I mistake not, will be found easy and apt, and it certainly has the merit of being very concise (Alexander 1971: 232).

The constellation of commonplaces coalescing in the term “Liberia” included the notion of a place for freedmen, free African Americans, freed slaves but also a place in which freedom as a principle of American liberalism could be exercised in the life of these freedmen. The term itself is historically contingent; that is, within varied political and social contexts, particular specifications of Liberia were advanced in an effort to stabilize the term itself; later uses of the term, then, resulted in real effects in terms of policy outcomes, as has been argued from the outset.

Conceptions of “Liberia” proliferated as various individuals within African American communities offered different characterizations of the project. Those that had access to the press and the pulpit made significant contribution to the public discussion on African colonization. Widely distributed tracts and sermons delivered to numerous congregations demonstrate the varieties of “Liberias” offered in the rhetorical landscape. For some, “Liberia” was a place free of daily life of oppression based on racialist distinctions, a fresh start in a life free from white racism. Aspiring businessmen and entrepreneurs considered the advantages of emigration
because of the commercial opportunities moving to the colony would offer. Others viewed “Liberia” as a home as “Africa” was the homeland of their ancestors. At the same time, for others, “Liberia” was a strange land full of Africa’s woes including disease, perpetual warfare conducted by primitive tribes, incomprehensible languages, customs and rituals. “Africa” generally lacked civilization, including Christian enlightenment.

“Liberia” was also characterized as a threat to the struggle to end African American bondage. Lastly, many African Americans publicly commented that relocating to “Liberia” was an escapist move, indicating defeat in the struggle for equal rights and opportunities in the land of their birth. As a result of opponents and critics of the emigration plan, the concept of Liberia proceeded through various mutations in the 19th century as discussed below.

By the mid-1820s, African American abolitionists were criticizing colonization in general and the ACS in particular, as it was characterized as part of a proslavery effort to deport free African Americans. In the first African American newspaper, the Freedom Journal, published in New York City in 1827, Presbyterian minister Samuel Cornish, encouraged African Americans to improve their conditions in the US rather than emigrating, as Liberia was characterized as “alien” and infested with dangerous diseases. Similarly, African American abolitionists in Baltimore, including William Watkins, Jacob Greener, and Hezekiah Grice published articles declaring that African Americans had no desire to go to Africa or send African Americans to Africa. These opponents of the ACS’ efforts argued that those efforts were based on the racialist assertion that African Americans were not entitled to live in freedom in the land of their birth. David Walker, an abolitionist and journalist asked, “Do they think to drive us from our country and homes, after having enriched it with our blood and tears?” (1830). However, John Russwurm—the Freedom Journal’s cofounder—was less opposed to the ACS and the back-to-
Africa colonization scheme than were Cornish, Watkins, Greener and Grice, and in 1829, Russwurm changed his mind and declared in *Freedom’s Journal* that African colonization was the most suitable choice for African American Americans (Miller 1971: 86).

Russwurm began to develop arguments in support of the movement that he now fervently embraced. Central to his position was his belief that African Americans would never be free from oppression while living in the United States. Go to Liberia, Russwurm urged, for only in the African American colony on the west coast of Africa – where the soil was rich and the land productive – could African Americans ever achieve freedom and dignity; there “the Man of Colour…may walk forth in all the majesty of his creation-a new born creature-a *Free Man!*” (Beyan 2005)

The implication was that there was nothing created by man currently on the west coast of Africa. It was simply open empty land on which a newly Free Man, a new created being, could now create a new world for himself. In 1829, Russwurm, one of the first African Americans to earn a college degree, moved to Liberia.

The writings of these African American abolitionists had a profound influence on William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879), who had not expressed public criticism or opposition to the ACS. Perhaps the most prominent abolitionist of the 1830s, Garrison argued that free African Americans were “brethren and countrymen” who had been “unjustly treated and covered with unmerited shame.” In 1831, when he began publishing his abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, in Boston, Garrison not only rejected gradual abolition and called for immediate emancipation without compensation to slaveholders but argued, along with Watkins and Greener, that African Americans must have equal rights in America and should not be sent to Africa after their emancipation.
In his book *Thoughts on African Colonization* (1832), Garrison argued that African colonization would only perpetuate the institution of slavery in the United States by precluding the possibility of African Americans’ ever becoming full citizens. A skeptical William Lloyd Garrison described in 1832 the ACS’ recruitment and fundraising activities in the following manner:

An agent of the Society goes into a place, and finds no difficulty in procuring a pulpit from which to address a congregation. He first dwells upon the miserable condition of Africa—desolated with civil wars—the prey of kidnappers—given up to idolatry—full of intellectual darkness and spiritual death—and bleeding at every pore. He next depicts the horrors of the slave trade, and shows how inefficient have been the laws enacted for its suppression. He finally expatiates upon the evils and dangers of slavery; and is particularly minute in describing the degradation of the free people of color, which he declares to be irreclaimable in this land of gospel light. ‘Now, my Christian brethren and friends,’ he continues, ‘the object of the American Colonization Society is to stay the effusion of blood, to give light to them who sit in darkness, and to make reparation for the wrongs which have been inflicted upon the sable sons of Africa’ (26).

Not only did Garrison report the ACS’ use of rich rhetorical resources to characterize Africa, Africans, African Americans, and the ACS vision of “Liberia,” but he noted their use of a rhetorical chain of logic to assert that Africa was the essential and natural homeland of African Americans, to which they should be repatriated. What is important about Garrison’s characterization of the ACS activities is that it contains two configurations of commonplaces that would be associated with the American colony on the west coast of Africa, namely that “Liberia” was the Promised Land in which African Americans could live free and that the purpose of “Liberia” was to enlighten and improve “Africa.” This particular specification of Liberia was effective in legitimating the policies that resulted in the establishment of the colony.

*The Emigrants’ “Liberia”*

Those who ended up going as settlers to Liberia were a decidedly mixed lot. Included were African American leaders who took up the challenge of colonization in spite of the
derogatory and racialist justifications of the ACS. Among their number were “men of training, integrity and ambition who were to participate in founding a new nation.” However, there were other African American settlers “including the slaves manumitted for exportation without choice and free men who took literally the glowing reports published about the colony” of Liberia (Cason 1962: 39). These reports are some of the ways ACS agents who ran the colony of Liberia from 1822 to 1847 disseminated their formulations of “Liberia.” By 1838, approximately 2,500 settlers had bought into ACS’s portrayals of life in the new land and had made the journey themselves. The European-American ACS agents and the African American settlers were committed to African regeneration through spreading Christianity, civilization, and commerce to Africa.

After declaring itself an independent republic in 1847, Liberia’s leaders continued to depend heavily on the advice of ACS agents, maintaining many of the governing practices that had been instituted within the colony from its beginnings. Presidents Joseph Jenkins Roberts (1848-1856, 1872-1876), Stephen Allen Benson (1856-1864), and James Spriggs Payne (1868-1870, 1876-78) emphasized that Liberia had a mission to bring Christianity and civilization to the ‘native’ people. Liberia’s destiny was to help Africans come out of their religious and cultural ignorance. In his book *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State* (1991), Amos Beyan presents a historical analysis of the development of Liberian political, economic and religious institutions. He argues that these Liberian institutions embodied the institutional values of the ACS. In fact, Beyan locates the origin of Liberia’s social institutions and values in the American Colonization Society. However, he does not offer an explanatory account of how these values manifested themselves within these social institutions.
By focusing on the discourse and rhetorical commonplaces used at the time, the policies of the early Liberian state can be accounted for.

In his first inaugural address in 1847, President Roberts, the newly independent Liberia’s first president, declared that the “redemption of Africa from deep degradation, superstition, and idolatry in which she has been so involved” should begin. He continued,

...the Gospel, fellow citizens is yet to be preached to vast numbers inhabiting this dark continent, and I have the highest reason to believe, that was one of the great objects of the Almighty in establishing colonies, that they might be the means of introducing civilization and religion among the barbarous nations of this country; and to what work more noble could our powers be applied than that of bringing up from darkness, debasement, and misery, our fellow men, and shedding abroad over them the light of science and Christianity” (African Repository, 1848: 120-126).

The notion of Liberia as introducing “civilization” and “religion” was explicitly made up of commonplaces that were in stark opposition to the notions associated with “Africa: “dark,” “barbarous,” debased and miserable.

Debates on the Concept of Liberia during the Second Back-to-Africa Period, 1840s-1860s

By the time Liberia proclaimed itself an independent republic in 1847, the notion that African Americans could lead a republican government in Africa had begun to become a possibility. However, the dissemination of the concept of Liberia was not the only event making such a possibility thinkable. In 1804, Haiti had freed itself of French rule in the aftermath of a revolt against slavery in the French colony of Saint-Domingue (Dixon 2000). In Europe, revolutions beginning in the mid-19th century brought with them notions of the legitimacy of popular rule in contrast to monarchical rule. Awareness of these international developments expanded the boundaries for conceptualizing African American self-rule in Liberia. From the 1840s to the 1860s, African American emigration continued, as did the debate.
Advocates of emigration to Liberia in the US encouraged emigration as a viable alternative to living in conditions in which African Americans continued to find themselves enslaved, denigrated, and without political rights. Particularly distressing for African Americans in the 1850s was the spread of slavery to the Western territories of the US. In 1850, the U.S. Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, which required law enforcement officers as well as ordinary citizens to assist in the seizure of suspected runaway slaves. Those who refused to help apprehend fugitives or who helped the runaways were subjected to fines or imprisonment. In addition to the law, which made it virtually impossible for any African American to prove that he or she was free, African Americans were dismayed by new state laws restricting their liberty and the Dred Scott Supreme Court case of 1857 which reasserted that African Americans enjoyed no rights associated with American citizenship. Justice Roger Taney explained,

> They had for more than a century before been regarded as being of an inferior order; and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit. (Fehrenbacher 1978)

African American leaders such as Henry Highland Garnet promoted colonization to Liberia, which was imagined as a place in which African American rights would be provided under the law and protected. Garnet, a Presbyterian minister and missionary, energetic and well-traveled lecturer on the topic of antislavery, was the owner of an antislavery newspaper. He disseminated the rhetorical commonplace of “Liberia,” combining two prominent sets of notions about it—“Liberia” as a promised land, a utopia, and “Liberia” as a means to uplift Africa by spreading civilization, Christianity, and commerce to the continent. As discussed in the next chapter, this commonplace “Liberia” is then used to justify the Hinterland policies of 1904-1905
as Liberia extended its control over Africans of the interior. These policies were implemented because “Liberia” was a regenerative and redemptive agent on the continent.

During the spring and summer of 1858, Garnet advocated in African American communities in Northeastern US cities that his audiences should consider African emigration (Hutchinson: 1972). “It is time,” Garnet declared, “for the colored people to look at things for themselves through their own spectacles…While we hate Slavery with intense abhorrence, and intend to fight it to the last, no man should deprive me of my love for Africa, the land of my ancestors” (Miller 1971: 192). In September 1858, Garnet became the founding president of the African Civilization Society with Theodore Bourne as the corresponding secretary; by mid-October, the organization had adopted and printed its constitution. Soon thereafter, Garnet issued a statement giving the organization’s aims: to promote “the civilization and evangelization of Africa, and the descendants of African ancestors in any portion of the earth, wherever dispersed [by establishing] the foundation of a future commonwealth, of the Republican form, on the Coast of Africa” (Miller 1971: 192).

The influence of the Second Great Awakening was felt in emigration numbers during this period, which marginally increased in part because of the conversions of African Americans to Christianity; some Christian slave owners found it difficult to continue enslaving their brothers and sisters in Christ. Wealthy Christians who freed slaves often financed their travel to Liberia (Barnes 2004).

The population of the ACS colony also increased due to the repatriation of re-captives. Recaptured slaves from illegal slave vessels by the US government were delivered to ACS agents in the coastal capital city of Monrovia (African Repository, 1868: 1-12 and 33-34). The ACS would pay African American settlers, providing clothing, shelter and instruction on how to
become “civilized.” In 1860, Reverend John Seys, a United States agent for re-captive Africans, reported that the re-captives from a ship named the Echo were demonstrating “the wisdom and humanity of the government which…snatched them from endless bondage and sent them here to be free and happy.” He reported on another occasion that the re-captives were “fed and fat, clothed and happy, learning rapidly all the manners, civil customs, and language of these American-born Christian blacks” (Boyd 1962: 118). The settlers were bringing “Liberia” into being.

The US government remained committed to the removal of African Americans from the US. On August 14, 1862, Abraham Lincoln invited African American leaders to the White House and appealed for their support for colonization (Shick 1980: 124). After condemning slavery as “the greatest wrong inflicted on any people,” Lincoln further suggested that racism made it unwise for African Americans to stay in the US. “Your race suffer very greatly, many of them, by living among us, while ours suffers from your presence. There is an unwillingness on the part of our people, harsh as it may be, for you free colored people to remain among us. . . . I do not mean to discuss this, but to propose it as a fact with which we have to deal” (Bennett 2000). Lincoln implored African American leaders to begin enlisting volunteers for colonization. In April 1862, Congress enacted a bill to pay District of Columbia slave owners up to $300 for each slave they freed and to provide $100,000 to support the voluntary colonization of the freed people in Haiti or Liberia (Shick 1980).

The public debate over the establishment and maintenance of an African colony for free African Americans throughout the 19th century further disseminated the commonplace of “Liberia.” The rhetorical resources used to characterize “Liberia,” and their deployment in
support for or against the African colony, can be found in the public writings and speeches of prominent individuals and organizations interested in the issue.

Articulations of “Liberia”

The clearest arguments for colonization or emigration came from the widely read writings and speeches of three prominent African American intellectuals and activists: Wilmot Edward Blyden, Alexander Crummell, and Martin Delaney. These three intellectuals articulated a particular form of “Liberia” in relation to “Africa” in the context of debates over African American emigration to Africa. Their articulations of these rhetorical commonplaces during the 19th century reflect the notions of Africa that were common intellectual property of their time. In that sense, they are representative in that their speeches and writings reflect a particular specification of “Africa” and consequently “Liberia.”

Both Blyden and Crummell had at one point been opposed to the American Colonization Society; however, both became prominent vocal advocates of the emigration of educated African Americans to Africa. These well-educated men emphasized the value of “enlightened” African Americans returning to Africa as “civilizers” to share the benefits of Christianity and American culture with their “backward” African brethren. By 1860, about over 5,000 African American immigrants had made the journey to Liberia (Shick 1980: 68-72).

In their writings and speeches, they participated in the ongoing project of defining “Africa.” They saw Africa’s value in terms of commercial prospects, in its moral, cultural, and material potential under the guidance of African American settlers, whose responsibility it was to “redeem” their continental “brethren” from savagery and heathenism. There was often this dichotomy presented in the characterizations of “Africa” and “Liberia.”
Of the three, Blyden was the most involved in the development of the Liberian state and the project of the ACS and as such occupied a critical position in the specification and dissemination of the concepts “Liberia” and “Africa” as commonplaces that informed and depended on one another in significant ways. Blyden’s writings and speeches were consumed by large audiences across various social groups in the US and Liberia and are exemplary of a particular articulation of the deeply intertwined pair of commonplaces “Liberia” and “Africa” which set the context for the debates around the Hinterland Policies of 1904-1905, which are discussed in the following chapter, and which certainly remained relevant until the reconfiguration of those notions in the later 20th century.

*Edward Wilmot Blyden’s “Liberia”*

Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832-1912) was a writer, educator, scholar, diplomat, explorer, politician, and statesman. Born in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, on August 2, 1832, he claimed to be of "pure Negro" parentage from the Igbo people of Nigeria. Between 1842 and 1844, he lived with his parents in Porto Bello, Venezuela (Blyden 1862: i-iii), and received his initial education from an American missionary who brought him to the US to continue his studies at Rutgers Theological College in New Jersey. An avid student, he had previously attempted to complete his formal education in the United States but was rejected on the basis of his race. An auxiliary of the ACS, the New York Colonization Society, offered Blyden an opportunity to complete his education in Liberia under the tutelage of a Presbyterian minister. Blyden emigrated to Liberia in December of 1850. In Liberia, Blyden continued his studies. From 1855-1856, he edited the newspaper *Liberia Herald* and wrote on a broad range of topics, including Africa, religion, and colonization. In 1858, Blyden was ordained a Presbyterian clergyman and became principal of the Alexander High School in Monrovia in that same year. He eventually moved to a
Blyden served as a statesman between Liberia and Sierra Leone for most of his career. He was Secretary of State in Liberia from 1864 to 1866 and led expeditions from Sierra Leone to various areas of west Africa while editing the *Negro*, the first pan-African journal in west Africa. He eventually served as Liberia’s ambassador to Britain and France, and as president of Liberia College and served for a time as minister of native affairs in Lagos, Nigeria, before settling in Freetown as the director of Muslim education, where he died in 1912 (Gordon 2008: 64). Liberian by adoption, a trained minister, a polyglot, an educator, an ambassador, and a statesman, Blyden was an impressive and significant advocate for emigration to Liberia.

Blyden wrote and published many books, pamphlets, and speeches, making multiple contributions to Liberian and African intellectual history, including *A Vindication of the Negro Race* (1857); *Liberia's Offering* (1862); *Being a Brief Examination of the Arguments in Favor of African Inferiority* (1862); *The Negro in Ancient History* (1869); *Liberia: Past, Present and Future* (1869); *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (1887), and *Africa for the Africans* (1903). His seminal work, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (1887) is a collection of various texts, articles, and speeches.

Blyden engaged easily with varied audiences, and met with European statesmen and American presidents in his role as ambassador to Great Britain and France. Blyden also travelled extensively. From July to September 1866, he visited Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria. During the years 1872-73, he founded and edited the *Negro* newspaper in Freetown, and was a British government agent to the interior. In 1877-78, he was Liberian plenipotentiary to Great Britain. When he became the Liberian ambassador to Queen Victoria in 1877-78, he came into contact—
epistolary or personally—with “...Mr. Gladstone... Charles Dickens [and] Charles Sumner” (Blyden 1967: ix).

_Blyden’s Articulation of “Liberia” in America_

In 1861, Blyden was appointed Liberian Commissioner to the descendants of Africa in the United States and the West Indies; in that capacity, he travelled to Britain and the US “to give information of Liberia, and invite them to a home in that country” (Blyden 1862: iv). In 1862 in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore MD, and Harrisburg, PA, Blyden preached to African American congregations (Miller), inquiring of them whether

...now, while Europeans are looking to our fatherland, ought not Africans in the Western hemisphere to turn their regards thither also?” and cautioned them, stating, “…[W]e should not content ourselves with living among other races, simply by their permission or their endurance...We must build up Negro states... An African nationality is our great need, and God tells us by his providence that he has set the land before us, and bids us go up and possess it (Blyden 1862: 75-76).

Blyden used the term “Africans” to refer not only to the inhabitants of the continent but all those of African descent. Given that he was seeking to draw his audience to Liberia, Blyden was using the term to call them back to the continent. Blyden’s insistence that Africans must build up “Negro states,” in conjunction with his previous statement, presented a conception of “Africa” as the homeland of all Negroes. Clearly, the Negro state that Blyden was bidding his audience to go up and possess was “Liberia.” Here, Blyden articulated an important commonplace associated with “Liberia,” that it was God-given land and a land in which the God-given inalienable rights of African Americans would prevail.

Blyden’s assertion that a connection existed between African Americans and Africa itself, and his subsequent activities have led to his being considered a founder of Pan-
Africanism. In a widely distributed speech from his 1862 lecture tour in the US and the West Indies, Blyden passionately stated,

My heart is in Liberia, and longs for the welfare of Africa. An African nationality is the great desire of my soul. I believe nationality to be an ordinance of nature; and no people can rise to an influential position among the nations without a distinct and efficient nationality. Cosmopolitism has never effected any thing, and never will, perhaps, till the millennium. God has “made of one blood all nations of men,” but he has also “determined the bounds of their habitation” (Blyden 1862: v).

Blyden presented “Liberia” as a kind of an open space, a vacant place, a *tabula rasa*, a clean slate on which settlers could write a new future for African Americans. He challenged African Americans to come to Liberia to experience the liberty that they were being denied in the US, and he impressed upon potential settlers to Liberia the importance of dedicating themselves to the redemption of Africa. Describing what Liberia had to offer to potential immigrants, he wrote,

Her civil, political, religious and social advantages, however, are her chief attraction. No community can have more perfect religious liberty. Republican government is nowhere more thoroughly carried out. No social disadvantage is felt by any descendant of Africa on account of color. The moment a colored man from America lands in Liberia, he finds the galling chains of caste falling from his soul, and he can stand erect, and feel and realize that he is indeed a man (Blyden 1862: v).

Here, Blyden was articulating the notion of Liberia as a Promised Land in which free African Americans could enjoy “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” as inalienable rights and, secondly, as a regenerative mechanism through which a “benighted” Africa might be redeemed and in which Africa would be remade into a facsimile of the US for African Americans.

“Liberia” as a Civilizing Agent
In 1866 in an address delivered on Mount Lebanon in Syria at the celebration of the 19th anniversary of the independence of Liberia, Blyden articulated “Liberia” as within (not apart from) the “civilized world,” while “Africa” lay outside the civilized world. Thus, in a very real sense, Liberia was not an “African” state. It exemplified freedom as opposed to the wars and oppression of the traditional native cultures; it expressed an organized authority against the corruption of indigenous chiefs; it institutionalized civilization, trade, and religion against the mass of crimes and immorality of the slave trade (Mudimbe 1988: 109). Here, “Liberia” represented the “New Negro” as opposed to both the heathenism of the natives and the barbarism of the slave-traders.

By its existence, “Liberia” represented the possibility of a transformation of “Africa”: Blyden argued, “Anglo-American Christianity, liberty, and law, under the protection of the Liberian, will have nothing to impede their indefinite spread over that immense continent. I say, nothing to impede their indefinite spread” (1861: 23). In another work, The Negro in Ancient History (1869), Blyden asserted, “we believe that as descendants of Ham had share . . . in the founding of cities and in the organization of government, so members of the same family, developed under different circumstances, will have an important part in the closing of the great drama” (28). The “great drama” to which Blyden was referring was the historical span of humankind, in which, Blyden believed, people of African descent had a special role to play. In the case of Liberia, that role was the implementation of “Anglo-American Christianity, liberty, and law” on the continent. Blyden was emphatic that African Americans were the only appropriate agent for carrying out the necessary positive transformation of “Africa.” This is precisely why “Liberia” was so important: “Liberia” was that agent.
Blyden was convinced that “only the Negro will be able to explain the Negro to the rest of mankind” (Blyden 1878: 263). The “Liberia” he envisioned was to be the most successful exemplary of this assertion. In a speech delivered on July 21, 1861 in New York City, New York in the Seventh Avenue Presbyterian Church, Blyden describes Liberia as the “Hope for Africa,” the “fulfillment of a Divine plan,” noting that “[t]here are fifteen thousand civilized and Christianized Africans striving to accomplish the twofold work of establishing and maintaining an independent nationality, and of introducing the Gospel among untold millions of unevangelized and barbarous men” (Blyden 1862: 19).

Disseminating the Notion of “Liberia” through Education

From 1862 to 1871, Blyden was a professor of Classics at Liberia College, where he was one of the main architects of the college curriculum. Blyden himself was a multilingual scholar: his essays include quotations in the original languages from Dante, Virgil, and Saint-Hilaire. His study of Islam, as well as the religion of the Vai and other indigenous peoples in the region of Liberia, showed a mastery of Arabic, which he included in the course offerings at Liberia College.

Blyden’s involvement in disseminating the notion of “Liberia” as a means to accomplish the regeneration of “Africa” can be seen in his significant contributions to the development of Liberia’s modern system of education, especially with regard to curriculum development. In his inaugural address as President of Liberia College, a position in which he served from 1880-1884, Blyden explained that “no country in the world needs more than Liberia to have its mind properly directed” (Blyden 1982: 98). He offered two reasons: Firstly, “We are here isolated from the civilized world, and surrounded by a benighted people, with whom we are closely identified.” In his address, “Liberia” was presented as the light of the civilized world surrounded
by the unenlightened peoples of Africa. The close identification is based on a shared “race.” However, the conception of “Africa” as a constitutively separate place inhabited by constitutively separate people was shared by Blyden, the ACS, and the settlers of Liberia. In this context, “Liberia” as imagined was the means through which the separateness of Africans from the rest of the civilized world could be mediated through the beneficial application of civilization.

The second reason Blyden offered for the importance of ensuring proper education was because of the uniqueness of the Liberian experiment of “establishing and maintaining a popular government with a population, for the most part, of emancipated slaves” (Blyden 1887: 98). As such, Blyden insisted on the necessity of “a practical education” (101) “to assist their power of forgetfulness” by increasing “the amount of purely disciplinary agencies” and reducing “to its minimum the amount of distracting influences” (79-80).

According to Blyden, the academic training of the settlers had to include the study of classics, “the key to a thorough knowledge of all the languages of the enlightened part of mankind. The Latin and Greek languages have furnished all the linguistic culture, and have contributed to all the rich results of the higher education of the whole civilized world, for the last two thousand years” (108). Through educational instruction, Blyden sought to operationalize the universal project of civilization. By implementing this formal education program, Liberia would assist in the transformation of the whole continent.

In his inaugural address as President of Liberia College, a position in which he served from 1880-1884, Blyden had explained that “what is gained by the study of the ancient languages is that strengthening and disciplining of the mind which enables the student in after life to lay hold of, and, with comparatively little difficulty, to master any business to which he
may turn his attention” (Blyden 1887: 87). Furthermore, “the study of the Classics also lays the foundation for the successful pursuit of scientific knowledge. It so stimulates the mind that it arouses the student's interest in all problems of science” (Blyden 1887: 87; Blyden 1862: 110).

Blyden also advocated the study of physics, and mathematics because “as instruments of culture, they are everywhere applicable” (1862:100; 1887: 87). Lastly, the study of the Bible was essential since “the teachings of Christianity are of universal application . . . and the great truths of the Sermon on the Mount are as universally accepted as Euclid's axioms” (1887: 89). Christianity had, he said, wisdom that was universally applicable to the settlers as well as to the Africans in the region who practiced a variety of other religions, including Islam.

As a modern republic, governed by men of such intellectual training, Blyden anticipated that “Liberia” would be the tool used to advance the argument of the equality between the “races.” The hope was that Europeans and Americans interested in Africa would one day “treat [an African] as they would a white man of the same degree of culture and behaviour, basing this demeanour altogether upon the intellectual or moral qualities of the man” (Blyden 1887: 266). Significantly, Blyden initially imagined the experiment of Liberia spreading out to the entire continent, that is, that all of Africa through the agency of such men should be converted. However, he warned, “whatever others may do for us, there are some things we must do for ourselves. No outward protection, no friendly intervention, no deed of gift can give those personal virtues--those attributes of manhood--self-reliance and independence” (Blyden 1887: 217).

Blyden saw “Liberia,” as not only a civilizing force in a “benighted” Africa but as also tied to the indigenous African peoples. As a result, he introduced into the curriculum of Liberia College the study of Arabic and African languages, “by means of which we may have intelligent
intercourse with the millions accessible to us in the interior, and learn more of our own country” (Blyden 1887: 88). Blyden advocated not only instruction in African languages but also the teaching of African history, society, and cultures. Speaking to Liberian audiences, he remarked,

We have young men who are experts in the geography and customs of foreign countries; who can tell all about the proceedings of foreign statesmen in countries thousands of miles away; can talk intelligibly of London, Berlin, Paris, and Washington . . . But who knows anything about Musahdu, Medina, Kankan, or Sego--only a few hundred miles from us? Who can tell anything of the policy or doings of Fanfidoreh, Ibrahim Sissi, or Fahquehqueh, or Simoro of Boporu--only a few steps from us? These are hardly known. Now as Negroes, allied in blood and race to these people, this is disgraceful (Blyden 1887: 88).

Liberia’s identification with Africans in the region, in Blyden’s telling, was based on bloodlines and “race,” not on culture or shared social practices. The construction of an African identity through education aimed at excavating and illuminating the value of Africa’s past and present was viewed as important because of the imperatives of those shared bloodlines. “Liberia” was tied to the Africans in the region by virtue of belonging to the same “race,” but it still remained socially and culturally distinct from native-born Africans in the region. As Anthony Appiah (1992) has eloquently pointed out, there are no races; no one can do anything in the name of a race (as races do not exist), and more importantly, race is a faulty basis for African solidarity. Nonetheless, the fact of races and social identification with a particular race was common intellectual property of the 19th century and integral to the justification of the founding and continued existence of the Liberian state.

*Alexander Crummell and Articulations of “Liberia” in terms of “Africa”*

Alexander Crummell, another representative figure, was an Episcopalian priest and fellow professor at Liberia College with Blyden with whom he worked closely. African-American by birth but Liberian by adoption and educated at the University of Cambridge, he travelled to Liberia in 1853. Crummell argued that the regeneration and redemption of Africa
could be best accomplished by African American Christian immigrants. Like Blyden, Crummell had adopted this particular notion of “Africa” from European-Americans as well as the nature of civilization and the lack of it in “Africa.”

Crummell also accepted and promulgated the notion that there were separate races. He argued that “Races, like families, are the organisms and ordinances of God; and race feeling, like family feeling, is of divine origin. The extinction of race feeling is just as possible as the extinction of family feeling. Indeed, a race is a family” (Brotz 1966: 184; Appiah 1992: 16). Crummell shared what his contemporary, friend, and colleague Blyden called “the poetry of politics” that is “the feeling of race,” the feeling of “people with whom we are connected” (Appiah 1992: 17). Likewise, he articulated an “Africa” that was the natural homeland of the Negro “race” in his talks, addresses, sermons and speeches, which were delivered in Liberia and later published as a collection entitled *The Future of Africa*.

Crummell, like Blyden, held that there was a common destiny for the “Negro race” that could only be brought to fruition by African Americans in Africa. In Crummell’s estimation, “Africa was the home of the Negro, as England was the home of the Anglo-Saxon, or Germany the home of the Teuton.” Crummell assumed that he had a “right to act in [Africa], to speak for it, to plot its future, derived – in his conception – from the fact that he too was a Negro” (Appiah 1992: 5).

On the basis of this distinction between the “races,” the shared “race” of African Americans and Africans was used to justify the creation of Liberia and the responsibility of the educated African American settlers toward the inhabitants of Africa. Shared “race” was to be the basis of national solidarity and as with members of the same family, African Americans were to
love their African brothers and sisters in spite of their faults (their primitiveness and heathenism), not because of their virtues (Appiah 1992:5).

*Late 19th-century to early 20th-century Back-to-Africa Movement: 1870s-1920s*

With the end of the US Civil War, African Americans’ interest in emigration waned, though “Liberia fever” revived briefly among African Americans in the 1870s. The violence and continued mistreatment of African Americans in the South at the end of Reconstruction contributed to the surge. As the lynching of African Americans increased during the 1890s, African Americans, particularly in the South, started to view emigration as a way to escape the continued experience of violence, discrimination, and segregation.

A new migration of African Americans to Liberia, many convinced that they would never achieve equality in the US and that the only experience of true emancipation offered to them would be in “Africa,” their homeland, their motherland, the land of their ancestors, began in the mid-1870s. During this period, “Liberia” was presented as the embodiment of a nationality that African Americans could claim while true American nationality was denied: “Liberia” was where African Americans could attain true personhood, equality, and citizenship. In addition, they were told that great wealth potentially awaited them as well. In 1877, the African American leaders Martin Delany and Congressman Richard H. Cain spurred the “Liberian Exodus” by encouraging groups in southern African American communities and churches to migrate to Liberia. Statements about the abundance to be found in Liberia were spread amongst these communities; a popular saying was “one potato in Liberia could feed an entire family.”

*“Liberia”: The Land of Milk and Honey*
In a speech delivered before the ACS in May 1880, Blyden continued to advocate for emigration to Liberia and in doing so continued to disseminate the rhetorical commonplace of “Liberia” as a land of “milk and honey.” He stated,

it is indeed impossible not to sympathize with the intelligent Negro, whose imagination, kindled by the prospects and possibilities of [America], the land of his birth...[who] as a result of their freedom and enlarged education, the descendants of Africa in [America] are beginning to feel themselves straightened [sic]. They are beginning to feel that only in Africa will they find the sphere of their true activity (Blyden 1967: 125).

“Liberia” was the land of the free, where African Americans could experience the freedoms and life they had been denied in the land of their birth. Blyden continued,

As long as he [the Negro] remains in this country, he is hampered both in mind and body. He can conceive of no radiance, no beauty, no inspiration in what are ignorantly called ‘the Wilds of Africa.’ The society in which he lives in the lands of his exile he supposes, from knowing no other, to be the normal condition of man, and fancies that he will suffer if he leaves it. But when he gets home he finds the atmosphere there a part of himself. He puts off the garment which has hampered his growth here, and he finds that he not only does not take cold, but has a chance for healthful development.

Blyden emphasized that educated free African Americans who were living in America were actually living in exile. “Liberia” was the home where they could finally be whole. However, despite the publicity and Blyden’s urgings, most free African Americans did not want to go to a “home” to which they had never been nor in which they had ever lived. The US was their home. Ultimately, the back-to-Africa movement waned because there was little interest in going to a foreign and “dark” land which might be the land of the ancestors but was definitely not home.

The Notion of “Africa”

How did these African Americans come to know the “Africa” they used to imagine “Liberia”? The public speeches and writings of both Blyden and Crummell reflected notions of
Africa that were not surprising given their background and education. Every authoritative, respected, and published work on Africa they consumed would have offered a depiction of Africa that confirmed or at least in some way reinforced this conception. Blyden commented in Fraser's Magazine in 1875, "It is not too much to say that the popular literature of the Christian world, since the discovery of America, or, at least for the last two hundred years, has been anti-Negro." In Anthony Appiah’s In My Father’s House (1992), he laments that

However much he [Crummell] hoped for Africa, however much he gave it of his life, he could not escape seeing it above all else as heathen and as savage... And we can see how inescapable these beliefs were when we reflect that every one of the ideas I [Appiah] have traced in Crummell can also be found in the writings of the same Edward W. Blyden I cited earlier, a man who was, with Africanus Horton (from the Old World) and Martin Robinson Delany (from the New) one of the three contemporaries of Crummell's” (1992: 21).

While it is a pity that these men were unable to escape thinking of Africa in terms of the negative commonplaces through which they had come to know it, it may be beside the point. Their aspirations for the Africa they knew were rooted in delivering the continent from heathenism and savagery by dispatching Christian, civilized, enlightened black Americans to its rescue. “Liberia” was their hope for “Africa.”

The way that prominent, educated African Americans such as Edward Wilmot Blyden and Alexander Crummell spoke and wrote about “Africa” during the 19th century formed the contours of 20th century conceptions of Liberia and Africa, as well as created and nurtured specific kinds of social, political and economic ties among the US, Liberia, and Africa. In their writings and speeches, Blyden and Crummell participated in the ongoing project of defining the basis for an African identity even while they were using limited conceptions of “Africa” that were shaped by European and American intellectuals’ writings and teaching on Africa. Not coincidentally, any education these learned men could attain was under the tutelage of European-
American scholars. As a result, like European-American scholars, they often saw Africa’s value in terms of commercial prospects and in terms of its moral, cultural, and material potential under the guidance of African American settlers, whose “responsibility” it was to “redeem” their continental “brethren” from “savagery” and “heathenism.”

However, Blyden and Crummell, as well as Delany, also celebrated the imperial greatness and glorious past achievements of “Africa.” They embraced ancient Egypt in particular as evidence of African ingenuity and cultural refinement. To their Christian evangelical sensibility, the potential of “Africa” was made even more significant given its appearance in Biblical texts, its noninvolvement in the transatlantic slave trade, and its universal acknowledgment as an early model of civilization. The role of ancient Egypt in the sweep of African and world history demonstrated the capacity of Africans for higher cultural, intellectual, and moral achievements. The historical point of view from which these men wrote and spoke about “Africa” was that it was a different world, but one possessing a history and traditions of its own.

Blyden accepted the notion that the people of “Africa” constituted a distinctive “race” as determined by bloodlines, based on his understanding of 19th century European-American anthropologists. Mudimbe (1988) argues that

Blyden's theory of race makes excellent sense when it is related to Arthur de Gobineau's Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines (1853) and other widespread racial conceptions. For instance, Voltaire, seeking a hierarchy of races in both his Traité de métaphysique (1734) and Essai sur les moeurs, affirmed that black peoples constitute a completely distinct brand of humankind. In Voltaire's anthropology, this distinction implied and explained the Negro's inferiority (see Duchet, 1971:281-321).

While Blyden did not accept the inferiority of African Americans to European-Americans, he agreed that within the “race” to which African Americans belonged, there were ethnic and social
differences that allowed for a kind of ranking. In his article entitled “Africa and the Africans” published in *Fraser’s Magazine* in August of 1878, Blyden noted that

The cruel accidents of slavery and the slave-trade drove all Africans together, and no discrimination was made in the shambles between the Foulah and the Timneh, the Mandingo and the Mendi, the Ashantee and the Fantee, the Eboe and the Congo—between the descendants of Nobles and the offsprings of slaves, between kings and their subjects—all were placed on the same level, all of black skin and woolly hair were ‘niggers,’ chattels . . . And when, by any course of events, these people attempt to exercise independent government, they start in the eyes of the world as Africans, without the fact being taken into consideration that they belong to tribes and families differing widely in degrees of intelligence and capacity, in original bent and susceptibility (1967:274).

Blyden rightly problematized the notion of “Africa” as a uniform entity, “the land of the black peoples,” by inserting an awareness of the great diversity between social groupings found on the African continent. The focus on the distinctions in skin color and the classification of peoples based on “race” obscured the fact that the peoples of Africa had much less culturally in common than was generally realized. However, Blyden’s main point about the diversity of Africa was undermined by the continuation of the conception that there were in fact inhabitants of “Africa” that were worthy of being called “niggers” and treated as property due to their ethnic and social differences. Blyden’s acceptance of the idea of differences in “intelligence” and “capacity” between the groups based on ethnic differences is emblematic of the faulty premises of many 19th century writers.

Blyden not only accepted but disseminated the notion of “Africa” as the natural and rightful home of “black people.” In an address to the American Colonization Society given in 1883, Blyden argued that “Africa” was the proper home of “the Negro,” and the African American was an exile who should “return to the land of his fathers . . . AND BE AT PEACE” (Blyden 1967: 94, 124). Blyden asserted that they “have never needed the stimulus of any
organization of white men to direct their attention to the land of their fathers…The exiled Negro, then, has a home in Africa. Africa is his, if he will. He may ignore it. He may consider that he is divested of any right to it; but this will not alter his relations to that country, or impair the integrity of his title” (100, 124). Blyden’s use of the word “exiled” emphasized that “Africa” was the home of the “Negro.”

Blyden’s framework was typical of the time. He and others articulated an “Africa” that was defined by means of three polarities: a racial polarity in terms of “white” and “black,” a cultural polarity between “civilized” and “savage,” and a religious polarity between Christianity and “paganism.” “Africa” was inferior because it was not civilized or Christian, not because it was “black,” as Africa was factually the home of “blacks.” For Blyden, Crummell, and others engaged in the Liberia project, the regeneration of “Africa” was possible, but it was a mission that only African American Christians could successfully carry out (1967: 194). Similarly, Blyden argued that African unity and nation-building, as in the development of the Liberian state, was a task that could only be carried out by the African American settlers themselves, not by agents of the ACS.

19th-century Specifications of an Imagined “Liberia” and “Africa”

By the end of the 19th century, “Liberia” was vaguely understood to be a settlement for African Americans in which they could participate in social and political relations free from the racist oppression of American society, a kind of “Promised Land” for educated and enlightened African Americans who were also committed to the regeneration and redemption of “Africa.” Similarly, “Africa” was broadly conceived of the natural homeland of the “Negro race” and constitutively and essentially different as well as inferior since it was barbaric and lacked civilization. Colonization/emigration efforts that led to the creation of the Liberian state make
sense in light of this widely entrenched notion of “Africa,” as “Liberia” would be a means to address the conflict between racial separateness and the supposedly universal application of civilization.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the historical development of the rhetorical commonplaces “Liberia” and “Africa” throughout the 19th century. These two terms solidified into a specific set of commonplaces in such a way that they served as a sort of shorthand when deployed in the legitimation process of specific policies, particularly in the case of the Hinterland Policies of 1904-1905, which is the subject of the following chapter, Chapter 4 “Enacting Liberia.” The central argument of this study is that the use of “Liberia” and “Africa” in policy debates made possible certain actions. That is, Liberian policy can be explained by the deployment of these rhetorical commonplaces. Their function in the public patterns of justification for a particular policy can only be explained in terms of their specific histories, hence the necessity for tracing the histories of these rhetorical resources and their dissemination.
Beginning in the 1860s, British and French colonial offices began to publicly contest Liberia’s sovereignty over territories in West Africa. The reason offered by both nations’ officials to legitimate their actions was that Liberia had not established adequately “effective occupation” of the territory it claimed in Africa (even though at the time both Britain and France recognized Liberia as an independent republic). In March of 1882, Britain seized two areas within Liberia’s borders and annexed them to its colony of Sierra Leone. Previously, in May of 1891, France had grabbed a significant portion of Liberia’s southeastern coastal region to add to the colony of Ivory Coast.

In a letter written to and made public by Major S. W. Blackall, the British governor of Sierra Leone, British merchants complained that “[t]he Liberian Government are quite unable to protect us in the removal of our property or to compel the natives” (Holden 1966: 133; American Colonization Society 1865). By 1900, Liberia was being depicted as a sparse collection of coastal settlements whose authority did not extend into the hinterland (Dalafosse 1900; Johnston 1906). French colonialist Captain Henri d’Ollone stated, in a Paris newspaper that was distributed within French West African territories, that Liberians “have [n]ever dared [to] adventure more than 10 km from the sea or navigable river, for fear of being eaten by the natives, aggressive cannibals” (Sims et al. 2003; West African Mail 1903; Liberia Recorder 1903). D’Ollone’s characterization of Liberia as insular, ignorant, and fearful of Africans implied that the Americo-Liberians were to blame for not establishing effective [military] control over the other ethnic groups in the region.
For its part, Liberia viewed the usurpation of its land by the British and French as a violation of its sovereignty and a willful disregard of agreements signed with African chiefs in the region during the early years of the republic (Duignan and Gann 1984: 27-41; Clendenen, Collins and Duignan 1966: 117-126; Liebenow 1987: 54). Liberia’s Secretary of State Hilary R.W. Johnson (1871-1874) commented of the British and French actions, “[They were] a clear case of might against right and the weaker had to yield” (Gershoni 1992: 22; Foley 1965: 78-79). However, might alone was not the whole explanation of why the British and the French were able to slice parts of Liberia away. Although superior military capabilities and administrative resources undoubtedly played a part in the European scramble for land in West Africa (West 1970: 253-260; Gershoni 1985: 102), discourse of “Liberia” at the time helped to render certain courses of state actions to be acceptable and others inappropriate. As noted in Chapter 4, “Imagining Liberia and Africa”, Liberia was constituted from the beginning by and through certain notions of a "Western" "civilizing" mission in Africa. Hence, the Hinterland Policies were justified in those terms.

Under President Arthur Barclay (1904-1912), the Liberian government devised and initiated a set of policies to extend its authority over the Africans of the inland territories by establishing military posts and an administrative system in which designated chiefs in the region were to be considered government officials (Blamo 1972; Buell 1965: 739-740). This policy was became known as the Hinterland Policy. Up to this point in the history of the country, Liberia had mainly consisted of settlements on the coast that consolidated and remained socially and politically distinct from the interior, the hinterland. The Hinterland policies aimed at bringing the African interior under the control of the Liberian state have been have characterized as “black imperialism” (Akpan 1973) and as “black colonialism” (Gershoni 1985). Christopher Clapham
describes Liberia state actions during this time as ‘a “manifest destiny” to control and civilize the peoples of the interior’ (Clapham 1976: 8). While this can be seen as part of the process of the Liberian state’s creation, Barclay’s actions were also the product of a struggle for legitimation, as Liberia was laying claim to a large portion of the interior territory adjacent to the coastal settlements and Britain and France were refusing to recognize Liberia’s territorial rights beyond the settlements. Following the rules of the Berlin Conference and in order to support Liberia’s claims, Barclay formed and deployed the Liberian Frontier Force in 1907 as a militia to establish military outposts in the disputed territories. The Frontier Force served as another part of the legitimation struggle against European characterizations of France and Britain’s actions in the region and against misunderstandings of the depth and breadth of the Liberian government’s commitments and interests. The rhetorical commonplaces deployed in the course of debates regarding possible courses of action legitimated Liberia’s policies towards the interior while significantly influencing later actions that were taken in the name of the Liberian state.

On January 4, 1904, President Barclay used his inaugural address to propose policy measures to the Senate and House of Representatives aimed at preventing further European encroachments on Liberia’s territory. He began by acknowledging an unfortunate interlude in the period between which Liberia had been first established and the contemporary shifting context of colonial conquests, including the consolidation of European empires in Africa:

*Government must rest on the consent of the governed.* We made a great initial mistake in the beginning of our national career. We sought to obtain, and did succeed in grasping an enormous mass of territory, but we neglected to conciliate and attach the resident populations to our interest…Take for instance the Manna and Gallinas territories, formerly a part of Liberia. Why did we lose these? Because we neglected to look after and conciliate the populations…The same thing happened with respect to the territory below the Cavalla [River]…Our old attitude of indifference toward the native populations must be dropped. A fixed and unwavering policy with respect to the Natives, proceeding on the lines of
interest in their local affairs, protection, civilisation and safeguarding their institutions when not brutal or harmful, should at once be set on foot.

When we came here in 1822, the country was indeed divided among a large number of tribes, but there were signs, not only in this territory but along the whole West Coast, of a desire to merge the tribal governments into wider political organisations which would secure the peace of the country, put a stop to incessant raids, devastations, and consequent loss of life and property and give the working classes a chance to secure progress and development…The more sagacious chiefs saw in our [Liberian] settlement the necessary center, hence the ease with which they came into line and placed in our hands political jurisdiction over their several districts in return for protection, civilisation and internal order, to effect which we virtually pledged ourselves.

We often neglected to make good our promises, but the native citizen has a very retentive memory and knows exactly what he wants.

The new departure in national policy toward the native population which I have suggested is but a return to the conditions upon which we obtained political jurisdiction over the country. (Guannu 1980: 189-193)

The interlude to which Barclay referred encompassed decades of indifference and disengagement with the African inhabitants of the land that had been claimed by Liberia. As Barclay presented his new policy of engagement with Africans in the region, he justified it by tying it to the initial purpose for which Liberia had been established, i.e., to provide Africa with “protection, civilization and internal order” (Staudenraus 1961; West 1970; Alexander 1971; Miller 1975). He was signaling a departure from the settlers’ practice of avoiding the indigenous people, a practice that had become common in the time between the arrival of the first settlers committed to the “regeneration of Africa” and the present Liberian community, and his language reflected the shift.

Similar kinds of policies had been proposed in the 1860s and 1870s. In the 1860s, presidential appeals for the inclusion of a few chiefs into the Liberian legislature had been accepted in principle by the Liberian government. In 1874 the Liberian legislature had agreed to
permit one “native” representative from each ethnic group to discuss affairs that pertained to their community (Acts Passed by the Legislature of Liberia, 1873-1874 (Monrovia, 1874). A few chiefs were duly admitted to the House of Representatives. However, each chief represented an ethnic rather than a political administrative unit. Moreover, the delegates were not full-fledged members of the House of Representatives. Persistent international pressures challenging Liberian territorial claims forced Liberian officials continue to revisit proposals for native participation in the government. In 1892 the Department of the Interior was created to serve as the liaison between the Liberian government and the indigenous communities. However, the legislature and their constituents preferred an exclusive Liberian community rather than one inclusive of the other ethnic communities within the regions. Disagreements between the legislature and the executive branches ultimately resulted in the forced resignation of President Colman in 1900.

Barclay’s argument in support of what became known as the Hinterland Policies drew upon the rhetoric that had already been commonly used in the social environments surrounding the establishment of the colony in 1822 and the state in 1847. Since 1822, agents of the American Colonization Society (ACS) and the Liberian settlers themselves have been preoccupied with including “native” political participation, as the melioration of Africa was the principal justification used in attempts to legitimate Liberia’s existence as a colony for free African-Americans and as a sovereign state.

One prominent characterization of Liberia involved the concatenation of the following: an African settlement of free, Christian, well-trained African-Americans to provide fellow Africans with protection from the slave trade, as well as civilization in the form of the “Western civilization” that they had experienced living in the US, as well as internal order in the form of the modern republic which they had witnessed. Barclay’s assertion that “the new departure…is
but a return to the conditions upon which we obtained jurisdiction over the country” was an attempt to legitimate Liberia’s initial territorial claims and to reinforce his proposed policies.

Barclay specified notions of “Africa” and of “Liberia” and linked them to the Hinterland Policies. He invoked two rhetorical notions: that of Africa as wild, immature, in a perpetual childhood, and factually (whether conscious of it or not) needy. Chief among the needs he cited was the Liberian people’s need for order and assistance to develop properly, and the notion of the Liberian state as uniquely suited to deliver Africa from its baser elements. In his address, Barclay interpreted the Liberian people’s “signs” indicating a “desire to merge the tribal governments into wider political organisations which would secure the peace,” as one might interpret the communicative attempts of toddlers unable to articulate or achieve their goals. In the address, Barclay explained that in the early 19th century, the American colonizationalists had encountered an Africa prone to destroying itself, as tribes regularly performed “incessant raids” which nonsensically resulted in “devastations, and consequent loss of life and property.” Portraying the Africans as not yet sufficiently developed to attain the desired peace and prosperity on their own, he referred to “the more sagacious chiefs [seeing] in our [Liberian] settlement the necessary center… and [placing] in our hands political jurisdiction over their several districts.”

Pairing the notions of primitive, childlike “Africa” and civilized “Liberia” as the appropriate deliverer of Africans from self-destruction, barbarism, and chaos allowed the Liberian state to pursue the use of military force to establish “peace” and “prosperity” in the hinterland territories; the use and acceptance of these notions also ruled out any serious defiance of France and Britain’s continued land grabs in West Africa.
Barclay’s rhetoric was effective because it used existing notions and commonplaces familiar to members of the legislature, who easily accepted these characterizations of Africa and Liberia. It also defanged international (and domestic) arguments against the Hinterland policies, that Liberia did not have a right to claim the hinterlands, since one of the central justifications for the existence of Liberia had been that it would allow the settlers to serve their consanguineous African relatives as a “midwife” to deliver a civilized, Christianized and commoditized Africa to the world. If that was the central justification for the existence of Liberia, failure to claim the hinterlands would indicate a failure of the Liberian project. Should Liberia not participate in the liberation of Africa by incorporating Africans into a Christian republic governed by more enlightened men of the African “race”? In 1905, the legislature approved President Barclay’s policy to institute Liberia’s engagement with the African communities in the region, and to assert its control and authority over them, by regulating the political participation of indigenous leaders in the Liberian state. These measures of the Hinterland Policy was an integral step in the legitimation process to make Barclay’s arguments in support of his proposed hinterland policies appear sensible and to make counterarguments unacceptable; this step is thereby relevant to this account explaining why Liberia’s policies towards African ethnic groups in the region were not unlike the colonial policies of European powers and, in particular, the British colonial political practice of “indirect rule.”

Another commonplace that was strategically deployed in the justification of the hinterland policies and Liberia’s sovereignty was that of “race.” Liberia’s state actions during this time reflected the notion that Africa was the rightful, providential homeland of all members of the black “race” and the notion that Liberia itself was a God-ordained state in which inalienable, God-given rights for those classified as “Negro” prevailed. As the Liberian
plenipotentiary to London and Paris, E.W. Blyden, remarked in his 1906 speech to the Liberian Senate, “The Significance of Liberia,”

...[t]here is a thing for the life of the people more important than the Church, and that is Liberty. ‘The Love of Liberty’ runs our inspiring national motto, ‘brought us here;’ not love of the Church. The safety of the people is the highest law (Blyden 1907: 35).

Blyden saw Liberia as the Promised Land in which the shackles of “race” would be removed and the duties to “race” would be magnified.

The problem is ours; we have got to live here….It is true we find this difficulty: that our people are slow, according to the slowness of ordinary humanity…They [non-Negros] cannot live here. Neither their race nor habits allow their permanent residence here (Blyden 1907: 34).

Blyden identified “race” as a real biological connection between emigrant ethnic groups and indigenous ethnic groups that not only afforded Liberians the ability to inhabit the land (which non-Negroes could not due to racial differences and subsequent limitations), but he also saw “race” as a reason that Liberia was obligated to uplift its more primitive African brothers.

For Liberian officials and settlers, the African “race” was simply the part of humanity they were to be responsible for. Blyden expressed this in the following passage:

Here [Africa] is a land adapted to us—given to us by Providence—peculiarly ours, to the exclusion of alien races. On every hand we can look, and say it is ours. Ours are the serene skies that bend above us; ours the twinkling stars and brilliant planets – Pleiades and Venus and Jupiter; ours the singing of the birds, the thunder of the clouds, the roaring of the sea, the rustling of the forest, the murmurs of the brooks, and the whispers of the breeze. The miry swamp, sending out disease and death, is also ours; and ours the malignant fever—all are ours….No pent-up Utica contracts our powers—The whole boundless continent is ours…. And here, if we would have our race honored and respected, we should try to build up a nation (1865: 41).

*Constructing the Liberian State*
“The civilized Liberian must contribute to the formation of the nation by his personal example, his conduct as a citizen, and above all his attitude toward the other necessary element of the national organism, – our aboriginal brother.” - President Arthur Barclay, 1906

Central to public officials’ statements legitimating Liberia’s Hinterland policies were notions of the identity of Liberia as an African republic and its responsibility to lead other African nations and people. In a letter to the editor of the Liberia Recorder published on July 26, 1904, Blyden supported President Barclay’s policy, arguing that Liberians “must understand their privileges and the responsibilities in connection with them [the natives]....” Blyden advocated the “upbuilding of an African nationality” by urging the state of Liberia to focus its attention on its own business and to “take the line of least resistance and be content like the Jew, to eschew politics in the Anglo-Saxon sense, and follow the line to which as a race they are called” (Holden 1966: 779-785). Like the chosen people of God, the African-American settlers were, he felt, called to carry out certain duties in relation to Africans because they were of the same “race.” Blyden claimed, “All intelligent natives in West Africa, and East Africa, and South Africa are looking to Liberia for guidance on race lines – to lead in the development of African life and the achievement of African destiny” (Holden 1966: 788). Liberia, therefore, was justified in claiming its authority over the interior not only because it had effectively occupied the African territories in the legitimating terms set at the Berlin Conference, but because it was the responsibility and founding mission of the state of Liberia to govern the land and its people.

Emphasizing President Barclay’s point that the new policies were not a departure from Liberia’s originally charted course but rather a return to it, the initial purpose for which Liberia had “obtained political jurisdiction over the country,” Blyden cited an address he had given to the City Council of Monrovia entitled “Liberia, Its Origins, Dangers and Duties” (1865: 27) nearly 40 years previously. He urged that the proposals he had made in the previous address be
adopted now as “they [were] even more necessary now than when first proposed” (Holden 1966: 783). Delivered on the 18th anniversary of Liberia’s independence, Blyden had asserted in this address many years before that Liberia must “cultivate pride of race”:

We have been so cruelly oppressed, that we have, in a great measure, lost out self-respect, almost any little untoward event will scare us into the belief that we cannot succeed in our undertaking on this coast. But we must endeavor to shake off the influence of the past. We must have faith in the Negro race. We are more eagerly watched than we have any idea of, the nations are looking to see whether “order and law, religion and morality, the rights of conscience, the rights of persons, and the rights of property, may all be secured” by a government controlled entirely and purely by Negroes (Holden 1966: 784).

Blyden justified the new Hinterland policies by arguing that they were in fact the true purpose of the Liberian state. Making reference to what he considered Liberia’s failure to carry out its charge, Blyden said, “Let us hope that the period which has elapsed during the fifty odd years since the Declaration of Independence was but a necessary interlude—not altogether out of harmony with the destiny of the race—a transition to a higher level of duty and attainment.” He warned that most ethnic emigrants had not left the US

…from a love of independence—[their departure] did not spring from, an earnest longing for the functions of self-government, but merely from a vague and uneasy desire to be freed from certain physical restraints and proscriptions in the land of their birth. These people have to be taught. Correct lessons of freedom must be imparted to them. They should be impressed with a sense of personal obligation to the country, and of individual responsibility; otherwise they will be an insurmountable stumbling-block in the way of all national advancement and all enlightened civilization” (1865)

It is important to note here that Liberia’s civilizing mission in Africa was envisioned as without boundaries and that “national advancement” occurred when Liberia brought its “aboriginal brother” into the polity as part of the program of advancing “enlightened civilization.” Thus, Liberia was seen to be a portion of humanity responsible for the rest of humanity.35

Interestingly, at the time of Blyden’s address on “Liberia, Its Origins, Dangers and Duties” in the mid-1860s, the British and the French were also accepting the legitimacy of
Liberia’s sovereignty, believing that Liberia would be a “civilizing” agent on the African continent. A global leader in abolishing the trade in slaves, Britain supported Liberia’s sovereign territoriality on the grounds that, as Liberia was cultivated in the image of “the West,” it could be an active partner in suppressing the slave trade along the West African coast. The British Prime Minister, philanthropists, and abolitionists had provided significant financial contributions to Liberia’s first President, J. J. Roberts (1848-1856, 1862-1876). Liberia had purchased territories between Monrovia and the Mano River with the support of the British government and the recognition of British naval authorities (Foley 1965: 16-17). France had also supported Liberia's participation in the suppression of the slave trade and its mission to spread “Western civilization” in Africa. The French navy had joined the Liberian militia to destroy slave factories in 1849, and again in 1859. Commenting on Liberia’s actions in Africa, France had declared: "The Liberian government is fulfilling a civilizing mission on the African coast which deserves the support of the French Republic” (Gershoni 1992: 2).

However, by the late 19th century, as Barclay remarked in his first inaugural address in 1904,

...the Africa of today is not the Africa of 1848. That Africa was a mysterious and little known continent, dangerous of access, and reputed to be filled with wild beasts and savages—the haunt of the slave trader, and of little interest to the man engaged in legitimate trade. The New Africa is as well-known as Europe or North America. A magnificent continent, its future [has become] a matter of interest to all the leading commercial peoples of the world. They have hastened to partition it, and to place their establishments and governments therein.

Unlike European activity in Africa, which was primarily based on the lure of exploitation of natural resources, according to supporters of the Hinterland policy, Liberian state actions were primarily based on moral considerations, not material ones. In “Liberia, Its Origins, Dangers and Duties,” Blyden presented a quotation to emphasize the importance of the Liberian republic for the “natives”:
The greatest engine of moral power known to human affairs," says Edward Everett, "is an organized, prosperous state. All that man, in his individual capacity, can do—all that he can effect by his private fraternities, by his ingenious discoveries and wonders of art, or by his influence over others—is as nothing compared with the collective, perpetuated influence on human affairs and human happiness of a well-constituted, powerful commonwealth (1865: 41-42).

This moral agency, according to Blyden, was what the Liberian republic should provide to the other ethnic groups in the region, since

…we [Liberia] shall never be able to conduct the affairs of this country as they should be conducted until more general interest is felt in keeping the body of the people properly informed. They must be visited by the more enlightened. They must be made to feel that their assistance and cooperation is required in the work of erecting this nationality. This is the duty of us all. If we accept democracy, we must accept it with these inconveniences…There is already too little of it; and what we see forms too gratifying and refreshing an exception to that general selfishness and isolation which pervades our communities…The tribes in the distant interior are waiting for us” (1865: 29).

In that particular address, Blyden was attempting to legitimate active engagement with the Africans of the interior by tying it to the ability of the Liberian state to function as it should. He challenged the position that Liberia should remain focused on itself by arguing that “Liberia” was coterminous with the duty of doing the work of creating a republic in Africa based on an African nationality. The commonplaces deployed in this address were similar to those later used in the justification of the Barclay administration’s plan to legitimate the Hinterland policies.

Six months after Barclay’s proclamation regarding the way forward for Liberia’s sovereign territorial expansion, Blyden demonstrated his support of Barclay’s Hinterland policies by asserting that “the inspiration of the race is in the race itself…The lesson for us is: Utilize the aboriginal populations and learn from them how to live and thrive in Africa. Liberia must adjust herself to African conditions. Prepare an African home for the exiles [“Negros” in the US and West Indies] before they come….”
It must be noted that neither Blyden nor Barclay objected outright to the colonization of Africa — whether by Britain, France, the US, or some other entity. Rather, both attempted to legitimate Liberia’s Hinterland policies using a particular arrangement of rhetorical commonplaces in their articulations of “Liberia” and “Africa,” including notions of Africa as the rightful homeland for “Negroes” and Liberia as the providential deliverer of Africa called to uplift the “race” on behalf of and for the sake of “enlightened civilization,” which was seen to be synonymous with “Western civilization” and all of humanity. These commonplaces allowed for European partition of Africa to appear problematic and Liberia’s Hinterland policies to seem appropriate.

In opposition to this pattern of justification of the Hinterland policies was an argument involving the commonplace “sovereignty.” Specifically, the British and French, and some indigenous groups in the region, argued that Liberia had failed to establish a national community that would include the indigenous ethnicities of the territories and had likewise failed to “effectively occupy” the areas where those indigenous people lived. When a senior British representative, at a conference held in 1869 on the issue of the northwest boundary, summarily declared a British protectorate over the entire coastline of Sherbo Island and land west of the Mano River, a large piece of land that fell within Liberia’s territory, the justification for this action was that the Liberian government had failed to “maintain order” in the region (Johnston 1906: 243-245; Foley 1965: 57-62). Additionally, some ethnic groups in the territories had publicly requested European protection. For example, King Guyude, the chief of the Grebo, offered Grebo land to England, stating “The object for which Liberia was colonized has not been realized, and Liberian domination does not make for good government, Christianity or civilization. We are constrained to offer our country to some European power whose methods of
colonization are less onerous.” (Los Angeles Times Oct 25, 1901) Other international challenges to Liberia’s sovereign territorial claims came from both European and African polities.

Objections to Liberia’s territorial claims grounded in the notion of “sovereignty” were also the focus of a series of exchanges in the French and Liberian print media after the signing of the Franco-Liberian Border Agreement of 1892. In the French press in 1903, French infantry Captain Henri d’Ollone accused Liberian explorer and surveyor Benjamin Joseph Knight Anderson, who had also served in the capacity of Comptroller of the Treasury Department (1861-1863), Secretary of Treasury, (1863-1871), and Secretary of the Interior, (1884-1892), of fabricating the maps of the interior. From 1898-1900, Captain d’Ollone had gone on a mission to explore the interior, and in 1901, he had published his findings entitled De la Cote d’Ivoire au Soudan et a la Guinee. In his Annales de Geographie (1903), D’ollone again ridiculed Anderson’s map, remarking on its failure to properly denote mountain, waterways, and ethnic groups in the region and denying that it was the route of a true explorer, but instead only a collection of lines (Sins et al 2003: 79-84). D’Ollone elaborated:

Add to all that, that Anderson, who many think to be an English person, or an American, is simply a black Liberian; that none of his brethren have ever dared adventure more than 10 km from the sea or navigable river, for fear of being eaten by the natives, aggressive cannibals; that he had only a very ordinary education, little in relation to the use of instruments that he would have to carry to make the astronomical calculations and which he makes a lot of in his book. (1903: 140)

In an editorial, “L’hinterland du Liberia,” published on June 6 of the same year, the Bulletin du Comite de l’Afrique Francaise supported d’Ollone’s arguments. In an article published in Paris and in The West Africa Mail on June 8, the French correspondent for the British colonial newspaper wrote,

It is now a well-established fact that Anderson never accomplished his so-called travels…The French have now, for the first time, methodically explored and scientifically mapped out regions claimed by Liberia but completely unknown to
that Government, even by name, before the discoveries of French explorers, and over which the Liberian Government exercises no jurisdiction, and possesses no influence of any kind. Amongst the recent discoveries of the French may be mentioned, in the North, those of several rivers, such as the Makona, the Lofa, the Dianu, by the French officers of the Soudanese “post” of Kissidugu, Diorodugu and Beyla and in the East, the results of the important Hostains-d’Ollone mission, in which in the words of Captain d’Ollone: “Surveyed the Northern limit of the Douhhoue, Sine, Same and Diobo valleys, and the Great Western bend of Cavally, together with its affluent the Duobe, which takes from Liberia almost the third of her territory and incorporates it within the [French] Ivory Coast (1903).

In 1904, the French colonial office, the Governor General of French West Africa, Ernest Roume, and the French Minister of Colonies, Gaston Doumergue, took for their colony of the Ivory Coast approximately 60 miles of coastline between the Cavalla and San Pedro rivers, claiming that it “contained no [Liberian] emigrant settlements,” “no agreement with the Liberian government” regarding its land and protection, and lastly, claiming that “the inhabitants requested French protections” (Liberian Recorder September 1903; Liberian Recorder June 1904). The presence of French troops on Liberian territory and France’s usurpation of territory that had been claimed by Liberia was justified by the French assertion that Liberia had not effectively controlled its hinterland and that the ethnicities in the region had requested French protection. It is noteworthy that the new French survey showed that French Guinea should cede some of its land to Liberia while France should gain territory for Ivory Coast, which the contemporary administration of the Ivory Coast had no means of effectively occupying. France retained its military posts in Guinea and claimed the upper Cavalla basin for France (Gershoni 1992: 34-35). Nonetheless, the French also publicly proclaimed that Liberia lacked the ability and means to maintain order, provide security, peaceably adjudicate disputes and stimulate prosperity in the region (West African Mail August 14, 1903; West African Mail April 29, 1904). This characterization of Liberia’s [lack of] sovereignty over the Hinterland compellingly countered the arguments put forth by the proponents of Liberia’s Hinterland policies.
In response to these characterizations of “Liberia,” advocates of Liberia’s Hinterland policies had two arguments to fight against: the international argument about Liberia’s sovereignty and the failure of the Liberian state to incorporate the Africans into their national community, and the domestic argument within Liberia that indigenous Africans were not “civilized” enough to participate politically. The latter arguments were often explicitly rebutted by proponents of the Hinterland policies, who chided both the Legislature and Liberian citizens for excluding native Africans from the political process.

The constitution of 1847 had not extended the rights of Liberian citizenship to the African population. In Barclay’s first Annual Message, given to the legislature on December 15, 1904, he had proposed that the Legislature pass an Act to call a constitutional Convention to frame a new Constitution, “which might embody most of the features of the present, submitting same to the people for adoption.” Barclay indicated why a new Constitution was necessary at the present juncture:

In the Declaration of Independence and Constitution of Liberia the word “Negro” is conspicuously absent. The impression is sought to be conveyed that we are of American origin. The adhesion, attachment and support of the native population of the Country are of vital importance to us. Yet these important State papers place the civilized Liberian in a false light before the eyes of the aboriginal citizen. He is made to appear as an alien and stranger in Africa, the land of his fathers (Dunn 2011).

The notion of Africa as the natural homeland of everyone identified as “Negro” makes explicit the relationship between the two commonplaces “African” and “Negro,” in this particular context. In Barclay’s articulation, all “Negros” were “African” by virtue of their skin color. “Africa” was imagined as a community of “Negros” regardless of physical location. Furthermore, while all Liberians were African, not all Africans were civilized Liberians. The
process of Africans becoming civilized by their own “brethren” was, in part, the justification of the Hinterland policies and the Liberian state itself.

An example of how proponents of Liberia’s Hinterland policies answered the “sovereignty-based” opposition to Liberia’s territorial rights appears in a pamphlet written and distributed by the Governor of Maryland County, John Brown Russworm, entitled *France versus Liberia: a statement and appeal by the citizens of Maryland County, Liberia, West Africa, to their fellow citizens of Liberia, the citizens of France and other countries against the proposed cession of one-half of their county to France, in satisfaction of "ancient claims,"* revived by *France, to other parts of Liberia* (1893).

Consider, we pray you, the situation. Having been carried away into slavery, and, by the blessing of God, returned from exile to our fatherland, are we now to be robbed of our rightful inheritance? Is there not to be a foot of land in Africa, that the African, whether civilized or savage, can call his own? It had been asserted that the race is not capable of self-government, and the eyes of many are watching the progress of Liberia with a view to determining the question. We only ask, in all fairness, to be allowed just what any other people would require—free scope of operation. Do not wrest our territory from us and hamper us in our operations, and then stigmatize the race with incapacity, because we do not work miracles. Give us a fair chance, and then if we utterly fail, we shall yield the point. We pray you, the civilized and Christian nations of the world, to use your influence in our behalf. We have no power to prevent this aggression on the part of the French Government: but we know that we have right on our side, and are willing to have our claims to the territory in question examined. We did not consent to France taking that portion of our territory lying between the Cavalla and San Pedro Rivers; nor do we recognize its claims to points on our Grain Coast, which, as shown above, our government has been in possession of for so long. We protest too against that government's marking off narrow limits of interior land for us. We claim the right to extend as far interiorward as our necessities require. We are not foreigners: we are Africans, and this is Africa. Such being the case, we have certain natural rights—God-given rights—to this territory which no foreigners can have. We should have room enough, not only for our present population, but also to afford a home for our brethren in exile who may wish to return to their fatherland and help build up a Negro nationality. We implore you, the civilized and Christian nations of the world, to use your influence to have these, our reasonable requirements restored to us. (Dennis 1893: 12-14)
The rebuttal to Europeanist objections involved yoking Liberia and its inland territories to “Africa” as well as blaming the actions in the inland regions on British and French colonial agents and their offices, but not the home governments of Britain or France. The colonial officers were characterized by Blyden and others as being brutal and uninterested in civilizing the Africans of the interior, only exploiting Africans for their resources. Speaking at a banquet given in his honor, held in London in August of 1903 and with other West Africans dignitaries in attendance, including Vice-President of Liberia, Hon. J.D. Summerville, Blyden stated:

> I know that what is called progressive civilization cannot be introduced into Africa without European intervention, but it would be a sad calamity for the natives, as well as for the exploiters, if they should consigned to a harsh and inhuman discipline in order to be taught the advantages of civilization. Those who sow trouble and woe in Africa are not, as a rule the poor Africans, who mind their own business and till their scanty acres, but those who seek for the bubble reputation at the cannon’s mouth, and those who in the name of civilization, and blind with covetousness, dream of nothing but exploiting the bodies and souls of their weaker fellow-creatures in order to profit…There are broad principles of human nature which men of all races recognize and some which apply only to sections of humanity, and these must be specially studied by all who would lead or influence for good any particular race or people.” (Holden: 773-774)

While Blyden considered Africans and Europeans to be members of humanity, not all members of humanity had been civilized yet. Because of the “differences” between the “races,” the process of bringing civilization had to be overseen by the appropriate group, i.e. members of the same “race.” It was in the context of this deployment of discursive resources that the Hinterland policies were made possible.

*The Creation of the Liberian State in the Name of Civilization*¹⁹

In the rhetoric used in support of the Hinterland policies, the borders of the Liberian state extended well beyond the coast and the borders delineated in the treaties with Britain and France. Blyden claimed that all of “Africa” stood to gain from Liberia’s establishing an administrative organization that would bring the indigenes under the indirect control of state authorities in a
formal structure, as the Africans of the interior were in need of “the advantages of civilization.” Liberia also would benefit, as Barclay noted: “…our aboriginal brother” was a “necessary element of the national organism” (Guannu 1980: 214). Liberia was attempting to legitimate its delineated boundaries and its existence as a state through the execution of the Hinterland policies based on its quasi-membership in “Western Civilization.”

In Civilizing the Enemy, Jackson traces the discursive constellations that came together to make the commonplace “Western Civilization” available for use in discussions during the interwar period. Jackson provides a sketch of “the West” as it appeared in subsequent policy debates in the aftermath of the Second World War.

First, “the West” is a supranational entity, in which other states and nations are “nested.” Larger and older than its component states, it is also somewhat superior to them; “civilizational” concerns trump merely national ones. Second, “the West” is an exclusive, essential community: not everyone is “Western,” and not everyone can or should be “Western.”…Third, “the West” is already linked to a series of other commonplaces, such as the defense of liberty…(2006: 72-111)

It is significant that this schematic notion of “the West,” along with “Africa” and “Liberia,” was referenced in the justification of the Hinterland policies to both domestic and international opponents. In his second inaugural address, delivered on January 1, 1906, Barclay engaged in this pattern of justification by claiming Liberia’s membership in these two “imagined communities,” “Africa” and “the West”; both, at the time, were seen to exist beyond Liberia’s borders. Appeals to these supranational entities sanctioned Liberia’s actions in the Hinterland. Barclay declared,

Now a nation may be defined as a body of people of one race inhabiting a defined territory with a community of language, manners and customs. The definition applies to Liberia in a general way if we consider the aboriginal peoples as the most important element of its populations. With regards to the civilized Liberians it is true as regards race, but not altogether correct in other respects…The Liberian nation is to be made up of the Negro civilized to some extent in the United States and repatriated, and of the aboriginal tribes. At present it is
composed of a small number of civilized and a large number of aboriginal communities in varying degrees of dependence. The problem is how to blend these into a national organism, an Organic Unity. A community of race is our first great asset. (Guannu 1980: 212-213)

President Barclay’s fusion of the terms “nation” and “state” was an attempt to construct the Liberian state in a particular way. With the possible exception of the related but distinct concept of “nation,” the “state” is the perhaps the most studied object in international relations and the subject of intense scholarly investigations and contestation (see Tilly 1975; Mitchell 1988; Spruyt 1994; Bartelson 1995; Nexon 2009). However, Barclay’s construction of the “state” deviates from the traditional conception of the state as a collection of legitimate political institutions that exercise a monopoly over the means of physical coercion, in the name of the common interest, within a limited territory. In this case, the “state” is not complete, nor is it a finished thing, but instead, state sovereignty is revealed as a constitutive political practice. The state is not a solid entity but rather the effect of social practices. As a number of scholars have noted, the state is a bundle of relations that attempt to sustain the meaning and construct of the state (Walker 1993; Biersteker and Weber 1996; Mitchell 1999). Within the legitimation process in which Barclay was engaged, public officials were attempting to define Liberia’s territory and to control its population by making reference to two distinct communities: “Western civilization” and “Africa.”

The argument for Liberia’s membership in these two communities is explained in the following statement from Barclay, one year after the passage of the Hinterland Act by the Liberian Legislature:

I have referred to the Americo-Liberian as the nucleus of the future nation. His advantage in that regard is, that he has been out of Africa so long that he has escaped from tribal trammels, traditions and relations, hence in the given community of race, he affords the necessary rallying point upon which a great community can form itself. But the one fact that cannot escape our attention is
that the attitude, conduct and policy of the civilized Negro will have a great deal to do with satisfactory accomplishment of a national Unity in which tribal distinctions will be lost. (Guannu 1980: 213-214)

Barclay deploys the commonplace that Liberians are “Negro” or “African” as they belong to a “community of race.” This supranational identity is used as the basis for the formation of the national state, “a great community.” Thus, the state is a part of a larger pre-existing community. However, Liberians are not of African civilization, nor practitioners of African culture; they are “civilized Negros.” Liberians instead are of “Western civilization”; that is, they are practitioners of the values, institutions, and traditions that come “from the Greeks through the Romans, from Christianity, and from the Germans” (Gress 1998: 261). They are inheritors of the modern republic which is the political emblem of Western civilization; they are Christian, which in this formulation is almost exclusively associated with “the West.” And they are speakers of English. Barclay also deploys another commonplace: that of “primitive Africa.” The Africa that is in the past but can be brought into the present by the “civilized Negros” who have traveled back from the future, that is, “returned” home from the US with the purpose of improving Africa by bringing it into the future they have witnessed.

The Liberia of the West

Liberia was larger than the sovereign territorial state in some important ways: First, the mission of Liberia was the “regeneration of the whole African continent”; second, the communities of African-American settlers were part of a particular social arrangement (in the US) which preceded the sovereign Liberian territorial state; third, a primary justification for its operation in Africa was “race.”
Civilizational communities such as “Africa” and “the West” are conceptual in nature. They are categories which specific actors compete to specify in order to define the relations that make up those categories. As noted by Jackson,

Conceptually, these communities are broader than the sovereign territorial state in a number of ways: they encompass a larger geographical area, precede the sovereign territorial state historically, and in general operate at a more fundamental level than the collectivities over which national governments exercise authority. In a way, sovereign territorial states are "nested" within them, almost as if the territorial borders of the state were surrounded by successive concentric circles of community membership: states belong to a civilization, which in turn belongs to humanity as a whole. (2006: 148)

In a sense, the territorial borders of the Liberian state were, in the terms of Ferguson and Mansbach, “nested” within the US (1996: 50-51) in the sense that while the Liberian state was physically in Africa, it belonged to “Western Civilization,” as the purpose of Liberia from its inception had been to spread the “benefits and blessings” of “Western Civilization” to Africa.

As early as at the 1816 American Society for the Colonizing of The Free People of Color (ACS) meeting in Washington, DC, US Senator Henry Clay had explained that the purpose of the organization was to advocate for and oversee the existence of a colony in Africa for the removal of free blacks from American soil. He noted that free blacks in the US did not enjoy the “immunities of freemen,” nor were they “subject to the incapacities of slaves,” but they also could never be free from “their condition, and the unconquerable prejudice resulting from their color” (West 1970: 98). Thus, Clay continued,

….while it [the ACS] proposed to rid our own country of a useless and pernicious, if not dangerous portion of its population, [it] contemplates the spreading of the arts of civilized life, and the possible redemption from ignorance and barbarism of a benighted quarter of the globe.” (West 1970: 99).

Clay’s comments indicate that from the beginning Liberia was nested in community membership to the US, which itself was nested in “Western civilization,” which in turn had a duty to the larger human community to which it belonged. In the case of Liberia, its duty was to spread the
blessings and benefits of “Western civilization” to Africa. Ironically, however, in this context, even though free African-Americans were charged with this task, they could not be fully part of “Western civilization” because they were of a separate “race” that made them “African.”

*The West in Africa*

As noted previously, the notion of establishing an African colony came out of an American debate over what to do about the increasing number of free African-Americans within the borders of the US. The solution was to put them outside of their borders. Thus, the forming of Liberia took place in the state-making process of the US inasmuch as that process involved determining what was in and what was out. In a pamphlet aimed to garner support from US Congress and citizens on the streets of Washington, DC, the ACS’s founder, Reverend Robert Finley, presented the following justifications for the founding and maintenance of such a colony: 1) It removed an unsavory relative new element of the American society, “We should be cleared of them [free African-Americans]”; 2) Africa would receive “partially civilized and Christianized” settlers and 3) free African-Americans could enjoy a “better situation” than they did in the US (Alexander 1849: 78-79; Staudenraus 1961: 17). In this way, the ACS successfully lobbied the US Congress for funding to bring civilization (conceived of as Christianity), commerce, and culture, to Africa through free African-Americans.

When, in 1822, the first group of freeborn African-Americans and freed slaves had set sail to start a settlement at Cape Mesurado (now Monrovia), they had no notion of political boundaries in their mission. They, and soon the Liberian colony and then the state, were nested in “Western civilization,” and Liberia’s boundaries were simply legitimated based on its civilizational membership. In his first inaugural address, President J.J. Roberts, declared that the
“redemption of Africa from deep degradation, superstition, and idolatry in which she has been so involved” should begin. He continued,

the Gospel, fellow citizens, is yet to be preached to vast numbers inhabiting this dark continent, and I have the highest reason to believe, that was one of the great objects of the Almighty in establishing colonies, that they might be the means of introducing civilization and religion among the barbarous nations of this country; and to what work more noble could our powers be applied than that of bringing up from darkness, debasement, and misery, our fellow men, and shedding abroad over them the light of science and Christianity” (African Repository, 1848: 120-126).

After Liberia’s independence in 1847, Liberia continued the ACS’ commitment to serve “Africa” as a member of “the West.” Liberia in many ways can be seen as a product of the enlightenment and its claims of universality. “Liberia,” socially and politically, was a constituted by the idea that “Western Civilization” was what it meant to be civilized. The structuring of world society along racial lines meant informed the imagining of “Liberia” as the chosen vessel to spread the “Western” values of civilization, commerce, and Christianity to Africans. As such, according to the proponents of the Hinterland policies, Liberia had to be supported in its efforts to extend government authority over the Africans of the hinterland.

This nested commitment (to the West, to civilization, to commerce, to Christianity) justified the very physical deployment of the Liberian Frontier Force (LFF) to subdue the Kpelle and other African peoples in the Hinterland who were rebelling in response to colonial encroachment and were refusing to accept Liberia’s authority in the region. Addressing the legislature on December 12, 1907, Barclay explained the necessity of “pacifying” the hinterland through the use of military force.

The Government through the interior Department has continued its efforts to put an end to tribal wars, to arrest turbulent Chiefs and generally to pacify such Districts as were in a disturbed condition. A considerable staff of District and Assistant Commissioners, some twenty in number, have been maintained for these purposes.
In the Annual Communications of 1906 attention was called to the frontiers and it was pointed out that it would be necessary to occupy posts thereon with an efficient police under proper supervision. As you will learn from the report of the Secretary of the Interior, efforts have been put forth in that direction but they have not been as effective as desired. Our neighbors complain that we do not efficiently police our frontiers, that neglect is a source of trouble and of expense to them. On the other hand, tribes in frontier districts have complained to the Government of Liberia of wrongs received from local officials and protégés of the French and English Colonies. Complaints have only led to recriminations. Each State is disposed to give credence solely to its local representatives. Under the circumstances the absence of proper officials and of an efficient police has been a detriment to the interests of our own State. The establishment of a well drilled and efficient Police Force has therefore become a necessity, and the Government has promised, with your consent to proceed as speedily as possible to effect its formations.” (Dunn 2011: 453)

On February 6, 1908, the Liberian legislature provided for the formation of a frontier force, authorizing the President to “establish a military police force to be called the Liberian Frontier Force” and “to employ some foreign officers to organize and command the same,” assisted by some Liberian officers. The number of foreign officers was not to exceed seven at any time. (Acts Passed by the Legislature of the Republic of Liberia during the Session 1907-1908: 23)

Finally, why and how did Liberia pursue the Hinterland policies? Certain notions of “Africa” and “Liberia,” as articulated by international political actors, played an important role in policy discussions. In this case, the notion of “Liberia” as a settlement of civilized African-Americans was the best agent for establishing political authority in the hinterland and the most effective way of spreading civilization in the African interior; this required that the republic be strengthened and supported, not consumed by French and British colonial activities in West Africa. The ubiquitous commonplace of “Africa” as the rightful homeland of Negros also played a role in justifying the Liberian claim to land in the hinterland, regardless of Liberia’s actual financial or military capabilities to maintain effective control over the region. While Liberia lost some of its land during this time, the diplomatic and military actions taken can best be seen in
the context of the establishment of the boundaries of the modern republic; in all this, the significant effects of the role of public rhetoric in the creation of the Liberian state can be clearly delineated.
CHAPTER 6
LIBERIANIZATION OF AFRICA

During the post-World War II period, global politics as they related to continental Africa were uncertain and dynamic. Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana described the situation in this way:

Now a new situation has arisen in Africa. Some of us have since 1945 thrown off the trammels of imperialism and set up independent sovereign States. Other territories are drawing near to freedom. Nationalist ferment in Africa is gaining momentum. [We] must make a new appraisal of the position which exists in Africa today. (All-African People’s Conference 1958: 3)

From its inception, Liberia’s diplomatic counterparts had been the French and British, as seen in Chapter 4, “Enacting Liberia”; for all three actors, the issue of political management of “Africans” had been a regular subject of discussion. Instead of following through with the dictates of its own Hinterland Policies, however, Liberia continued to function as an insular, inwardly focused settler state. The conception of Liberia as a civilizing agent for the entire continent was largely abandoned in the rhetoric of Liberian politicians during this period. The shift away from the notion of Liberia as a change agent for all of “Africa” in the specific constellation of commonplaces that had come to instantiate “Liberia” in the mid-19th century was in part due to the challenge “Africans” had posed to Liberia’s existence shortly after the establishment of the ACS colony and the rejection of Liberia’s authority over the indigenes during European colonial encroachment, as discussed in Chapter 4. Over time, Liberia had come to view Africans as a threat to its way of life and its survival. However, post-war transitions of global significance to Africa became pressing, particularly as European colonial powers became more interested in postwar rebuilding than in administering their colonies. They were in some ways dependent on two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, who were
uninterested in helping Europe maintain its colonies. In the mid-20th century, Liberian policymakers were forced to grapple with how to relate to the peoples and the emerging states in the new Africa.

Of particular importance was the debate over the future form of political organization of the African continent. Nkrumah argued for a tight political federation of states, deploying a particular notion of “Africa” informed by early 20th century discursive shifts. This rhetorical commonplace, “Africa,” with particular meanings attached, was used in political arguments that ultimately (despite Nkrumah’s efforts) resulted in the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) as a reason for forming a tight political organization resembling the US federal system. Nkrumah reasoned that total political and economic freedom from European domination could occur only through the formation of a strong unified African political entity that could negotiate with major powers. On the other hand, Liberia’s President William Tubman led a faction of African leaders who argued for a much looser association of independent sovereign states with strong economic ties. Tubman did not publicly deny the powerful notion of “Africa” as articulated by Nkrumah, but he did reject it as being sufficient grounds for the establishment of a political union. He justified his position by deploying two important commonplaces central to the 19th century conception of Liberia, “freedom” and “equality.” Tubman argued that forming a kind of United States of Africa would undermine the hard-fought liberation struggles and the newly acquired independence of African states, as they would then be forced to submit to another political authority. Instead, Tubman reasoned that all new states, big and small, should have equal status in the proposed continent-wide political organization. Using as models Liberia’s independence process and the subsequent Liberian society, which in many ways re-created the American southern society from which many of the settlers came (Reef 2002; Clegg
Tubman viewed continued cultural, economic, and political affiliation with former “mother countries” as unproblematic. The debate between Tubman and Nkrumah played out publicly on the international stage and was documented in speeches and discussions leading up to the 1963 founding of the OAU.

**Formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU)**

Nkrumah’s advocacy for a United States of Africa and Tubman’s counterargument for the recognition of the sovereignty of newly independent states were the two poles in the debate over how to forge a continent-wide international organization. Those discussions took place in the period leading up to the 1963 formation of the OAU (Amate 1986; Sesay et al 1984; Cervenka 1977; Andemicael 1976). The rhetorical strategies employed by Liberian political leaders during this debate resulted in the OAU’s being based on a notion that a federated continent-wide organization was illegitimate while requiring at the same time strict adherence to the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention. At the first meeting of the OAU in 1963 in Addis Ababa, 33 African governments signed a charter whose contents reflected Tubman’s argument for an intergovernmental international organization, a kind of United Nations of Africa, instead of Nkrumah’s vision of a political union. The OAU would facilitate coordination and cooperation among sovereign member states in their pursuit of economic and regional interests. Two founding principles were accepted: first, the recognition of international boundaries as they existed at the time of gaining independence, and second, a proscription on interference in the internal affairs of member states. Tubman won this war of visions. But how did he do it? What produced the victory of Tubman’s vision over Nkrumah’s?

The first part of this chapter describes the discursive shifts that made the debate between Tubman and Nkrumah possible. The second part identifies rhetorical deployments in the debate
itself in the context of the All-African People’s Conference of 1958, the Sanniquellie Conference of 1959, the Monrovia Conference of 1959, and the Lagos Conference of 1962 and discusses how the deployment of those rhetorical resources produced a particular outcome. The debate over political organization led to the formation of two associations of African states: the Monrovia Group and the Casablanca Group, which held opposing viewpoints. Ultimately, these two groups converged at the founding conference of the OAU in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1963.

This chapter, then, explains how key Liberian officials influenced the eventual form of the OAU. First, the discursive shifts that allowed for the rhetorical commonplace “Africa” to be used in certain ways are traced from the turn of the 20th century to the 1960s. Next, contemporary political speeches are examined with a focus on the deployment of “Africa” by key individuals to advance certain political arguments. Lastly, this analysis will show how Tubman strategically made use of rhetorical commonplaces to defeat the formation of a continental-wide political federation.

Discursive constructions of “Africa” during the early 20th century: 1900s-1950s

Certain discursive shifts made the debate between Tubman and Nkrumah possible. This historical account of the commonplaces available to these interlocutors sets the stage for the deployment of the terms in the debate. After explaining how the commonplaces came to be, a topographical sketch of the commonplaces will be outlined. The background on the commonplaces sets the stage for the explanation of how their deployment during the debates was able to make certain courses of action acceptable while excluding others. Both in Tubman’s authoritarian Liberia and in Ghana, which was in the process of achieving independence, the legitimation of state policies was an issue for both leaders, who had to render their policies
acceptable at least to a handful of elites. Both did so by drawing on the contemporary discursive context.

As discussed in Chapter 3, “Imagining Liberia and Africa,” by the end of the 19th century, “Africa” was broadly conceived of as the natural homeland of the “Negro race”; as such, it was constitutively different from and inferior to the rest of the world, being “barbaric” and lacking civilization. The prevalence of this notion of “Africa” can be seen in the following 1904 dispatch from East Africa by US president Theodore Roosevelt:

The dark-skinned races that live in the land vary widely. Some are warlike, cattle-owning nomads; some till the soil; some are fisherfolk: some are ape-like naked savages, who dwell in the woods and prey on creatures not much wilder or lower than themselves…Most of the tribes were of pure savages; but here and there were intrusive races of higher type; and in Uganda... lived a people which had advanced to the upper stages of barbarism. (Roosevelt 1910)

On another hunting excursion in East Africa in 1909, Roosevelt commented: “[In Africa,] nature, both as regards wild man and wild beast, did not and does not differ materially from what it was in Europe in the late Pleistocene” (Roosevelt 1910). “Africa” was seen socially and in nearly every other way to be far behind Europe.

Some American-born 19th century Liberian intellectuals like Edward Blyden and Alexander Crummell attempted to address the inequalities inherent in racial theories of their time. However, both Blyden and Crummell largely accepted that “Africa” was the land of racially distinct peoples lacking civilization and barbaric in nature. Two early 20th century African American public figures accepted this notion of Africa as well. William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) DuBois and Marcus Garvey inherited the notion of Africa as a constitutively separate place populated by constitutively separate people. But like Blyden and Crummell, they advanced the claim that there was a link between the destinies of people of the “Negro race” in America and Africa based on their common heritage. As such, the American Negro should be at
the forefront of spreading the benefits of civilization to “Africa,” including self-governance and
the formation of modern republican states in which the rights of the Negro would be recognized
and respected. Although both Du Bois and Garvey operated primarily in the United States, they
contributed to the international dissemination of this notion of Africa, and it shaped the debate
over the form of continental Africa’s political organization during the late 1950s and 1960s.

W. E. B. Du Bois’ “Africa”

W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963) was an internationally respected historian, sociologist,
writer, and activist. Born in Massachusetts, he has been considered the most significant African-
American leader of the early 20th century, the most influential African-American intellectual of
the 20th century, and the “father of Pan-Africanism.” During a time when it was rare for African
American children to attain education beyond primary school, Du Bois became the first African
American to receive a doctoral degree in history from Harvard University. From 1896 to 1910,
Du Bois was Professor of Economics and History at Atlanta University. In 1910, Du Bois, along
with other leading African American figures in the struggle for social and political rights in the
US, founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Du
Bois served on the NAACP’s executive board and as Director of Publicity and Research as well
as editor of its monthly publication, The Crisis. In 1924, Du Bois was appointed Envoy
Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Liberia and was sent to the inauguration of
President King of Liberia as the Special Ambassador of the US government. In 1945, he attended
the founding of the United Nations and was invited to participate in the Fifth Pan-African
Congress held in Manchester, England by conference organizer Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana; at
that conference he was made International President and Permanent Chairman of the Congress.
In 1960, Du Bois was invited by Nkrumah to his inauguration as the first President of Ghana.
The following year he accepted Nkrumah’s invitation to move to Ghana and subsequently became a Ghanaian citizen where he died in August 1963, at the age of 94, and was honored by a state funeral. In addition to contributing to leading magazines and journals, Du Bois wrote 16 nonfiction books, five novels, and two autobiographies. In 1939 he founded the influential journal *Phylon* in order “to record the situation of the colored world and guide its course of development,” and he served as its editor from 1940-1944.

**African American Connection to “Africa”**

Like Crummell, Du Bois conceived of “Africa” as the natural racial homeland of the Negro. Du Bois considered that there were not three but eight "distinctly differentiated races, in the sense in which history tells us the word must be used" (Du Bois 1970: 76): Slavs, Teutons, English, the Romance race, Semites, Hindus, Mongolians, and Negroes, who were of Africa. Du Bois expanded on his concept of race in "The Conservation of Races" (Du Bois 1970: 73-85), an 1897 speech delivered to the American Negro Academy (ANA), which had been founded by Crummell upon his return to the United States after living in Liberia for two decades. The organization comprised African American intellectuals who sought to “secure equality” and “destroy racism” through their scholarship and writings. To this audience, Du Bois declared,

> While these subtle forces have generally followed the natural cleavage of common blood, descent and physical peculiarities, they have at other times swept across and ignored these. At all times, however, they have divided human beings into races, which, while they perhaps transcend scientific definition, nevertheless, are clearly defined to the eye of the historian and sociologist.

> If this be true, then the history of the world is the history, not of individuals, but of groups, not of nations, but of races. . . . What then is a race? It is a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life.

> The question now is: What is the real distinction between these nations? Is it physical differences of blood, color and cranial measurements? Certainly we must all acknowledge that physical differences play a great part. . . . But while
race differences have followed along mainly physical lines, yet no mere physical distinction would really define or explain the deeper differences—the cohesiveness and continuity of these groups. The deeper differences are spiritual, psychical, differences—undoubtedly based on the physical, but infinitely transcending them. (Du Bois 1970: 75-77)

These different races were, he said,

….striving, each in its own way, to develop for civilization its particular message, its particular ideal, which shall help guide the world nearer and nearer that perfection of human life for which we all long, that “one far off Divine event.” (Du Bois 1970: 78)

In this speech, Du Bois shed some light on the 19th century practice of referring to African Americans as well as the inhabitants of the African continent as “Africans.” Reflecting the thinking of the time, Du Bois stated that there were not only physical differences between the races but “deeper differences” that transcended merely physical differences. Each race, including the “Negro race,” was striving to develop its civilization; separately, the races of the world were contributing to the unfolding of history. Based on this racialist tie to “Africa,” he advocated that people of African descent should talk about their ties to the continent and explore ways to address the problems of “Africa.” This series of assertions formed the basis of Pan-Africanism.

Du Bois’ comments were part of a larger project in which he and his audience of highly educated African American professionals were engaged. Through their achievements, the members of the ANA were seeking to prove the equality of the Negro race with all other races. Within this project of dismantling racism by advancing African American achievement, “Africa” remained an albatross around the necks of these accomplished individuals because it fundamentally lacked the civilizational accoutrements which these African Americans were masterfully using to justify their equality with other races. From this viewpoint, “Africa” needed to be uplifted to provide evidence in support of the equality of the “Negro race,” whose homeland was “Africa.” Much as European-Americans had an evolutionary conception of
“Africa” as “in the past,” these educated African Americans viewed “Africans” as uncivilized members of their shared race. Like Blyden, Du Bois argued that “Negroes” had a duty to work together through race-centered projects and organizations to ensure that “Africa” developed its civilization.

The First Pan-African Conference

In 1900, Du Bois attended the first Pan-African Conference, held in London and organized by Henry Sylvester Williams, a Trinidadian lawyer who had relocated to London from Canada. Du Bois chaired the committee that was charged with drafting the conference’s global appeal to the “Nations of the World.” After drafting the “Address to the Nations of the World”, Du Bois was subsequently appointed vice chair of the US branch of the Pan-African Association, the organization established after the Conference. It was in this address that Du Bois’ insight that “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line” first appeared. He wrote,

The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the colour-line—the question as to how far differences of race which show themselves chiefly in the colour of the skin and the texture of the hair are going to be made hereafter the basis of denying to over half of the world the right of sharing to their utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilization. (Sherwood 2011: 101)

The Pan-African Conference appealed for “a great central Negro state of the world” and its “Address to the Nations of the World,” drafted by Du Bois, made the following appeal:

…[I]f by reason of carelessness, prejudice, greed and injustice the black world is to be exploited and ravished and degraded, the results must be deplorable if not fatal, not simply to them but to the high ideals of freedom, justice, and culture which a thousand years of Christian civilization had held before Europe…Let not the mere line of colour or race be drawn between white and black men, regardless of worth or ability…Let not the native of Africa be sacrificed to the greed of gold…Let the British Nation…give as soon as practicable the rights of responsible self-government (i.e., self-government but as a British colony) to the black colonies of Africa and the West Indies. (Sherwood 2011: )
The political domination and economic exploitation of colonial rule, Du Bois said, not only harmed “the black world” but delivered fatal blows to the ideals of “freedom,” “justice,” and “culture” that belonged to European Christian civilization. Implicit in Du Bois’ drafted statement was the common notion of Africa as lacking freedom, justice, culture, and Christian civilization. By the early 20th century, “Africa” was still in need of civilizing. Du Bois argued that African “natives” be given self-government when “practicable” but should still remain a British colony.  

The Notion of “Africa” in Justifications of Colonial Rule  

By 1914, Great Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Belgium, Spain, and Italy had colonies across Africa; only Liberia and the Empire of Ethiopia were independent. Colonialism was justified intellectually by early 20th century studies of Africa, which defended colonial domination based on two prominent anthropological paradigms, diffusionism and structural functionalism. Both theoretical frameworks reflected the popular notion of “Africa” as constitutively different as well as inferior since it was barbaric and lacked civilization.  

Diffusionism theory posited Africa’s past as a series of great migrations in which superior groups had established their dominance over lesser ones. Using the racial classification system expounded in C. G. Seligman’s *Races of Africa* (1930), African ethnic-linguistic communities were classified based on how similar their physical features were to those of Euro-Americans. The narrative of African history based on this framework had it that the Bantu had established their dominance over lesser groups of Africans such as the Khoisan of South Africa and Twa of Central Africa as they moved across the continent. But the Bantu had failed to conquer the lighter-skinned cattle-keeping Hamites, who were clearly superior. Diffusionism presumed that the more the members of an African society physically resembled Anglo-Saxon Europeans, the more advanced the society. However, no Africans, regardless of their group, were
superior to the colonizers. European colonization was justifiable because essentially inferior peoples could benefit from being ruled by a culturally superior group.

The second theoretical framework, structural functionalism, viewed African cultures as closed, static systems. Anthropologists writing within this framework claimed that sharing modern innovations and inventions with Africa would have negative social effects because Africans were incapable of change and resistant to progress, as peoples without history. These theories supported the political objectives of colonial administrators, who argued that the introduction of modern innovations in engineering, medical science and other fields including African political self-rule would shatter the delicate equilibrium of African social systems. Other theorists maintained that Africans actually desired a dependent colonial relationship with superior Europeans.

_Du Bois’ Proposal for a New African State from Post-German Colonies_

During negotiations after the First World War, the question of what to do with Germany’s colonies created an opening for discussions on the future of Africa. The second Pan-African Congress, organized, like the first, by Du Bois, took place in Paris in 1919. Among the 57 delegates, 12 were from 9 African territories, 16 were from the United States, and 21 were from the Caribbean. Most of the delegates were already in France for reasons related to the war. The United States and European states that had colonial holdings, however, refused to issue special visas for delegates to travel to Paris from those countries. The delegates who did participate embraced the Fourteen Points that President Wilson had proposed to create a new postwar world, in particular Wilson’s fifth point, which asserted that the interests of colonial peoples be ascribed “equal weight” in the adjustment of colonial claims after the war. The Congress proposed the creation of a new African state comprised of former German colonies in
Africa. The new African state, importantly, would be administered by the major powers plus “the civilized Negro world.” An article published in the *Chicago Tribune* on January 19th, 1919, stated, 

An Ethiopian Utopia, to be fashioned out of the German colonies, is the latest dream of leaders of the Negro race who are here at the invitation of the United States Government as part of the extensive entourage of the American peace delegation. Robert R. Moton, successor of the late Booker Washington as head of Tuskegee Institute, and Dr. William E. B. Du Bois, Editor of *The Crisis*, are promoting a Pan-African Conference to be held here during the winter while the Peace Conference is on full blast. It is to embrace Negro leaders from America, Abyssinia, Liberia, Haiti and the French and British colonies and other parts of the black world. Its object is to get out of the Peace Conference an effort to modernize the Dark Continent, and in the world reconstruction to provide international machinery looking toward the civilization of the African natives.

The Negro leaders are not agreed upon any definite plan, but Dr. Du Bois has mapped out a scheme which he has presented in the form of a memorandum to President Wilson. It is quite Utopian, and it has less than a Chinaman's chance of getting anywhere in the Peace Conference, but it is nevertheless interesting. As “self-determination” is one of the words to conjure with in Paris nowadays, the Negro leaders are seeking to have it applied, if possible, in a measure to their race in Africa. Dr. Du Bois sets forth that while the principle of self-determination cannot be applied to uncivilised peoples, yet the educated blacks should have some voice in the disposition of the German colonies. He maintains that in settling what is to be done with the German colonies the Peace Conference might consider the wishes of the intelligent Negroes in the colonies themselves, the Negroes of the United States and of South America and the West Indies, the Negro Governments of Abyssinia, Liberia and Haiti, the educated Negroes in French West Africa and Equatorial Africa, and in British Uganda, Nigeria, Basutoland, Swaziland, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, Gambia and Bechuanaland and in the Union of Africa.

Dr. Du Bois' dream is that the Peace Conference could form an internationalized Africa, to have as its basis the former German colonies, with their 1,000,000 square miles and 12,500,000 population. “To this,” his plan reads, “could be added by negotiation the 800,000 square miles and 9,000,000 inhabitants of Portuguese Africa. It is not impossible that Belgium could be persuaded to add to such a State the 900,000 square miles and 9,000,000 natives of the Congo, making an international Africa with over 2,500,000 square miles of land and over 20,000,000 people.

This Africa for the Africans could be under the guidance of international organization. The governing international commission should represent not simply Governments, but modern culture, science, commerce, social reform, and religious philanthropy. It must represent not simply the white world, but the civilized Negro world.
With these two principles the practical policies to be followed out in the government of the new States should involve a thorough and complete system of modern education, built upon the present government, religion, and customary law of the churches. Within ten years 20,000,000 black children ought to be in school. Within a generation young Africa should know the essential outlines of modern culture. From the beginning the actual general government should use both coloured and white officials.

We can, if we will, inaugurate on the dark continent a last great crusade for humanity. With Africa redeemed, Asia would be safe and Europe indeed triumphant.” (Padmore 1945: 13-14)

The notion of “Africa” in the article and in the plan drafted by Du Bois and quoted in the article is familiar. The objective of the Congress was to help the “dark continent” and civilize the “African natives.” Du Bois’ assertion that the “civilized Negro world” must be involved in the creation of an Africa for the Africans echoes the mission of “Liberia” described in Chapter 5.

Du Bois used the term “talented tenth” to refer to those intellectuals adept in “modern culture,” which in this case was synonymous with Christian civilization or so called “Western” ways of life, who would lead the Negro race to equality with “whites.” Like Blyden, Du Bois was convinced that the advancement of the Negro was the responsibility of a well-educated and cultured “black” elite. Du Bois believed that education was central to the uplifting of the “race”:

Work alone will not do it unless inspired by the right ideals and guided by intelligence. Education must not simply teach work—it must teach Life. The Talented Tenth of the Negro race must be made leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among people. No others can do this work, and Negro colleges must train men for it. The Negro race, like all other races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men.” (Du Bois 1903: 33-75)

Similarly, the educated Christian African American settlers of “Liberia” had as their mission to redeem and educate “Africa.” Like Blyden, Du Bois accepted the notion of racial separateness as well as the responsibility of the “Talented Tenth” of the Negro race to uplift Africans because of the purported connections between the destinies of the “Negro race” in the world and on the continent of Africa. Blyden and Du Bois articulated the notion of “Africa” in their writings and
speeches to international audiences, and thought of “Africa” as the natural homeland of the “Negro race,” a place in need of the benefits of civilization, including “freedom,” “justice” (understood as American-style republicanism), “culture” (understood as modern European American ways of life) and Christianity.

Subsequent Pan-African Conferences


No one denies great differences of gift, capacity, and attainment among individuals of all races, but the voice of Science, Religion, and practical Politics is one in denying the God-appointed existence of super-races, or of races, naturally and inevitably and eternally inferior…

That in the vast range of time, one group should in its industrial technique, or social organization, or spiritual vision, lag a few hundred years behind another, or forge fitfully ahead, or come to differ decidedly in thought, deed and ideal, is proof of the essential richness and variety of human nature, rather than proof of the co-existence of demi-gods and apes in human form. The doctrine of racial equality does not interfere with individual liberty: rather it fulfils it. And of all the various criteria of which masses of men have in the past been prejudged and classified, that of the colour of the skin and texture of the hair is surely the most adventitious and idiotic… (Padmore 1945: 19)

Although very few participants were from continental Africa, the congresses also brought together activists and delegates from the United States, Ethiopia, Liberia, Haiti and the colonies, as well as those from the Caribbean and Africa who lived in Europe, to demand self-governance for the majority of the colonies’ inhabitants. As Du Bois himself observed,

The idea of one Africa uniting the thought and ideals of all native peoples of the dark continent belongs to the twentieth century, and stems naturally from the West Indies and the United States. Here various groups of Africans, quite separate in origin, became so united in experience, and so exposed to the impact of a new culture, that they began to think of Africa as one idea and one land. (Du Bois 1945: 13)
Altogether, the four congresses helped to disseminate the common idea of “Africa” as a homogeneous entity but ultimately failed in their attempt to influence the policies of the colonial powers, especially with regard to the German colonies, which Britain, Belgium and France ultimately divided among themselves. This notion of Africa as a unified whole was adopted by Nkrumah in his efforts to establish a continent-wide political organization that would be more federal than intergovernmental in scope and mission.

Marcus Garvey’s “Africa” and the Back-to-“Africa” Movement 1920s-1930s

In the 1920s, a new back-to-Africa movement led by Caribbean-born Marcus Garvey further disseminated the notion of a unified Africa, that is, “Africa” as “one idea and one land.” Like Du Bois, Garvey viewed “Africa” as a transnational community based on membership in the same “race”, not on shared culture. In an effort to instill racial pride in disaffected communities, Garvey preached on the glories of Africa’s past in churches and on street corners on Harlem. Garvey’s movement was decidedly a people’s movement, with adherents largely reflecting urban African American communities’ disillusionment with the persistent social and economic hardships of racial discrimination in the United States. Garvey instructed his followers to abandon dreams of achieving equality in the United States and to go back to Africa to create a new state within which their rights would be recognized.

Garvey was born in the British colony of Jamaica in 1887. He left formal schooling at 14 to become a printer’s apprentice. In 1906, Garvey went to the capital city of Kingston, where he eventually took the position of vice-president of his trade union. In Kingston, Garvey encountered Dr. Robert Love, a Bahamian-born US-trained physician, whose newspaper, the Jamaica Advocate, advocated race-centered organizing against colonial rule and reported on news from African American communities outside of Jamaica. In 1909, Garvey joined and then
became the secretary of the National Club, a national organization that advocated selfgovernment for colonies. In 1910, the organization dissolved and Garvey travelled to Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador, Nicaragua and London, where he engaged in discussions on the plight of “Negroes” around the world with Africans and people from the Caribbean at the offices of Egyptian-British journalist Dusé Mohamed Ali’s journal, *African Times and Orient Review*. Garvey returned to Jamaica and founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914, a political organization with a mission to establish “a universal confederacy among the race, to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and unity among the race”; to “promote racial pride and reclaim the fallen”; “to promote conscientious Christian worship among the native tribes of Africa and assist in the civilizing of backward tribes of Africa”; and to establish educational facilities and “worldwide commercial and industrial intercourse” (James 2009: 177). As referenced in its slogan “One God! One Aim! One Destiny!” Garvey’s UNIA embraced the notion of a common destiny for the Negro race as well as evincing a Christian missionary fervor. As Crummell had done in the 19th century, Garvey viewed “Africa” as one land populated by peoples who were family members but who fundamentally lacked Christian civilization. Similar to the 19th century concept of “Liberia,” Garvey’s UNIA was to participate in the regeneration and redemption of “Africa.”

Hundreds joined UNIA in Jamaica, prompting Garvey to take the message to the United States in 1916, a time when lynching, segregation, and African American migration to urban centers were widespread. Garvey regularly spoke in churches and open air forums in urban centers in the United States. The charismatic Garvey’s message resonated among the disenfranchised urban African American working class. With the opening of the first office of UNIA in New York, the organization’s membership increased exponentially. By June 1919, the
organization reported 5,500 members in Harlem, associations in 25 states, and divisions in the West Indies, Central America and West Africa with an estimated 2 million followers (Grant 2008: 164). C.L.R. James has noted, “[T]here has never been a Negro movement anywhere like the Garvey movement, and few movements in any country can be compared to it in growth and intensity” (Adi and Sherwood 2003). UNIA’s weekly newspaper encouraged the proliferation of divisions and branches independently established by adherents, who collected membership dues and hosted debates, lecture classes and other community events. The notion of “Africa” preached by UNIA became common in the rhetorical landscape.

Membership in a transnational community based on “race” came with certain commitments to that community. In the case of the “backward tribes of Africa,” African Americans were encouraged to participate in the civilizing mission in order to advance their African “brothers’” spiritually, educationally, and economically. Garvey explained the demand of this racial brotherhood in an article entitled “The Purpose of Man’s Creation” in the following manner: “Nature placed each race originally in his habitat…the white man was from Europe…the black man was from Africa…each group must find a sphere from which to operate, a sphere that is specifically different from the other group, so that the group may be able to maintain itself in the future…” (Garvey 1938: 16). Garvey’s 20th century notion of Africa was in significant ways still the Dark Continent imagined by African Americans in the 19th century, in need of members of the same “race” to develop the continent for the fulfillment of a divine plan.

_Campaigning for Emigrants to Travel Back to Africa_

In order to convince African Americans to perform the missionary work required to redeem “Africa,” Garvey launched a campaign to make “Africa” desirable to African Americans. Garvey spread the message that “Africa” had a glorious past before “white” domination and
exploitation. He explained, “Africa was peopled with a race of cultured black men, who were masters in art, science and literature; men who were cultured and refined; men, who, it was said, were like the gods. . . . Black men, you were once great; you shall be great again” (Garvey 1969: 77). Colin Grant, in his biography of Marcus Garvey, notes,

To a majority of black people, scattered across America and around the globe at the turn of the twentieth century, Africa was just as dirty a word as Uncle Tom; a source of embarrassment, the skeleton in the ancestral cupboard which, if they stopped to think about it, was an uncomfortable reminder of their slave past. Africans were depicted in cartoons as a comical, conquered, barely civilised people with bones through their noses, riding semi-naked on the backs of alligators down the Zambezi. Many in a Garvey audience would have heard for the first time “Africa” spoken of as the motherland. For the migrants who thronged to UNIA massed meetings, “the old country” meant Louisiana or Alabama. Their connections had been severed from Africa generations previously; maybe, after 200 years, they were still aware of one or two words and mutated customs that had survived but beyond that there was no history; beyond that was only darkness. (2008: 162)

In the UNIA newspaper, the Negro World, Garvey argued for a self-governing continental Africa free from European political domination. In line with the arguments for the concept of “Liberia”, “Africa” was to be governed by black men. Garvey preached,

Each race should be proud and stick to its own,  
And the best of what they are should be shown;  
This is no shallow song of hate to sing,  
But over Blacks there should be no white king.  
Every man on his own foothold should stand,  
Claiming a nation and a Fatherland!  
White, Yellow and Black should make their own laws,  
And force no one-sided justice with flaws.  
Say! Africa for the African,  
Like America for the Americans:  
This the rallying cry for the nation,  
Be it in peace or revolution. (James 2009: 135-136)

Notions of racial separateness and of members of the same Negro race as the appropriate means for civilizing Africa, both of which were central to the 19th century concept of “Liberia”, appear throughout Garvey’s speeches and writings. As a result, the liberation of Africa from
European colonial rule was a central preoccupation for Garvey and UNIA. Similar to another key aspect of the 19th century concept of “Liberia”, an “Africa” governed by the black man for the black man would serve as a refuge, a Utopia, a Promised Land in which freedoms, rights and legitimate aspirations for a life of happiness could be pursued. Garvey proclaimed in his speeches, “Wake up Ethiopia! Wake up Africa! Let us work towards the one glorious end of a free, redeemed and mighty nation” (Garvey 1969: 5). Black liberation theologian James Cone observed,

In a world where blackness was a badge of degradation and shame, Garvey transformed it into a symbol of honor and distinction...“Africa for the Africans” was the heart of his message. In 1920 Garvey called the first International Convention of Negro Peoples of the World, and 25,000 delegates from twenty-five countries met in New York City. A redeemed Africa, governed by a united black race proud of its history, was the theme which dominated Garvey’s speeches. (West 2003: 756)

Echoing Blyden, Garvey charged that “Africa” must be redeemed by the black man. In a redeemed and regenerated Africa, the black man, according to Garvey, could attend to his own affairs. Garvey argued,

White and black will learn to respect each other only when they cease to be active competitors in the same countries for the same things in politics and society. The races can be friendly and helpful to each other, but the laws of nature separate us to the extent of each and every one developing by itself. We want an atmosphere all our own ....No man can govern another's house as well as himself. (James 2009: 135)

In the speeches and writings of both Du Bois and Garvey, then, “Africa” was a homogeneous entity, racially and culturally separate from “the West,” in need of civilization, redemption and regeneration, and racially tied to Negroes in the Americas. Both leaders urged African Americans to uplift their African brothers on the continent. Garvey implored African Americans to return to Africa to carry out the redemptive work and to establish an independent
African nation. Du Bois, on the other hand, saw cultured and highly educated African Americans and European Americans as necessary overseers for any state governed by African brothers.

"Africa” in the 1930s and 1940s

In Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept (1940), Du Bois explicitly rejected “race” as referring to any biological difference but rather to skin color only. Du Bois continued to argue that there was a link between the destiny of African Americans and Africa. Protesting the treatment of Africans as second-class citizens in world politics did not require any scientific definition of “race” because, he wrote,

All this has nothing to do with the plain fact that throughout the world today organized groups of men by monopoly of economic and physical power, legal enactment and intellectual training are limiting with determination and unflagging zeal the development of other groups; and that the concentration particularly of economic power today puts the majority of mankind into a slavery to the rest. (Du Bois 1940: 137-138)

Du Bois remained a Pan-Africanist committed to a political program that would bind all members of the black race together. An unintended consequence of this kind of political organization, however, was that color became conflated with culture. Du Bois attempted to explain his connection to Africa by considering poet Countee Cullen's question, “What is Africa to me?” Du Bois wrote,

Once I should have answered the question simply: I should have said “fatherland” or perhaps better “motherland” because I was born in the century when the walls of race were clear and straight; when the world consisted of mutually exclusive races; and even though the edges might be blurred, there was no question of exact definition and understanding of the meaning of the word [Africa]. . . .

Since [the writing of "The Conservation of Races"] the concept of race has so changed and presented so much of contradiction that as I face Africa I ask myself: what is it between us that constitutes a tie which I can feel better than I can explain? Africa is of course my fatherland. Yet neither my father nor my father's father ever saw Africa or knew its meaning or cared overmuch for it. My mother's folk were closer and yet their direct connection, in culture and race, became tenuous; still my tie to Africa is strong. On this vast continent were born
and lived a large portion of my direct ancestors going back a thousand years or more. The mark of their heritage is upon me in color and hair. These are obvious things, but of little meaning in themselves; only important as they stand for real and more subtle differences from other men. Whether they do or not, I do not know nor does science know today.

But one thing is sure and that is the fact that since the fifteenth century these ancestors of mine and their descendants have had a common history; have suffered a common disaster and have one long memory. The actual ties of heritage between the individuals of this group vary with the ancestors that they have in common with many others: Europeans and Semites, perhaps Mongolians, certainly American Indians. But the physical bond is least and the badge of color relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Seas. It is this unity that draws me to Africa. (Du Bois 1940: 116-117)

African Americans were tied to Africa through “common history,” through sharing “one long memory” of the “social heritage of slavery.” Pan-African unity was thus rooted in the common history of “discrimination and insult.” This unity or solidarity was based on race (a flimsy basis for unity since there is no such thing, biologically speaking, as race). The notion of “Africa,” a homogenous cultural entity racially tied to African Americans but different from African Americans, persisted culturally. Africans remained different from their African American brothers because “Africa” still lacked Christian civilization, which the American Negro possessed as a result of living in the modern cultures of “the West.”

In 1945, Du Bois was invited to the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester, England by Kwame Nkrumah. Unlike the previous Pan-African conferences, this one had a substantial number of African participants who came directly from the continent. It had, in fact, been organized by Africans from the colonial territories, who in the aftermath of World War II were trying to reform or overthrow the colonial system. These Africans of different ethnicities and shades largely accepted that what bound them together was that their African culture was essentially different from the cultures of Europeans and Americans. In other words, much as
African Americans accepted the notion of race as something they shared, these post-war anti-colonial activists accepted the conception of “Africa” as a homogeneous entity, a unified cultural community as articulated by Du Bois and Garvey in the early 20th century.

“Africa” in Debates about the Form of Political Organization of Continental Africa

In any account of how a rhetorical commonplace contributed to producing a particular political outcome, two mechanisms are particularly useful: “breaking” and “joining.” According to Patrick Jackson, “[b]reaking” describes a situation in which a speaker commandeers a commonplace and thus de-links that commonplace from other commonplaces with which it had been closely connected. In contrast, “joining” involves a speaker’s linking a “commonplace to others in such a way as to point in a determinate policy direction” (Jackson 2003: 44-45). Unlike imagining, inventing or specifying a commonplace such as “Liberia” or “Africa,” breaking and joining take place in the process of advancing claims as to why a political action is the correct one to follow. The effectiveness of breaking and joining in achieving the desired outcome involves 1) the history of the commonplace; 2) the connections among commonplaces created by the speaker; and 3) the opponent’s alternative arrangement of connections between the commonplaces. In this process, the commonplace is used as the grounds for action, the reason for pursuing a particular political path instead of another; thus, the meaning of the commonplace is stabilized.

The various positions in the debate about the form of political organization on the African continent can be represented as a network of commonplaces, specific configurations of which, when used in the context of public debate, gave rise to different policy directions. The position that Africa had to be united politically had, at its rhetorical core, three central notions: a) all of Africa had a common (or common enough) sociohistorical core and as a result of that shared
history the commitment to racial politics must trump cultural differences; b) political and economic freedom from European domination could only be achieved through continent-wide cooperation; c) only unwavering collaboration amongst African states would allow African states to achieve equality in international political and economic systems.

Several commitments justified the regional cooperation position. First, the freedom of African states and peoples had to be protected (because Africans had just fought the colonizers for that very reason; in addition, and more importantly for Liberia, it was already and intended to remain a sovereign independent state). Secondly, equality among all states—big or small—had to be recognized, including non-interference in the internal affairs of another sovereign state. This was particularly important for Liberia; because it had been founded as a “Promised Land” for settlers seeking a life denied them in the United States, and because it was empowered by a mission to “Christianize, civilize and commercialize” “Africa”, the state had a specific kind of relationship with the Africans within its borders. For example, it was not until 1964 that the African population of the Liberian interior was granted full voting rights, and then only for those who paid a hut tax. Thirdly, Africa should emulate the United States and its allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); that is, it should follow the liberal democratic way, not the communism of the Soviet Union. Advocates of both Nkrumah’s plan of an African political union and Tubman’s blueprint for a regional cooperation organization made arguments within this rhetorical framework, but there was little deviation from the framework.

The notions “liberty,” “freedom” and “democracy” as ideal forms of social organization joined together to form a prominent commonplace in that debate over the form of political organization of the African continent. “Africa,” socialism, anticommunism, Liberian isolationism, Liberia’s American-ness, and the liberation of the continent formed the rhetorical
topography in which the debates about the postwar African continental politics took place. As described in the following sections, from these rhetorical resources advocates on both sides of the debate constructed their arguments and as a result, so to speak, “locked down” their specific meanings.

*Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s Independence, and the Argument for a United States of Africa*

Nkrumah’s political activism began in the United States, where he came to study at Lincoln University in 1935. There he was a member of UNIA, the Council on African Affairs, and the Communist Party. Nkrumah studied Garvey’s notion of a global African nationalist identity (James 2009: 177-291). In 1945, Nkrumah continued his political activism and studies in London, organizing the Manchester Pan-African Congress for the Trinidadian pan-Africanist George Padmore of the Pan-African Federation. It was in Britain that Nkrumah began calling himself by his “African” name of Kwame instead of his Christian name, Francis, to more closely identify himself with the black-power, anti-imperialist, Marxist-inspired movement of which both Du Bois and Padmore were outspoken advocates. Nkrumah became active in the West African National Secretariat (WANS), the Union of African Socialist Republics, and the British Communist Party, publishing a text called *Towards Colonial Freedom* in which he called for the colonial masses to achieve independence. Nkrumah also travelled to Paris to discuss plans for West African unity that would lead to independence, with Senegalese (HOA) Leopold Senghor and other African representatives in the French National Assembly (Adi and Sherwood 2003: 142-148).

By 1947, when Nkrumah returned to Ghana to become general secretary of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) and then the leader of the Convention Peoples’ Party (CPP), his position that complete African national unity was necessary for a truly independent Africa had
been argued in the United States, Britain, with political and trade union leaders in Sierra Leone, and in Liberia (Boahen; Nkrumah 1965). In a 1952 speech in Liberia as part of a campaign to establish an independent union of West Africa, Nkrumah referred to “Africa” as grounds for the establishment of such a political union. He declared, “Africa for the Africans! A free and independent state in Africa. We want to be able to govern ourselves in this country of ours without outside interference” (Nkrumah 1973: 152-153). Speaking of Africa as one country, rather than as a continent, emphasized his vision of the oneness of Africa. In so doing, Nkrumah used language typically reserved for a sovereign state seeking to protect its internal affairs. Continental Africa’s freedom from outside interference from former “mother countries” or emerging superpowers was inextricably linked to continent-wide close cooperation.

On the occasion of accepting the Ghanaian independence constitution in July 1953 (although the constitution would not be fully implemented until 1957 at the Gold Coast Parliament), Nkrumah uttered these words:

> Honourable Members . . . The eyes and ears of the world are upon you; yea, our oppressed brothers throughout this vast continent of Africa and the New World are looking to you with desperate hope, as an inspiration to continue their grim fight against cruelties which we in this corner of Africa have never known—cruelties which are a disgrace to humanity, and to the civilisation which the white man has set himself to teach us. (Nkrumah 1973: 166-171)

In his remark about the expectations of “our oppressed brothers throughout this vast continent of Africa and the New World,” Nkrumah was claiming an African civilization’s identity and drawing the boundaries of that identity as a transnational community based on a link between the past experience and future destinies of Africans on the continent and in the New World. Thus early 20th century notions of Africa as a sociohistorical and cultural community that had been disseminated in the United States appeared in Nkrumah’s discourse in Africa itself.
With his arguments for the establishment of a continent-wide federation of states, Nkrumah adopted with some modification the rhetorical commonplace “Africa” as specified in the speeches and writings of both Du Bois and Garvey. He utilized the notion of “Africa” as a uniform and unified cultural community, as had Du Bois and Garvey, but broke with the associated commonplace of a dark land populated by backward peoples in need of Christian civilization. For Nkrumah the political and economic independence of Africa depended on its unity, and political integration was the best way to secure independence for African populations. The conception of “Africa” as a cultural community distinct from the European colonizers served as a compelling reason for forming a political organization by, for, and of the peoples of continental Africa. In his speech on Ghana’s Independence Day on March 6, 1957, Nkrumah declared,

…when the African is given a chance he can show the world that he is somebody! We have awakened. We will not sleep anymore. Today, from now on, there is a new African in the world! That new African is ready to fight his own battles and show that after all, the black man is capable of managing his own affairs. We are going to demonstrate to the world, to the other nations, that we are prepared to lay our own foundation. (Kiruthu 2001: 28)

Nkrumah took this opportunity to speak for and about the whole of Africa in front of an audience consisting of millions of Ghanaians as well as much of the world. Nesting Ghana in “Africa,” Nkrumah declared that “[o]ur [Ghana’s] independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of Africa.” Thus, he tethered the reality of a free, independent Ghana to that of the rest of the continent, which was still “unfree” with the exception of Liberia, Ethiopia and Ghana itself. Nkrumah’s rhetorical deployment of “Africa” highlighted the distinctiveness of the continent as separate from other world communities and helped to advance his argument for a particular form of political organization of the African continent. Additionally, Nkrumah continued that there were commitments that come with belonging to
“Africa.” Nkrumah cautioned the millions of Ghanaians present that “my last warning to you is that you are to stand firm behind us.” In this case, the “us” referenced was not simply the state officials of Ghana, but all of “Africa.” To refuse membership and its associated commitments to this community was outright betrayal and a fundamental, unforgivable disrespect of “our [Africans’] difficulties, imprisonments, hardships and suffering.” Nkrumah’s rhetorical strategy makes explicit his position that complete African political unity would be required to achieve real independence for the continent.

The configuration of core commonplaces of Nkrumah’s Africanist argument can be represented in a rhetorical network diagram. In Figures 1 and 2, the rhetorical cores of the Africanist and the Regionalist positions are mapped to show the differences between proponents and opponents of the formation of a Ghana-led continental African political entity. The opposing positions necessarily made use of the same notions such as “Africa,” “equality,” “freedom,” and “unity” but differences are apparent in the way the notions are combined and their prioritization. The differences exist because language is a shared public resource; without common terms, there could be no debate between the two stances. The Africanist position is depicted in Figure 1.
The rhetorical core of Figure 1 uses “Africa” – understood as the community of black indigenous inhabitants of the continent organized in opposition to colonialism and sharing a commitment to pursuing the political freedom and economic equality of all members – as grounds for forming a political union. This Africanist argument can be found in Nkrumah’s opening speech at the All African Conference in 1958. Nkrumah called on the Peoples of Africa [to] unite! We [Africa] have nothing to lose but our chains…The liberation of Africa is the task of Africans. We Africans can emancipate ourselves. We welcome the expressions of support from others, for it is good to know that we are wished well in our struggle; but we alone can grapple with the monster of Imperialism which has all but devoured us. (All-African People’s Conference Speeches 1958: 3)

This argument was clearly an attempt to frame the liberation of the continent in an Africanist way. In the same speech, Nkrumah continued,

…the burning desire among all the peoples of Africa [is] to establish a community of their own, to give political expression in some form or another to the African Personality. It is this desire which animated my Government and the Government of Guinea to initiate recently certain action which we hope will constitute the nucleus of a United West Africa which will gain the adherence of other independent States as well as those yet to come. We further hope that this coming together will evolve eventually into a Union of African States just as the original thirteen American colonies have now developed into the 49 States constituting the American community. We are convinced that it is only in the inter-dependence of such African unity that we shall be able truly to safeguard our individual national freedom. (All-African People’s Conference Speeches 1958: 6)

The use of the commonplaces “African Personality” and “Africa” made possible certain actions to lay the groundwork for the formation of a Union of African States. At a conference of more than 300 political leaders from across the continent in a newly independent Ghana, Nkrumah advanced a proposal for the future political organization of the continent. According to Nkrumah, Africans in the three-fourths of the continent living under the oppression of colonial rule were important to Ghana and Guinea because they were all part of a common cultural community. This claim by itself did not support the establishment of a political union, but the
action to form a political union would be required to ensure the protection of “Africa.” The argument would not have had as much impact if the commonplace had not been so rhetorically powerful.

*William Tubman and Liberia’s Isolationist Regional Response to the Africanist Position*

William V. S. Tubman was an attorney who was elected to the Senate from Maryland County in 1923. In 1937, he was appointed associate justice of the Supreme Court. Tubman was sworn in as president in January 1944 (Dunn et al. 2001: 337). Relationships with members of the ruling oligarchy were central to the success of any Liberian political leader. For example, President C.D.B. King (1920-1930) was the previous president’s (Arthur Barclay, 1904-1912) Attorney General. King’s Secretary of State, Edwin Barclay (Arthur’s nephew), succeeded him. Edwin Barclay (1930-1944) appointed Senator W.V.S. Tubman to the Supreme Court. Justice Tubman succeeded President Barclay, whose Secretary of State, C.L. Simpson, became Tubman’s first vice-president. The history of the Liberian government is full of examples of such close associations. The leadership was closely held, and very few indigenous Liberians were allowed to become members of the government (Hlophe 1979).

In the debate about the political organization of Africa, the position advanced by Tubman did not oppose the notion of “Africa”; after all, the establishment of Liberia had been justified by the racial connection between African American settlers and Africans, an argument that remained important to discussions of Liberian identity in the early 20th century. Unlike Nkrumah, whose political aspirations were rooted in American Pan-Africanism, Tubman was part of a Liberian political system that had largely abandoned its 19th century mission to civilize all of “Africa” and had instead focused inward, especially as European countries consolidated their African empires by the early 20th century. The rhetorical commonplace “Liberia” in the early 20th
century retained the notion of a land for settlers in which they could participate in social and political relations free from racial discrimination and oppression as well as a kind of “Promised Land” for an educated and enlightened elite group of descendants of the 19th century settlers.

Given the closely held nature of Liberian leadership, the commonplace of “Africa for the Africans,” was viewed as potentially threatening to the Liberian government (Holloway 1981; ). Tubman advocated an intra-African continental policy that provided for emerging African states to keep the borders they had at the time of independence, thus protecting Liberia’s borders. From Tubman’s point of view, any African political union or federation should be discouraged and a regional inter-governmental organization formed instead. Likewise, Tubman did not discourage a continued reliance, culturally, economically, and politically, on the “mother countries” or former colonizers. Within a regional organization, Tubman argued for African states to cooperate in economic, social, cultural and political spheres.

Tubman’s problem was that he had to devise a way to disrupt the rhetorical core of Nkrumah’s Africanist position and de-legitimate its associated policies. Tubman did this by de-linking the notions of shared African identity and political self-determination and by linking the notion of self-determination to the individual states instead of to continental Africa. Tubman argued that African states and peoples had different needs, capabilities and resources; consequently, their primary relationships were not necessarily to be found on the continent. In the interests of “Africa,” Tubman argued that these emerging states and peoples should not be subjected to the constraints of communism, a linkage which was implicit in Nkrumah’s position, nor should the authority of new African political leaders be subject to a continent-wide political structure.
The prominent configurations in the argument for a regional inter-governmental organization of continental Africa can also be depicted in the form of a rhetorical network diagram. In contrast to Figure 1, which represents Nkrumah’s Africanist position, the central commonplaces associated with Tubman’s position are depicted in Figure 2.

The central points of Tubman’s position were two closely connected commonplaces of American nationalism, “equality” and “freedom,” which produced the familiar notion of Liberia as a Little America on the continent, isolated from the neighboring Africans and European colonizers, both of whom posed a threat to Liberia. “Anti-communism” and “anti-colonialism” were peripheral to the rhetorical core of freedom and equality. Opposition to this Regionalist position would involve breaking from the ideals of equality and freedom by using the notion of “Africa” as depicted in Figure 1.

It is important to note that Tubman did not challenge the biologically-determined racial notion of "Africa." Tubman was operating with a notion of "Africa" as articulated by Crummell and prevalent in the 19th century, specifically, that races are families and that not all family members are the same. The creation of Liberia was justified in part by the responsibility of the enlightened civilized members of the race (African American settlers) to advance the inhabitants
of Africa. Shared “race” was to be the basis of national solidarity, and as with members of the same family, the American-Liberian settlers were to love their African brothers and sisters in spite of their “faults.” There was a persistent fear among the early settlers (including ACS agents) that they might succumb to the heathenism and primitiveness of the Africans that surrounded their settlements on the coast. While the early African American settlers’ mission was to civilize as part of their duty to race and country, there was simultaneously a desire to protect themselves from the heathenism that surrounded them. Tubman continued this dynamic in arguing for regional cooperation instead of political federation.

*Liberia’s Approach to Africa during the Post-war Period of Colonial Transfers*

Until Ghana’s independence on March 6, 1957, Liberia had been an insular state, choosing to focus on developing coastal settlements and recreating the American society from which the colonists had fled. Despite regular and extensive trade relations within West Africa, Liberia was located on the continent without really being an African state and was largely isolated from continental affairs. Liberia’s relations in West Africa were not with indigenous political leaders but with their colonial governments. As described in Chapter 5, Liberia’s “foreign policy” had more to do with the indigenous people that it claimed within its borders than it did with other countries in Africa, as these indigenous African communities had operated independent of the Liberian state until the implementation of the Hinterland Policies of 1905. Liberia’s policies towards other African countries during that time can be characterized as indifferent, fear-based and distrustful. Thus, like Liberian officials at the turn of the century, Tubman saw Nkrumah and the newly independent states as a threat to Liberia’s existence.

In all of this, two recurring components of debates within Liberia about Liberian identity and foreign policy were the rhetorical commonplaces “Liberia” and “Africa.” The enduring
constellation of commonplaces that came to instantiate “Liberia” included the notions of 1) liberty for the 2) educated and enlightened African American settlers, who would 3) redeem “Africa” by 4) spreading the universal benefits of 5) civilization 6) to the whole of the continent. In this context, “Africa” was broadly conceived of as the natural homeland of the “Negro race”, which was essentially different as well as inferior, since it was barbaric and lacked civilization. In “Africa,” the 19th century project of “Liberia” was the means through which the tension between racial separateness and the universal application of civilization would be resolved. However, colonization during the late 19th century and its consolidation during the first decades of the 20th century meant that Liberia’s leadership mission on the continent was curtailed. The independence of Ghana and Nkrumah’s Africanist proposal for a continent-wide African polity required Tubman to respond by articulating Liberia’s continental policy.

On Liberia’s Independence Day, July 26, 1957, just four months after Ghana’s, President Tubman fumbled for a coherent position about what Liberia’s policy towards the continent would be. While Tubman was unclear about Liberia’s position, he was convinced that forming a political union in the name of “Africa” was not Liberia’s preferred position. Instead, Tubman deployed the commonplaces of “freedom” and “equality” when talking about the new African states, specifically the attainment and preservation of liberty and equality among the states of the world. Although Tubman’s speech is a monologue, as most political speeches are, he was actually engaging in what amounted to a public conversation with Nkrumah. In that speech, Tubman did not explicitly reject the notion of Africa as a cultural community. Instead, he de-linked “Africa” from anti-colonialism, a commonplace that helped justify the creation of a supranational African state. He remarked,

In this era when the peoples of Africa, who have long been subjugated and under colonial trust and other administrations, are gaining their independence towards
which we have endeavoured to contribute greatly in the United Nations as the oldest African republic, we take particular pride and regard it our duty to lend them further support when and wherever required, because we have long upheld the principles that all men are born equally free and independent and entitled to the right of self-determination. It is inevitable that the time must come when all men will be free to enjoy those rights and blessings which a Beneficent Creator has bestowed upon them. (Townsend 1969: 185-186)

Tubman was connecting the fight against colonialism to legitimate aspirations for equality and freedom—principles which, as he noted, were connected to the notion of Liberia. Colonialism must be fought because of Africans’ inalienable, God-given rights to freedom and self-determination. As discussed in Chapter 3, these commonplaces, and specifically the idea that African Americans had been bestowed with these God-given rights, had been used to justify the concept of Liberia. But Tubman’s speech made no appeal to African nations to express themselves politically in the form of an organization to fight colonialism. In Tubman’s view, emerging African states were embarking upon a path Liberia had already trodden.

With respect to the leadership of Africa, which Nkrumah had clearly indicated Ghana’s willingness to assume, Tubman was conspicuously quiet. Some scholars have suggested that Tubman was consciously biding his time until 1960, when most of the states on the continent would have gained their independence. However, Tubman could have no idea how long the wait was going to be. Instead, it is clear that he sought to diffuse Ghana’s grab for the leadership position by undermining any centralized continent-wide organization. “I have observed,” Tubman stated, “that there seem to be three schools of thought on the leadership question:”

There are those who feel that Liberia should assume leadership based on the fact that she is the oldest African Republic and is riper in political experience; but it will require more than age and political experience to assume leadership of Africa. There are others who hold that Ghana should assume that role because she is physically more developed and embraces larger territories. It will require more than development and larger territory to assume leadership of Africa. And there are yet those who opine that Egypt, with its rich traditions dating back to the remotest antiquity, should do so. It will require more than rich traditions of
antiquity. It will require, in my opinion, the aggregate of all three of these and more besides. It will require the aggregate of the best of all that Liberia, Ghana, Egypt, Tunisia, Ethiopia, The Sudan, Morocco, Nigeria and all other African Territories and States possess, moulded together, to assume the leadership of Africa, compounded in such a manner as to represent the divisibility of Africa indivisible. (Townsend 1969: 185-186)

Tubman was appealing to the notion that equality should exist among all territories and states on the continent. In doing so, he laid out the regionalist position in anticipation of any move toward a continental political organization in the near future. According to Tubman, leadership of Africa would require all the attributes, resources, and features of the states on the continent, but no state had all of these qualities, so leadership must then fall back onto the separate states on the continent. Instead of a president of Africa, what was needed was cooperation among the governments of the continent.

In order to break “Africa” from Nkrumah’s United States of Africa proposition, Tubman remarked on the “divisibility of Africa indivisible.” Steeped in all things American, Tubman was no doubt referencing the US pledge of allegiance, which affirmed the United States of America as one nation indivisible, where liberty and justice reigned for all. Tubman did not contradict the notion of Africa as one nation. But Tubman made one thing clear about “Africa”: it was not indivisible. Liberia was, as Tubman noted in the speech, the oldest African republic, so it was already divided from the rest of Africa and it intended, at least in some senses, to stay that way.

Thus, Tubman advocated regional cooperation and undermined political unification by using the commonplace “freedom.” He stated, “Each African State must remain independent, entering, of course, into pacts, treaties or international agreements, naturally so as to strengthen and accelerate mutual intercourse and reliable ties of friendship among them, which will be beneficial to themselves and the world” (Townsend 1969: 186). In this statement, Tubman joined
an African state to freedom in such a way that the freedom of the new state to exercise its privileges in the international system must be protected after independence.

Tubman also rejected the notion that true political and economic independence could only happen in a larger political body that had more leverage in international negotiations, pointing out that newly minted countries had that capacity at independence but would be giving it up if Nkrumah’s plan were implemented. Tubman warned,

Now, more than ever before, it should be our concerted effort to repel and subdue any and all doctrines or ideologies which would tend to divert us from the path of human dignity and the rights of the individual, and particularly those that envisage national disintegration and enslavement by stealthy artifice and subversive actions. (Townsend 1969: 186)

Cold War dynamics were also at work in the struggle between Nkrumah and Tubman. For Nkrumah, Sekou Toure of Guinea, Amilcar Cabral of Guinea-Bissau, and other political leaders on the continent, Marxist or socialist ideals informed their agitation for freedom from the economically exploitative relationship with their countries’ colonizers. In contrast, Tubman, a firm ally of the United States in the Cold War, viewed Marxist-socialist ideologies as essentially opposed to the ideal of freedom. Moreover, the notion of Liberia as the land of capitalist economic and business opportunity for African Americans, a haven of trade and commerce on a dark continent that had yet to be exposed to notions of “free markets” and “free peoples,” had been part of the Liberian identity since the founding of the country. In effect, Tubman drew a line for African states coming into being: choose “freedom” and “democracy,” or be enslaved by socialism, understood as communist, doctrine. Liberia clearly was with the United States, not with “those”—Tubman’s opponents—who sought to enslave. By using such language, Tubman attempted to delegitimize Nkrumah’s continental plan.
With battle lines drawn between Nkrumah’s and Tubman’s approaches to forming a continent-wide political organization, a series of international conferences was held, including the All-African People’s Conference and the Sanniquellie Conference. At the conferences, leaders of various organizations agitated either for political reform of a colonial government or independence from it. In the scrum, trade unions, businesses, and newspapers deployed strategic commonplaces to advance their positions and to diminish those of their opponents. In public statements, key individuals and organizations offered justifications for their particular plans of action.

*The All-African People’s Conference of December 1958*

At the All-African People’s Conference of 1958, Nkrumah hosted a non-governmental assembly of more than 300 political and trade union leaders representing 200 million Africans in 28 territories: Angola, Basutoland, Belgian Congo, Camroons, Chad, Dahomey, Ethiopia, French Somaliland, Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Occidental Afrique (French West Africa), Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South West Africa, Tanganyika, Togoland, Tunisia, Uganda, and Zanzibar. The participants set up a permanent All African People's Conference, its secretariat to be located in Accra, Ghana, and passed resolutions on federation, racial discrimination, imperialism and colonialism; on tribalism, religious separatism and traditional institutions; and on borders and boundaries (Johnson 1962). Tom Mboya, then a prominent Kenyan labor activist and later President of Kenya, chaired the planning committee, which was made up of representatives from eight independent states (Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and the United Arab Republic [a short-lived political union of Egypt and Syria]). In addition to representatives from political parties, labor organizations, liberation movements, and
associations from across the continent, observers from Canada, China, Denmark, India, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States also attended.

It was before this international audience that Nkrumah argued his case for federation by appealing to African national unity. In his opening address, Nkrumah announced his pleasure at hosting a gathering of “Africans speaking for Africa and Africans” for the express purpose of the “total liberation of Africa.” Nkrumah called on the conference participants “to bury our political hatchets in the interest of Africa's supreme need…this Conference opens a new era in our African history and our struggle is to wipe out Imperialism and Colonialism from this Continent and erect in their place a union of free, independent African States” (All-African People’s Conference Speeches 1958: 1). He asked for political unity as a show of commitment to “Africa.”

Nkrumah supported his Africanist position by claiming that his concern was the welfare of all of Africa, an appeal that was more powerful than merely seeking the interests of Ghana or Liberia. Nkrumah connected the search for the greater good of “Africa” (in the form of political union) with anti-colonialism and the safeguarding of new African states’ freedom. Attendees were instructed to put aside the pettiness of “political hatchets” and act in the “interest of Africa’s supreme need.” Political unity in the name of “Africa” was necessary in order to secure independence, and it trumped all other interests and needs. It was “Africa” that had been assaulted by imperialism and colonialism, and Nkrumah’s Africanist position asserted that “Africa” needed to be expressed as a political body in order to “wipe out” its adversaries. Indeed, identification with “Africa” had greater impact in arguments to form a political federation than did any appeals to Ghanaian, Liberian, or Guinean identity. In this way, the rhetorical
commonplace, “Africa,” played a prominent role in the debates that ultimately led (over
Nkrumah’s opposition) to the formation of the OAU.

Nkrumah argued that establishing “some form of African union or federation” would
ensure the freedom of states and peoples of the continent. He argued that

...[U]nity must be the keynote of our actions. Our enemies are many and they
stand ready to pounce upon and exploit our every weakness...They do not tell us
that we should unite, that we are all as good as we are able to make ourselves
once we are free. (All-African People’s Conference Speeches 1958: 4)

Disrupting the rhetorical core of Tubman’s position, Nkrumah asserted that complete freedom
would not be achieved at independence. Real freedom, that is, economic and political freedom
from the vestiges of colonialism, Nkrumah argued, would come with a federation that could
actively forestall the exploitation of divisions between Africans, divisions which had been the
primary means through which colonialism and imperialism had moved onto the continent in the
first place. Nkrumah declared,

Do not let the Colonial Powers divide us, for our division is their gain. Let us
recall that our Continent was conquered because there were divisions between our
own people, and tribe was pitted against tribe... Do not let us also forget that
Colonialism and Imperialism may come to us yet in a different guise—not
necessarily from Europe. We must alert ourselves to be able to recognise this
when it rears its head and prepare ourselves to fight against it. (All-African
People’s Conference Speeches 1958: 7-8)

Some of us, I think, need reminding that Africa is a continent on its own. It is not
an extension of Europe or of any other continent...Others may feel that they have
evolved the very best way of life, but we are not bound, like slavish imitators, to
accept it as our mold. (All-African People's Conference Speeches 1958: 6)

He further attempted to delegitimize Tubman’s regionalist position by claiming that it was
fostering divisions on the continent. Nkrumah’s assertion that “Colonialism and Imperialism may
come to us yet in a different guise—not necessarily from Europe “ directly challenged the regime
of the descendants of the African American settlers in Liberia. The implicit charge was that
Liberia was itself a colonial state, as it had colonized the Africans within its borders and now with that same policy it was trying to extend its colonization to the rest of Africa. In other words, the rhetorical core of Tubman’s argument for regional cooperation because Liberia favored the freedom and equality of the states and peoples on the continent was, to Nkrumah, just another example of Liberia acting in its own self-interest. He rhetorically grouped Tubman and Liberia with the colonial and imperial powers that oppressed “Africa” and denied African states’ and peoples’ freedom and independence. Nkrumah’s rhetoric “joined” Liberia with Europe and America and not with “Africa” and “bound” and “slavish” imitators of the West because of its use of “the West” as a model for first “Liberia” and then for “Africa.”

Nkrumah also “broke” the commonplaces of freedom and democracy from Tubman’s core rhetoric in support of a political organization of the African continent based on regional cooperation. He used the commonplace “freedom” to justify the establishment of an African union or federation, commenting on the failure of European colonizers to live up to democratic ideals as they governed their colonies on the continent: “We find it rather ironical that we in Africa have to be reminding the European communities on our Continent of this fundamental principle to which they give so much lip service but to which they pay so little heed in practice. They use racial doctrines as instruments of political domination. Invoking the principle of democracy,” Nkrumah declared, “we say that Africa belongs to Africans!”

In contrast to Nkrumah’s fiery proclamations, the six-man delegation representing Liberia’s ruling True Whig Party (TWP), chaired by Attorney General Christian Abayomi Cassell, and including Ernest Eastman and Tubman’s African affairs advisor T. O. Dosumu-Johnson, presented Tubman’s domestic unification policy as an example of how to address the problem of ethnic over national identification (Eastman 1973). Under Tubman’s Unification
Policy, universal adult suffrage had been extended to both indigenous African men within Liberia’s borders and to women; four new counties had been created, giving the Hinterland areas status equal to that of the coastal counties; and the indirect rule of the Hinterland policies had ended (Saha 1996: 77-80; Wreh 1976). As long as constituents pledged allegiance and loyalty to Tubman himself, African Liberians from the Hinterland had been able, for the first time in the history of the country, to achieve (in theory) social and political equality.

Attorney General Cassell delivered the TWP statement, which excoriated the “radical and extreme” approach of Nkrumah as “incitement to revolution and violence.” The Liberian representatives advocated moderation. The Liberian delegation was received poorly, however, and a sentiment of anti-Liberianism reportedly swept the room, according to Earnest Eastman (Eastman, “The Road to Addis”; a 12-page document prepared on the 10th anniversary of OAU for publication in the Liberian press). Throughout the delivery, Cassell was “hissed at, derided, and ridiculed,” and the anti-Liberianism in the room reportedly even spilled out into the corridors, as nationalists such as Tom Mboya of Kenya and Patrice Lumumba of the Congo seemed to join Hastings Banda of Nyasaland (now Malawi) in the threatening question: "Where shall Liberia be ten years from now when we are free? You must ask yourself that question a thousand times!" The reception in the room clearly indicated that the Africanist position had won this battle in the war of visions.

The Sanniquellie Conference of July 1959

In 1959, Tubman invited Nkrumah and President Toure of Guinea to meet with him in Sanniquellie in northern Liberia. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss regional cooperation and political union. In his opening address to the media at the public conference, Tubman stated that “responsible leadership” involved executing “sound and correct policies enunciated within
the framework of cooperation and consultation with other African states and peoples” (Tubman 1964: 56). Nkrumah had announced the formation of the Ghana-Guinea Union, a model of the kind of political union that he felt newly independent African states should enter into, at the All African People’s Conference in 1958. At the Sanniquellie Conference of 1959, Tubman’s aim was to slow down if not actually stop Nkrumah’s efforts to unite the continent under a single government.

At this conference, Tubman and Nkrumah predictably clashed over their different positions relative to the future form of political organization of the continent. Nkrumah supported immediate political union, while Tubman argued for a loose association that would work cooperatively in the pursuit of mutual economic and political interests. Nkrumah pushed for a unified government and Tubman responded by insisting that it was necessary to wait for the other emerging states to gain their independence before a full discussion of union could properly take place. Tubman was successful in slowing the momentum towards Nkrumah’s Africanist federation by arguing that

…all discussions on African Unity at this time should be of an exploratory nature and no decision, conclusion or agreement on such a far-reaching, intricate –and delicate matter should be taken until other African territories with fixed dates for independence have achieved their independence, and other independent States have been consulted and can fully participate as foundation members in a meeting or conference which should finally be agreed upon so as to decide the specific form that unity should take which will be satisfactory to all and spontaneously supported by all. (Tubman 1964: 56-57)

At Sanniquellie, Tubman declared, “Freedom, Unity and Cooperation should be the noble objectives of all peoples. But these will never be assured if we fail to create the right conditions which all Africans, despite their varying customs, traditions and culture, can wholeheartedly support.” He continued,
Thus, in our determined search for African Unity, let us endeavor to evolve that formula which will be sufficiently flexible for each nation to maintain its national sovereignty and its peculiar identity. We should show a willingness to cooperate with all African countries and peoples regardless of their choice of associations. (Tubman 1964: 56)

After four days of deliberation, the communique issued from the Sanniquellie conference reflected Tubman’s regionalist position as opposed to Nkrumah’s Africanist position. The three leaders pledged to cooperate economically and work together for the formation of a “Community of Independent African States”, a regional organization in theory, and agreed that the structure of this organization would be detailed at another conference in 1960 after Nigeria, Togoland, and the Cameroons had attained independence. In this instance, Tubman joined the commonplace of freedom with his idea for a regional cooperative political organization and in doing so, won in the sense that he was able to forestall the immediate political union of the continent’s free states. Tubman usurped the commonplace “freedom” from Nkrumah’s position, as evidenced by Nkrumah’s finally agreeing with Tubman’s prioritization of the effort “to assist, foster and speed up the time for the total liberation of Africa and Africans” without having to immediately join a political union after gaining independence. For Tubman, helping territories on the continent gain their independence was an end, but for Nkrumah it was a means to an end. This might explain Nkrumah’s statements to the media upon his return to Accra that the Sanniquellie Declaration had been a success. Tubman achieved two major wins at this summit: he forestalled any immediate decision on the question of political unification and he persuaded Toure that for the time being his regionalist position was the right one.

Emboldened by his victory in the Sanniquellie talks, Tubman expressed his opposition to Nkrumah’s policy, but without mentioning the Ghanaian leader’s name. To the Liberian Gazette, Tubman explained that Liberia did not wish to impose constraints on its diverse neighbors, many
of whom had different economic systems, political allegiances and social customs. The Liberian government supported the position that the states and peoples of the continent should “resolve to achieve close association and cooperation, without prejudice to their national or international identities” (Holloway 1981: 36).

Lastly, the significance of Tubman’s convening the meeting in the relatively small village of Sanniquellie, in the interior hinterland of Liberia, cannot be overlooked. Tubman clearly sought to problematize the depiction of Liberia as a black colonial state, a portrayal Nkrumah had hinted at in his opening speech to the delegates at the All Africa Conference when he had warned that “Colonialism and Imperialism may come to us yet in a different guise—not necessarily from Europe.” In arranging a summit of African leaders covered by international media deep in the Liberian hinterland, Tubman was in a sense stating that Liberia was a whole country comprising all its inhabitants, and no longer a settlement of insular American emigrants confined to the coast.

However, the unintended consequence of Tubman’s action was that Nkrumah’s notion of a politically unified Africa spread to the African peoples of Liberia’s hinterland. Members of the media and the foreign delegates at the conference engaged with the townspeople of Sanniquellie. Some Ghanaian delegates commented that “the idea of African unity had spread from Accra even to the Liberian interior and that Tubman was being forced by domestic pressure to take this awakening into account” (Holloway 1981: 36). Discussions of international policy opened the possibility of considering new ways of organizing Liberian society.

The outcome of the Sanniquellie Conference allowed Tubman more time to prepare for the next battle against Nkrumah’s Africanist Monrovia policy and to consider how to make rhetorical appeals that would win the newly independent states to his regionalist position. During
numerous post-Sanniquellie meetings, consultations, and alliances, including the formation of the radical Casablanca and moderate Monrovia groups, the contours of the OAU began to emerge.

The Monrovia Conference of August 1959

Liberia further advanced the regionalist position among emerging independent states at the Monrovia Conference in early August 1959. The purposes of the conference were primarily to formulate joint African policies on the Algerian liberation war, to garner African support for Algerian nationalists, and to seek a resolution to the increasingly brutal (for civilians) war in Algeria. However, French nuclear tests in the Sahara and South Africa’s apartheid policies were also agenda items. In some sense, Liberia’s call for a conference to discuss these “African issues” represented a heightened awareness of the power of the commonplace “Africa,” particularly as an organizing tool in liberation struggles. Held in the capital city of Liberia, Monrovia, the five-day conference was attended by foreign ministers from nine independent African states, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, and the United Arab Republic, as well as representatives of the Provisional Government of Algeria.

In his message to the delegates, J. Rudolph Grimes, Acting Secretary of the State of Liberia, reiterated Liberia’s regionalist position in stating that

Every people has a right to institute a Government and to choose and adopt that system or form of it which, in their opinion, will most effectually accomplish these objects, and secure their happiness, which does not interfere with the just rights of others. The right, therefore, to institute Government and all the power necessary to conduct it, is an inalienable right and cannot be resisted without the grossest injustice. (Grimes 1959)

Therefore, freedom and equality could be secured by recognition of the rights of Africans to govern themselves, as leaders and their populations were recognized by the rest of the world as capable of managing their own affairs. Securing freedom on the continent and equality with
other states in the world did not require, as Liberia’s opponents argued, the creation of a unified government. In Grimes’ argument, it was an expression of loyalty to “Africa” itself that Liberia was seeking to protect it from the “grossest injustice” of denying “Africa” the inalienable right to institute Government. Neither Grimes nor Tubman rejected the notion of Africa, but rather the formation of a unified continental government justified by the commonplace.

In his opening address at the Monrovia conference, President Tubman showed his support for the Algerian nationalists, who were recognized as full delegates. He asserted that Liberia would be the first African state to raise the flag of the Algerian Provisional Government on its territory as “an act of courtesy” to “our Algerian brothers.” Tubman also chided the French for threatening to break diplomatic ties with any state that recognized the provisional Algerian government, by stating that threats were “very weak substitutes for negotiations among nations.” Instead, he argued for the French and the Algerians to come together under the auspices of the UN or some other entity to negotiate a peace deal. The Algerian Minister of Information confirmed willingness to meet with the French government on neutral ground to discuss a political settlement. In his grandiose style, Tubman noted the futility of the French efforts to hold on to Algeria, commenting that “one can fight an army of a million men, but independence is a million ideas, and one cannot fight a million ideas” (Townsend FLN 1959). Importantly, while Ghana, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, and the United Arab Republic had recognized the provisional government of Algeria prior to attending the conference, Liberia at the time of the conference was still reviewing the matter. Nonetheless, the significance of the conference for Liberia was in positioning Liberia to legitimately speak for “Africa” in the interests of “Africa.”

This positioning of Liberia as an instrument for shaping “Africa” was part of Liberia’s foreign policy of managing the pro-Africanist, anti-colonial fervor that was sweeping across the
continent and garnering international attention. In an interview with the newspaper *Liberian Age* on April 1, 1960, Secretary of State Grimes stated that Liberia's foreign policy position was the maintenance of the country’s sovereignty and the formation of an association of states, not a political union. He emphasized,

> There are some African States that seem to favour and argue for a federation of Africa; others for a United States of Africa, and still others who advocate unity of West Africa. But we advocate that type of African Unity and West African Unity and solidarity in particular which is based upon treaties and conventions of friendship, amity and navigation, trade and other alliance on the basis of mutual respect and equal consideration.

Grimes deployed the commonplace of “equality” as a basis on which “solidarity,” presumably in the form of some organization, could be established. This statement on the eve of the Francophone West African states’ gaining their independence demonstrated the precarious nature of Liberia’s relations with its soon-to-be new non-European neighbors in light of the pressure for continental political unity. The mid-20th century transitions were reminiscent of the threats to Liberian sovereignty that had existed in the 19th century. In that context, when indigenous African communities in West Africa had claimed their autonomy, Liberia had lost part of its territory to the French and the British and had barely escaped with its sovereignty.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter and the conclusion of Chapter 5, “Enacting Liberia,” from the period following independence to the post-World War II transitions, Liberian officials had moved away from using rhetoric that tied “Liberia” to the notion of a civilizing agent for the entire continent. However, “Liberia” had continued to be joined with the notion of a “Promised Land” for settlers and their descendants. The reasons for this shift included the Liberian government’s wariness of Africans engendered during the pioneer years by skirmishes between the settlers and the native inhabitants whose land had been taken from them to create the colony. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 4, “Enacting Liberia,” some of the indigenous
inhabitants of the Liberian hinterland had publicly contested Liberia’s claim that it “effectively occupied” the land during European colonialization of West Africa, which ultimately included the usurpation of territory claimed by the Liberian government. As outlined in Chapter 3, “Imagining Africa and Liberia,” a largely negative view of “Africans” articulated by American-Liberians expanded to include the notion of “Africans” as threatening. As a result, Liberian officials chose to focus inward on the capital city and coastal settlements instead of outward toward “Africa,” including the “Africa” within its borders, which resulted in a divide between the American-Liberians of the coast and the African-Liberians of the hinterland.

With the rise of African nationalism, Liberian officials saw Africans inside and outside of Liberia’s border, including the neighboring British and French territories of Gold Coast and Nigeria, as a threat to the existence of the Liberian state. Apprehension regarding these new political developments was clearly indicated in the Liberian Secretary of Defense’s annual report in 1960. His message read,

With the attainment of independence of our sister African brothers contiguous to our borderline, problems which we never thought of are arising and have to be grappled with every degree of efficiency and alertness. Not only are the problems of the crossing into our territories of citizens of other states involved but also the question of national ideologies, some of which are divergent to ours and destined to threaten and uproot the very foundation upon which our democratic institution was founded. To ensure that the situation just referred to will be averted and not permitted to take a foothold in Liberia we have to strengthen and increase our border control units and give more attention to border problems as they arise from day-to-day. (Liebenow 1987: 143)

As noted in Chapter 3, “Imagining Africa and Liberia,” the commonplaces that were used to justify the creation of “Liberia” in the 19th century appeared again in the postwar period. The notion of Liberia re-emerged as a place in which the liberal democratic principles of the United States could be applied to the lives of African American settlers who had been denied freedom and equality in 19th century American society, a “Promised Land” for enlightened African
Americans who were aware of their responsibility to spread civilization to a barbaric “Africa.” In this mid-20th century context, Liberia’s main fear was the spread of powerful commonplaces that might challenge the very concept of Liberia. It was imperative to Tubman and his administration that Liberia dominate the rhetorical landscape, both on the continent and in the world, as well as that it dismantle and problematize notions that would jeopardize Liberia’s security.

*The Addis Ababa Conference of June 1960*

By 1960, more African states had gained their independence and talks resumed regarding what form continental political organization should take. Attendees included representatives of nine independent states—Ghana, Guinea, Cameroon, Liberia, Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, and Ethiopia—and delegations from Nigeria, Somalia, the Congo (Léopoldville), and the Algerian provisional government. At Addis Ababa, Tubman continued to advocate regional cooperation, a position that found adherents among more of the newly independent states than did Nkrumah’s Africanist position. For example, in the opening address, the Emperor of Ethiopia avoided the issue of political union entirely, choosing instead to speak about inter-African cooperation. But perhaps the most explicit conflict over the question of forming a political union was evident in the speeches of Ghana’s Foreign Minister, Ako Adjei, and the leader of the Nigerian delegation, Yussaf Maitima Sule.

The three signatories of the 1959 Sanniquellie “Declaration of Principle,” Ghana, Guinea and Liberia, had agreed to cooperate economically while looking toward the prospect of political union once the territories had achieved their independence and could participate in discussions regarding the political organization of the continent. Nkrumah understood the Sanniquellie Declaration as a step on the path toward a Union of African States. Despite Liberia’s de-legitimization at the All African People’s Conference of December 1958, the Sanniquellie
summit of 1959 vindicated Tubman’s preferred continental policy of regional cooperation by achieving agreement amongst the three states that the regionalist position should serve as the interim framework. The discrepancy between Nkrumah’s and others’ interpretation of the outcomes of the meeting at Sanniquellie surfaced at Addis Ababa. Ghana’s Foreign Minister, Ako Adjei, argued that the Addis Ababa conference adopt the principles of the Sanniquellie agreement. He stated,

It is clear this declaration of principles (the Sanniquellie Declaration) that the Union of African States which the three leaders discussed and agreed upon is intended to be political union. Such a political union in their view will provide the framework within which any plans for economic, social and cultural cooperation can, in fact, operate to the best advantage of all. To us in Ghana the concept of African Unity is an article of faith. It is a cardinal objective in our policy. We sincerely believe that the Independent African States can, and may someday, form a real political Union—the Union of African States… It does not matter whether you start with an Association of African States or whether with economic or cultural cooperation…we must start from somewhere, but certainly the Union can be achieved in the end. (Adjei 1960)

Adjei argued that the concept of Africa as a unified whole constituted grounds for the establishment of a real political union, the Union of African States, which would “operate to the best advantage of all [Africans].” Guinea was the only state in open agreement with Ghana.

Expressing the opposing argument, the Nigerian delegation leader, Sule, argued,

…No one in Africa doubts the need to promote Pan-Africanism …But we must not be sentimental, we must be realistic. It is for this reason that we would like to point out that at this moment the idea of forming a Union of African States is premature. On the other hand, we do not dispute the sincerity and indeed the good intentions of those people who advocate it. But we feel such a move is too radical—perhaps too ambitious—to be of lasting benefit. Gradual development of ideas and thought is more lasting… It is essential to remember that whatever ideas we may have about Pan-Africanism it will not materialize, or at least it will not materialize as quickly as we would like it to if we start building from the top downward…We must start from the known to the unknown. At the moment we in Nigeria cannot afford to form union by government with any African States by surrendering our sovereignty…President Tubman's idea of the association of states is therefore more acceptable for it is as yet premature to form a Union of States under one sovereignty. (Sule 1960)
Sule offered the notion of sovereignty as a reason for not forming a politically united government of African states. Thus, Tubman successfully joined the commonplaces of “freedom” and “equality” with the regionalist approach to continental policy. However, like Tubman, Sule did not question solidarity based on the notion of Africa as a unified cultural community. As he professed, “Pan-Africanism is the only solution to our problems in Africa… No one in Africa doubts the need to promote Pan-Africanism.” The problem was that the formation of a government of Africa based on an appeal to a transnational African community was too expensive, too ambitious, too radical, too premature, and most of all, “top down,” that is, it was totalitarian and autocratic in nature. Thus it was contrary to “freedom” and “democracy.”

In the same speech, Sule went on to compare Nkrumah’s advocacy of the Africanist position with Hitler’s agenda (Holloway 1981: 41). This argument was an indication of Tubman’s success at breaking the commonplace “freedom” away from the constellation of commonplaces associated with the Africanist position.

Interestingly, Tubman’s argument for a loose association of sovereign states became a position that could be justified by an appeal to “Africa.” The logic of this move went thus: as a community, “Africa” had been subjected to oppression and denial of inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination. Tubman’s advocacy for each state to maintain its sovereignty thus represented the restoration of the rights of the inhabitants of the continent. In this way, Tubman broke the notion of “Africa” from Nkrumah’s rhetorical core for the formation of a United States of Africa. While Nkrumah continued to advocate the commitments expressed at the All Africa Conference 1958 and the Sanniquellie principles, the issue of union government versus a political federation was effectively tabled. Economic cooperation on a regional basis was
discussed among the conference participants. Nkrumah’s position of a politically unified Africa was effectively dispensed with for the remainder of the conference.

The Casablanca Group and the Monrovia Group

While the main conflict at the 1960 Addis Ababa meeting was over the form of the continent-wide political organization, other conflicts between the states present were also aired. The bones of contention included Morocco’s claim to Mauritania; Guinea’s harboring of Cameroonian rebels; Tunisia’s and Egypt’s mutual accusations that the other had supported an assassination attempt on its leader; Ghana’s claim to Togo; Somalia’s and Ethiopia’s border disputes; the Algerian war; and the response to the Congo Crisis. Not surprisingly, the sides in each area of tension generally consisted of states on opposing sides in the central debate, called the Monrovia and Casablanca groups.

The Monrovia bloc was a conservative alliance of Ethiopia, Nigeria, and most of the Francophone states, who opposed the formation of any political federation. The Francophone African states chose to remain tied to their “mother country,” France, in financially, culturally, and politically significant ways, reminiscent of Tubman’s desire to protect the ties with the United States that had defined Liberian identity since the 19th century. The Monrovia group supported the continental policy of regional cooperation. Many of the states of the Monrovia bloc feared losing their arrangements with their former colonizers or their sovereignty under Nkrumah’s Africanist plan to consolidate the continent’s territories under one governmental authority. Tubman’s regional economic cooperation plan was favored by a majority of the 26 states that had become independent by October 1, 1960, when Nigeria became independent.

The Casablanca bloc comprised Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Algeria, Egypt and Morocco, all of which favored Nkrumah’s position of immediate formation of a political union. The Casablanca
The Monrovia Conference considered the major issues affecting continental Africa and discussed views and procedures related to the formation of a political organization on the African continent. It was the largest single gathering up to that time of independent states on the continent. Attendees included representatives of Congo Republic (Brazzaville), the Central African Republic, Chad, Dahomey, Ethiopia, Gabon, Libya, Malagasy, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Togo, Tunisia, and the Upper Volta. In a statement, conference
organizers expressed their hope that the Casablanca powers would soon join the “grand African family of nations.” In his opening speech, the elected chairman of the conference, Tubman, stated, “We have assembled here today, as representatives of African States, to consider the successes that have been ours over the last five years, to discuss some of the pressing problems that confront us, to seek solutions to these problems and to prepare for pushing forward toward the cause we represent, the cause of African Freedom.” In Tubman’s rhetorical argument, freedom was the stated reason for organized political relations among the states of the continent in the form of regional cooperation. “Freedom of Africa” was thus delinked by Tubman from “political unification” and joined to the regionalist position.

The purpose of the conference was “to bring all African leaders to reason together” with the understanding that “…only tolerance, good faith, honor, and good neighborliness” could produce much-needed unity and solidarity on the continent. Underlying Tubman’s comment was the belief that Nkrumah’s position was unreasonable and thus could not be realistically implemented, as Sule had argued at Addis Ababa in 1960. Tubman went on to note that “political union as opposed to political domination can be more rapidly achieved where there is a community of economic interests, cultural cross-fertilization, as well as free social intercourse and association” (Tubman 1964: 24). Tubman boldly characterized Nkrumah’s plan as “political domination,” joining the commonplace of the political unification of continental Africa to a denial of freedom to African states and peoples. Tubman broke Nkrumah’s notion of real political union away from the Africanist position by claiming that political union could only result from regional cooperation. In order to get those sympathetic to the position of a political union, Tubman argued that the means to the end of political union was the formation of an institutional structure that focused on cooperation rather than federation—a strategy similar to
the rhetorical arrangement of commonplaces he had used to subdue Nkrumah at the Sanniquellie conference of 1959.

In his opening speech, Tubman stated his argument for regional cooperation using the commonplaces “freedom” and “equality,” which were, after all, the purpose of the liberation struggles. He explained that the conference sought “to provide a climate in which large as well as small States will participate as equal partners in building a New Africa and a New World order.” Tubman continued,

In our long struggle for respect for the sovereignty and independence of all States, and for the total liberation of the peoples of the Continent, we have come to believe that Unity, understanding and tolerance are the principal means of achieving and perpetuating our objectives. Unity, therefore, should be the watchword of this Conference. Within this frame of reference, we can seek to utilise our potentialities, our combined forces, our best talents and our opportunities to more useful and practical advantages; we can employ the knowledge of our common racial background, the history of our common struggles and the fact of the identity of our [African] aspirations and struggles to work towards a better and secure future for the present and future generations… The sense of oneness should be deeply rooted in the breast of every African. (Tubman 1964: 20)

Tubman was co-opting the commonplace “unity” to support his concept of “regional cooperation.” He was also joining the concept of “Africa” with his regionalist position in a different manner than had Nkrumah. Tubman argued that the “common racial background, the history of our common struggles and the fact of the identity of our [African] aspirations and struggles” could be used to strengthen inter-African collaboration but did not justify the formation of a union government.

Tubman consolidated his rhetorical repertoire as he repeated a pivotal portion of the speech he had given at Liberia’s Independence Day celebration in 1957. On the topic of the leadership of Africa, Tubman reiterated,
I come now to the question of leadership of Africa. On this issue I repeat what I said in an Independence Day message delivered on July 26, 1957 when there were fewer independent African States. In this connection I have observed that there seem to be three schools of thought on this subject. There are those who feel that Liberia should assume leadership based on the fact that she is the oldest African Republic and is riper in political experience to assume leadership of Africa. There are others who hold that Ghana should assume that role because she is physically more developed and embraces larger territories. It will require more leadership than development and larger territory to assume leadership of Africa. And there are yet those who opine that Egypt with its rich traditions dating back to the remotest antiquity should do so. It will require, in my opinion the aggregate of all three of those and more besides. It will require the aggregate of the best that is in all compounded in such manner as to represent the divisibility of Africa indivisible. (Tubman 1964: 22).

Tubman once again broke the rhetorical commonplace “Africa” away from the once powerful commonplace “Africa for the Africans” and joined it with the notion of divisions in an attempt to direct policy toward intergovernmental collaboration as opposed to the establishment of one government. He used the “divisibility of Africa” as grounds for maintaining the sovereignty of the new state within a new institutional structure for inter-African cooperation.

However, the enduring notion of “Africa” as a transnational community was also referenced by Tubman when he described “Africa” as “indivisible.” Tubman was agreeing with the notion that some commonality existed among “Africans.” Given Tubman’s commitment to the 19th century concept of Liberia, the basis for any bond between Liberians and Africans was race, not culture, as “Africans” both inside and outside Liberia were distinctly not of the same civilized Christian culture as the Liberian descendants of African American settlers and “reformed” Africans. Both Nkrumah and Tubman accepted and used the commonplace “Africa” to mean “one idea and one land.” Tubman wanted to keep “Africa” separate from “Liberia,” just as Liberia’s separateness from the uncivilized and barbaric Africans had been an important part of Liberian identity since its founding. With regard to relations between the two, Liberia was to refashion “Africa” into its image by redeeming “Africa.” Nkrumah’s plan to consolidate all of
the continent’s territory under one government, justified by an appeal to an African transnational cultural community, was fundamentally objectionable to “Liberia” since it had never imagined itself to be an African state.

Most of the Monrovia conference attendees confirmed their commitment to the regionalist position. The following resolutions were adopted:

1. The recognition of the absolute equality of sovereignty irrespective of size and population.
2. That each African State has the right to exist and no State should try to annex another for any reason.
3. That should any African State desire freely and voluntarily to join with another state, no other African State should stand in its way.
4. That all States should respect the principle of non-interference in the internal and domestic affairs of sister African States.
5. That each state should respect the territorial integrity of another state and should not harbor within its boundaries any dissident elements from another state who might wish to use that state as a base for carrying out subversive activities against their own state.

At the Addis Ababa meeting in 1960, political unification had been considered too expensive, too ambitious, too radical, and too premature. At the 1961 Monrovia Conference, the notion of forming a political union of continental African states was characterized as irrational and foolish and was effectively barred. The Monrovia communiqué, then, reflected the triumph of Tubman’s regionalist position. African, American and European media outlets reported the Monrovia Conference as a success, while the Ghanaian press excoriated the participants as neo-colonial imperialists. Having won perhaps the most important battle of the war, Tubman gave no public response to those charges. A follow-up conference in Lagos, Nigeria in 1962 was scheduled to further discuss economic, technical and cultural cooperation toward the advancement of continental “unity of aspirations and action.” The Casablanca group, however, declined the invitation to attend the Lagos conference.

*The Lagos Conference of January 1962*
Prior to the meeting in Lagos, a group of representatives from the Monrovia bloc met in Dakar, Senegal in the summer of 1961 to review a draft proposal prepared by the Liberian government regarding an organization for economic and political cooperation for the African continent. Within the document was a draft charter of the future organization as well as the organizational mechanics of cooperation. On January 25, 1962, Tubman presented this draft at the Lagos conference, where it was decided that the foreign ministers would review the document in advance of another conference in Addis Ababa in 1963. Reporting on the Lagos Conference, The Ghanaian criticized Liberian officials for being “western agents of America”. Nkrumah declared “the moment the British Broadcasting Corporation and other imperialist broadcasting brasslands began their phony adulation of the so-called virtues of Monrovia’s slave-mentality operated slogan of unity without unification…. In an article published in the Ghana Evening News, Nkrumah called upon President Tubman to admit he was an American first and an African second (Legum 1965: 54). Tubman did not publicly respond.


The draft of the Lagos Summit was accepted at the Addis Ababa conference and became, on May 25, 1963, the official charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Instead of a “United States of Africa,” as initially called for by Nkrumah, there would be a “United Nations of Africa”, with each state respecting the others’ territorial sovereignty and conforming to the principle of non-intervention except for supporting liberation struggles.

Through strategic rhetorical deployments, Tubman thus advanced the Liberianization of Africa. That is, Tubman managed to successfully exclude the ubiquitous pre-independence racialist “unification of Africa” position by emphasizing the importance of sovereignty for each
new formally independent state. The defeat of that powerful notion of a unified Africa, which had been used so effectively by African political leaders as an organizing tool against colonial rule, was accomplished through a series of rhetorical moves in international forums, specifically a series of historically unprecedented continental conferences. However, the justification for Liberia’s regionalist position was located in the narrative that dated back to the founding of the country, particularly the 19th century notion of Liberia being on the continent but not of it with regard to social practices and political organization. The notion that Liberia's purpose was to “civilize” the continent had fallen out of favor. Among the reasons for the demise of the civilizing impetus were Liberia’s isolationism and, perhaps more importantly, the decline in the perceived need to civilize the rest of the continent. (European colonial agents had taken over that responsibility starting in the late 19th century.) However, the notion of Liberia’s exceptional and exclusive existence as a “Promised Land” was consistently utilized in official speeches. Thus, the “Liberianization of Africa” can be seen as the extension of the Liberian narrative to other African states.

In an unsettling post-war global environment, Liberia managed to achieve some stability for itself by strategically deploying rhetorical commonplaces to shape continental policy. Despite the post-war winds of change blowing across the continent, Tubman won the debate over the future form of political organization by commandeering the notion of Africa as a transnational community with certain commitments. While Tubman hosted two important meetings leading to the establishment of the OAU, it is clear that there were other significant conferences with other hosts. Thus, it is not the material resources that necessarily persuaded the other participants but rather the force of Tubman’s recasting of Africa. Theoretically-speaking, in the war of words, what accounts as a victory is the fact that Tubman’s rhetorical arguments about the nature of
Africa unity or connectedness are revealed as embedded and connected the institutional arrangement called the OAU. Ultimately, as Africa is a contested category, there is no permanent victory. Things are not settled once and for all as the discussion on the Tolbert administration will demonstrate in Chapter 7, “The Africanization of Liberia.” Africanist discourse continued to gain currency throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, particularly among the younger generation. This resurgence of ethnic cultural integrity and identification had implications for Liberian policy during the 1970s and will be the subject of Chapter 7, “The Africanization of Liberia.”
CHAPTER 7
AFRICANIZATION OF LIBERIA

Over the course of the conferences that led to the creation of the OAU, a change occurred in Liberia’s foreign relations with the rest of the continent. As previously noted, throughout the 1960s, Tubman had conservatively kept Liberia closely aligned with the US and “the West” more broadly, which was consistent with the pre-existing narrative of the settlers’ civilizing mission on the continent. However, the political transitions from European colonies to African-ruled states and the rise of Nkrumah’s strategic vision of a Pan-Africanist political union compelled Tubman to reshape the rhetorical contours of African unity; a shaping that then had implications for the formation of the OAU. Although Tubman supported closer unity among African states based on racial identification, he criticized and ultimately derailed the creation of a supranational political authority. While Nkrumah had sought to advance a more radical form of African unity, Tubman’s concept (to be embodied as a regional organization as opposed to a political union) triumphed partially because of Tubman’s strategic use of the rhetorical commonplace “Africa” in the debates. Particular specifications of “Africa” then became available for use to the Tolbert administration as it justified its policies. This chapter focuses on the use of a particular specification of the concept of “Africa,” which was featured prominently in debates, discussions and official speeches regarding Liberian foreign policy; its use can, I argue, help to explain the shift in Liberian policy during the 1970s.

Importantly, a shift in the meaning and dynamics around the term took place over time between the institutional formation of the OAU in early 1960s and when Tolbert came into the presidency in the early 1970s. First, the widespread dissemination of the term "Africa" during the course of numerous anti-colonial nationalist movements in neighboring territories and across the continent had made it common in everyday language, concretizing the notion of “Africa” or
“African” as simply non-European and non-white. Secondly, with the entrance of many new states into the international system, the global environment had shifted in such a way that the new states located in Africa, Asia and Latin America had begun to make demands with regard to their collective position within the global economic system and to carve out new political positions within the Cold War context. As a result of the various anticolonial surges of nationalism, the broad conception of “Africa,” as a supranational political community had not only become a reality that was accepted and lauded, but an entity to which there were commitments and responsibilities and in the name of which countries' independence had been fought for and won. Lastly, in Liberia itself there were shifts in the dynamics between social groups and the government, including movements to publicly end ethnic exclusion and discrimination while celebrating ethnic identification with non-Euro-American or Americo-Liberian values and people.

Tolbert’s actions at the very beginning of his administration both reflected this shift and contributed to it. When Tolbert succeeded Tubman in 1971, he sought to identify Liberia more closely with Africa and to change Liberia’s standing as America's Western-style protégé. To that end, he appeared at his inauguration symbolically attired in an African bush jacket instead of the typical Liberia formal attire of traditional top hat and tails, signaling with costume and words that Liberia was identifying itself more closely with Africa. Tolbert’s identification with an African identity, represented and instantiated in his dress, translated to his foreign policy in the sense that the shift in policy during the 1970s reflects the extension and deepening of political and diplomatic relations with African states and a prioritization of relations with other states over the US. In this chapter, I explore how “Africa” as a discursive resource made some novel actions possible and opened new ways of dealing with criticism of Tolbert’s actions in global politics.
This chapter proceeds in the following manner. In the next section, I briefly discuss how the commonplace "Africa" was changing to invoke a supranational community to which Liberia naturally belonged, how it became available for Tolbert to use to justify Liberia’s new policy direction, and what happened to make a particular specification of "Africa" viable in Liberian politics. Two occurrences had a significant effect on the changing meaning of “Africa”: first, Liberians were witnessing the independence movements taking place across the continent, movements that had initially begun with demands for human, civil and political rights by African majorities within the colonies (many of which rights African-Liberians had been denied in Liberia). Secondly, new and substantial segments of the Liberian population were becoming politically activated, in part, by the Tolbert administration’s promises of a more inclusive society and to end the exclusion of African-Liberians from the Americo-Liberia dominated government.

A brief sketch of the history of both processes is provided. In the second section, I will specify the new courses of action taken by Tolbert in depth and provide brief sketches of Tolbert and key members of his foreign policy team, focusing on the context in which these politicians operated. The new Africanist-oriented language Tolbert and his administration used to justify the new departures in Liberian foreign policy will be examined.

In the third section, I present a case study demonstrating how Tolbert used Africanist language to justify his controversial decision to meet with apartheid South Africa’s Prime Minister Balthazar Johannes Vorster. That section analyzes contemporary international debates about whether African states should even engage in dialogue with South Africa. Opponents to such engagement used Africanist language to tie the liberation struggles of Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africans to the defense of all of “Africa.” It should be noted that member states of the OAU who supported those struggles did so at a considerable price: providing
financial and military assistance to the South-West African People’s Organization (SWAPO), to
the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), and to the African National Congress (ANC),
among others.

The fourth section focuses on Tolbert’s attempt to legitimate the talks he held with South
Africa in February of 1975 by explaining that he was pursuing the best interests of “Africa,”
whose interests, he argued, were inextricably linked to Liberia’s. Tolbert justifies this assertion
by emphasizing Liberia’s identity as an African state. In his effort to legitimize his involvement
with the government of South Africa, Tolbert tied Liberia to Africa, instantiating Liberia as an
African state. In the heat of the criticism Tolbert received for his meeting with apartheid South
Africa, Tolbert’s claims of Liberia’s being an “African” state and belonging to Africa
(understood as a civilizational identity), opened other future actions following this new policy
course.

The last section offers an analysis of this legitimation process and how it related to
Liberia’s subsequent foreign policy actions of the 1970s, with particular attention paid to the
lock-in effects of the Tolbert administration’s justification of the Vorster visit. The shift in
Liberian foreign policy from its dependent traditional US orientation to an autonomous
Africanist orientation in the early 1970s is thus accounted for. The central focus will be on
describing how Liberia legitimated its actions by using certain rhetorical commonplaces and how
the use of those commonplaces yielded concrete outcomes.

This section also discusses the response of the Liberian elite to the political reforms
attempted by Tolbert, the rising frustrations of the new mobilized segments of the society as their
demands for increased political and economic participation were being met unevenly, as well as
Tolbert’s inability to manage expectations and balance his call for more transparency in the
Liberian government with his continued involvement in shady family business ventures. These dynamics came to a head in the “rice riots” of 1979. Although the riots and subsequent events fall outside of the period under review in this study, the dynamics that led to the 1980 coup d’état are briefly touched upon.

“Africa” in the Context of Global Transitions

African civilizational identity played an important role in the politics of the continent throughout the anticolonial liberation movement of the mid-20th century. During 1960, the “Year of Africa,” in the midst of Africa's emergence from colonialism, a surge of political events occurred, all involving claims of an African identity and the new reality that social and political actors sought to create by using those claims. Political actors used “Africa” to powerful effect in raising awareness of the subjection of African peoples and in mobilizing those peoples to fight for self-governance. Slogans like “Africa for the Africans!” and “Africa unite!” were used effectively in liberation campaigns waged across the continent and around the world. Political rhetoric of anti-colonial liberation struggles regularly made reference to “Africa” and “Africans.” For example, in 1960, in what may have been the first major liberation movement publication distributed in London, the major features of the liberation movements in Portuguese-ruled Africa were outlined by Amilcar Cabral, the Secretary-General of the Partido Africano da Independencia da Guinie e Cabo Verde (PAIGC) in the Portuguese-ruled West African colony of Guinea-Bissau. Cabral wrote,

Eleven million Africans suffer under Portuguese colonial domination…The African population of these colonies has been enslaved by a small country, the most backward in Europe.

...[Surrounded by] natural riches, some of which are exploited by the colonialists, Africans live on a sub-human standard--little or no better than serfs in their own country.
After the slave trade, armed conquest and colonial wars, there came the complete destruction of the economic and social structure of African society. The next phase was European occupation and ever-increasing European immigration into these territories. The lands and possessions of the Africans were looted, the Portuguese 'sovereignty tax' was imposed, and so were compulsory crops for agricultural produce, forced labour, the export of African workers, and total control of the collective and individual life of Africans, either by persuasion or violence.

As the size of the European population grows, so does its contempt for Africans. Africans are excluded from certain types of employment, including some of the most unskilled jobs.

Racial discrimination is either openly or hypocritically practised. Africans have been driven from the remaining fertile regions left to them in order that colonatos for Europeans could be built there…

As Africans have awakened and begun moving towards freedom and independence, efforts to control and oppress them have redoubled…The colonial army was reinforced. In Portugal, military mobilisation was increased, attended by warlike manoeuvres and demonstrations of force. Air and sea bases were built in the colonies. Military observers were sent to Algeria. Strategic plans were drawn up for a war against the Africans. Political and military agreements were made with other colonial powers. New and increasingly advantageous concessions were given to non-Portuguese enterprises.

The demands of the Africans and the work of their resistance organisations, which are forced to remain underground, have resulted in severe repression. All this was and still is perpetrated in the name of 'Civilisation and Christianity' by the most retrograde kind of colonial system.

Both the human and natural resources of these colonies are exploited and mortgaged at the lowest possible value. The colonialists deny the practice of Christian principles in their lack of reverence for the human being, and they do everything they can to hide the true effects of their 'civilising influence'. While humanity discovers its unity and strives for community of interest based on peace and the recognition of the Rights of Man, of freedom and equality among all peoples, the Portuguese colonialists prepare to launch new colonial wars…The colonialist 'theory' of so-called 'assimilation'…is unacceptable not only in theory but even more in practice. It is based on the racist idea of the 'incompetence or lack of dignity' of African people, and implies that African cultures and civilisations have no value (Braganca and Wallerstein 1982: 7-10).
This anticolonial creed not only provides a succinct description of the nature of colonialism on the continent but demonstrates the kind of language that was able to tie the Mandinka, Fula, Balanta, Papel, Ovimbundu, Kimbundu, Bakongo, Makua, Yao, Makonde, Shona, and Tsonga peoples of Portuguese-ruled colonies together under the larger collective identity classification of “African.” The cultural affiliation articulated in the course of the external liberation struggles was that of being "African," not Fula or Papel or Ovimbundu. This broad identification of “Africanness” in opposition to the colonial powers proved to be effective across the spectrum of anti-colonial liberation campaigns, whether mass mobilizations, elite negotiations, or armed struggles. Although the various communities within these territories spoke different languages and practiced different religious and culture, all accepted the identification as “African” in the struggle for liberation, and that identification proved to be a potent political tool.

As the liberation struggles went on, a particular specification of “Africa” became dominant in the anticolonial literature. The Mozambican liberation group, Frente de Liberatacao de Mocambique (FRELIMO) published a statement in September 1963 entitled “Why We Fight”:

There is a great difference between a White and a Black. The White, because he is white, finds a job easily, earns a good living, can support his family and cover his expenses including the education of his children. While the African obtains work with difficulty, and as a result earns miserably little, not being able to satisfy even his minimum needs.

When there is a competition, 300-400 persons enter, but systematically only Whites win even if there are Africans with greater knowledge.

Why is it that the African, owner of the land, must suffer and the White enrich himself at the cost of the African?

...Almost all the commerce of Mozambique is in the hands of Whites and Indians. There are very few Blacks in commerce, and those who are poor.
It is rare to see a bar or a shop belonging to a Black because it is difficult to get a licence. When they can, they construct a shed and use it to earn their daily bread; but when it's discovered by the police, the poor man's bar is seized and closed. The Black woman who sells peanuts in the streets, does it furtively, fearing that 'Papa Policeman' will say to her: 'Come now, mama, you can't sell peanuts here, do you hear? Go home and hurry up.'

We Mozambicans cannot continue to accept such humiliations. The White man cannot abuse our Black mothers. She is a Mozambican lady. She has a right to life.

In industry the same things happen as in commerce. There are many African workers who are quite skilled in their jobs, but badly paid. Where then is the equality between Whites and Blacks?

The large majority of Mozambican Blacks live from agriculture. Everything that the Black has achieved or won, he has done with great effort. The White man has seized everything and the Black must be satisfied with a capulana (sarong) in exchange for maize, catfish, peanuts, or even cotton.

...It is very sure that the African is suffering, working only for the White man. Thus, for example, in the province of Cabo Delgado the Portuguese use a method to buy cotton cheap. They create many categories in terms of which payment to the Black man is made. Thus even the highest quality of cotton is placed in a lower category; and the African can never protest.

The modern methods the Portuguese have introduced into agriculture in Mozambique have as their object perfecting the exploitation of the land and the workers. The new technical methods serve only to develop those crops that interest Portuguese companies without any consideration for the interests of the Africans. Furthermore, the new methods the Portuguese use tend to favour and legitimize the swindle that occurs when products are bought from African growers.

The education and training of Mozambican youngsters require money. But if Africans earn very little, where can they get this money? It's almost impossible. This is why the number of educated Africans is still rather small. There is only one barrier to their mental development - MONEY.

When the White man educates his children, the Black man is perturbed, because he wishes to do the same but cannot for lack of money.

...We have all had enough of so much oppression. The torture is coming to an end. It is time to demand our rights. But if the Portuguese do not wish to leave, what
are we going to do? ONLY FIGHT. It is only through struggle that they will be convinced we want freedom, that we want to take back our land.

Mozambique is only for Mozambicans and we do not accept the intervention of any outsider. Many promise us their assistance but it is we who must take the initiative. We are going to expel the Portuguese! Let us shout at the top of our lungs: FREEDOM! FREEDOM! FREEDOM! (Braganca and Wallerstein 1982: 12-13).

FRELIMO’s rallying cry exemplifies the language that characterized anti-colonial gatherings, protests, boycotts and strikes in different colonies. “Africa” or the “African” was delineated as a cultural and racial community territorially bounded to a land that had been invaded and exploited by “Whites” and “outsiders.” Countless more examples of this language exist in pamphlets and other publications of the movements for human, political, and civil rights and ultimately for the right to self-governance. What stands out is that Africanist rhetoric was widely publicly available to legitimate a variety of policy options, from advocating colonial and white settler retreat from southern Africa, to demanding South Africa’s withdrawal from Namibia, to showing Afro-Arab solidarity, to meeting with apartheid South Africa leaders.

Post-Independence Global Politics

In 1960 alone, 17 African territories won their independence from European colonial rule and joined the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). These new states constituted a significant enough portion of the assembly of states of the world that for the first time, the affairs of the continent were placed on the agenda in that world forum. Remarking on the new African states’ entrance into the international state system and the changes those states could effect in world politics, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan (1957-1963), stated in his famous "Winds of Change" speech, delivered to the South African parliament on February 3, 1960, that
"[t]he growth of national consciousness in Africa is a political fact, and we must accept it as such." A distinctly pro-African movement had to be reckoned with.

During the 1970s, the division between the many new states of the Global South and Global North briefly garnered as much attention as the East-West Cold War divide. These states organized themselves into negotiating blocks like the Group of 77 in order to focus world attention on the issues of international social and economic justice, and newly independent states were public in their rejection of East-West nuclear politics. Many of the so-called Third World demands for development, debt forgiveness, and reform of trade policies for greater equality in trade relations were heard within global forums like the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Cries for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in the aftermath of the success of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)'s embargo showed how new paths in global politics were possible. This is the context in which Liberia began to pursue its new policies.

On the global stage, Tolbert embraced the notion of African solidarity and the progressive agendas of many African states, which were in line with other states of the Third World. Tolbert joined these newly independent developing states’ calls for a “new international order” in demanding equity and social and economic justice on the world stage in addition to human, civil, and political rights reforms that they believed they had just won. Liberia’s identification and alignment with African states nested within the Third World marked a shift in Liberia’s traditional orientation.

What accounts for this change? The notion of Africa as a supranational community had become prominent in public discourse and was therefore now able to be used to justify policies that reflected a commitment to this community. Liberians in rural and urban areas had been
exposed to the Pan-Africanist sentiment and democratic ideals of the African nationalist independence movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Regular and, in many cases, daily access to international and local radio programs, newspapers and other publications served as a source of shared knowledge on these liberation struggles, their ideals and aspirations, and perhaps most important, the notion of Africans as a collective identity group. Thus, these media outlets contributed to the spread of the Pan-Africanist sensibilities that were infiltrating and becoming commonplace in the wider Liberian society.

Throughout its existence Liberia had struggled with integrating the various ethnic groups into a national collective, as discussed at length in previous chapters (see Chapter 5 “Enacting Liberia” and Chapter 6 “Liberianization of Africa”). And while distinctions between the immigrant and indigenous populations had to some degree been blurred by intermarriage and the establishment of Tubman’s personal networks, a significant element of Liberian society in particular leaders from the interior and indigenes in the coastal urban areas could relate to the issues fought for in the independence movements, in particular the demands for an end to African ethnic exclusion and discrimination. Stephen Hlophe (1979) writes that

…the repercussions of the victories of African nationalism against colonialism were deeply felt by the Americo-Liberian ruling stratum, whose colonial hegemony over the indigenous population of Liberia was seriously threatened. The removal of such ethnic labels as “Americo-Liberian – Civilized and Uncivilized,” “Tribal” and “Country-Boys” from conventional public usage by Tubman, partly reflected the Americo-Liberians elite’s awareness of the threat of African nationalism. Similarly, the hasty appointment of prominent loyal Indigenous-Liberians as department secretaries and deputy secretaries in the State Department, the Department of Education and the Department of the Interior, attempted to counter any possible criticism of exclusion of the Indigenous-Liberians from political office. (222-223).

The demands for civil and political rights and the use of an African continental identity as a tool to mobilize protests against discrimination and exclusion from political and economic life
resonated with many Liberians. Regardless, the widely disseminated rhetoric of anti-colonial nationalist movements left a specific form of the rhetorical resource “Africa” available for use in policy debates, discussions and speeches by Liberian officials and also available to be used to legitimate certain policies.

*Domestic Divisions and Articulating an African Liberia*

In addition to pursuing policies in world politics that identified Liberia as an African state with political commitments rooted in claims of membership to an African continental identity, Liberian leadership under the Tolbert administration sought to “celebrate” African ethnic identification domestically through the adoption of policies that were inclusive of the African majority within Liberia’s borders. To that end, Tolbert addressed and implemented policy changes that deemphasized exclusive identification with the dominant narrative of Americo-Liberian and American identity, which constituted the traditional narrative of Liberian national identity. Some policy changes under the Tolbert administration included civil service reform, which installed standardization and replaced the old patronage system with a merit system; the creation of opportunities by the government for various ethnic groups to redress past inequities based on need and qualification; a foreign economic policy that focused on the interests of the entire population and not only that of the repatriate core; and a national economic policy that shifted from an export industrialization strategy to investing in agriculture and rural development. The government of Liberia, then, sought to create a more democratic and liberal society by expanding its scope to include elements drawn from the indigenous, hinterland population. In a sense, the process of democratization was initiated in order to incorporate the African majority into Liberian politics, a collective identity group with which the government of Liberia had begun to identify and affiliate itself both internationally and domestically.
Tolbert’s Reforms

Early in his presidency, Tolbert introduced the program called "Total Involvement," which was aimed at creating a “wholesome functioning society” for “a new breed of Liberians” while promoting “self-reliance” and balancing economic growth with social equity. His program aimed to draw those outside of the American-Liberian core to participate politically--especially youths, intellectuals, and the emerging rural middle class. Tolbert promised a new Liberia, “...where people are totally involved, where merit, not favoritism; productivity, not influence and connections; selflessness not selfish individualism, form the criteria for real distinction” (Liberia 1972). As previously noted, Tolbert's ambitious reforms included the revitalization of the Civil Service Commission, instituting standardization and the merit system in public service employment.

From the earliest days, Tolbert had attempted to show that his approach to governance would be less autocratic than Tubman’s, markedly more tolerant of government criticism, and supportive of democratic freedoms, including the freedoms of the press and of association. Important indications of his commitment to change included granting freedom of the press; dismantling Tubman’s security apparatus and the secret network of paid informants and public relations officers (PROs) that had reported directly to Tubman; and the proposal of term limits (Sawyer 1992: 288-290). Tolbert also ordered the sale of the luxurious presidential yacht at a savings of $250,000 in maintenance costs and proposed term limits for elected officials (Sisay 1985: 159). As part of restructuring the security sector, for example, Tolbert ordered the retirement of more than 400 aging soldiers (Lowenkopf 1976). The character of the Liberian military changed as the retired soldiers were replaced by poorly trained, less disciplined and less obedient young recruits mostly from urban areas, many of whom were subsequently poorly
trained at the Tubman Military Academy. These specific to the military changes had significant and unintended consequences in light of the 1980 military coup d’état.

The economic component of Tolbert’s reforms reflected the demands of the Global South for more economic justice in the global economy and more progressive and inclusive economic growth strategies. Thus, Tolbert sought to increase the level of participation of Liberians in the economy by investing in agriculture and rural development as part of a strategy to couple economic growth with social equity. The shift in focus of Tolbert’s economic policies from export industrialization to one focused on agricultural development and rural infrastructure development stood in stark contrast to the previous president's policies, which had focused on foreign investment without any notion of shared growth. Tolbert's policy of “integrated rural development” was aimed at bringing more farmers into tree crop production and other commercial agriculture, with the expectation that these would result in broader economic growth, particularly for African-Liberians. To that end, organizations like the Agricultural Credit and Development Bank and rural marketing cooperatives were established. Tolbert also rationalized and modernized the interior administration by replacing Tubman’s informal relationship with chiefs and elders with a more formalized arrangement that involved the election of chiefs who were tasked with overseeing production, tax collection, and labor recruitment. Through these economic reforms, Tolbert attempted to unify Liberian society and to create what he termed a “wholesome functioning society” for “a new breed of Liberians,” while promoting “self-reliance,” economic growth, and development alongside social equity.

Domestic response to the reforms was initially positive. Press outlets proliferated, in addition to youth, student, workers’ rights, and political groups. Tolbert’s program of self-reliance for social welfare served was initially received well as segments of the society from
trade union workers to the Liberian Caucus of the Chamber of Commerce to student election committees on high school and university campus organized themselves to effect change in their sphere of society. Workers’ organizations in plants became more active, and a newly established Liberian Caucus of the Chamber of Commerce became more assertive in arguing for business policies and practices. Student organizations practiced democracy as student elections were regularly held in most schools and universities. The famous pamphleteer Albert Porte, whose vigorous campaign against constitutional abuses of the Liberian government had begun decades earlier, became even more vocal in his criticism of the system of the old guard and his advocacy for an open society. Even preachers in their pulpits critically examined social and political issues—a practice that was unthinkable during the Tubman years.

_Tolbert’s Constituency_

Tolbert’s political constituency included young urban professionals, technicians, trade unionists, bureaucrats, and the intelligentsia; rural educated elites and entrepreneurs; and members of the military hierarchy. Significantly, these groups had been disaffected, repressed, or simply nonexistent during the Tubman era. The new or emerging social groups included a high youth population with higher levels of education, knowledge of new technologies, and a desire to exercise their democratic freedoms. Other groups that Tolbert’s reforms sought to reach were the educated elites and emerging business leaders in the rural communities. Also courted by Tolbert were people who had previously been critical of Tubman’s administration and therefore excluded from the political process.

Many of these emergent groups and newly recognized individuals were instrumental in advocating the removal of remnants of 19th-century provincialism from the Liberian constitution, the national motto, and Liberia’s Declaration of Independence. In a speech given on
Independence Day, July 26th 1972, the Minister of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism, Dr. Edward Kesselly, commented on Liberia’s national motto: “...in the spirit of the time, our present motto ‘The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here’ should be replaced with the motto, ‘Unity, Justice, Equality.’ For the present motto implies that only those who came here are citizens and not those who were here” (quoted in Hlophe 1979: 226). Tolbert responded to the criticism that the national motto was problematic, as it excluded the majority of African-Liberians who were not immigrants’ descendants, by stating that the “...need to make these changes in our Constitution and also the Flag, motto and National Anthem is imperative, because, as can be readily observed, they do not correctly and appropriately reflect our African heritage…” (Liberia 1974). Later, Tolbert formed a commission to address this grievance and the commission members recommended that the old motto, “The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here,” be replaced with “Love, Liberty, Justice, and Equality.”

_Tolbert’s Stated Foreign Policy as Reflective of World and Liberian Politics_

Early in his administration, Tolbert outlined a coherent foreign policy for the Republic of Liberia that included the security and welfare of the country and its people, “maintaining and strengthening traditional friendships while developing, expanding, and deepening new ones; and consistent ideals and principles such as the dignity of the human person, peaceful settlement of disputes, international economic cooperation, and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.” His foreign policy was consciously rooted in his domestic policy (Guannu 1980: 393-396; Dunn 2009; Sisay 1985; Kieh 1992; Sawyer 1992), and his policies of inclusive governance with the Africans within Liberia’s border were extended to the pursuit of a foreign policy, with Liberia’s “national interest” no longer narrowly focused on protecting the interest of the
repatriate core, the so-called “Americo-Liberians,” but expanding to make common cause with African progressives.

In these steps, Tolbert's administration was beginning the process of re-creating Liberia as an “African” state, which included an alignment with a progressive Africanist agenda. Tolbert’s Africanization of the Liberian state stood in sharp contrast to its previous image as a settler state on but not of the continent. In opening diplomatic relations with the new socialist and progressive states worldwide, “with which the Liberian people shared aspirations,” and to legitimate his policies, Tolbert had to situate Liberia squarely within an African transnational cultural community and make commitments to that community. Liberia’s claimed membership to that African community had certain lock-in effects that strongly influenced subsequent policy options.

Liberia’s Shift to a More Autonomous, Anti-colonial and Africanist Foreign Policy and Its Justifications

This section will enumerate the policy directions taken by Tolbert with a focus on the Africanist language (and in particular the rhetorical commonplace "Africa") that he or his administration used to justify or legitimate the paths taken. Again it is important to note that the term “Africa” is ideal-typical in that it was a way of organizing information and making sense of a series of interrelated relationships or events. Central to the argument that the shift in Liberia foreign policy can be explained through an examination of how the rhetorical resource “Africa” was used is the idea that a policy path independent of the US demonstrated Liberia’s historical move away from its "American identity" and toward African states, which in turn were nested in the broader community of newly independent developing states in the global South. Many others of these states publicly espoused a policy of nonalignment, too; hence, Liberia’s adoption of a
nnonaligned posture was justified in terms of Liberia’s membership to the African community, a membership that legitimized the articulated policy as well as Liberia’s status as a truly African state.

Tolbert’s bold departures in Liberian foreign policy will be discussed in contrast to the cautious pro-West policies of the previous president, Tubman. A brief sketch of Tolbert and key members of his foreign policy team will focus on the rhetorical context in which these politicians operated. Special attention will be paid to the legitimation activities that they engaged in, such as giving public reasons for a course of action and criticizing other options. It is also argued here that in the process of performing these legitimation activities, that “Liberia” as an “African” state was produced; in other words, that the Africanization of Liberia took place by means of the legitimation process.

Decoupling Liberia from US Policies in the Cold War Era

Seeking to identify Liberia with “Africa” as he aligned Liberia with progressive African and developing-world agendas, Tolbert also had to adopt a nonaligned position in the context of Cold War politics. In his 1973 inaugural address, Tolbert spoke of the non-aligned approach as part of “Liberia’s response to a changing world,” introducing his new policy of “direct dialogue between nations,” which, he argued, could establish the “basis for compromising attitudes…producing reconciliatory action among nations” (Guannu 1980: 391). In 1972, as has been noted, Liberia had abandoned its traditional policy of shunning the Soviet Union, and Tolbert allowed a Soviet embassy to be opened in Monrovia. Several other socialist or communist regimes were also allowed to open embassies in Monrovia, including Romania, Hungary, East Germany, China, Cuba, and North Korea. Speaking at the Fourth Non-Aligned
Conference in Algiers in 1973, Tolbert used language similar to that used in his first inaugural address as he stated the rationale for the non-aligned postures of Liberia and other NAM cohorts. 

…we must cultivate the spirit of self-reliance for self-sufficiency. The time for relying mainly on appeals to the collective conscience of the developed countries (them) for economic and technical aid massive enough in scale to ensure our development has passed. While many of our nations have benefited in some measure from aid and continue to welcome it, the major task of our economic development must rest upon our (us) own shoulders…It does not appear reasonable to expect that developed nations will always be prepared to bear the major portion of the burden of assuring our development, or unilaterally improving the terms of trade for us purely on an altruistic basis (Liberia 1973: 394).

Tolbert was trying to link Liberia with “Africa” in a narrative understood to be that of the “real” Africa: progressive, radical, and rooted in African nationalism. In that linkage, he also aligned Liberia with the politics of NAM. Hence, the “us” in the statement above included the “Africa” to which Liberia belonged, as well as the other developing states of Asia and Latin America. The “them” he referred to were the developed countries of the world, including the US, which in the recent past and throughout Liberia's history would have been in Liberia’s in-group because of Liberia's close association with “the West.” In the same speech, Tolbert steered his audience away from the option of not taking a non-aligned position; not to follow the non-aligned path was dangerous, since the violence of Cold War politics was a real and present threat to the “smaller nations” of the world. He stated,

The Government of Liberia views with disfavor the flagrant disregard by certain world powers for the rights and interests of smaller nations, as evidenced by their persistence in nuclear weapons testing, in spite of the dangers of human life and to man's environment, and in spite of the opposition of the international community…Violence continues at an alarming pace and thousands of innocent people are being slaughtered because there are still those who vainly and foolishly feel they have a divine right to dictate the destiny of others…It appears to me that many of the ills of the world and their consequent effect upon developing nations have resulted from the erroneous assumption entertained by some nations that peace can only be ensured by massive arms build-up. This belief, though
evidently misleading, has too long polarised the nations of the world, produced economic waste, aroused ideological suspicion, and dissipated the capital resources so desperately needed to make our world a better place for all men to live together in happiness and with dignity (Liberia 1974: 391, 394).

In contrast to Tubman’s previous steady focus on maintaining and strengthening US-Liberia relations, Tolbert actively sought to diversify Liberia's foreign relationships. Importantly, however, moving Liberia more in line with African and nonaligned progressives in world politics did not mean that Liberia needed to completely abandon its traditional allegiance to the US.

While moving toward the non-aligned nations, the Tolbert administration also established relations with several Arab states, a move that inevitably upset the balance of its relations with Israel. During the Yom Kippur War in October 1973, Tolbert issued Executive Order IV, blocking the transport of arms to Israel on Liberia-registered shipping vessels (a substantial percentage of shipping vessels at the time). Although the order was never tested, it marked Liberia’s alignment of itself with African, Islamic, Eastern bloc, and Asian states supporting Egypt and Syria in that war. That Order also indicated to the world that Liberia was exercising its autonomy from the US. Thus, Liberia essentially chose Afro-Arab solidarity over Israel, the US’ closest (and most non-negotiable) ally. In 1973, Liberia cut diplomatic ties with Israel in a demonstration of Afro-Arab solidarity. Tolbert explained why this action was necessary in his annual message to the legislature:

We were recently faced with one such rare and unusual situation affecting our relations with the State of Israel. This resulted from that country's stubborn and persistent refusal to comply with the provisions of Security Council Resolution 242 and the several Resolutions of the OAU, calling upon her to withdraw from illegally occupied Arab territories, particularly the territory of our sister African state, the Arab Republic of Egypt…As this open defiance of Israel was considered to be detrimental to the interest of Liberia and tending to jeopardize the mutual relations which hitherto so happily subsisted between our two states, the Government of Liberia, in the spirit of African unity and solidarity, severed diplomatic relations with Israel on November 2, 1973 (Liberia 1974: 428).
Tolbert legitimated the severance of ties with Israel because of the “spiritual” connection Liberia had with the Arab world and in particular with “African sister states” nested within the Arab world. By this, Liberia was publicly embracing the Palestinian cause and signaling that the diplomatic freeze would continue until Israel ended its occupation of Arab territories. This was an especially significant direction change, as Liberia had long benefited from its security arrangement with Israel. Seen in realist terms, Liberia's policy move makes no sense. However, seen through the prism of "Africa" and the meanings that the commonplace now carried, it did make sense. Tolbert further justified the policy by commenting elsewhere that “[i]t might be interesting to note that for the same reasons, an overwhelming majority of member states of the OAU also broke off diplomatic relations with Israel” (Liberia 1974: 428). This change in Liberia-Israeli relations under Tolbert stands in sharp contrast with Tubman's pro-Israel policy of close security and economic relations with the Jewish state.

As has been noted, Tubman had actively worked to contain what he viewed as “radical African nationalism.” In contrast, Tolbert embraced the so-called radical states and sought to bring Liberia into the “progressive African mainstream.” In the competing narratives over which group--the conservative pro-West Monrovia bloc or the more radical African nationalist Casablanca group--represented the real “Africa” in the discussions that led up to the founding of the OAU, Tolbert clearly adopted the language of the latter as he worked to extend Liberia’s leadership role in African affairs. In the president’s Independence Day message, delivered on July 26th 1974, Tolbert stated Liberia’s posture, pulling the rhetorical resources of "Africa," "unity," "solidarity," and "aspirations" together to make his case:

…the cause of African unity and solidarity must ever lie close to our hearts, and support for that cause had been and will continue to be a firm pillar of our policy. The OAU is the institutional machinery through which the aspirations of African
peoples to achieve ever greater continental successes can be best expressed. This Government accordingly attaches the greatest importance to that Organization and is determined to play a more active and positive role in upholding its Charter and fostering the lofty principles for which it stands” (Liberia 1974: 555).

Tolbert's attention was particularly drawn to the struggles of the liberation movements. Under his leadership, Liberia began to provide active support and, for the first time, financial assistance to African liberation, committing the country to a much greater role in removing colonialism and apartheid from Africa. Tolbert publicly disclosed the reasons for honoring those commitments at an OAU meeting in January 1974:

> Those of us who have been blessed with freedom, and who enjoy the right of self-determination within our own countries, cannot and should not be content as long as our brothers and sisters continue to be deprived of their most basic and inalienable human rights, and remain the victims of exploitation by vicious and diabolical colonialists. It is therefore the compelling duty and sacred obligation of every African to become completely committed to the great and noble cause of total liberation of Africa, and become totally involved in the fight for the attainment thereof… Let us remember that first and foremost, we are all Africans; and if any African anywhere is humiliated, we all are humiliated; if he is oppressed, we are oppressed, and as long as colonialism and imperialism remain on any part of our beloved continent, our freedom is in danger” (Liberia 1974: 419).

Tolbert's leverage of Africanist language to legitimate his policies is clear. The reference to “our brothers and sisters” pointes to those of African descent whose inalienable rights Liberia and other member states of the OAU should protect against the colonialists. The primary community to which Liberia owed a duty was civilizational: “We are all Africans…” While his use of the phrase "inalienable rights" would normally suggest a reference to the natural rights of every human, his purpose in this speech was to show a commitment to securing the rights of peoples bound together in their presumed shared identity, not as human beings or as denizens of the
“Third World” or developing countries, but as Africans. Tolbert went on to lambaste any alternative policy paths by warning the members of the OAU that

We should not shirk this responsibility; and must not evade, if Africa is truly to be free politically, economically and socially. The great battle in which we are now engaged, is being waged on many fronts. It is being fought not merely with arms but also with ideas, diplomacy, and economic measures. In doing so, let us always be mindful that tribalism and parochialism are the forerunners of internal disunity and strife, and will surely divert our attention and needed resources away from the vital task of national development, thereby weakening our ability to effectively combat imperialism and colonialism. To cause such internal unrest and dissension is a favorite strategy of the enemies of Africa, against which we must vigilantly be on our guard. Equally so, are their attempts to create strife among sister African States with the hope of destroying the fabric of African unity and solidarity, which should always be of the high-priority Liberia 1974: 420).

In his warning against other policy directions, Tolbert suggested that “tribalism and parochialism” were the alternatives; he emphasized the failure of those two paths, the "unrest," "dissension," and "strife" that would ensue if Liberia did not honor its commitments to its African brothers and sisters. Clement Adibe (2001) has referred to this Africanist argument as “Afrorealism.” That is, in order for African states to successfully pursue their self-interests, they had to have a level of integration as well.

Divining the intention behind any political leaders’ arguments is a perilous and tricky task, particularly the difficulty of "getting inside the speaker’s head." Focusing on Tolbert's actions and statements, however, allows us to see that the rhetorical resource “Africa” was understood and used in the specific social and political context of post-independence African nationalist movements and that it played an integral role in the shift in Liberia’s policies.

At an OAU summit in Mogadishu on June 11, 1974, Tolbert explained,

Our brothers and sisters in Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Island as well as those still under alien domination and subjugation in Southern Africa need and deserve unabatingly all the moral and material support we can provide. We continuingly identify ourselves with the African liberation struggles, as we fully
realize that Africa will never be free until the last vestiges of colonialism and imperialism have been effaced from our continent and all of our peoples economically emancipated. The total elimination of these intolerable diabolical burdens from Africa is our primary aim and no matter how the wind of change now appears to be blowing, we must not relent in the least in our determination to pursue our charted course until this solemn objective is fully accomplished (Liberia 1974: 519).

By describing the colonialist "burdens" as "diabolical," Tolbert was placing a liberated "Africa" definitively on the side of the "angels." "Africa" itself, then, by a contrastive argument, was seen as the opposite of evil. “Africa” would not be freed of its devils until colonialism and apartheid were eradicated. Further, Africa’s other member states must also honor that fundamental connection:

…[T]hose African nations who enjoy political independence have a sacred and inescapable obligation to contribute significantly to the liberation of our brothers and sisters still shackled by alien domination and subjugation. Equally, we all have a duty to free ourselves from the yoke of foreign economic and cultural dependency…This new spirit must be activated in order to promote the total liberation of Africa, particularly in view of the new opportunities presented by recent developments in Portugal and super power detente. Invariably, we will not be able to coordinate our ideas or effect a united decision, if we do not all speak with one voice or are not prepared to act courageously in union…Africans, in particular, have an advantage in the fact of their ethnic bond, grounded in history, which in our time is proving to be stronger in uniting our peoples...The oneness of mind and spirit that has characterized our past--must be brought to focus on our present problems. The great challenge which led to the establishment of this Organization and which has kept it together undaunted must now triumph over our present difficulties (Liberia 1974: 519-524).

On another occasion in the same year, Tolbert explored the notion of the benefits that would accrue to all of Africa once its member states joined forces, further justifying Liberia’s support to liberation movements in southern Africa:

Our major concern, however, is not just any kind or quantity of improvement anywhere among any group of people…We are concerned in 1974 and the immediate years ahead about favorable, significant and quality improvement in the condition of those people, first in Liberia, then in Africa…our brothers and sisters who continue to suffer under colonialism, alien minority domination,
racism, oppression and suppression. These are our major and most immediate concerns.

Our visits just ended to the Republic of Zambia, the Kingdom of Lesotho and the Republic of Malawi were limited to the African scene, where there is doubtless a need for greater cooperation, interdependence and common self-reliance. As we overflew vast portions of this continent as we have done on other occasions, we reflect upon the rare, rich, untapped and natural resources with which Africa abounds.

As we visit one African country and then another, we see progress everywhere but realize that greater and more substantial improvement awaits a systematic pooling of our resource and the encouragement of area specialization instead of duplication and overlapping of efforts.

But this new phase in our development which is indispensable cannot be meaningfully engaged, when Africa is part free and part enslaved; when part exists in discord and isolation; when part is parochial and indifferent to the wellbeing of others. For it is only through understanding that can we all plan together to … liberate those of our African brothers and sisters from alien domination, economically emancipate all of us and build a Wholesome Functioning Society (Liberia 1974: 531-534).

George Kieh (1992) has charged that Liberia can be characterized as having a “lopsided patron-client relationship between the core--the developed capitalist states—and the periphery—the developing states.” Even if Liberia's shift in orientation towards Africa was motivated by economic relations, it was nonetheless made possible in part by Tolbert's use of the rhetorical resource, “Africa.” In the words above, Tolbert was basing his desire to emancipate and then develop Africa economically not primarily on economic benefits, but on the notion of a shared Africanness, understood as a supranational community to which these states belonged and had family-level responsibilities and commitments.

At an address given to members of the General Assembly and the Secretary General of the United Nations in November of 1974, Tolbert further stressed Liberia’s increasingly firm commitment to the struggle by using the words "accept nothing less" and "demand":

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Portugal, after more than 500 years of colonial rule and more than a decade of military struggle to maintain its colonial status in Africa, changed its attitude and, last April, reasonably accepted the inevitable, rejecting the outmoded, dangerous and repressive policy of colonialism. By so doing, she has ushered in a new era promising a fruitful and friendly relationship with Africa, and echoed the beneficial change of attitude which certain European states, faced with African determination to achieve independence, demonstrated during the course of the preceding two decades. In the meantime, let it be clearly understood that the Liberian Government will be satisfied with and accept nothing less than the total independence of all of the colonies and this she consistently demands to be done without any untimely procrastination (Liberia 1975: 207).

In the same speech, Tolbert identified one of its administration’s major foreign policy opponents by name, using rhetorical resources both to characterize "Africa" and its worst enemy, South Africa. Tolbert continued,

In contrast, the racist regime in South Africa has for many years resisted all urgings by African states and by the entire international community to heed the winds of change, abolish their oppressive system of apartheid, and join with the African majority in building a new society based on respect, justice, and human dignity. It is because of its intransigence and persistent refusal to adhere to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and comply with the numerous resolutions of the General Assembly that a Resolution initiated by the African states, was overwhelmingly adopted earlier during this Session of the General Assembly calling upon the Security Council to review the relationship between the United Nations and South Africa...There, member states who could no longer tolerate the presence of the racist minority regime of South Africa as the representative of the peoples of that country joined with the African nations in advocating the expulsion of South Africa from membership of the United Nations (Liberia 1975: 208).

Where South Africa was "racist," "oppressive," and "intransigen[t]," "Africa" was correspondingly engaged in a struggle to build "a new society based on respect, justice, and human dignity." By using these rhetorical commonplaces to define Liberia, Africa, and South Africa, Tolbert was paving the way for Liberia to participate in the UN Security Council debate over whether to expel South Africa from the United Nations. (The United States, Britain, and France all vetoed the Resolution, which led Tolbert in the speech to question the effectiveness of
the United Nations.) What is significant is how the colonial power, Portugal, and the racist regime of South Africa were spoken of in relation to “Africa.” Both were enemies of Africa and Liberia. Portugal’s retreat from its colonies meant that “Africa” could now have a “fruitful and friendly relationship” with the former colonial power. South Africa’s continued intransigence provoked African nations to advocate its expulsion along with other member states. This response to the South African regime was seen as the purview and responsibility of the African nations.

Liberia’s policy of pursuing the independence of all colonies was justified by Liberia’s being an African nation, but it also served to tie Liberia to “Africa,” a supranational community. To further support this point, when the former Portuguese territory Guinea-Bissau won its independence, Tolbert acknowledged it by proclaiming that

> In the spirit of independence, we also joyfully give special recognition to the hard-won sovereignty of our nascent sister Republic of Guinea- Bissau. Recalling the bloody struggle by our brothers and sisters for freedom from colonialism and imperialism, we hail and salute, with a deep sense of satisfaction, this emergent African nation which symbolizes a victory not only for Guinea-Bissau alone, but the whole of Africa over the stubborn forces of alien domination on this our beloved continent (Liberia 1974: 556).

As a settler state, of course, Liberia could have easily been characterized as a force, itself, of alien domination. However, Tolbert firmly resisted any such characterizations of Liberia by pulling from a narrative that had been used early in the country's history but then marginalized, namely that the settlers were “Africans” who had returned “home.” In addition, Tolbert was careful to reiterate the notion that Africans had something specific and of value to contribute to the world—a sentiment common in the writings of Wilmot Blyden, one of Liberia’s founding fathers, over a hundred years earlier.

_Tolbert’s Focus on Africa_
Tolbert’s efforts to “Africanize” Liberia, that is, to disrupt the justificatory arguments for Americo-Liberian settlers' social and political control by nesting Liberian identity within African identity, may have reflected his personal history: he came from both indigenous African-Liberian and immigrant American-Liberian stock. He had been born in 1913 of both African-Liberian and American-Liberian parents who had emigrated from the US to Liberia. Socially, he was a member of the Americo-Liberian settler group; however, he had spent his formative years in Bensonville, Liberia, a Kpelle community, and spoke Kpelle fluently. As the son of settlers, Tolbert enjoyed a social status unavailable to indigenous Africans, but he encountered the dominant group’s prejudice against local ethnic groups when he chose to marry a woman of the Vai community. After earning his Bachelor of Arts at Liberia College in 1934, Tolbert had entered government employment at the Treasury Department and eventually had been elected to the House of Representatives in 1942, where he served until called to the vice presidency in 1952. He served there for 19 years until Tubman's death in office in July 1971. Tolbert assumed the presidency by constitutional succession.

Tolbert’s Cabinet

Tolbert assembled a cabinet whose members had their own progressive ideas about the power of a united Africa, ideas that informed their advocacy for an autonomous, Africanist Liberian foreign policy that would support the intentions of the president. The foreign ministers that served during Tolbert’s administration were J. Rudolph Grimes (1971-72), Rocheforte L. Weeks (1972-73), and Charles Cecil Dennis, Jr. (1973-80); all of them appear to have favored a nonaligned and Africa-oriented Liberian foreign policy. J. Rudolph Grimes had been the Secretary of State when Tubman had died in office in July 1971 and Tolbert had taken over. In a memorandum dated December 1971, Grimes recommended that Liberian foreign policy should
seek friendly exchange and cooperation with as many states as possible (Dunn 2009: 116).

Grimes’ successor, Rocheforte L. Weeks, had studied at Howard University in Washington, DC, where he had been exposed to Black and African nationalist ideas as well as Afrocentric perspectives. Weeks had also studied in the US, graduating from law school at Cornell, the birthplace of the field of Africana Studies in the US. However, Weeks only spent a little over a year in office before resigning. Lawyer C. Cecil Dennis, who succeeded Weeks, was appointed Foreign Minister in 1973 and served until 1980; he was instrumental in developing an Africanist posture for Liberia in world politics. Born of mixed repatriate and Vai parentage, Dennis had studied in the US, graduating in 1954 from Lincoln University.

During his relatively long tenure as Foreign Minister, Dennis actively pushed for Liberia to align itself with African, nonaligned, and Afro-Arab states in solidarity with them. He was convinced that world events and historical circumstances required Liberia to cultivate ties with Africa and the rest of the developing and newly independent states of the world. In a speech at the UN in the fall of 1973, Dennis fervently argued for the expulsion of South Africa from the UN because of its treatment of the majority of South Africans (opposing the triple Security Council veto of the United States, Britain, and France). Dennis argued,

...the Government of South Africa, supported by a minority racist clique from within and its powerful trading partners from without, carries on with impunity, what this Organization has rightly called "crimes against humanity". Apartheid, the worst form of racism in existence today, continues to plague the African peoples of South Africa. The United Nations has condemned this outrageous policy which denies to the African majority their fundamental freedoms and constitutes a threat to the maintenance of international peace and security. Our brothers in South Africa have demonstrated extraordinary patience and endurance, but their patience is not unlimited. Unless this Organization can find means to effectively and speedily implement its resolutions on South Africa, I foresee a deterioration of the existing situation and a consequent failure of all efforts on behalf of a peaceful solution... My Government finds these commitments most encouraging and expresses the hope that all nations will desist from those activities which perpetuate injustice and inhumanity in southern Africa, but rather
render substantial moral and material assistance to the peoples of South Africa and southern Africa as they seek to acquire their fundamental freedoms… In all forums of this Organization, Liberia has appealed for justice and self-determination in freedom for all the peoples of Zimbabwe; yet, the illegal regime of Ian Smith continues its oppressive domination of the majority African population while denying to them the basic rights of political representation and equal economic and social opportunities. Most African political leaders in Zimbabwe are either in prisons or, have severe restrictions placed on their movements. This increasingly intolerable situation cannot and will not last. A small group of men, solely for racial reasons and because they possess the power to do so, continue to deny to an African majority in Africa all political rights as well as their equitable share of the wealth of their own land. Such practices shock the conscience of the world--and if the people and leaders who perpetuate and benefit from them cannot be convinced by measures now being employed, then it is the responsibility of the entire international community to undertake whatever new measures are required to eliminate these injustices. We reaffirm our commitment to and total solidarity with our oppressed brothers in Mozambique and Angola. Portugal should now know that there is no price which the people of Africa will not pay to end oppression and colonial domination (Liberia 1974).

Commenting on Dennis' speech, the foreign minister of progressive Tanzania, John Malecela, wrote to congratulate him on challenging those “adversaries of the African cause.”

Dennis also cultivated relations with as many counterparts as possible, including the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Algeria, Somalia, Ethiopia, Romania, and East Germany, in defiance of the US' policy positions; in addition, he established regular contact with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) leader Yassir Arafat. For Tolbert and his cabinet members, post-decolonization 1970s was a new day in world politics that required Liberia to align itself appropriately.

Meeting Apartheid South Africa’s Vorster

Since 1971, Liberia’s position on bringing an end to apartheid and colonialism in southern Africa had been consistent. However, in 1975, Tolbert stunned both Liberia and the world when he hosted and held talks with Prime Minister John Vorster of apartheid South Africa in Monrovia for 24 hours from February 11 to 12 of that year. At the time, the South African
government’s apartheid policies, suppression of the Namibian liberation movement, and support of the white settler minority regime in Zimbabwe had been publicly disavowed by most of the continent in accordance with OAU resolutions. Most states on the continent and in the world were pursuing policies of disengagement with South Africa.\textsuperscript{45} Tolbert’s meeting with Vorster took place in the process of an ongoing legitimation struggle, as Liberia, along with other member states of the OAU, applied international pressure for a negotiated solution to the discriminatory laws to which Portugal, South Africa, and Rhodesia remained committed. In 1969, the OAU had passed the Lusaka Manifesto, which explicitly denounced the governments of South Africa, Rhodesia, and Portugal “because they were systems of minority control based on the doctrines of human inequality” (Tanzania 1969). The Manifesto stated OAU members’ commitment to support the “African Freedom Fighters,” and in a show of solidarity, OAU members initiated a policy of “official noncontact” with the repudiated regimes in order to strengthen the liberation movements and to build international resolve against those governments. South Africa was becoming, for a number of states in the world, a pariah.

The effect of Tolbert's meeting with Vorster could be seen in the news media and press releases in the days following the meeting. Headlines included “Liberia Welcomes Africa’s Enemy!”; “Tolbert in Trouble with the OAU!” and “Mr. Vorster Pays Secret Visit to Liberian Leader” (Dunn 1982: 38; 2009: 129). In response, Tolbert released an Official Statement on February 18 justifying his meeting with Vorster and reasserting Liberia’s commitment “to the promotion of peace, progress and security in Africa and throughout our one world,” claiming that “…we shall not cease in our search until the whole of Africa is free.” He argued that Liberia was engaging with South Africa on behalf of “Africa” because of “Liberia”:

\begin{quote}
Just as no nation can exist today in complete isolation so also is the whole world affected by ills in any part of it. The commission of any act in one part of the
\end{quote}
Tolbert was historically situating Liberia’s existence and identity, acknowledging that “Liberia” could only be explained in the context of global politics, as the commission of acts in “one part of the world [America] vitally affects the other [Africa]”; this had been true, of course, particularly in the founding of Liberia. Tolbert applied the commonplace “Africa” in a manner that was in line with the narrative of Liberia as a civilizing/positive force charged with transforming Africa. Tolbert’s justification for the meeting with South Africa combined these commonplaces in his effort to continue Liberia’s role as a leader on issues in continental affairs. Tolbert’s defense of the meeting challenged both the OAU position on southern Africa’s liberation struggles and South Africa’s position, which upheld (to its own benefit) the OAU’s principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states.

Some critics suggested that in this meeting, as traditionally for Liberia, Tolbert was simply continuing the practice of adopting US foreign policy aims (MOJA 1980: 12). Others claimed that Tolbert’s meeting with Vorster was primarily a selfish attempt to gain international recognition as a leader, particularly after he had spent 19 years as the pliable vice-president to the strongman President Tubman (Sisay 1985: 159; Clapham 1976: 12-13). Kieh has suggested that Tolbert was merely keeping Liberia relevant on the world stage, despite its relative economic and military weakness; such diplomacy allowed Liberia to contribute in a significant way to international affairs (1992: 86).

**Role of Legitimation in Defending Meeting with Vorster**

Using theories of African politics or international politics, an argument can be made that Tolbert was acting in his own selfish interests (see Bayart 2009) or in the self-interest of the
Liberian state (see Waltz 1979; Nkrumah 1965). However, these arguments do not sufficiently consider the issue of legitimation, the “public pattern of justifications for a course of action” (Jackson 2006: 16-24). The legitimation process involves political actors giving reasons for what they have done or why they should act in a particular manner. Explanations of completed or anticipated state actions are usually socially plausible. Tolbert’s attempts to legitimize the meeting with apartheid South Africa by asserting that Liberia’s credentials as an African state were deeply rooted in the rhetorical resources that had been developing throughout the early 1970s. The debate itself involved exchanges in which various interlocutors, including the President’s staff, legislators and legislative staff, and other state officials attempted to effectively persuade their opponents or at least successfully prevent them from plausibly responding to their arguments.

The rhetorical landscape was already clear in Tolbert’s argument, in the Official Statement above, that “Liberia has…participated in international organizations for the general improvement of world conditions, especially those of the African peoples.” In this analysis, Tolbert’s statement should not be empirically evaluated in terms of whether or not Liberia had actually done the things Tolbert claimed. Instead, his statement must be evaluated in terms of its usefulness in Tolbert's legitimation of Liberia’s actions. Tolbert’s justificatory statements did not make use of new arguments but reached back, in a sense, to the familiar rhetorical commonplaces, and the notions of civilizational identity, that were already present in the social environment.

_Africanist Rhetoric_

The rhetorical commonplace of “the African peoples” that Tolbert used, like the rhetorical commonplace “Africa,” was a “vague, weakly shared notion” specifically being used
in this debate about opening dialogue with South Africa against the guidelines of the Lusaka Manifesto and other declarations of the OAU, but Tolbert used it to legitimate this policy and thus to give credit to “Liberia” for actions initiated in the interests of “Africa.”

Tolbert made use of two important persuasive ideas in his speech. The first was the notion that “[an] act in one part of the world vitally affects the other”; second was the notion that Liberia had historically participated in efforts to improve the world and Africa in particular. The pairing of these notions carved out rhetorical terrain within which to articulate Liberia’s actions and provided a context that allowed for the arguments presented by Tolbert to fit within Liberia’s history, values, and identity. The notion that a Liberia keenly aware of the significance of international relations would improve the world by first improving Africa simply continued the particular configuration of commonplaces related to Liberia that went all the way back to the early 19th century conceptualizations of “Liberia” used by the ACS (previously discussed in Chapter 4, “Imagining Liberia and Africa”).

As has been discussed in Chapter 6 “The Liberianization of Africa,” with the emergence of African states during the mid-20 century, commonplaces associated with Liberia’s founding appeared again in Liberia’s justification for its policy towards African states and territories, specifically the form that African unity should take on the continent. Tubman had supported independence struggles across the continent based on commonplaces associated with “Western Civilization,” including notions such as “all men are created equal,” “freedom, liberty, and justice,” “inalienable rights,” and “self-government,” and as a result, Liberia’s assistance to African liberation struggles in Tubman's time had not been justified by any reference to a supranational, superordinate African identity, but rather by Liberia’s commitment to “Western” notions. These public proclamations had no doubt contributed to what has been described as
Liberia’s “dubious distinction of being the most conservative and pro-Western state in Africa…an image that Tolbert wanted to change” (Sisay 1985: 159).

In the Official Statement released after Vorster’s visit, Tolbert’s proclamation that “the unhappy, even distressful, situation in Southern Africa is as much our concern as that of the inhabitants of the area” is an example of the Africanist arguments that he used to justify Liberia’s actions with regard to Southern Africa.\(^{46}\) The notion that the injustice, inequality and violations against “the African peoples” anywhere on the continent was a concern of Liberia allowed for certain kinds of action, such as efforts aimed at helping millions in Southern Africa, while ruling out others, such as isolating Liberia from South Africa’s distress. These commonplaces contained the notions that Liberia would help Africans fighting for their freedom and that it was within the purview of Liberia to do so; use of them effectively and dramatically shifted the loyalties of Liberia away from the US to “Africa.” It should be noted that Tolbert’s argument was directed to members of the OAU, the United Nations, and to Liberian society at large. In this legitimation process, Tolbert sought to deal with counter-arguments claiming that he had betrayed “Africa” by meeting with its declared enemy.

*Exchanges with the Enemy*

Liberia was not the only OAU member state to have considered engagement with the Vorster administration (Siko 2014: 20-23). In 1971, President Felix Houphouet-Boigny of the Ivory Coast had made similar justificatory statements when he had called for an African summit to discuss the possibility of dialogue with South Africa. Houphouet-Boigny had argued that although “the revolting system of apartheid outrages us all…a carefully thought-out approach conducted with serenity, realism and modesty would serve more faithfully the dignity, the pride and the best interests of our continent.” Like Liberia, Ivory Coast had no apparent political or
economic motivations to get involved. Arguing that it was in the interest of states on the continent to engage with South Africa went beyond the calculation of interests for any individual state in Africa. But to which “Africa” was Houphouet-Boigny making reference?

In this 1971 address, speaking to an audience that included several American and European reporters in the Ivorian National Assembly chamber, Houphouet-Boigny made the following rather puzzling justificatory statement in the form of a rhetorical question: “How would it be possible for the whites of South Africa to have a good relationship with us without being brought to re-examine their present attitude toward their black and colored nationals?”

In the same press gathering, Houphouet-Boigny repeatedly referred to South African government leaders as “our brothers,” reflecting the theme of South Africa’s Minister of Information, Connie Mulder, when, on a 10-nation tour of Africa earlier in 1971, he had said that “while we claim Africa for the Africans, we must remember that whites are also African.” He went so far as to assert, “We must help them to consider themselves first as Africans regardless of color. The future of the continent, our joint patrimony, is at stake.”

Of primary significance is the fact that Boigny combined the commonplaces of “brotherhood” and “white” with “Africa” to allow for the apartheid regime to be characterized as a “brother” regime in need of reform, rather than an alien regime that needed to be removed from “Africa,” as the colonial ones so clearly needed to be. Houphouet-Boigny went on: “When I see a sick man – and South Africa is a sick man today – I can scarcely hold back my tears at his suffering. But I must hold them back and keep my mind clear of emotion if I am to find a way to help him out of his sickness. That is what we must do in the case.” Boigny’s advocacy for dialogue gained support with other French-speaking states (Gabon, Benin, Niger, and Burkina Faso), as well as getting support from the respected President Leopold Senghor of Senegal.
While the OAU, then, resisted engaging with South Africa, proponents of dialogue with South Africa argued that lacking the means to enforce threats against South Africa, the failure of sanctions and guerrilla campaigns required a different approach. At the 1971 OAU summit, Boigny declared, “For seven years we have had nothing but grand and violent speeches, with tragic and sometimes ridiculous results. We cannot make threats without the means to apply them.” Prime Minister Kofi Abrefa Busia of Ghana elaborated on this concern: “What we appear to be doing so far [in the campaign against South Africa] is to send our African brothers to slaughter” (Barber and Barrett 1990: 147). The advocates of dialogue at the OAU conference were calling for contact with South Africa precisely in order to stop the bloodshed that was occurring without stint in the region.

The opposing argument to this justification for dialogue with South Africa also made use of the commonplace “Africa.” The outraged ANC commented that Houphouet-Boigny’s proposal “may perhaps be the beginning of the end of African unity,” and requested that Houphouet-Boigny and other proponents of dialogue be expelled from the OAU.49 Nigeria’s Foreign Minister, Dr. Arikpo, reiterated the conditions of the Lusaka Manifesto when he stated that unless Pretoria offered political freedom to all of its population, “she must not expect peace with the Africans.” In his use of the commonplace of “the Africans,” Minister Arikpo excluded the apartheid government of South Africa. President Nyerere declared, “If the right of self-determination does not exist for the blacks of southern Africa it does not exist for Tanzania” (Barber and Barrett 1990: 147). As Tolbert would do a few years later (but supporting the opposite position), President Nyerere explicitly tied “blacks of southern Africa” to “Tanzania” in the discussion about the struggle for freedom and self-determination for Africans.
When the OAU had voted in 1971, the proponents of dialogue had been defeated by 28 votes to 6. Those in favor of dialogue had been Gabon, Ivory Coast, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, and Mauritius. The outcome of the OAU vote had posed a serious challenge to the proponents of direct official dialogue with South Africa. After the 1971 OAU debate and vote, public proclamations denouncing South Africa had increased. At the next OAU summit in 1972, dialogue with South Africa had not even been raised for discussion. Partially in response to South Africa’s failure to make the necessary changes demanded in the OAU’s Lusaka Manifesto, at the East and Central Africa Summit the Mogadishu Declaration had been adopted, affirming that military force was the only way to deal with the South African government. It was in this hostile and contentious international social environment that Vorster was invited to Monrovia to hold talks with Tolbert in February of 1975.

**Engaging Apartheid South Africa in the Name of "Africa"**

In his Inaugural Address on January 3, 1972, Tolbert had outlined Liberia’s new approach to world politics, asserting that “direct dialogue” could be “a positive catalyst for common understanding and peace among men.” Establishing direct contact with South Africa in February 1975 was in line with this approach and was an example of actions that could be taken within the boundaries that Tolbert had articulated at the beginning of his administration. However, Liberia was a member of the OAU, which had decided on non-engagement with South Africa; thus, Tolbert’s action was viewed by some as a betrayal.

In order to deflect such accusations, Tolbert referred to one of the provisions of the Lusaka Manifesto: that South Africa must first engage in dialogue with its own citizens if it sought to establish contact with free states on the continent. In accordance with both Liberia’s stated policy and the declaration in the Lusaka Manifesto, Tolbert had set as one of the
preconditions of the meeting that Vorster must meet with the political leaders of the majority of South Africans agitating for freedom, such as Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, the leader of the four million Zulus within South Africa, and in Tolbert’s words “a prominent and renowned leader of our brothers and sisters in that country.” Tolbert explained in his Official Statement on the matter that upon being approached by South Africa, “we [Liberia] reiterated the conditions on which we would join in dialogue with that Government which included dialogue in South Africa between and among the peoples themselves” (Tolbert 1975: 296). Tolbert justified his dealings with South Africa by claiming solidarity with leaders and populations of “Africa.”

A review of Tolbert’s public statements attempting to legitimate his meeting with Vorster demonstrates his use of the commonplace "Africa" to support his notion of “Liberia” as autonomous, anti-colonial, and Africanist. Ten months after the meeting with Vorster, in his annual message to the Legislature, Tolbert vowed,

> We shall consistently maintain and strengthen fraternal bonds with our neighbours and advance the noble cause of African unity, brotherhood and solidarity. We shall never relent in our encouragement, support and assistance for the liberation of oppressed peoples everywhere, particularly on our beloved continent of Africa (Tolbert 1975).

In this address, Tolbert justified Liberia’s action not in terms of material gains or increased security for a small state caught in the major power politics of a bi-polar international system. Instead, Tolbert used the commonplaces of “African unity,” “brotherhood,” and the notion that Liberia had an obligation toward the liberation of oppressed peoples on the continent to indicate that Liberia’s involvement in negotiations regarding Southern African issues was rooted in something other than simple economic benefits. Tolbert’s proclamation echoed Nkrumah when he had asserted that Ghana’s liberation had been tied to the total liberation of Africa. Tolbert was legitimating his actions by binding “Liberia” to “Africa.”
Concentric or Nested Argumentation by President Tolbert

In the quotation above, Tolbert makes what is called a “nested community argument.” As mentioned in Chapter 5, “Enacting Liberia,” sovereign territorial states are seen as being nested within collectives or communities, such as “Africa” or “the West,” so that states are enclosed by “successive concentric circles of community membership…which in turn belongs to humanity as a whole” (142-150). These conceptual communities are distinct from the state in three important ways: 1) they include a wider geographical area; 2) they historically precede the state; and 3) they generally function on a more basic level than nations, over which governments exercise authority. States belong to these communities, which in turn belong to humanity. Arguments based on membership in these concentric communities enjoy a status unlike the speech used of an impersonal state or speech that abstractly totalizes all humankind. Nested community arguments can provide useful insight into who a group is, where they came from, and where they are going. In that sense, such arguments are simultaneously more authoritative and more personal than arguments that are made in the interests of an individual state. The conceptualization of Liberia as an “African” state justified Liberia’s commitment to seeking a solution to the conflict that was harming millions of Africans in Southern Africa. Because of Liberia’s membership in the broader African community, some action was required, even if it must involve the non-OAU-sanctioned dialogue.

In Liberia's official statement, the "African" objectives in meeting with Vorster were outlined. In the case of Namibia, the aim was independence and majority rule under the leadership of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) with SWAPO recognized by the OAU and the UN as the authentic representative of the Namibian people. In the case of Zimbabwe, it was support for independence talks and the holding of free and fair elections.
However, during Tolbert’s visit with Vorster, Tolbert made it clear that he was seeking African help to "find a solution and not demand white surrender." A month after the meeting, Tolbert attempted to justify the meeting to Liberian legislators, stating,

I want to confirm to you and I want the world to know that I am committed to the extent of sacrificing my life for the liberation of Africa. I will fight this battle for African liberation on every, and all fronts. I am prepared to go anywhere to fight this battle; I will even add, even to go to hell and conquer Satan, because that is the only reason why I will go there with the purpose and objective of conquering him and not let him conquer me. I want what I did to be considered as an act complementary to the engagement for African liberation. If I am alone, I stand alone and I feel that history will vindicate the cause I believe in penetrating new frontiers (Liberia 1975).

Tolbert's argument that the meeting had taken place for and because of his commitment to Africa made it more difficult for politicians to oppose the meeting, given the widely accepted pro-Africa posture.

President Press Secretary Henry Cole demonstrated the "nesting" of Liberia within Africa and the world in a 1974 press briefing, in which he made clear that any meeting with South Africa was a demonstration of Liberia’s performing its fraternal obligation to “brothers and sisters” in Southern Africa. Secretary Cole commented that Liberia would not enter into dialogue with South Africa until it accepted the principle of equality by holding talks with the African majority in South Africa. Previewing what Tolbert himself would say in 1975, he further stated that President Tolbert advocated dialogue with the South African government as “the Liberian Government has always by precept and examples advocated the use of the bargaining table rather than the battle ground in the solution of vexing problems.” Liberia, he said, insisted that such discussions should be conducted on the basis of equality and respect of human dignity by all parties (West Africa 1974: 281). At the level of the largest circle, humanity, Liberia was demonstrating a commitment to pursuing “peace among men” through direct dialogue. However,
at the level of the next circle inwards, "Africa," Liberia was arguing for equality for all African leaders in discussions, including South Africa’s. Liberian officials’ effort to legitimate the meeting with South Africa thus included equating “Africa” with the innermost circle of “family”; indeed, like Cole, Tolbert characterized the meeting as Liberia's meeting with “our brothers and sisters in that country” (Tolbert 1975: 297). This multifaceted nested commitment justified Tolbert’s meeting with Vorster.

Opposing Arguments Using “Africa”

Tolbert and his government were not the only ones to use rhetorical commonplaces to attach certain ideas to "Africa." His counterparts in other nations, opposed to the pattern of policy justification that Tolbert so expertly used, also used a commonplace with a different set of attached values but the same name: "Africa." At an Extraordinary Session of the OAU Council of Ministers held in April 1975 in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, Guinean President Sekou Toure drew on this commonplace when he denounced any peace overtures toward the South African government without prior OAU approval. Toure's commonplace, however, was wielded to make a quite different point. He referenced “Africa” as a supra-national community to which Liberia owed its allegiance, identifying “as a traitor of African freedom and dignity, any African government which echoes or makes itself and accomplice of imperialism in our ranks by playing the game of the apartheid regime” (Dunn 1982: 45). Toure argued that “Africa” needed to be defended specifically against Tolbert’s actions, which had made “Africa” vulnerable.

Toure was not the only African head of state who was concerned about Tolbert's actions. The keynote speech indicates this. As the host of the conference, Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere explained that the purpose of the meeting was “…not about so-called dialogue or détente with South Africa. This conference is about the liberation of southern Africa” (Thomas
1996: 137). The opening address resolutely called for the continued isolation of South Africa. Tolbert's justifications of his actions were falling on barren ground.

Tolbert’s attempt to legitimize the Vorster visit also faced resistance at home in Liberia. The two-year-old Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA), a Liberian political organization with international offices, whose purpose was to “work for meaningful national development,” was oriented specifically against colonialism, apartheid, and other social injustices. MOJA articulated its disapproval over the government’s decision to allow “Africa’s enemy,” South Africa, to visit Liberia. MOJA claimed that Liberia's minority settler government was paying more heed to the voice of the US than to the voices of its own people.

Another political group, chaired by opposition politician Samuel Jackson was called the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL); formed in January of 1975, its objective was to effect “progressive change in Liberia based upon the principles of freedom, justice and total equality.” PAL also expressed its dismay at Tolbert's decision to accept South Africa’s policy of dialogue. In a public letter to him, PAL admonished Tolbert:

Mr. President, you have seriously embarrassed the people of Liberia before the entire world. Even before the tide of shock and surprise can ebb, Vorster, in open mockery of the people of Liberia, has invited you to South Africa. We must say here to you, my dear friend, that if you go to that place, please do us the very kind favor of not returning to our country (44).

In order to demonstrate Liberia’s commitment to its Africanist foreign policy and to placate the critics at home and abroad, Special Liberian envoy, Deputy Foreign Minister T. Siafa Sherman, was sent to participate in a series of talks aimed at facilitating Zimbabwe's independence.

Opponents of Tolbert's South Africa policy cited two basic objections: First, they argued, the apartheid government was an alien governing body on the continent. Second, it was
illegitimate since it was so unresponsive to its majority population. Thirdly, Liberia's treating with South Africa would bestow the appearance of legitimacy on apartheid South Africa. The justification for direct dialogue with South Africa involved responding to all three arguments.

First, Liberia had to publicly reiterate its opposition to colonial rule, minority rule, and apartheid, as emphasized in Tolbert’s Official Statement.

We are definitely opposed to colonialism and we welcome the turn taken in Africa towards the complete eradication of its last vestiges. Similarly, this Administration has made clear its position in opposition to alien minority rule and apartheid in Africa. The records will confirm Liberia's opposition to the South African Government's:
1. policy of apartheid;
2. refusal as Mandatory to grant independence to Namibia; and
3. support for and encouragement of colonialism and alien minority rule in Southern Africa.

The further rebuttal to these objections depended on a rhetorical strategy using nested community arguments to further yoke Liberia to "Africa" and to attribute the success of the Liberia’s actions not to Vorster, but to the preconditions set for the meeting: that is to have the apartheid government speak to the leadership of the majority of South Africans. In this way, Tolbert used the rhetorical commonplace “Africa” and linked it to commonplaces such as “solidarity” and brotherhood” to justify meeting with the state officials of racist apartheid South Africa. In response to the criticism Tolbert received for meeting with Vorster, Liberia adopted the commonplace “Africa” as its fallback method of justifying its policies. The next section explores the way that this newly specified notion of "Africa" operated after the Vorster incident to shape and lock in subsequent Liberian actions.

Constructing Liberia’s Interests: “Africa” in Liberian Foreign Policy

It is noteworthy that Liberia did not actually have any political or economic interests in South Africa as those terms are traditionally conceived. Tolbert was operating from an
assumption that Liberia, a single nation, had the legitimacy and the authority to speak and act on behalf of “Africa” as a whole. It was a commitment, he argued, an obligation that he was compelled to perform. Part of this commitment can be seen in the public pattern of justification that had been given for Liberia’s actions over a considerable span of time. For example, the conception of “Africa” had played a role in a number of foreign policy debates, particularly during the post-World War II period after Ghana had won its independence in 1957. Conceptions of “Africa” had also featured prominently in debates leading to the initial formation of the OAU in 1963. By the early 1970s, Tubman’s notion of “Africa” as a set of discrete sovereign states on the continent had effectively supplanted the notion of “Africa” as a political federation of states that Nkrumah had championed. However, both notions had included the commonplace of an “Africa” that must be liberated through the combined efforts of all of its members.

The enduring salience of the commonplace “Africa” can be seen by Tolbert’s having to actively try to justify Liberia’s efforts to liberate the southern African nations by citing his country’s membership in the larger African community. Tolbert declared, in his first inaugural address, that

…viewed against the background of our past histories and our future goals, we realized that unity among African states was indispensable to the fulfillment of the aspirations of the African peoples....and we are committed to the proposition that our collective efforts and resources must be totally harnessed, and a common will developed. Our Government, therefore, will use its full potential to strive in the direction of creating a future equal to the rising expectations and legitimate aspirations of our African brethren (Guannu 1980: 387-388).

Here, in his first significant address as president of the republic, Tolbert was explicitly identifying the basis of Liberia’s shared membership in a collective African identity. The shared "past history" to which Tolbert was referring was, of course, the international trans-Atlantic slave trade and the experience of colonialism (see Rodney 1972). Liberia’s very purpose, as outlined in

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its Declaration of Independence and quoted by Tolbert in the same speech, was “to evince to all who despise, ridicule, and oppress our race that we possess with them a common nature, are with them susceptible of equal refinement, and capable of equal advancements in all that adorns and dignifies man” (Guannu 1980: 383). Thus, his notion of “Africa” made use of the commonplace “race,” specifically in the form employed by Blyden in the 19th century, to further the notion of “Africa” as naturally the rightful, God-given home of one “race.”

As a result of his moral commitment to “Africa,” Tolbert committed Liberia materially to the liberation movements in southern Africa, where, he said, “the hopes of millions upon millions of our brothers are souring in the blood of continued suppression, oppression, and repression” and “the denial of basic human rights of millions of Africans by minority regimes is woefully rampant” (Guannu 1980: 385). In an address to the Fourth Non-Aligned Conference in September 1973, Tolbert rallied the members to seek the release of the “illegally imprisoned African leaders who are fighting to regain the rightful place of their peoples in their own countries,” claiming that “[n]o one nation should feel itself oblivious to the need and urgency of removing all vestiges of colonialism and alien oppression from the face of the globe” (Tolbert 1974). Similarly, Liberian Minister of Foreign Affairs Cecil Dennis convened a subcommittee meeting in March of 1974 to propose the establishment of a fund dedicated to the support of the liberation struggle in Africa, beginning with Liberia’s contribution of several million dollars. Minister Dennis called on all the countries of the non-aligned movement to take “united action” to provide African freedom fighters with material, diplomatic, and moral support, declaring that Liberia had taken every occasion to seek to persuade the representatives of certain European countries to intervene with their NATO allies in other to bring a stop to the military and economic support now being given by that military alliance of Portuguese imperialism and colonialism, support which has been indispensable to
Portugal’s ability to sustain its oppressive aggression against, brutal military operations in, and occupation of certain areas of our beloved Africa (Dennis 1974).

Thus, Liberia’s provision of material support to and advocacy for the liberation struggles in southern Africa was justified by the country’s membership in the broader African community. To further strengthen the legitimation of its actions, the Tolbert administration maintained that the president's February 1975 meeting with Vorster was simply a continuation of a previous policy that had united Liberian interests to those of the African people at large.

However, ultimately, South Africa did not keep the promises it made to Liberia. Although Vorster vowed to withdraw troops from Rhodesia and to refrain from opposing independence for Namibia, in the end he clung to apartheid governance practices by claiming that there “has been a clear acceptance that we are of Africa.” Appropriating the commonplace "Africa" that Tubman had used, Vorster justified his position: “We do not interfere, nor do we permit anyone to interfere in our affairs” (Barber and Barrett 1990: 149). Vorster went so far as to claim that “We, [South Africa] just like the other African states, are seeking understanding and peace” (150). Despite Vorster's attempt to claim membership in the "Africa" that Tolbert referred to, the fact that compulsory segregation, discrimination, and political violence continued unabated in South Africa was ultimately unacceptable to Monrovia. Once South Africa’s intransigence became clear, Liberia redoubled its efforts to help dismantle apartheid, end South Africa’s illegal occupation of Namibia, and bolster the settler minority regime in Zimbabwe by providing additional support to the liberation struggles in all three countries, particularly at the UN and the OAU.

“Africa’s” advocate at the United Nations: Liberia
The commonplace "Africa" was used again by Liberia very shortly after the South African talks. During the 1975 UN Security Council's discussion of South Africa’s failure to comply with Security Council Resolution 366, which had passed six months before, Liberian officials participated in the international debate regarding how to advance Namibia’s liberation. Resolution 366 had demanded that South Africa withdraw its troops from Namibia, release political prisoners from Namibia, and end its illegal occupation of the country, as stipulated in previous resolutions (in particular the 1966 General Assembly Resolution 2145, which had ended South Africa's post-World War II trusteeship of Namibia). Rhetorically invoking both “Liberia” and “Africa,” Foreign Minister Dennis attempted to reclaim Liberia’s position as the leading advocate for Africa on the world stage in the international forum of the UN. In his statement to the United Nations’ Security Council on June 2, 1975, Dennis asserted that Liberia has always been firmly and unequivocally committed to the total liberation of Africa and to the eradication of all systems designed to deprive the African peoples of their inherent right to decide their own destiny in complete freedom, to uphold their dignity as human beings and to find proper expression for their just and legitimate aspirations. The preservation of Liberia as a nation during the long dark night of colonialism and racist oppression, rampant throughout the African continent, serves as a beacon of hope that the dawn of African independence would surely one day arrive. For most of Africa, that time has come (Dennis 1975).

Just as in the early days of the country, the commonplace “beacon of hope” was again joined to “Liberia” as it related to an “Africa” trapped in the dark (but this time the darkness of colonialism, not those of “ignorance” and “barbarism”). “Liberia” had contributed to African independence by the fact of its survival as a state during colonial encroachment and rule. When combined with the characterization of southern African populations as “our African brothers and sisters” referenced previously, the argument had the effect of transforming the whole continent's freedom from colonialism and racist oppression into a legitimate state concern of Liberia. In this
sense, the Tolbert administration was enlarging the territorial borders of Liberia to include the entire continent. This process was the “Africanization of Liberia.”

Now that the time had come for African independence, Liberia was continuing its leadership, and Tolbert’s meeting with Vorster to discuss the liberation of Namibia demonstrated that leadership. As Dennis put it, “Liberia has endeavored in the past and as today to spare no effort in assisting the transition of unliberated territories of Africa to self-determination and independence” (Dennis 1975). As a sort of "big brother" of the African community, it was incumbent upon Liberia to address the South African situation directly and unacceptable not to do so.

From the moment that Tolbert had stunned the international community in February 1975 by announcing plans to talk with Vorster, Foreign Minister Dennis had engaged in shuttle diplomacy with outraged OAU member states, trying to calm the waters. By June of that year, however, it had become clear that Vorster would not keep his promises, and Dennis appeared before the UN Security Council to advance the argument that Tolbert had actually met with Vorster to exhaust all possible means to bring a peaceful end to the conflict in southern Africa and Namibia. Tolbert's actions had merely showed the depth of his commitment to "Africa." If Tolbert had resisted a meeting with Vorster, presumably that would have made Liberia’s commitment to “Africa” questionable. However, given South Africa’s failure to keep its promises yet again, Dennis had strong words to say:

And that is why it is the more difficult, painful and intolerable to be confronted by the continued exploitation of Namibia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa itself. The people of Africa will never accept the inhumane, unjust and condemned systems of racism, colonialism and apartheid which are so repugnant to the Charter of this Organization, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the very concept of human dignity and the rights of all people to self-determination. They are therefore perfectly justified to employ all means at their command to bring them to an end (Dennis 1975).
Dennis’ argument combined a commitment to "Africa" with a commitment to the world, as represented by the UN, to take a stance against racial discrimination and oppression. Tolbert's attempt to resolve the issue with diplomacy had failed; therefore, Liberia was proceeding to the next step: all means, including warfare, were now deemed justifiable, as, Dennis said, the “intransigence of South Africa has brought us face to face with the stark reality of an intensifying armed struggle...The right of the Namibian people to live out their lives in freedom, justice and human dignity is worthy of the most fearsome sacrifices.”

In this difficult moment for Liberia and for Africa, Dennis also drew on another powerful commonplace - that of "racism"- to strengthen the case for adopting stronger measures against the recalcitrant Vorster: "Racism," he said,

...is a source of grave danger to world peace and security. It gives rise to irrational and blind hatreds and is totally contradictory to mankind’s highest hopes for the establishment of a world order based on freedom, justice, equality, and meaningful cooperation. It stifles human development and advancement and appeals to the most base instincts of greed, fear and selfishness which have so many times in the past, and most recently in the Second World War, exposed humanity to profound depths of horror, tragedy, suffering and sorrow (Dennis 1975).

By surrounding the term "racism" with such strong language and such historical associations, by characterizing the apartheid regime as akin to the Nazi and fascist regimes that had been defeated in the Second World War, Dennis was elevating the term to the status of a commonplace. He was asserting the vital importance of addressing the noncompliance of South Africa with international laws. Such full-throated rhetorical condemnation of the Vorster administration closed the rhetorical possibilities for anyone who quailed at the idea of adopting stronger measures towards South Africa.
Connecting the apartheid regime of South Africa with the Nazis and fascist regimes was a rhetorical twist of the knife on Dennis' part; after all, South Africa had pushed Germany out of its colonial territory of Southwest Africa, subsequently renamed Namibia. South Africa, then, had taken over the former German colony, eventually governing it as a part of South Africa itself.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the ICJ, the Security Council, and the UN General Assembly had agreed that South Africa’s rule of Namibia was illegal and must end. Subsequently, several UN resolutions had been passed to finish it, including Security Council Resolution 366, passed in December 1974. In the June 1975 debate regarding South Africa’s failure to honor its promises to move out of Namibia, Dennis again used the commonplace of "Africa" to argue that ending “the exploitation, oppression, and degradation of an African majority” by a “minority racial group” would be a victory “not for any one nationality, race, or special group but for all mankind.”

It is important to note that neither the Vorster meeting nor the justification for it happened in a vacuum, but both were part of social processes, including diplomatic exchanges, preconditions, and legitimation. Liberian state officials who defended the move toward official contact with South Africa did so by consistently linking Liberia to the commonplace of helping “African brothers and sisters” in the struggle against racial discrimination, oppression and toward majority rule.

Although the rationally strongest objection to Liberia’s engagement with apartheid South Africa should have been that it had not been sanctioned by the OAU, the Tolbert administration, utilizing the nesting strategy, managed to shift the discussion to the question of which nations
were authorized to speak and act on behalf of “Africa.” This was accomplished by requiring Vorster to meet with Chief Buthelezi before coming to Monrovia.

After Vorster duly met with Chief Buthelezi, Liberian officials were able to deploy the commonplace of “speaking for the peoples of Africa” in their subsequent meeting with Vorster, leaving open a way to legitimate Liberia’s position and actions. When Vorster failed to keep his promises of withdrawal from Namibia and Zimbabwe, and to bring an end to apartheid policies, Liberia was now in a position to vigorously advocate action against South Africa, including military options, again on behalf of “Africa” in the international forum of the United Nations.

*Lock-in effects of Tolbert’s use of “Africa” in the legitimation of the South African case*

At this critical period and as a result of the criticism Tolbert had received for his meeting with Vorster and other South African leaders, Liberia began to make renewed use of the rhetorical commonplace "Africa" to justify its policies. Using this notion of “Africa” in this particular way created some “lock-in” effects for the Tolbert administration. The remainder of this chapter describes how the notion of "Africa" operated after this moment to shape subsequent Liberian actions.

After these public commitments to "Africa," Liberia now was "locked into" publicly demonstrating its membership in and allegiance to “Africa.” To that end, Liberia became even more assertive toward the regimes in South Africa and Rhodesia, increasing its support for independence in Zimbabwe and the Portuguese-ruled territories, including Mozambique. During Tolbert’s state visit to the US in 1976, the Soweto uprisings took place; reports of the unrest actually came in during the state dinner at the White House. In his remarks at the dinner, Tolbert spontaneously noted, "our joy is subdued by the violent and continued brutal suppression and massacre of my brothers and sisters in South Africa at this time." Tolbert had encouraged
president Nixon to adopt a more positive African policy, especially with regard to southern Africa policy; he continued to do the same with presidents Ford and Carter, which was a source of tension in US-Liberia relations as the Liberian president became more emphatic about the need to condemn South Africa’s policies in the region.

In 1977, Liberia led the establishment of a committee within the OAU that raised and distributed funds to liberation movements in southern Africa. Liberia itself supplied more than $600,000 to the OAU Liberation Fund, and Tolbert intensified his African diplomacy, getting involved in strengthening African unity by serving as a mediator in longstanding disputes among President Sekou Toure of Guinea, President Felix Houphouet-Boigny of the Côte d'Ivoire, and President Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal at a conference with West African leaders in March 1978. Tolbert’s personal mediation was effective, as it led to the normalization of relations between Guinea and Ivory Coast and Senegal and Guinea. In Tolbert’s closing remarks at the conference, he said:

The magnitude and significance of our meeting which has just ended, cannot be over-emphasized in terms of the far-reaching and positive effects it has had on our own fraternal relations, and could have on the harmonious relations among the Nations of Africa and of our one World. We have endeavoured, and as evidenced by the Communique to which we have affixed our signatures, succeeded in rekindling the flame of genuine brotherhood in the hearts of our Brothers of Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea and Senegal, and reawakened among ourselves a new consciousness of our oneness (Liberia 1978).

We have resolved to uphold fraternal and harmonious relations. We have reaffirmed our adherence to the sacred principles enshrined in the Charter of the Organization of African Unity. We have agreed to work together even more assiduously in unity and solidarity, thus upholding one of the finest of African traditions.

I am convinced that if left to ourselves, we in Africa have the maturity, wisdom, ability and determination to find just and lasting solutions to all of our problems; and we can do so in the African tradition and way - the method we know best. Our commitment is binding. We must stand unswervingly in Africa as a Continental Front for internal and external unity and solidarity.
Let me once again thank you, my dear Brothers and Colleagues, for responding so graciously to our invitation to hold these significantly meaningful discussions in such a timely manner which has resulted in tremendous success with immeasurable benefit for our Sub-region, and victory for Africa. We are humbled by this opportunity to have been privileged to serve in the manner that has been afforded us to bring glory to Africa (Liberia 1978).

Continuing his new assertiveness, Tolbert was becoming more vocal in condemning South Africa’s policies. On a visit to Angola in December of 1978, Tolbert castigated South Africa for the conditions of Africans in the region and pledged Liberia’s support to the liberation campaigns of the South West African People’s Organization (SWAPO), the Patriotic Front, the African National Congress (ANC), and the Polisario guerillas who were fighting to gain control of the Western Sahara region.

Along with its demonstration of Liberia's commitment to Africa-centered foreign policy actions, ties to states on the continent were strengthened against the wishes of Liberia's traditional patron, the US. For example, Liberia had had a mutual defense pact with the US since the 1950s. Although Guinea was clearly classified as a “radical” state because of its strong connections with the East and with socialist ideals, Liberia entered into a defense pact with Guinea in December 1978; in fact, the Guinea-Liberia Non-Aggression and Defense Pact became the most far-reaching mutual defense treaty that Liberia had ever entered into, including any security arrangements with the US. (The pact called for mutual security assistance against external aggression while the longstanding defense pact with the US offered only consultative sessions.)

Tolbert continued his activist Africanist foreign policy by, in early 1979, convening the OAU and Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)-sponsored “Monrovia Conference” in Liberia. At the conference, whose purpose was to devise plausible plans for economic
development for the continent projecting out to the year 2000, the assembled African experts
looked for common patterns in the economies of African states with an eye to addressing them
collectively. The development of an African common market by and for Africans, and that of a
technology hub for knowledge transfers were among the ideas agreed upon at the conference for
African development. Important resolutions passed at the summit included a resolution to form a
committee on African human rights; the renewal of the OAU Committee of Twelve on Afro-
Arab Cooperation, of which Liberia was a member; resolute demands regarding the situation in
southern Africa, including additional support for OAU-recognized liberation movements in
Namibia and South Africa; and peace negotiations leading to independence for Zimbabwe.

Finally, in 1979 Tolbert accepted the OAU chairmanship and became the official
spokesman for Africa. From this position, Tolbert further demonstrated Liberia’s commitment to
Africa. At great financial cost in an economic downturn, Liberia hosted the Sixteenth Summit of
the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Monrovia that year. Tolbert closed out the
conference, and in his remarks, he announced the adoption of a new resolution to

...draw the attention of Member States to certain international conventions whose
ratification would help to strengthen Africa's struggle against certain scourges,
especially against apartheid and racial discrimination, trade imbalance and
mercenarism; and to organise as soon as possible, in an African capital, a
restricted meeting of highly qualified experts to prepare a preliminary draft of
an "African Charter on Human Rights,' providing, inter alia, for the establishment
of bodies to promote and protect human rights (Liberia 1979).

In contrast to Liberia’s participation in the founding of the OAU, in which Liberia had
attempted to contain the scope of the organization’s reach, Tolbert vigorously supported the
drafting of a human-rights charter for the organization’s member states, which, if executed
would present a challenge to Liberia's sovereignty, the very thing that Tubman before him had so
fiercely guarded. Perhaps nothing could have so definitively demonstrated Tolbert's willingness to break with the past and turn his nation toward Africa.

Speaking about the economic plight of Africa, he justified the work of the Economic Commission for Africa at the Monrovia Conference by defending the notion of "Africa" as a collective one:

...we cannot develop one by one; we must develop altogether. We cannot diversify one by one; we must integrate our economies together. Our self-reliance is secured through inter-reliance. Our individuality is captured through collectivity. Our independence is realized through inter-dependence… Emerging from the recent OAU/ECA Colloquium as well as this very Assembly of State and Government is the MONROVIA STRATEGY and the MONROVIA DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT for cultivative self-reliance and inter-dependent socioeconomic development (Liberia 1979).

The reference to “cultivative self-reliance” was a nod to African socialism as practiced by Nyerere’s Tanzania; the turn from US-centric thought was dramatized if we look at Nyerere's policies, which prioritized African self-reliance in agriculture and other important sectors over engagement with the international economic system and rejected the status quo, in which African economies and states had been perpetual losers, always indebted to the more industrialized countries. Press and attendees quickly reported to the world that Tolbert’s dedication to Liberia’s active role in the political and economic future of African states was clear (see Sankawulo 1980).

Liberian Responses to the Tolbert’s Changes

Two relatively new political organizations formed in Liberia during the 1970s, the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA) and the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL), demonstrate some support or agreement with Tolbert’s shift in policy orientation. PAL, founded by a handful of Liberians in the United States in 1975, established offices in Monrovia in 1978 and cultivated a constituency among urban workers. MOJA was formed in 1973 by a group of students and professors of the University of Liberia to support African liberation movements.
reflecting connection to an African continental identity and the associated responsibility of membership to such a supranational community among the educated elite. The goal of MOJA was to educate the public and mobilize financial support for the wars of liberation against Portuguese colonial forces and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Armed with the examples of the African liberation struggles, including new appreciation of ethnic cultural integrity, these new groups began to publicly urge Liberia to support Africanist causes and agenda within Liberia and in global politics. MOJA and PAL applied pressure to the Tolbert government on questions of civil liberties, equality of opportunity, and urban and rural poverty in Liberia.

However, members of Tubman’s patronage network and the old guards of the True Whig party were markedly less enthusiastic about the political reforms Tolbert was attempting to put in place. Many viewed Tolbert’s actions as too quickly breaking with the tradition of a 100-year-old conservative Liberian political system and as fundamentally disrespectful of the political arrangement that had created Tolbert and delivered him to the presidency. Threatened by the changes that were moving through the Liberian society, the old guard felt alienated by Tolbert’s new approach and policies. Subsequently, they committed themselves to putting up resistance to Tolbert’s concessions to these emergent segments of Liberian society. Lacking the personal forcefulness of Tubman, Tolbert eventually found himself in a position in which he moved between fulfilling the demands of his family and the core repatriate group while haltingly moving Liberia in a new direction of social equity rooted in a deeper identification with “Africa.”

To illustrate, Tolbert had promised an open society and committed his government to the protection of civil liberties. He released Tubman’s political prisoners, encouraged free debate,
and invited criticism of government officials. However, the press was curtailed when it came to criticisms leveled at high officials who happened also to be his relatives. In 1974, for example, a news magazine was banned and the editors imprisoned for criticizing Stephen Tolbert, the President’s brother and finance minister. The finance minister’s business interests had rapidly expanded after Tolbert had become president. The Supreme Court, presided over by the father-in-law of the finance minister, fined Albert Porte close to a quarter-million dollars as a result of the libel suit brought by Finance Minister Tolbert. There was a growing discontent with the pre-existing unjust, exclusionary and discriminatory social, political and economic systems of the country, which were slow to change (Libenow 1984). Indeed, Tolbert’s liberal measures led to a growing assertiveness and discord among Liberia’s African population, as indicated with the rise of MOJA and PAL. Tolbert’s position placed him in a network from which he benefited and to which he was accountable while trying to govern a society fed up with the status quo.

An example of this tension was the question regarding the legalization of gambling. By the mid-1970s, the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA) had expanded its scope to concern itself with local issues as well. Questions about civil liberties, equality of opportunity, and urban and rural poverty in Liberia became as important among its concerns as the problems of colonialism and white settler rule in southern Africa. Within seven years, MOJA, with the help of supporters, had organized grassroots opposition to the legalization of gambling and supported the legal defense of Albert Porte in a libel suit brought against him by the president’s brother. In the gambling case, Tolbert appeared to be on the side of the popular opposition during the course of the public debate. At the last minute, Tolbert failed to veto the measure ultimately taking the side of the Americo-Liberian elites in government to the dismay of MOJA and other opponents of the measure. The main issue here was not gambling but rather Tolbert’s equivocation.
**Political Mismanagement and the Downfall of the Regime**

By the end of the decade, as Tolbert’s and his family’s action came under more intense scrutiny, Tolbert's commitment to the protection of civil liberties and freedom of press was tested. To deal with critical voices that included outspoken clerics, professors, student leaders, newspaper editors, and reporters, Tolbert increased security forces and subjected critics and opponents to security surveillance. Reporters and student leaders were regularly imprisoned while Tolbert called for emergency powers and tougher sedition laws.

The contentious interactions between institutions of the state and groups in society destabilized Tolbert’s regime. In April 1979, the government announced a 50 percent increase in the price of rice, sparking the famous "rice riots" in Monrovia. The Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL) organized a public demonstration against the government’s decision to increase the price of rice to as much as one-third of the monthly wages of low-income earners. The public outrage stemmed from the fact that the Tolbert family and a few high officials were large-scale rice producers and importers and were perceived to be the beneficiaries of this policy. The protests resulted in rioting and looting in Monrovia, where hundreds were killed or wounded. In part due to Tolbert’s restructuring of the security sector, soldiers and police joined the looters, demonstrating a lack of discipline and reliability.

In the aftermath of the riots, Tolbert accepted many of the recommendations of a commission on “reconstruction,” but he resisted scaling down the family business (Boley 1983; Dunn and Tarr 1988). The Tolbert's family business interests were extensive, including fishing, automobiles sales and service, poultry, and the distribution of textbooks and uniforms (Lowenkopf 1976). Tolbert resisted questions of conflict of interest that involved himself and his relatives, while frequently having junior officials of government charged and prosecuted for
embezzlement and malfeasance (Clampham 1991: 99-111; Sawyer 1992: 289). Late in 1979, PAL reorganized and registered as a political party called the Progressive People’s Party (PPP). In early 1980, PPP called for a nationwide strike, demanding that the Tolbert government resign and form a coalition government. The government’s response was to arrest its leaders and charge them with treason.

In January 1980, the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) staged the “midnight march” near the Executive Mansion and called for Tolbert’s resignation. Tolbert responded with force. The PPP was banned, arrests were ordered and a purge of critical voices within the society commenced. Schisms and tensions in state-society relations led to a coup on April 12, 1980. President Tolbert was assassinated, the ruling True Whig Party (TWP) was overthrown and Samuel K. Doe became head of state. According to the People’s Redemption Council (PRC) and Doe, the coup was necessitated by government corruption, the government's disregard for human and constitutional rights, and high levels of unemployment.

Conclusion

The rise of MOJA and PAL were made possible by the Tolbert administration's liberal policies, and yet, Tolbert was unable to manage the frustrations and vigorous response of emerging groups to these political openings. The non-governmental organizations, along with a freer media, and student groups, became effective avenues for putting political pressure on the government. For example, Tolbert's financial support to liberation movements was clearly influenced by the example of MOJA's sending support--moral, financial and otherwise--to liberation organizations. The Tolbert administration's Africanist leadership in African international relations could be seen as a way to legitimize the Tolbert presidency but also as a
response to the demands coming from a Liberian society eager to embrace the interests of fellow African states more fervently.

In this way, the shift in Liberian foreign policy in the 1970s may be explained in terms of the spread of the Pan-Africanist sentiment that had inundated Liberian society and made available "Africa" as a discursive resource to justify certain policies. For historical reasons, a significant portion of the Liberian population could relate to the struggles against policies of discrimination, colonialism and apartheid in southern Africa. By publicly pressing the Liberian government to support those struggles, the Liberian media and the actors described above revealed linkages between domestic developments and international policy that were both produced and legitimated by references to an African continental identity. Tolbert’s domestic policies initial reflected a continuity with Liberia’s international relations. Tolbert's commitment to inclusive governance with the Africans within Liberia’s border was congruent with a clear affinity to more Africa-centric politicians and political leaders on the continent; similarly, the interest in supporting liberation groups in southern Africa and the opening up of Liberia to the East can be seen as reflections of new courses of actions made possible by a closer identification with Africa.

Tolbert justified his new policy directions to the public and the world by the commonplace “Africa” to signal the country's new direction. Despite any potential repercussions of Liberia’s newly autonomous, anti-colonial, and Africanist foreign policy, which created significant ruptures in Liberia’s relationship with its closest and most powerful historical ally, the US, Liberia under the Tolbert administration pursued those policies fervently nonetheless. Thus, where other theoretical frameworks fail to do so, an examination of the role of the commonplace
“Africa” and other associated commonplaces in the foreign-policy actions of the Tolbert administration illuminates possible answers to the shift in Liberia’s policies in the 1970s.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

The subject of this theoretically-informed empirical study--Liberian foreign policy--highlighted African international relations, which are usually considered marginal with respect to international relations theory. The activities of African states in international politics remain relatively unexplored in the international relations theory literature, which raises the question: does a systematic empirical examination of the international political action of an African state generate valuable insight into international relations? Waltz (1979) pointedly commented, “it would be…ridiculous to construct a theory of international politics on Malaysia and Costa Rica…A general theory of international politics is necessarily based on the great powers.”

While it is not the aim of this project to seek to empirically establish general laws of state action across all time and location based on the African experience, it is important to note the dearth of IR scholars venturing outside of Europe and North America for empirical evidence to work out their theories or wagers on how world politics works. In his seminal text, The Philosophy of History (1837),19th century German philosopher G.W.F Hegel declared that Africa was not part of history and described Africa as “the land of childhood…lying beyond conscious history…enveloped in the dark mantle of Night”. In addition to Waltz, there are many intellectual children of Hegel who precipitously yet ceremoniously declared that Africa was not part of world history because it lacked any serious movement or development (Hegel and Sibree 1956). 20th century political scholar and US foreign policy advisor Samuel Huntington in Clash of Civilizations divides the world's cultures into seven contemporary civilizations, Western, Latin American, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu and Slavic-Orthodox (Huntington 1993:26). He judges Africa only as a “possible” civilization. If the prevailing assumption, rooted in the Hegelian notion of Africa as a void, is that the study of Africa is a meaningless exercise unable
to provide valuable insights, then the question is why study Liberian foreign policy? Studying the foreign policy of Liberia may produce useful insights into the workings of global politics specifically, the intersection of cultural political affiliation and the creation of different institutional arrangements in the international realm. The study of African international relations as produced by and productive of international arrangements offers a sorely needed different perspective and generates new insights into world politics. This study has sought to show that how we organize ourselves socially on a global level has implications for world politics.

In attempting to denaturalize the term “Africa,” this study opened space to imagine different ways of organizing ourselves in the world. The shift from an analytical focus on Africa as a real entity to instead talking about Africa as grounds, means or justification for a particular action has intended to avoid the error made in most social scientific studies on culture or civilizations, which is to treat the analytical tool or concept as the object to be studied. Hence, this analytical approach has consciously attempted to avoid the reification of a non-Western Other and the reification of the Western Self, a common pitfall of some postcolonial literature. Actors performing on behalf of the Liberian state have not been idealized constructions but instead have been rooted in historical contexts with an intense focus on how the political and social context informed their choices. Equally important has been how those actions and concatenated processes continuously produced and reproduced the Liberian state in various forms in specific contexts.

In traditional civilizational analysis, as discussed earlier, there has been a tendency to treat civilizations as an ontological reality, an object in the social world to be studied, and as an analytical tool for understanding the social world. These sorts of analyses are prone to reification by mistaking the analytical concept for an empirical object. To avoid that, this study has asked
the question, "In what way is civilizational language, that is the use of “the West” and “Africa” in political rhetoric, involved in the generation of world political actions?" In this analytical framework, it was not necessary to outline the contents of “Africa,” which would have required presenting an essence of Africa. Instead, the focus has been on how the notion of “Africa” existing already in everyday language used by politicians played a role in the generation of policies. The approach employed by this study has drawn from, built on, and was situated within the work of the civilizational analysts discussed herein. However, the challenge with civilizational analyses is that it can lead to the reification of social categories such as a Liberian “self” and an African “other.” This research adds to the critical constructivist research agenda by problematizing the notion of the state and de-naturalizing the category of “Africa”. On a practical level, this research can also inform further research and teaching on Africa. In many ways, continental Africa is researched and taught as if it is a unified entity. However, Africa is not a monolith. Even devising policies that are based on an essential Africa is problematic.

This project described the processes of state-making in global politics that are outside the comparatively extensively studied Euro-American experience. The English School of International Relations has consistently emphasized the need for research from different global orientations. A significant number of these studies have detailed the processes through which non-European states have entered into the society of states. Starting with Bull’s (1977) insight that the formation and perpetuation of the society of states in Europe involved a construction of a European self that was distinct from and superior to other groups in the world, Linklater (2006) notes that for newly independent states of the post-World War II, the expansion of international society was not simply a matter of accepting the principles of sovereignty, non-intervention and diplomatic protocol but that it required the “westernization” or “modernization” of non-European
communities. The acceptance of principles central to the order of modern international society by these new states was not a foregone conclusion, as indicated by Bull and Watson’s (1984) discussion of a sense of relief felt by European powers with the general acceptance of the equality of states by these non-European states. The challenges of addressing the power imbalance and inequitable distribution of wealth between Euro-American and non-Euro-American states have also been considered by scholars of the English School. Bull emphasized that the maintenance of order between the states had to be coupled with a “sense of the continuing challenge” to address the social and economic injustice between the rich and impoverished in the global society. The English School work on the expansion of international society has been, perhaps, the most ambitious in confronting the need for more international relations research on and from the states that entered into the international society post-World War II. The English School research largely focuses on the challenges and responses of the society of Euro-American states to a changing world, one in which new states proliferated after the Second World War. As such, they have called for research from the perspective of non-European states. This study responds to the call for research from the perspective of non-European states.

Reporting on conflicts and corruption in Africa often recount an Africa in a state of social and political backwardness, a state of nature as opposed to civilization. The hollowing-out of the modern African state by well documented patronage networks indicates a chaos in African political systems in contrast to the Euro-American bureaucratic ideal (Zartman 1995; Bayart 1999). Popular and academic writings on Liberia offer little respite as the focus on the corruption of the oligarchy overshadows accounts of politics taking place in this small state. From this view, African states are not real states engaged in real politics that can then be studied. Noted scholars
pejoratively note that African states are “states” only in recognition of borders, but not functionally (Jackson and Rosberg 1982). In other words, they are not to be taken seriously. The African state—as broken, decrepit, etc. as it is—has, remarkably, persisted. In the case of Liberia, it existed for over 134 years before its brief collapse in 1990, only to be reconstituted within a matter of days. Given the resources and processes required to keep a state going, what is shocking and intriguing is not the alleged state collapse, but rather how the Liberian state held together for over a century. The empirical investigation presented here provided as part of the analytical narrative an account of Liberia’s political history that examines how this particular African state survived. As such, it presented an examination of the social and political transactions that produce an African state, a constitutive element of global politics. Analytical depictions of the workings of the Liberian state can provide important insights into how world politics transpires. For example, the causal mechanism and the use of cultural and discursive resources to justify policies may explain policy outcomes in other states within the international system. Furthermore, the study’s treatment of Liberian politics as a meaningful exercise is intended to counter the widely-held perception of African political affairs as an unending cycle of war and corruption. Lastly, the techniques or the discursive formations outlined in this study may be useful for Liberian leaders currently engaged in the project of building a national consciousness and social cohesion in contemporary Liberia. Given that this study traced how historically situated actors produced Liberia, it could help in identifying pitfalls in Liberian state formation and highlight alternative paths to aid in the furtherance of the Liberian state project.

The field of African studies is flooded with research on international development as opposed to international politics. There is a conflation of African studies with development studies. Thus, discussions on “African issues” are often limited to hunger, poverty and high
mortality rates, and the like but rarely the conduct of politics. The question arises what is the value of a study that does not directly address “African issues,” such as hunger, poverty and high mortality rates and their putative cause, criminal governance and pathological corruption? Schmidt (2013: 1) notes, “for many outsiders, the word Africa conjures up images of a continent in crisis, riddled with war and corruption, imploding from disease and starvation. Africans are regularly blamed for their plight. They are frequently viewed as being intolerant of ethnics and religious differences but accepting of corruption and dictatorship. They are often presumed to be unwilling or unable to govern themselves.” This study brought into focus Africans engaged in political debate and discussion in a democratizing context, e.g., Africans in the process of confronting the challenges of governing themselves. Furthermore, it presents an analysis of policy-making and implementation in an African state. This study acknowledged African agency in social transactions of political consequence in recognition of the integral role that politics plays in sincere efforts to address the problems and issues of human existence in Africa.

As noted earlier, the subject of Liberian foreign policy during the decade of the 1970s was under-researched. This study attempted to address existing gaps in knowledge on Liberian and international relations research by researching this topic. Lastly, the analytical tools employed in this dissertation can be applied to explaining policy outcomes in other cases.

The analytical narrative presented here has attempted to account for Liberia's break with its historical policy positions by examining the role of the rhetorical commonplaces “Africa” and "Liberia" at the three significant moments in Liberia's. It contended that the use of these commonplaces aided in the legitimation of Liberian state policies in all three periods, and particularly during the 1970s when Liberia shifted away from a US and Europe oriented policy to a more Africa oriented policy. A turn to the field of international relations theory to seek
solutions to this puzzle yields a variety of possible positions from which an explanation may be crafted. Structural and economic approaches commonly used in the field of IR to analyze such a shift fail to explain why the shift in Liberia’s policy. A realist approach, for example, would explain Liberia’s Africanist policies in the 1970s as an effort to pursue power because of the anarchical nature of the international system. In this view, military power and wealth are how states survive, meet their security requirements, and thus continue to compete in a system that maintains itself through balancing. However, an autonomous, anticolonial, Africanist foreign policy embraced by Liberia made it more vulnerable in the self-seeking international environment by moving it away from its long-standing alliance with the powerful United States. Thus, a central pillar of realist think is undermined as realist theories in important ways fail to account for Liberia’s shift in allegiance. Theoretically, Liberia should have pursued other policies that would have increased its security. For example, Liberia could have continued its close relationship with the United States and its allies, which had allowed the Liberian state to survive for over a century. A realist approach, explaining Liberia's actions only in terms of structural imperatives, would eliminate any self-determining role for the agents who chose to pursue a particular action. A successful explanation of Liberia’s shift in policy orientation during the 1970s would also have to causally account for the success of the policies implemented over other policy options while preserving a role for human agency. The realist approach fails to preserve agency in its explanatory framework, which is problematic. Economic approaches, such as liberal and Marxist approaches, emphasize that economic relations determine interests. Policies are then created to protect those interests. However, Liberia’s autonomous, anti-colonial and Africanist policies of the 1970’s did not explicitly seek to protect Liberia’s economic interests. On the contrary, those policies threatened the steady flow of revenue to the Liberian
state. Also, as with the realist framework, economic approaches do not preserve a role for agency.

In order to analyze case like the case of the Liberian state’s shift to an Africa-oriented policy in the 1970s, a different approach is needed. This study, then, has sought to demonstrate the value of looking at factors that are often overlooked by conventional IR theories, namely the role of public rhetoric and policy legitimation in the generation of policies. This analysis showed that prominent individuals and organizations in each period deployed rhetoric that drew on publicly current notions of “Africa” and, more specifically, “Liberia,” to define and redefine the nation in different eras; and that those newly negotiated context-dependent meanings then were used in arguments to support specific policy positions. The objects of study were the social transactions, social relationships, and negotiations that were involved in the legitimation of state actions. Instead of focusing only on individual leaders' actions, the analysis presented herein focused on the dynamic social activities that gave rise to temporarily stabilized meanings of “Africa” and “Liberia” that produced policy outcomes. By focusing on the public sphere, this approach then avoided the pitfalls of reductionist explanations that equate motivation with cause.

As noted in the introductory chapter, the concept of identity has become a core explanatory category in International Relations (IR). This study is situated within this body of work insofar as it focused on the intersection of identity and the conduct of foreign relations in its investigation into Liberia’s foreign policy shift in the 1970s. It has attempted to explain Liberia’s change in policy from a close alliance with the United States (US) to a more autonomous, anti-colonial and Africa-centric orientation. This change in Liberia's foreign policy was notable because of Liberia’s origins, as a colony and later a republic, that reflected American social practices and political institutions. Founded by American colonists in 1822,
Liberia had historically aligned itself with the US. For most of its history, Liberia had existed on the African continent without being an African state, choosing instead to culturally and politically affiliate itself with the US. Why did Liberia shift from its established pattern of relations with the US dating back to 1862? This study has addressed that question and the following questions, which have been overlooked by scholars of Liberian studies, African studies and IR: Why did Liberia, “a small nation” break with the US, “a big power” and its oldest and most powerful ally? Why did Liberia opt for a policy of nonalignment in the context of the Cold War and the intense struggle over East-West allegiance? Why did Liberia claim a leadership position in the community of newly independent states, particularly on issues related to African affairs in international forums such as the United Nations? Scholarly studies of Liberia have noted the policy shift that is the subject of this study; however, none adequate accounted for the shift. To inquire how this shift in orientation came about, the particular cultural context and relevant discourses on “Africa” and Liberia” that politicians used to justify Liberia’s foreign relations was considered. A major premise of this study was that discourse is the medium through which identities are socially constructed and interests formed. This study builds on the tradition of constructivist scholarship in IR, but it self-consciously took a poststructuralist turn in focusing on the role of language in the social construction of identity and foreign policy, which is understood here to be a locus for identity politics. Thus, the answers to the questions posed were found in notions of what Liberia claimed itself to be; that is Liberian state actions were connected to Liberia’s identification practices in public discourse, specifically in the justification of those policies. Hence, this study offers an account of the why Tolbert’s Liberia moved to a more autonomous, anti-colonial and Africanist foreign policy by focusing on how certain
articulations of “Liberia” and “Africa” legitimized certain courses of action while opening space for new policy directions.

Linking popular discourses of Africa and Liberia’s identification with “Africa” to policy outcomes required the use of the causal mechanism of legitimation to explain, in a systematic way, how Liberia’s public claims to an African identity contributed to those policy outcomes. Specifically, the study applied Patrick Jackson’s analytical tools of legitimation, which is the public pattern of justifications for a course of action, and rhetorical commonplaces, which are some form of specification of a vague, weakly shared notion capable of being used in a specific policy debate to legitimize a course of action. It is important to note here that the rhetorical commonplaces “Liberia” and “Africa” are historically contingent and thus unfixed. Commonplaces have no fixed meaning, but at any given time, they may be temporarily stabilized and used rhetorically to achieve certain goals. They exist in the space outside of individuals, or rather between individuals, as they are essentially social and inter-subjective in nature. As such, they are open to being joined with a variety of meanings or other notions. In that sense, rhetorical commonplaces used in legitimation claims are less like an “idea” and more like specific articulations, inextricably related to the social and historical contexts within which they exist and exploited to advance a legitimation claim. Actors at different moments in Liberia’s history attempted to claim an apparent essential “Africa” and “Liberia.” However, the commonplaces themselves were dependent on actors who used them in specific configurations and in specific social environments.

The terms “Africa” and “Liberia” were specified as constituting meanings that shifted over time. By the 1970s, these rhetorical commonplaces were composed of certain notions that helped to shape Liberian foreign policy of that time. As Liberia’s post-colonial neighbors began
to articulate their new identities, within Liberia itself, the discursive practices and patterns relating to a specific articulation of “Africa” also took hold in the country’s relationship with the rest of the continent and the world. The discourse that had previously been marginalized within Liberia’s public space now began to be used to yoke Liberia to the new African states. Thus, Liberia was “nested” within Africa; this new identity produced certain foreign policy actions and produced Liberia in its new manifestation as an African state.

The study argued that the shift in policy can be adequately explained by the Liberia’s claim to be an African state, specifically part of a supranational community called “Africa”. While this narrative had not been the dominant narrative in Liberia’s recent political history, there had been a discourse of Liberia as an African state, that is being, belonging to and fundamentally connected to the land and peoples of Africa, that can be traced to the beginnings of the polity in debates and discussion in the US during the 19th century. Liberian state leaders justified their policy choices by asserting Liberia’s African identity. This move also simultaneously served to recast Liberia as an African state, which in turn had implications for Liberia’s allegiances, alliances, alignment and actions in international politics. While there has been an increase in studies on identity and world politics and it is commonplace for political actors to reference an African collective identity, few scholarly studies have paid analytical attention to how notions of “Africa” have shape world politics. The complex processes that mediate the effects of discourse on Africa and policy outcomes had largely been left unexplored. This dissertation has attempted to beginning filling that gap in the literature. By focusing on the role of ideas expressed through language in the social construction of identity and how that process shaped public debate about the range of acceptable policy options, the shift in Liberian foreign policy in the 1970s is explained in ways that scholars using other approaches have not.
Instead of “Liberia” or “Africa” being labels for concrete entities, this study treats them as conceptual tools that state actors used to make sense of the complex circumstances prevailing at different historical moments. Any claim advanced about what “Africa” was or what “Liberia” was can be understood and treated as an intervention or attempt to shape day-to-day debates, discussions and negotiations. Hence a substantial portion of the dissertation was devoted tracing the cultural and discursive resources that were used to shape policy outcomes. Here, Liberian identity was shown to be constructed in, through and by the ongoing process of defining the conceptual boundaries of both “Liberia” and “Africa.” In foreign policy debates throughout the 20th century, this boundary-drawing process was arrested as political actors used these terms to legitimate certain state actions. A central argument advanced in this dissertation is that Liberian policy can be explained by the deployment of rhetorical commonplaces about what “Liberia” was or was not in relation to what “Africa” was and was not in the context of political debates at different historical moments. To adequately grasp their role in shaping policy outcomes, the function of these commonplaces was explained in terms of their specific histories. Thus, the study traced the historical development and rhetorical deployment of the terms “Africa” and “Liberia” within the confines of historic foreign-policy debates surrounding 1) the Hinterland Policy (1900-1905), 2) the creation of the OAU (1957-1963), and finally, 3) the Tolbert administration’s Africanist, autonomous, and anti-colonial foreign policy (1971-1975). The national discourse of an "African" continental identity became part of the Liberian rhetorical landscape in the 1970s; newspapers and other publications frequently exposed Liberian audiences to the African nationalist discourse of the anti-colonial independence movements taking place at their borders and across the continent. However, the discourse of traditional
Liberian conservatism also competed for prominence in shaping policy. Without the specifications of “Liberia” and “Africa” that became salient in the 1970s but originating from those earlier debates, Liberia might not have implemented the more autonomous, anti-colonial, and Africanist foreign policy that it adopted. Since these terms, with their contemporary discursive significance, were rhetorically deployed specifically to legitimate Liberia’s new policy direction, without that rhetoric such actions would seem to have been unlikely.

As seen in all three empirical chapters, existing notions of “Africa” and “Liberia” were combined with other commonplaces or reconfigured by specific political actors to advance positions, with far-reaching implications. The case studies demonstrate how this framework can be used empirically to give a fuller account of policy outcomes. All three cases deal with the use of rhetorical resources deployed during critical periods of transition for Liberia, debates in which Liberia has had to articulate itself and defend its right to exist in a sense. They all focus on how rhetorical commonplaces “Africa” and “Liberia” aided in the legitimation of Liberian state policies. In each case – the Hinterland policies, the founding of the OAU, and the anti-colonial, Africa-oriented policies of the 1970s – the meaning of Africa and the Liberia and subsequent implications of those cultural affiliations is a key factor in explaining the policy outcomes.

For example, as British and French colonial offices began to challenge Liberia’s effective occupation of the land it claimed, the commonplaces deployed in debates helped Liberia respond to the usurpation of its territory by British and French colonial activities and shaped Liberia’s policies towards the interior. In the process of defending Liberia’s existence and its borders, both President Barclay and Secretary of State Blyden invoked a concatenation of discursive resources that made up the commonplace of “Liberia”. In the process of justifying Liberia’s existence “Liberia” is tied to the notion that members of the same race were the most appropriate means
for Christianity, Civilization and Commerce to be introduced to the continent. The commonplace “Africa” was linked to certain discursive constellations including that 1) it as the natural home of African-Americans, 2) in a perpetual “child-like” state of nature in need of help from the outside, 3) “wild,” “ignorant” and “dark”. These discursive resources shaped the contour of the policy debates that made possible the Hinterland policy, which brought Africans of the interior under the control of the government of Liberia through a chieftaincy system that would eventually be merged with the modern state system as more of the ethnic groups came into contact with the settlers.

The use of rhetorical commonplaces “Africa” and “Liberia” to legitimate Liberian state policies is further demonstrated in Chapter 6, “The Liberianization of Africa,” which shows how the OAU was created between 1957 and 1963, a period of transition for the world in the wake of World War II. The Cold War international environment served as the context for these discussions. As African states were coming into being and African territories were engaged in active contest and even combat for their sovereignty, a series of debates about the form African unity should take. New combinations of discursive resources came to constitute “Africa” and “Liberia” while prominent, enduring notions traditionally linked to the terms by politicians continued to be used to advocate for different policy positions. The transforming notions of “Africa” and “Liberia” and the way it was deployed by speakers at the conferences that led up to the establishment of the OAU opened new policy directions, making certain policies acceptable while excluding others. When speaking about the role of Liberia while in the decolonization process, President Tubman, for example, linked “Liberia: to certain prominent commonplaces associated with Liberia including democracy and republic. He also invoked notions that had been dormant for decades such as Liberia as a leader of the peoples on the continent of Africa. In the
1957 Liberian Independence Day speech given to African state leaders and representatives of liberation movements, Tubman juxtaposes an experienced mature Republic of Liberia with an inexperienced “Africa” that was vulnerable to “radical” influences studiously avoided by Liberia in the stable path it had trod. From the perspective of Liberia, “Africa” at the period during which the OAU debates take place was still a land of mystery shrouded in the dark mantle of night and thus potentially dangerous. Hence, the idea of building a continent wide political union was met with resistance. Instead President Tubman used the commonplaces “Africa” and “Liberia” to argue for a continent-wide intergovernmental organization that holds at its core the principles of sovereignty and noninterference. Contrary to Nkrumah’s vision of an OAU endowed with supranational authority, Tubman’s proposal for a loose intergovernmental organization prevailed largely due to the rhetorical strategy he employed.

As noted in Chapter 7, “The Africanization of Liberia” when President Tolbert took office in 1971, the use of the commonplaces “Africa” and “Liberia” in public discourse had changed significantly. Contrary to Tubman’s Liberia, Tolbert’s Liberia embraced the notion of Liberia being tied to Africa. Segments of the Liberia population actively supported liberation struggles on the continent in the name of African solidarity. The new positive associations invoked when speaking about African and Liberia’s connection to it help shape the range of legitimate policy options available to the Tolbert administration. State officials’ use of “Africa” and “Liberia” in public discourse yoked Liberia to the new African states and "nested" Liberia within Africa. The effects of the demarcation of that boundary can be seen in Liberia providing support to the remaining liberation struggles, in southern Africa. Particularly noteworthy was Tolbert’s mid-1970s justification of his meeting with President Vorster of apartheid South Africa by claiming the meeting had taken place on behalf of and in solidarity with “Africa.” Tolbert’s
legitimation of his meeting with Vorster reveals “Liberia” as 1) a nonaligned state as opposed to its previous pro-West orientation; 2) an advocate of pro-African unity, brotherhood and solidarity; and 3) a leader in efforts to end minority rule and colonialism in Africa. Tolbert’s characterization of Liberia in relation to the southern African question echoed Nkrumah’s assertion that Ghana’s liberation was tied to the total liberation of Africa. “Africa” in relation to this new articulation of “Liberia” served as adequate cause for aiding African territories in their struggle for sovereignty, as well as Liberia’s international campaign against apartheid South Africa post-Vorster meeting, and its support for other repressive minority-rule and colonial regimes in southern Africa.

This study has focused on how certain actors used a constellation of commonplaces to encapsulate the essential “Liberian” identity in the articulation of their policy positions as they attempted to persuade a wider audience to accept and adopt those positions. President Barclay used a specific constellation of commonplaces in his attempt to legitimate the Hinterland policies of 1904-1905 to an international audience that included Liberia and the United States. He and Secretary of State Blyden made reference to “Liberia” as especially equipped to spread the benefits of Western civilization to an Africa in need of being civilized, Christianized, and commercialized. A mark of their success in deploying these notions of “Liberia” and “Africa” was that Liberia was not ultimately annexed by the French and British colonies in West Africa. Similarly, in the continent-wide debate regarding the contours of African unity, President Tubman managed to wrench the commonplace “Africa” away from President Nkrumah and to link it with notions of diversity as well as principles of sovereignty and noninterference. The successful reconfiguration of this rhetorical commonplace also helped him disassociate the appropriate leadership of “Africa” from Ghana and associate it with, or rather return it to,
“Liberia.” Hence, instead of becoming a political federation, the OAU is today an intergovernmental organization reflecting Tubman’s, not Nkrumah’s, vision. The Tolbert administration pivoted to explicitly join “Liberia” with “Africa” as conceived of by Nkrumah in the sense of a familial, symbiotic relationship of equals. Liberia in that case was speaking on behalf of “Africa” as it sought to affect international policy towards South Africa. As a result of the legitimation process of Liberia’s assuming a leadership role regarding engagement with South Africa, Liberia was able to advance the claim that the appropriate international response to South Africa’s failure to comply with UN resolutions regarding Namibia justifiably included violence.

This study has given a causal account of the part played by public rhetoric, the commonplaces “Africa” and “Liberia,” in forming conceptions of the world that engendered certain policies and organizations; to do so, it has examined the rhetorical strategies that made those policies socially and politically possible. The three empirical chapters presented ideal-typical accounts of three policy debates in which specific commonplaces were used in context-specific ways to bring about particular policy outcomes. Over time, each debate is seen to have offered resources and strategies for the next. The aim of the study was to account for Liberia’s autonomous, anti-colonial Africanist foreign policy, which existing scholarship in the fields of international relations, African studies, and Liberian studies has failed to adequately explain. It should be noted that many commonplaces associated with “Africa” and “Liberia” have been set aside, as they were not necessary to this specific study. The involvement of these rhetorical commonplaces in the formation and ongoing sustaining practices of other policies and institutions remains an area for further investigation.
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 included discourses about civilization itself, Social Darwinism, racial separatism, and black nationalism. The Colonization Society was founded and established in Washington, D.C. The rhetoric that surrounded this nascent idea of Liberia included Senators Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, and Presidents Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and James Monroe. They solicited free blacks in the United States who were generating a "back to Africa movement" for blacks in America, motivated by the racial separatist argument that they would never achieve equality in the American society. In 1816, the Reverend Robert Finely of New Jersey adopted the colonization cause and hired a clergyman, Samuel John Mills, to serve as a fund-raiser. To gather support for their project, they spoke to church groups, missionaries and other social groups. The colonization society supporters eventually included Senators Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, and Presidents Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and James Monroe. They solicited free blacks in the United States who were generating a "back to Africa movement" for blacks in America, motivated by the racial separatist argument that they would never achieve equality in the American society. In 1816, the American Colonization Society was founded and established in Washington, D.C. The rhetoric that surrounded this nascent idea of Liberia included discourses about civilization itself, Social Darwinism, racial separatism, and black nationalism.

4 Blyden, Edward Wilmot. 1907. The Significance of Liberia. An Address Delivered in the Senate Chamber, Monrovia, Liberia, 20th May, 1906. Liverpool: J. Richardson & Sons. Blyden, Edward Wilmot. 1865. Our origin, dangers and duties The annual address before the Mayor and Common Council of the City of Monrovia, July 26, 1865; the day of national independence; and repeated on Tuesday, August 1, 1865, at Caldwell, St. Paul's River. New-York: J.A. Gray & Green.

5 Tubman to Senator Edwin Morgan (Oct. 30, 1946) responding to charges that Liberia was a “divided nation ruled by an oligarchy” by an American national. (Private Tubman Papers, Totota, Liberia).

6 In Elwood Dunn’s analysis of Liberia’s foreign policy, “Anti-Colonialism in Liberian Policy: A Case Study” he discusses Liberia’s involvement in the post-war settlement of former Italian colonies in the United Nations. Dunn also argues that that anti-colonialism was a “significant determinant” of Liberia’s policy. He asserts that “[f]or Liberia, it appears, ending European colonial rule over Africa was the overriding principle. Throughout the debate on the disposal of the former Italian colonies, the Liberian core position remained directed to rapid independence for the territories concerned, or on solutions with that objective” (1974: 66).

7 It must be acknowledged here that the move towards African states was coupled with an attempt to maintain ties with “old friends” such as the United States. According to some analysts, Tolbert’s problem was that he did not clearly link his Africanist foreign policy to a domestic policy of inclusive governance. Had he done the latter, the foreign policy, they argue, would have been unassailable. This was Tolbert’s undoing (Sawyer 1992; Dunn 2009).

8 Tolbert’s predecessor, Tubman, was strong on support for African decolonization, etc., but did so in the context of the cold war. Tubman also cautiously pursued a domestic policy (National Unification and Integration) that some call a degree of inclusive governance, though others call assimilation of indigenes into an essentially settler body politic.


10 It is important to note here that some at the domestic level thought the policy a ploy to delay implementation of inclusive governance. The Tolbert administration’s dramatic shift in foreign policy from a more passive foreign policy of largely following the United States to an active autonomous, anti-colonial and Africanist foreign policy may have been an attempt to divert attention from the serious domestic challenges of the durable inequalities within the old system and the management of reforms. The political opening created by Tolbert’s domestic policies allowed for a rising tide of voices critical of the Liberian government and protest actions expressing dissent and discontent. Tolbert’s inability to manage the changes within the old system which benefitted few and inflamed many quickly enough to satisfy agitators, and Tolbert’s failure to find a way to calm the fears of the winners under the old system and keep their support, may have led him to focus on executing bold actions on the international stage. Interestingly this was the well-worn path of Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah during the latter part of his presidency. As political opposition increased at home in Ghana, Nkrumah relished in the role of international statesman. Some charge that this may also have been the case for Tolbert.
There are other approaches that could be applied to explaining the shift in Liberia’s policies including the following those that focus on decision-making, Tolbert’s idealism, and domestic sources. The following note encompasses a brief discussion of those approaches.

Decision-making in Liberian Foreign Policy and Tolbert’s idealism: The study of foreign policy has traditionally focused on the president and close advisers. With regard to the study of African foreign policy, in a one-party (like Liberia’s True Whig Party) state system, the head of state was considered to be the only decision maker, with the legislature serving as a rubber stamp, supporting the centralization of policy decision making. To some degree, the lack of data on policy making processes within small developing states has allowed this approach to dominate accounts of foreign policy making in states like Liberia. Explaining the shift in Liberian foreign policy using this approach would involve looking to the directives of the President or tracing the ascendancy of the recommendations of an adviser or a small group of advisers. A focus on the head of state may also lead to an examination of the individual level characteristics and psychology of the president. However, even the most autocratic or authoritarian regimes have to enjoy some kind of legitimacy or buy-in from the people they govern. Tolbert was certainly more open to allowing voices of dissent and criticism from the public than the previous administration. At the beginning of his presidency, Tolbert articulated a commitment to political liberalization and more democratic governance. This approach of focusing on the president as the reason for the shift in policy, however, ignores the political pressure that was coming from Liberians sympathetic to the plight of Africans still under colonial rule and the challenges confronted by post-colonial states. There was political pressure coming from within Liberia’s society to support a growing African nationalist sentiment within its borders and on the continent. Hence, explaining policy in terms of a centralized political authority forecloses an exploration of how legitimacy was sought by the Tolbert administration and how certain segments of society challenged Tolbert’s legitimacy, which is an important part of accounting for the shift in Liberian foreign policy.

Some have suggested that Tolbert was seeking legitimacy, not only within Liberia and with African states but with the rest of the world, by adopting an Africanist foreign policy. As a long term vice-president under the authoritarian leadership of Tubman, Tolbert was viewed as weak and thus the Liberian state was viewed as weakened because of the new leadership. The change in foreign policy, according to this perspective, was an attempt to contest this unfavorable view of Tolbert’s leadership. Tolbert embarked on an autonomous, anti-colonial and Africanist course of action in world politics to establish himself and Liberia in world politics in a way that would increase the power and prestige of both. With the issues of Africa and the Global South in many ways at the forefront of world politics, Tolbert could have used the world platform to establish himself as the brave new torchbearer of African and international progressivism. This move would have accomplished several things, all aimed at increasing Liberia’s power in the international arena: it would differentiate Tolbert from Tubman in a way that would garner respect for Tolbert; it would balance Liberia’s staunch traditional pro-Western posture, which would win support with more radical and progressive Africa and would combat the image of Liberia as a puppet of the United States; it would also allow Tolbert to exercise moral authority in his political leadership as he supported the rights of those historically discriminated against by the world. The problem with this approach in explaining Liberia’s puzzling shift in foreign policy during the 1970s is that the Tolbert administration continued to publicly support the United States in global forums, engage in moderate nation building for post-colonial states, and highlight the “special relationship” between the US and Liberia. In other words, the move away from the United States would have been more definitive.

A prominent narrative in Liberia foreign policy scholarship is that Tolbert’s idealism of the 1930s Wilsonian-European variety drove his foreign policy. For instance, Liberia took up the mantle previously held by Ghana’s Nkrumah of African leadership of African liberation and African affairs in the international arena. Under Tolbert’s visionary policies, Liberia was so committed to international causes that later in the Tolbert presidency, it was accused of neglecting domestic issues. Given Liberia’s serious socio-economic challenges, it is striking that it devoted significant time and resources to international affairs. The idealistic image of Tolbert’s Liberia was exemplified when, in an attempt to end apartheid in South Africa and colonialism in southern Africa, Tolbert invited Prime Minister Vorster to Liberia to convince Vorster of the error of South Africa’s ways. Vorster quickly used the opportunity to show that South Africa had some support on the continent and did nothing to curb South Africa’s support for the settler regimes in southern Africa or weaken its war against majority rule in southern Africa. In the light of the humiliating South African summit, Tolbert seemed to begin to question his faith in the good-will of all nations and redoubled his efforts to fight for Africa on the world stage as Liberia argued for South Africa’s immediate withdrawal from Namibia, which it was occupying illegally. The idealistic interpretation of Liberian foreign policy gained credence given the lack of clear strategic thinking as it related to certain aspects of state actions during the 1970s. However, an examination of Tolbert’s public speeches related to Liberian foreign policy reveals pragmatism more than idealism as Tolbert consistently gives reasons for why Liberia performed the actions it did on the world stage. Instead of applying a covering law to the shift in Liberian foreign policy during the 1970s, it is more useful to look at the reasons the Tolbert administration gave for Liberia’s policy choices and actions in world politics.

Domestic Politics: Another possible reason for the shift could be Liberia’s domestic politics. The confluence of three processes taking place at the domestic level could have influenced Liberia’s foreign relations. First, early in the Tolbert administration there was a publicized effort made to extend the inclusive reforms initiated under Tubman’s ‘Unification Policy.’ Tolbert introduced political and economic reforms aimed at extending civil and political liberties to all Liberians, fostering social equity and economic justice in order to create a more inclusive and democratic Liberian society, what Tolbert referred to as a “wholesome functioning society.” These reforms are related to Liberian foreign policy under Tolbert because, at the outset of Tolbert’s presidency, he
asserted that foreign policy would be an extension of domestic policy. Second, in the political opening provided by Tolbert’s reform measures, there was an increase in “self-help” organizations or civil society groups, from union organizers to lobbying groups, all keen on participating in the political process. The personalized autocratic rule of Tubman had suppressed such opportunities. Some of these groups were single issue based. Others, in particular student groups and youth organizers who had felt left out of the patronage networks of the old oligarchic system, wanted to shape their society and engage with the Liberian government on issues of particular concern. Moreover, this generation of youth had come of age during the anti-colonial movements of the 1960s; they were intensely aware of the struggles via international media and new technologies that allowed them to connect with these movements. They were witnesses to the powerful effect of notions of democratic governance and African nationalism in transforming governance structures. Tolbert’s foreign policy departures, particularly his move to deepen African ties, could be seen as a response to these concerns of an increasing vocal and engaged public.

12 Neorealism, a variant of realism, emphasizes anarchy and the distribution of power in the international system over other versions of realism such as neoclassical realism. Neoclassical realism suggests that the structure of the international system based on the distribution of power does not alone explain all international political action taken by states. Neoclassical realists emphasize domestic factors such as particular regimes or state leaders as intervening variables between the distribution of power and how states respond to that distribution.

13 In 1925 the Firestone Rubber Company surveyed suitable tropical environs to grow rubber to meet increasing worldwide demand. Firestone enlisted the US government to help secure its investment. An agreement was reached in 1926 between Firestone, the US State Department, and Liberia to lease a 1,000,000-acre plantation for 99 years with the requirement that Liberia accept a $5 million loan from Firestone, and American officials would administer Liberia’s financial, military and indigenous affairs. The loan, extremely modest in size compared with the profits Firestone extracted from its business, was immediately diverted to pay Liberia’s heavy foreign debt; it also put the United States in control of Liberia’s revenues. While Firestone pretended to be helping the development of Liberia, it paid only a nominal rent but no income tax on the extraordinary profits made in Liberia; in addition, of course, the company shamelessly exploited local labor. During the 1970s, this contract with its attendant agreements and associated actions remained in effect.


17 Africans in this historical context refers to any black person in the Americas or on the continent.


21 Scholarly researchers do not approach their objects of study with a mind that is a “blank slate.” Rather, they bring all sorts of ideas about how their study subject works, acts, performs, affects, is affected and even the fact that their object of study is already determined. Furthermore, these notions do not exist by happenstance, but have been strategically and systematically programmed into the research by academic training which requires the researcher to “make sense of texts” in heavily prescribed ways. The monist position acknowledges that even before a researcher begins the empirical investigation, he or she can readily convey relatively detailed information about the topic and that the process of acquiring that knowledge has conditioned the researcher and subsequently the knowledge that will be produced.
In order to gain these legal rights, Africans had to meet certain clearly defined criteria. An African could vote or be elected if he met the criteria set by the Liberian legislature. Thirteen years after the admission of "native referees" to the House of Representatives, a member of the Grebo tribe, Samuel W. Seaton, was elected to the House as the representative from Maryland County. A few years later, F. W. Prowd, another Grebo, was elected to the House by the voters of Maryland. Seaton and Prowd were "civilized" Greboes, and therefore met the criteria set by the legislature. The debate on "indigenous minority" continued throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Public officials often emphasized Liberia's assimilationist policy. However, the Americo-Liberian community, as represented by the legislature, remained largely resistant to the idea of granting political rights to indigenous Liberians. The majority of the Grebo ethnic group whom they represented was not interested in becoming Liberian citizens. The debate on "indigenous minority" continued throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Public officials often emphasized Liberia's assimilationist policy. However, the Americo-Liberian community, as represented by the legislature, remained largely resistant to the idea of granting political rights to indigenous Liberians. The majority of the Grebo ethnic group whom they represented was not interested in becoming Liberian citizens.

In 1874 the Liberian legislature agreed to permit - for a $100 fee - representation of one "native referee" from each ethnic group. This was a significant step in allowing Africans to participate in the political life of Liberia. In 1875, the Liberian legislature agreed to permit - for a $100 fee - representation of one "native referee" from each ethnic group. This was a significant step in allowing Africans to participate in the political life of Liberia. The terms of reference Africa and Liberia are inclusive of the peoples and the place.

In Mudimbe, these articulations of what Liberia is come out of public debates in the United States around the establishment of an African colony for the increasing free African-American population in the early 19th century (see Staudenraus, In search of African identity, etc.).

The terms of reference Africa and Liberia are inclusive of the peoples and the place.

The notion of "race" was at the time that Africans were a group exclusive of and distinct from other members of the human race.

Liberian constitutions of 1824, 1841, and 1847 did not stipulate political boundaries.

Anderson's map, it should be noted, was not only used to set Liberia's agreed-upon boundaries in the 1892 treaty but it was used internationally as the standard for displaying the geography of the region (Forstner 1969: 216; L'Afrique Francaise 1902: 369).
to public office only after he had accomplished the process of becoming a “civilized” person. Being a “civilized” person consisted of owning and cultivating a plot of one’s own land and having relinquished paganism for at least three years, including traditional customs, and having accepted the Christian religion. Africans who were deemed “civilized” assumed Anglo-European or Christian names, and dressed and behaved like the settlers.

Claiming membership to, belonging to and/or adopting stated attributes of “Western Civilization” is widely considered what it means to be civilized.

A nationwide broadcast by President Tolbert on the policy of his administration on September 10th, 1971.

Interestingly, the Tolbert’s first Minister of Foreign Affairs, J. Rudolph Grimes, who proposed a more Africa-centered foreign policy to Tolbert also served under Tubman.

Importantly, for the Tolbert administration, moving Liberia more in line with African and nonaligned progressives in world politics did not mean that Liberia would have to completely abandon its traditional allegiance to the US.

Again, it is important to note that critics of the Tolbert regime would point out that this is merely political-diplomatic changes not real changes because Tolbert failed to implement a polices to becomes more deliberately inclusive in its governance practices. For example, Jackson Doe an “outsider” to the old establishment of the True Whig Party was denied a chance to become Vice President in 1976 to appease the old guards. There is little doubt that the Tolbert regime was progressive, but to what degree the regime practiced inclusive governance is a topic of debate. Critics assert that Liberia did not take inclusive governance to the appropriate level (for a thorough critique see Kieh 1992).

Present with the two leaders were Liberian Foreign Minister Cecil Dennis, Presidential Affairs Minister Reginald Townsend and his Deputy Burleigh Holder. On the South African side, there were present Foreign Minister Hilgard Muller, Head of State Security H.J. van der Bergh, and Secretary for Foreign Affairs F.A. Fourie, and Ambassador Pik Botha.

Although, the US under both presidents Ford and Nixon surreptitiously continued to engage with South Africa all the while decrying South Africa’s apartheid regime publicly.

(Tolbert 1976: 294)


Ibid

The Washington Post Sept 22, 1976

Tolbert played a leadership role in the creation of The Mano River Union in 1973 which sought to enhance trade between Liberia and Sierra Leone through a commitment to the development of a common market and eventually joint industries and in 1975, the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) which sought to create a free trade zone across sixteen countries.