

1Statement of Introduction and Overview

**Of Symposium on “African Governance, Philosophical Thought & Rule of Law”**

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**Greensboro, NC (4/26/03)**

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you on behalf of the Organizing Committee of the African Governance Symposium, and to thank you for your timely response to our invitation. We gather here today to celebrate the peoples of Africa and their history, and to exchange views not only about the plight of the African continent, but how the customs, traditions, governance structures and social norms of the African people currently impact the pace of socio-economic and political developments on the African Continent.

As I look around this audience, I see mostly people of a common patrimony, a people of African origin. It doesn't matter whether we were born on these American shores, whether we came here as slaves, domestic workers, refugees, students, professionals or scholars, or whether or not we prefer to be called African-Americans, Liberian-Americans, Nigerian-Americans, Ghanaian-Americans, or simply as Liberians, Sierra Leoneans, and so on. But one thing is certain – all peoples of African origin will always be looked upon and treated as Africans. And, rightly so, because there is no denying the fact that even if we wanted to, we may never be able to hide our Africanness in terms of our outlook, taste, and sound. Our physical bone structures, social preferences, body language, and taste in music, food, social gathering and dress, speak volumes about who we are – people of African origin! And, we are mostly proud, if not totally comfortable, with such identifications. But, the problem is we are often uncomfortable and less proud when news break out that Africans are corrupt, uncivilized, and prone to undemocratic and rash actions. And that is understandable from a human standpoint!

Notwithstanding, justly or unjustly, the waves of military coups, social unrests, poor health and sanitation conditions, and the general slow pace of national socio-economic developments in Africa, as well as the current high number of unproductive African government leaders across the African continent give rise to some of these claims. But do we really believe that Africans are more undemocratic, corrupt, and uncivilized in comparison to non-Africans, or are such references to Africa and Africans a direct result of ignorance or pure exaggeration? I would think that such references are a combination of ignorance and exaggeration, considering the number of African PhDs and college degree holders in this audience and elsewhere in the world, and the historic roles and invaluable contributions of Africa and Africans to modern civilization.

Ladies and Gentlemen, if you open almost any books on history and social science, you will learn about the great Nile River Valley Civilizations of Egypt, Nubia, and Ethiopia, as well as the great African kingdoms and empires of Mali, Ghana, Songhay, Benin, Oyo, Fulani or Hausa-Fulani. Each civilization or empire had a unique system of governance, law and order, education, and socio-economic structure that guaranteed its power, prestige and developmental aspirations.

The Egyptian Civilization, for instance, had much influence on the development of the Roman and Greek civilizations, and much of modern medicine, geometry, and embalming, and so forth. In essence, traditional African empires and civilizations provided the pillars for much of modern civilization. In fact, Africa is not the Dark Continent portrayed by some academics, but rather the Cradle of modern Civilization if we consider the fact that archaeologist L. S. B. Leakey found one of the oldest human fossils in northern Tanzania in 1960, while other human fossils found since then in the grasslands of Ethiopia and elsewhere in Africa date as far back as 1.8 million years. But these developments have still not accorded Africa its true recognition and contribution to modern civilization.

In the meantime, in our present world, Africa is generally regarded as backward, underdeveloped, unsophisticated, and its leaders said to be corrupt, undemocratic and so on. But there is an inherent inconsistency, or a major problem here! And the question that comes to mind is, how can a people who made such tremendous strides to the growth of modern human civilizations be so backward and unproductive? What sorts of political, economic, and governance systems accounted for such major declines? Well, these are the very issues and questions that led to the hosting of this symposium. We invited our African brothers, sisters, and friends from the world of academics, politics, and communications to sort out the problem and give us some directions

But, before we hear from our distinguished panelists, we will first hear from Mr. Joseph M. N. Gbadyu, Bassa Historian & Former Deputy Minister of Local Government of Liberia, who will give the keynote address on “The Bassa Model of Leadership,” drawing on the history and governance structures, social doctrine and norms of a once powerful African ethnic group with leadership tracks dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Then Dr. Syrulwa Somah of our host institution, NC A&T State University, will give a brief account of his new book, *Nyanyan Gohn-Manan: History, Migration & Government of the Bassa*”, which became a reliable source for the theme of this symposium.

For the panel discussion, we have invited Rev. Pianapue K. Early of Norfolk State University to deliver a paper on “The Influence of Religion in African Governance, Social Order & Justice,” Dr. Fuabeh Fonge and Mrs. Mary Enekam of NC A&T State University to deliver a paper each on “The Impact Of Colonization On The African System Of Government,” and “The Role of Women in Agricultural Development in Africa” respectively, while Dr. Victor E. Archibong of Greensboro College, will deliver a paper on “Attributes of Elections and Politics in Traditional African Societies.” Political Analyst & Writer, Mr. Tarty Teh will deliver a paper on “Non-Partyism As A Tool Of African Leadership And Education,” while Mr. Siahyonkron Nyanseor, Chairman of the Liberia Democratic Future (LDF) and Publisher of The Perspective Online Magazine will deliver a paper on “The Roles of Military Governments in the African Quest for National Development.” Political Science Professor and Author, Dr. D. Elwood Dunn of the University of the South in Tennessee will moderate the symposium. Independent Education Consultant, Dr. Mariah Y. Seton would be unable to deliver her paper on “The Roles of African Women in Societal Development” due to personal emergency.

I should remind you, however, that as the panelists take turns to give some insights into the factors that led to the present declines of Africa, review the African governance structures and civil institutions, and propose solutions, each of you in this audience have the responsibility not to take the presentations and recommendations at face value, but to take steps to investigate the subject further to satisfy your own convictions. For us on the Organizing Committee, we have started to do just that. We believe most sincerely that a one-day symposium, no matter how well organized and how brilliant the speakers, can only be the beginning of a great effort to dig deeper into history in calculated attempts at finding possible solutions to common problems challenging our humanity. We believe we can promote common understanding and harmonize our differences over tactics and priorities in our social systems and political doctrines as Africans and non-Africans if we met regularly through forums such as this symposium to discuss our differences. In this connection, we plan to launch a Liberian History & Education Society as a direct consequence of this symposium, to serve as base for hosting this kind of symposium on an annual basis, and undertaking other projects of an educational and historical nature.

I should like you know that we are sensitive to the fact that not every participant at this symposium is a person of Liberian origin. But we have all learned at one time or another that charity begins at home. And this goes to say that because members of the Organizing Committee are mostly persons of Liberian origin, we couldn't resist the name Liberian History and Education Society to cover the scope of the kinds of activities we want to undertake. Membership in the society will be opened to any persons interested in history and education, regardless of origin. The society is still in the formative stages, and we will appreciate if as many persons at this symposium as possible could sign up. All interested persons will be contacted regarding future meetings and official launching. Again, thanks for accepting our invitation to be here for this symposium.

I thank you.

## **Of cultural neglect in Liberia"**

**Nat Galarea Gbessagee**

Saturday, 18 April 2009

### **Background**

In a recent article, "[Fluidity of Liberian Intellectualism](#)," I argued that no society can develop and prosper economically, politically, culturally, academically, and technologically without a strong intellectual base that is steadfast enough to probe the intricacies of Liberian society and propose workable solutions thereto. I argued that culture and intellectualism are inseparable, in that the level of intellectual development in any country depends on the culture of that country.

I suggested that Liberian intellectuals and educated persons exposed to western ideas, western cultural values, and western assumptions about life, liberty, and happiness will do well not to

neglect but to recognize, embrace, and articulate the tangible cultural values of Liberia that contributed to their individual growth and development. I also spoke of the values inherent in Dr. Syrulwa Somah's article on African culture and spirituality, and the continuing quests of black Americans to embrace African culture through Kwanzaa and related pursuits. I want to stress in this article that while it is true that certain aspects of an individual or nation's culture could be shared with others not originally of that culture, no one can successfully mimic the culture of another, due to the intricacies of each culture. The culture of a people (i.e. the food, clothing, language, artifacts, religious, social, ethical practices, and related idiomatic expressions and gestures) is so geographically or environmentally situated that it cannot be duplicated entirely by outsiders. And this is why I believe that the absence of a clear national cultural identity in the educational and governing structures of Liberia is to blame for the current levels of disunity, mistrust, and underdevelopment in Liberia.

### **Defining a Liberian Cultural Identity**

In "Culture is Ordinary," for instance, cultural theorist Raymond Williams speaks of three categories of culture that are inherent in the make up of every human society, including "lived culture, recorded culture, and culture of the selective tradition" (66). In terms of lived culture, Williams believes that only people alive at a particular time and place can have firsthand knowledge and experience about a culture, while recorded culture relates to aspects of a culture that is preserved through written or other recorded forms from a past period and placed in time for the benefit of the next generation of people of that culture. The culture of the selective tradition, on the other hand, refers to the degree to which certain aspects of a lived or recorded culture are studied to acquire a clearer understanding of that culture. Williams illustrates the notion of the culture of the selective tradition by insisting that "no nineteenth-century reader would have read all the novels [of that century]" in that "no individual in the society would have known more than a selection of its facts" (66). In other words, Williams believes that each member of a culture or society can only learn as much about that culture as the facts available to him or her by means of recorded history, oral history, or the contemporary events through which the person lived. In the case of Liberia, therefore, there is an urgent need for a national reform effort to begin the teaching of indigenous Liberian culture in Liberian schools to compensate for centuries of neglect of the indigenous cultures, traditions, and languages in Liberia.

The language, culture, and traditions of each of the sixteen major ethnic groups of Liberia are complete mysteries to many Liberians because these local languages, cultures, and traditions are not taught in Liberian schools. There is currently no clear national language in Liberia that is representative of the indigenous population and reflective of the cultural mosaic that makes up the environmental tapestry of the Liberian landmass. Many Liberians—young and old, western educated or otherwise—know little or nothing about the languages, cultures, and traditions of the people and ethnic groups within their respective counties of origin and surrounding counties. And the underlining reality for these developments is that "neither the Constitution nor the Declaration of Independence [of Liberia] mentions 'culture' or even indigenous traditions; in fact, the only mention made of the native African was in reference to religion," Liberian media executive Kenneth Y. Best declared in a 1974 UNESCO report entitled, "Cultural Policy in Liberia" (p. 7). To Mr. Best, perhaps, there was something remiss about a black-run independent country situated in the heart of Africa at a time period when blacks were generally thought of as

lacking abilities at intellectual pursuits and leadership unwilling to embrace the cultural tapestries of their very existence. And this neglect of local Liberian culture and traditions in favor of western cultural values first took root at the start of the Liberian experiment back in 1822 and continues unabated today in Liberia, even after 162 years of national independence in 1847.

In Liberia today English is the *lingua franca*, official language, language of instruction, and language of trade and commerce, although more than half of the Liberian population cannot speak English or read and write in English. But this outcome resulted from a national language and cultural policy in Liberia, according to Mr. Best's UNESCO report, that catered more to satisfying Liberia's external public (other governments and peoples) rather than the internal public (the indigenous population). Mr. Best wrote thus:

*Liberia has always striven to maintain close, cordial and effective cultural links with the rest of Africa, and particularly with her nearest neighbors, Guinea, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone, with which Liberia shares certain common cultural features and languages. The Prime Minister of the Republic of Guinea, for instance, during a recent visit to Liberia, addressed a rural Liberian audience in Kpelle and Lorma, the languages of two of Liberia's major tribes....However, as the lingua franca in both Guinea and the Ivory Coast is French, the government decided that, in order to facilitate closer links, Liberian children should be given a basic knowledge of French, which is accordingly included in the curriculum. (p. 23)*

Of course, in the specific case of the Guinean prime minister, the national interest of Liberia might have been well served if Kpelle, Lorma, and Mandingo were developed to promote cross-border communication between Liberians and Guineas. However, the Liberian government chose to prioritize the teaching of French in the national elementary, junior, and senior high school curriculums rather than Kpelle, Lorma, Bassa, and other Liberian traditional languages. Sadly, up to this time, no Liberian languages, including Kpelle and Lorma, are being taught in Liberian grade schools and high schools as part of the national school curriculum. Liberian colleges also have no course offering in Liberian languages, except for a token elective course in introductory Kpelle instituted at the University of Liberia not so long ago. Indeed, the net results of this glaring cultural neglect in Liberian educational and political systems have led many Liberians to grow up in Liberia thinking and believing that western popular culture and western-styled education are true representations of Liberian traditional cultural values and embodiment of the attributes of intellectual growth and development in Liberia. Consequently, many western-educated Liberians tend to associate anyone professing an affinity to Liberian language and culture with being uneducated, unsophisticated, primitive, or divisive. And it is this continuing ambivalence among successive Liberian government leaders and western-educated Liberians about what constitutes culture that has resulted in the lack of any national cultural and linguistic identities in Liberia today by which Liberians can collectively embrace, articulate, and celebrate the unique food, clothing, music, arts and crafts, and related cultural artifacts of Liberia before the rest of the world.

In addition, many Liberian youths and adults living in the urban cities of Liberia or abroad hold negative views about Liberian culture and traditions. They tend to second-guess the importance of the indigenous Poro and Sande institutions in national reconstruction efforts in Liberia. They have even sought to reduce these sacred, centuries-old traditional learning institutions to nothingness based on western stereotypes that project the all-female Sande Institution as an operating table for female circumcision (or preferably “female genital mutilation”), and the all-male Poro Institution as a training camp for rapists of small girls. These western-educated Liberians go as far as to conveniently condemn and detest the traditional cultural practices of polygamism, marriage by dowry, and sassywood on the grounds that female circumcision is an act of barbarism, marriage by dowry is an act of statutory rape of young girls by older men, and sassywood is an unscientific undertaking. It is as if these western-educated Liberians still have yet to realize that culture is developed locally and never imported from abroad, even as the British people roared in awe that the visiting American first lady placed her arms around the Queen.

Regrettably, many Liberians live in the U.S. and other western nations where every aspect of the national culture in each nation or society is celebrated daily in various forms, yet they still don't understand that culture is local. It is as if these Liberians do not see the daily meshing of American cultural values in the form of television talk shows, movies, cultural festivals, tattoo parlors, psychic houses, adult entertainment centers, and occasions and issues related to Halloween, Ground Hound Day, St. Patrick's Day, gay rights, organ donation drives, etc. These Liberians also pretend that polygamism is a Liberian or African phenomenon, even as polygamism is practiced across the world, including selected U.S. states and Canada. Interestingly, these Liberians have yet to read the comments of Leah Barlow who confronted detractors of Mormon women involved in the practice of “plural marriage” or polygamism in no unflattering terms: “Our lifestyle is not for everyone,” she says, “and may not be the right choice for you, but for us, this is the right choice” (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) News, 20 April 2005). The practitioners of sassywood, marriage by dowry, female circumcision and other aspects of Liberian indigenous culture and tradition also feel the same way as Leah Barlow feels about plural marriage in Mormon faith. And this Star Radio paraphrase of Madam Kulubo Kannley in Liberia is as forceful as that of Leah Barlow's stance on plural marriage: “Traditional leaders in Bomi and Gbarpolu Counties [Liberia] have warned against open discussion of traditional practices in public places. The spokesperson of the traditional women told Star Radio, discussing the Sande society in public was a direct attack on Liberian traditional values. Madam Kulubo Kannley described such attack as dangerous and warned that they would not take it lightly” (Star Radio Liberia, 9 April 2009).

Of late, especially in the aftermath of the 14-year civil war, a loosely-knitted “we've got our country back” movement involving some western-educated Liberians frequenting the corridors of state power in Liberia have sought to abrogate the role of the traditional Sande and Poro Institutions in Liberian social life and national reconstruction efforts. First, the government banned the traditional Liberian legal practice of sassywood in disregard of customary law and without consultation with traditional leaders. Second, a campaign to ban female circumcision in Liberia is ongoing, and the traditional practice of marriage by dowry is set to be affected under a new rape law that makes no exception for traditional practices. The main test of these attempts to demonize and subordinate traditional cultural values to western cultural values in Liberia will

come about eventually, however, if the government attempts to carry out arrests for rape in connection with a marriage by dowry ceremony, or in connection with female circumcision and application of sassywood against violators of traditional social norms. But whatever the disconnection underlying the government's action against traditional Liberian cultural practices, the Poro and Sande Institutions are not what the detractors claimed they are. Quoting a former president of the University of Liberia and a former Liberian minister of education, Mr. Best observed the following about the Poro and Sande Institutions in his 1974 UNESCO report on cultural policy in Liberia:

*Dr Mary Antoinette Sherman Brown [former president of the University of Liberia], quoting Kenneth Little in her unpublished thesis 'Education and National Development 1800-1900', traces the Porro and its female division, the Sande, to the seventeenth century. The Porro and Sande societies were the principal educational and civic institutions among indigenous Liberians... Little suggested the following roles which the Porro played in secular life: general education in the sense of social and vocational training and indoctrination of social attitudes; regulation of sexual conduct; supervision of economic and political affairs; operation of social services ranging from medical treatment to forms of education and recreation. The instructional content in the Porro school also included farming, hunting, fishing, hut construction, military tactics, artistic training (such as handicrafts, drumming, dancing and singing), tribal history, law and religion.... The Sande Society is the guardian of feminine chastity. The girls learn to be mothers and home-makers, and they also learn personal hygiene, fishing and feminine crafts such as basketry. The aim of Sande education, says Dr Augustus F. Caine [former minister of education], as quoted by Dr Brown, is to transform the girls into responsible female adults... Because education and religion have always been of great importance to State cultural policy in operation [of] the people, it goes without saying that the Porro and Sande societies held great political power also. It was difficult to reach even the status of an elder without being a member of the Porro or Sande (27-28).*

It is difficult to understand from reading these quoted passages why some western-educated Liberians are inclined to launch public assaults against the Sande and Poro Institutions which have been the source of knowledge, power, stability, and civility for the indigenous peoples as far back as the 17th century or earlier. Yet one can deduce that the current waves of hostility toward indigenous cultural practices by some western-educated Liberians are borne out of a failure of the Liberian educational system to educate Liberian children and adults on the role of the Poro and Sande Institutions in Liberia's reconstruction and national development. The Poro and Sande Institutions are the primary custodians and promoters of indigenous Liberian language, culture, philosophy, arts and crafts, law and order, social etiquettes, and morality. Liberian intellectuals therefore need to take steps to erase this cultural neglect in the Liberian body polity by doing research and writing books to teach Liberians old and young that culture is the basis of human existence and that any groups of people—as many Liberians are today—who lack understanding of and appreciation for their culture are doomed.

According to cultural theorist Raymond Williams, "Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, [and] its own meanings" (4), and that together these shapes, purposes, and meanings are transmitted or expressed through arts, institutions, and learning as defining

characteristics of that society. And reflecting on his childhood in the company of his parents and siblings in a farming valley alongside mountains that seriously lacked some of the basic amenities of today's modern societies, Williams writes that by going to the big city for school he was "never better or worst" (7) than the people with whom he coexisted and interacted in the valley because "To grow up in that country [valley] was to see the shape of a culture, and its modes of change," and "to grow up in that family was to see the shaping of minds: the learning of news skills, the shifting of relationships, the emergence of different language and ideas" (6). Like Williams, Liberians—western-educated or not—must learn to cultivate a sense of identity with and belongingness to the cultural values of their place of birth no matter what their current stations in life. Centuries of traditional cultural neglect in Liberia have created a void of belongingness for which Liberians are now fond of embracing other cultures, particular western culture, in search of substitutes.

Liberians cannot continue to glorify and glamorize western music, pop culture, and governance structure at the expense of the language and culture of the indigenous population of Liberia. Moreover, Liberians cannot be mystified by their very existence in Africa, so much so that many Liberians cannot bring themselves to identify with any language or cultural practice in Liberia, least they be seen as uneducated, primitive, and unsophisticated. I believe that this line of thinking is definitely a fallacy because no matter what we do as Liberians, we will never be able to fully adopt and implement western cultural values in Liberia due to the geography, cultural difference, and scale of development between Liberia, the U.S., and many other nations of the western world. Even the language we speak may very well help us to formulate our worldview of the things and people around us, and if that language is foreign such as English rather than the local Bassa, Kpelle, or Lorma, we will never get to appreciate ourselves as Africans. In fact, according to linguist Benjamin Whorf, "Every language contains terms that have come to attain cosmic scope of reference, that crystallize in themselves the basic postulates of an unformulated philosophy, in which is couched the thought of a people, a culture, a civilization, even of an era"(269). Basically, Whorf is convinced that every language is unique in that it contains words and phrases that define the "philosophy, thought, culture, civilization, and even...an era" of a people within a particular linguistic setting or geographic region, as manifested by the Hopi's notion of time and space which is radically different from the western concepts of "reality, substance, matter, cause," and of "space, time, past, present, future" (269).

German philosopher Martin Heidegger also writes in "The Way To Language" that "while language is not the only form of world view developed by human subjectivity, it is that form to which we [humans] must ascribe a special authority in the history of man's development by virtue of its formative power at each given time" (119). Heidegger argues that "In order to be who we are, we human beings [must] remain committed to and within the being of language, and can never step out of it and look at it from somewhere else" (134). Indeed, it should dawn on Liberian intellectuals that academic fields of study such as anthropology, sociology, linguistics, cultural studies, folklores, communication, etc. are formulated in western societies not because these societies are "primitive" but because there is genuine effort to examine the impulses of society—the language, culture, and traditions of the people—as a way of promoting peaceful coexistence and development.. And as Heidegger and Whorf have observed the language we speak exerts a great influence on both our being and natural worldview as humans.

Indeed “It is impossible for us [human beings] to understand and interpret things without the mediation...of tradition, shared values, personal predispositions, and creative imagination” in the process of seeking knowledge, A. Suresh Canagarajah writes in *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*. He argues that “knowledge constitutes a body of interpretative grids (or explanatory paradigms) that interpret reality, and is periodically revised according to the interests and experiences of the specific community” (p. 18). In other words, we as educated Liberians owe it to ourselves and our people not to seek to carbon copy what we see in the western world, but to interpret these realities in the context of promoting “the interests and experiences of the specific community” of our being, which is Liberia.

### **Somah and African Spirituality**

Liberia and other nations in Africa are subjected to western influence in the educational, cultural, linguistic, economic, political, military, financial, diplomatic, and religious spheres. Western Christianity, western capitalism, and western democracy have become the preferred forms of religious, economic, and governance practices in Africa, and the current political reality of the sub-categorization of Africa into English-speaking Africa, French-speaking Africa, Portuguese-speaking Africa, and Arabic-speaking Africa attest to overwhelming western influence in Africa, and Liberia is no exception. English is both the official language and the language of instruction in Liberia and other African countries, in spite of the existence in Liberia of sixteen major ethnic languages, including at least five with well-developed linguistic or phonetic scripts similar to English. As a result, many Liberians who learned English in school have come to show no respect and appreciation for Liberian cultural values because as Caranarajah has correctly noted, “To be academically literate in English, second language students have to acquire not only certain linguistic skills, but also the preferred values, discourse conventions, and knowledge content of the academy” (p. 147)

Indeed, as persons of Liberian or African origin living, studying, or working in the U.S. for unspecified period of time, we can never fully claim to be Liberians in all its cultural dimensions, nor can we claim to be Americans in all its cultural dimensions. We have unwillingly become “hybrid individuals” with roots in both Liberia and the U.S. or whatever western nation we currently live in, such that neither Liberian society nor American society will continue to fully embrace us as bonafide members of each society. This is the dilemma we now find ourselves in as legal residents and naturalized citizens of the U.S., so we need to make use of our two worlds by meshing the values of the two countries without subordinating one to the other. This was the message that Dr. Syrulwa Somah articulated in his article on African spirituality, colonialism and the deculturalization of Africa. Dr. Somah apparently coined the article based purely on his own social class and value system or ideology, since the social class and ideology or philosophy of a person are constitutive of the worldview of that person. According to Barry, “A writer’s social class, and its prevailing ‘ideology’ (outlook, values, tacit assumptions, half-realised allegiances, etc.), have a major bearing on what is written by a member of that class” (Barry 158). And this is true for any writer, including me, Dr. Somah, or any reader of this article who also writes articles of his or her own.

Consequently, in his November 2008 on “Africa: Origin of Monotheism and the Bible ,” Dr. Somah sought to remind fellow Africans that the vestiges of western colonialism, linguistic

imperialism, and religious indoctrination in Africa are partly to blame for many contemporary Liberians and other Africans being woefully unaware and insensitive to the cultural, linguistic, and religious practices of their countries of origin. Dr. Somah said specifically that “There is no smidge of truth...in the periscope of thought that Africans need to undo themselves [culturally, linguistically, and politically in order] to be civilized... [in western culture” (Liberian Forum, 28 November 2008), as per the prevailing myths being circulated by some Africans and westerners that embracing Christianity, learning a western language, or adopting certain western precepts and cultural practices can stimulate development and growth in Africa. Dr. Somah also said the transformative revolutions of African consciousness ought to impel western-educated Liberians and other Africans to return to the value systems embedded in their culture of birth as a way of reclaiming their African heritage and avoiding the perpetual presence of external cultural, linguistic, political, economic, and spiritual influences on the African continent.

Dr. Somah, in essence, is not the first person to call on western-educated Africans to free themselves of the yoke of western domination and return to the cultural, linguistic, and religious practices and associated with the traditional values and ethics that made Africa (at least the landmass now called Africa) the cradle of modern civilization. He is also not the first to draw on his social class, worldview, and cultural values in his writings or advocacies. The Canadian women represented by Leah Barlow did, as did the entire Pan Africanist Movement that took root across Africa concurrently with the African independent struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. The Pan Africanist movement advocated for Africans to cling to their African values and develop and promote those values as a counterweight to the creeping western cultural, linguistic, political, and economic influences on the continent at the time. The Pan Africanist message was widely welcomed by many blacks in Africa, the U.S., and other places around the world who had suffered the dreadful effects of colonialism and slavery. And today many American blacks (African Americans) who embraced the Pan Africanist message have endeavored over the years to painstakingly trace their ancestors’ roots in Africa, which efforts have resulted in many American blacks taking on traditional African names in place of their original western names.

Today, many American blacks celebrate, in addition to or instead of Christmas, Kwanzaa, a national holiday devoted to rededicating black Africans to the cultural values of Africa, the birth place of their ancestors. According to the official Kwanzaa website, Kwanzaa was founded by Dr. Maulana Karenga in 1966 and it now takes place from December 26 to January 1 each year in the U.S. Dr. Karenga writes in a welcome statement on the website that “As an African American and Pan-African holiday celebrated by millions throughout the world African community, Kwanzaa brings a cultural message which speaks to the best of what it means to be African and human in the fullest sense” (Kwanzaa website). And under the subheading, “Reaffirming and Restoring Culture” the three principal objectives underlining the creation of Kwanzaa are listed. The first principle of Kwanzaa is to reaffirm and restore rootedness of black Americans in African culture, as “an expression of recovery and reconstruction of African culture which was being conducted in the general context of the Black Liberation Movement of the '60's and in the specific context of The Organization Us, the founding organization of Kwanzaa and the authoritative keeper of its tradition.” The second principle of Kwanzaa advocates “a regular communal celebration to reaffirm and reinforce the bonds between us as a people. It was designed to be an ingathering to strengthen community and reaffirm common identity, purpose and direction as a people and a world community (Kwanzaa website).

Indeed, the sentiments that the group of American blacks associated with Kwanzaa have expressed regarding African cultural values are not different from those that Dr. Somah had expressed in his article. Dr. Somah, Dr. Karenga and others interested in the study and promotion of African culture do so most likely out of a necessity for self-identity and cultural renewal rather than a desire to replace western culture in their lives. Dr. Somah therefore wrote about African spirituality not in opposition to Christianity, but to inform and educate those fellow Africans who see no values in African spirituality and culture. Religiously, the western-dominated versions of Christianity, as reflected mainly in the Catholic and Protestant outfits (i.e. Baptist, Methodist, and other churches) have continued to have a stranglehold on the promotion and growth of African spirituality due to many years of western colonialism of Africa, during which time every traditional African cultural or religious practice was prohibited from being taught in schools and ridiculed as heathenism or demonism. So with the religious, cultural, educational, and governing practices of people on the African continent being manipulated and polluted by western colonialism and contemporary global politics dominated by the western powers, Dr. Somah thought the time was ripe to call on the young generation of Africans to strive to reclaim their destiny from foreign manipulation and pollution.

I concur with the points of view of Dr. Somah, Dr. Karenga, and others in that regard. For whether we western-educated Liberians believe it or not, our current worldview is influenced to a great extent by both the ethnic group and environment in which we were born in Liberia. So what we ought to understand as western-educated Liberians is that by virtue of the very circumstance of our long years away from Liberia and residence in the U.S. or other countries of the world we have become hybrid citizens of Liberia and the other countries. By our experiences in Liberia and the U.S. or other countries, we can bear testimony to the uplifting and depressing cultural values of each country. But what we cannot do is to forget where we came from. We are children and adults of Liberia, and it is obligatory of us as educated Liberians to develop and promote the culture into which we were born by divine providence. There are no ifs and buts about our obligation to Liberia in all its dimensions if we truly want to reclaim our indigenous cultural heritage and proclaim our self-identity as a people. The challenge for every educated Liberian is to act and act now before it gets too late. New nationalities and cultures have been infused into the Liberian political tapestry as a result of the 14-year civil war, and the more we wait as Liberians—indigenous or Americo—the more the other cultures will take root in Liberia. Beware my brethren!

## Liberia & the Burdens of Statehood

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In my last article, “Dispensing with Stepchild Mentality in Liberia,” I spoke about a Liberia whose lack of a dominating race conception and the ability to forge ahead with clearly defined national development goals and benchmarks through adherence to unity of purpose, peace, reconciliation, good governance, and rule of law has caused it to remain at war with itself and drift apart for the last 160 years, in spite of a scanty population and abundant natural and mineral resources at its disposal. I said that Liberians are not only a strange mixed-breed of people in Africa with no appreciation for their own African cultural values and no clear identity

of themselves as Africans, but also that many Liberians think they can destroy their own country and an “international community” will come and rebuild Liberia whilst Liberians sit on the sidelines and watch. And whether this hope in a proverbial “international community” waiting in the winds to come to the rescue of a Liberia disgruntled with itself is wishful thinking, many Liberians are just insensitive to the plights of others. For while the 1989 Christmas Eve military invasion that plunged Liberia into a protracted 14-year civil war is still fresh on the minds of many Liberians, the current government still found it necessary to announce publicly amid highly-publicized elaborate plans for celebrations of Liberia’s 160<sup>th</sup> independence anniversary on July 26, 2007 the arrests of a group of alleged coup plotters as if the government had anything to lose by waiting until after the independence day celebrations since the coup plot investigations are anything but conclusive.

But Liberians are a funny and peculiar people, as retired Liberian army General Mansfield Yancy once said, so it is not much of trepidation to watch Liberians swing from one political pendulum to another in a matter of minutes as if the reasons for identifying with the first political pendulum never existed. So it was that in April 1980, many Liberians poured into the streets of Monrovia, the Liberian capital, and cities across Liberia to celebrate the long-awaited but abrupt change in national leadership in Liberia initiated by a group of junior Liberian military officers. That is on April 12, 1980, a group of junior Liberian military officers shocked the Liberian people and the world with a predawn radio announcement that the 133-year-old (1847-1980) Americo-Liberian political and economic empire in Liberia had crumbled in a military coup. The sitting Liberian president and a few bodyguards were killed in the process of what amounted to a palace coup. And, apart from the change in political leadership, Liberia remained intact in every respect as people went about their normal businesses on the morning of April 13, 1980.

Then thirteen days into the coup (April 22), thirteen former cabinet officials and government leaders of the deposed government were publicly executed by firing squad after being found guilty of corruption in hasty military tribunal trials. A few other former government officials were arrested and interrogated for their roles in keeping the Americo-Liberian Empire alive for so long, but no one was executed thereafter publicly. However, the recrimination and bitterness from the public executions and the coup itself spilled over into a series of failed coup attempts against the new government before the 1989 military invasion ignited a 14-year civil war that saw the deaths of more than 200,000 Liberians and showcased the scope, depth, and scale of the barbarism and self-destruction of Liberians, mainly the callous manner by which Liberians killed and maimed one another and destroyed hydro plants, telecommunications facilities, municipal buildings and other public offices, residential and school buildings, religious institutions and road networks, and other infrastructures of value for national political and economic stability in Liberia as if there was no tomorrow.

The callousness of the entire civil war episode also raised serious doubts about the ability of Liberians to understand the burdens of statehood and the responsibilities of Liberian citizenship, as Liberians acted during the civil war like an estranged and disgruntled spouse breaking up every item of value in the home prior to divorce. But, unlike a spouse who can leave one marital relationship and enter another anytime, Liberians didn’t realize that the burdens of Liberian statehood and the responsibilities of Liberian citizenship made it impossible for them to break up Liberia and divorce from Liberia in any true sense, except to compound their own individual

miseries and human sufferings. So today after 14 years of civil war and the escapades of one inefficient interim government after another, Liberians still entertain the hope that their willful act of self-destruction will be compensated by an outpour of foreign capital investment, and financial, technical, human resource, and material generosities from the “international community,” so Liberians are still continuing to treat one another with disdain and contempt instead of setting into motion a series of national development policies, programs, and projects with specific sector-by-sector priority development benchmarks and project completion target dates aimed at improving the living conditions of the mass of the Liberian people. Yet it seems that rumors of coup plots, political power struggles, and heavy reliance on foreign handouts remain the primary productive enterprise of the Liberian government and people as no efforts are being expended to define a dominating race conception in Liberia and empower Liberians to share in the burdens of Liberian statehood and the responsibilities of Liberian citizenship.

Indeed, it seems that Liberians have reached a stalemated end underlying any foresight, fortitude, and impetus for identifying and undertaking meaningful projects for national growth and development that the whole country is now immune to shame and disgrace. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand that limited funds are expended on mammoth independence day celebrations just as scores of Liberians are currently sleeping in the streets or graveyards due to high unemployment and housing scarcity, just as the official home of the president is gutted by fire and laid in ruins, and just as prices of goods and services have not only skyrocketed but also that payments for goods and services are demanded in US rather than Liberian currency when Liberian civil servants can barely make sixty US dollar per month. But like fellow compatriot R. Wesley Harmon declared in The Perspective newsmagazine article July 5: “any society in which individuals lose their ability to feel ashamed and disgraced, for acts of commission and omission, inimical to the welfare of that society is evidence that the society is on a downward spiral.”

Perhaps Mr. Harmon did not contextually mean to imply that Liberian society is populated by a group of people who have over the years lost their sense of shame and disgrace due to a number of extenuating circumstances encountered throughout the country’s history, particularly in the last 30 years, but it is difficult for one to analyze the political history of Liberia from 1822 to the present and not see the tragedy of the Liberian independence story squeezed all too well in Mr. Harmon’s profound sentiment about the social, economic, political, cultural, and educational realities at play in Liberia today. Liberians, it would seem, have generally lost any desire to “feel ashamed and disgraced” in spite of the near virtual takeover and domination of Liberia by foreigners ever since Liberians decided in 1989 to set about on a collision course of political self-destruction and material starvation. And sadly, every successive government leader in Liberia before and after the advent of the 1989 national tragedy has been more than clueless as to what to do to lift the Liberian nation and people out of immense poverty and human suffering.

Yet in a matter of days, on July 26, 2007, Liberians will dress up once more in elegant dresses and coat suits, glamorous African attires, and expensive shoes and jewelries to gather at pre-designated public halls across the globe to celebrate the 160th independence anniversary of Liberia. But beyond the momentary pomp and pageantry of the occasion, punctuated by animated speeches by clever politicians and a galore of enticing social festivities, Liberians have yet to grapple with the burdens and responsibilities of statehood. A 14-year civil war in Liberia from 1989-2003 exposed serious weaknesses in the Liberian political system—a political system

that generally denies Liberians the desire, vision, and determination to develop a comprehensive system of national leadership, security, fiscal management and accountability, and national socioeconomic policies to propel Liberia to maximum growth and development without the country's current heavy reliance on outsiders for basic social services and other development initiatives.

Foreigners today dominate Liberia's security and fiscal management activities due to uncontrollable greed, mistrust, and disunity amongst Liberians. A contingent of 15,000 U.N. peace-keepers are currently stationed in Liberia to provide security, while a group of international financial and economic experts operating under a hastily-arranged 2005 agreement called "GEMAP" are currently managing the key revenue-generating agencies of Liberia with full administrative rights to override the decision of certain Liberian cabinet ministers. In addition, after a controversial 2005 runoff presidential election, the new president found no Liberian qualified and trustworthy enough to oversee the restructuring of the Liberian army but a Nigerian army general. Liberian industries, retail stores, and other businesses are virtually in foreign hands, while chains of NGOs and other private or state-sponsored international organizations dominate the healthcare, education, and social service sectors of Liberia.

Besides, Liberia is awfully underdeveloped for a country with a shanty population of 3.4 million people and abundant natural and mineral resources. Living conditions in Liberia have also seriously degraded to pre-20th century levels due to the 14-year civil war, while dozens of foreign-funded NGOs now bear the brunt of responsibility for providing food, shelter, healthcare, clothing, and other social services to the Liberian populace because successive national leaders of Liberia have failed miserably since independence in 1847 to take concrete steps to adequately develop the 43,000 square miles of the country. As a result, the majority of Liberians continued to live in abject poverty, with some sleeping in the graveyards and under public bridges, while a few greedy Liberian politicians and their foreign collaborators repeatedly ripped the country of its natural resources.

Rubber plantations, mining companies, gold and diamond enterprises, and manufacturing outlets in Liberia are generally controlled by foreigners, aided in a few instances by Liberian front men and women. For example, before the civil war, expatriate workers at mining concessions in the Liberian political subdivisions of Nimba, Bong, Bomi, Grand Bassa, and Grand Cape Mount counties, as well as at rubber plantation companies in Margibi and Bomi counties lived in well-furnished and carpeted bungalows with golf or tennis courts, water-cooler fountains, 24-hour electricity, water supplies, and security protection, while Liberian workers at those companies lived in squalid camps with tiny brick huts and little or no furnishings and playgrounds. Expatriate workers and their children also had easy access to paved alley roadways and well-equipped schools, while Liberian workers and their children had to inhale dust particles daily from gravel roads to and from work, home, and special division schools for their children.

Amazingly, many Liberians are in no hurry to curtail the proliferation and rising influence of foreign-funded NGOs in Liberia, the virtual foreign takeover of Liberian economic and financial resources, or seek to improve the deteriorating housing, health, and employment problems in Liberia. In fact, many Liberians—educated and uneducated—still think that there is an "international community" out there somewhere that will come and rescue Liberians from their

individual complacencies and the gross underdevelopment of their country. Apparently, somewhere along the way to political and economic self-destructions, many Liberians forgot that Liberia is a bona fide member of the “international community,” and that the “international community” is made up of a group of countries just like Liberia with their own social, economic, and political problems. And, perhaps, the fact that Liberia is a member of the “international community” is yet to resonate with Liberian policymakers, politicians, intellectuals, religious leaders, civil leaders, and many ordinary Liberians who still see the “international community” as distinct from Liberia.

Liberians have yet to grapple with the fact that any external help given to Liberia, whether by the proverbial “international community” or by other entities is only temporary, as the final and lasting solutions to Liberia’s myriad problems will come about through the national policies and programs initiated by the Liberian government and the extent of the participation of the Liberian people in these national policies and programs. Moreover, no external assistance is ever totally free, as every external assistance usually comes with certain strings attached. And these strings often require the recipient country to make substantive changes in national socioeconomic policies, diplomatic policies, and cultural perspectives to the point of recalibrating and realigning the social, political, cultural, and economic objectives and development priorities of the country being aided. And glaring examples of these kinds of socioeconomic realignments currently exit in Liberia in the form of increasing rates of HIV/AIDS and prostitution, the astronomical prices of basic goods and services with payments demanded in U.S. Dollar rather than Liberian Dollar, the construction of a casino in Monrovia for expatriate gambling while ordinary Liberians languish in abject poverty with little or no access to housing, education, health, and employment opportunities.

Sadly, after nearly 160 years of national independence, Liberia is still virtually an unknown country in the United States (usually mistaken for Libya), in spite of the historical claim that Liberia was founded by former American slaves. Liberia’s historical status as the “Africa’s oldest independent republic” also remains a dubious distinction because Liberia has no real leverages in the formulation of global economic, cultural, political, monetary, or environmental policies, as the number of Liberians heading or working with international organizations is awfully scanty or virtually nonexistent. Indeed, the time has come for the Liberian government and people to think of the 160<sup>th</sup> independence anniversary of Liberia as a moment of introspection, a moment to reflect on the errors that Liberians have collectively made over the years to render Liberia an insignificant player in global political and economic decision-making, in spite of Liberia’s unique distinction and role as Africa’s oldest republic and champion of many independence and liberation struggles in Africa in times past.

Liberians must, as part of that introspection, contemplate on a clear definition and goal of Liberian independence and sovereignty as well as the burdens and responsibilities of statehood as applicable in Liberia. For it is obvious that Liberians cannot in earnest celebrate 160 years of national sovereignty and political independence amid the presence in Liberia of foreign troops, foreign military advisors, foreign legal advisors, foreign commander of the Liberian army, and foreign businessmen running the affairs of Liberia, while Liberians take the backseat in their own national stability and development. In essence, in celebrating 160 years of national statehood, we in Liberia ought to realize that statehood presupposes that a group of people,

whether for social, economic, political, or cultural reasons, had set out to unite their efforts in peaceful coexistence on a particular landmass and had agreed to certain sets of responsibilities and burden-sharing activities as citizens.

It is, therefore, a pity that after 159 years of our national existence as a nation and people (160 years on July 26, 2007), some Liberians actually think the burdens of Liberian statehood can fluctuate between good time and bad time in Liberia. But I doubt seriously that the burdens of statehood and the responsibilities of citizenship in Liberia can fall to anyone other than Liberians. Sure, some Liberians are in the constant habit of condemning their own statehood in favor of such haphazard measures as GEMAP, UN peacekeepers patrolling Liberian streets, and a Nigerian general leading the Liberian military, but at the end of the day the viability of Liberia rests squarely in the hands of Liberians and not foreigners. Certainly, Liberians will from time to time feel disgusted, disappointed, and frustrated by the slow pace of development in Liberia and make a few feel-good statements to the point of speculating about why Liberia is in the mess it is in today in terms of living conditions and high rate of institutionalized corruption, but at the end of the day all the feel-good statements and speculations will not develop Liberia until Liberians agree to work together to develop Liberia. In other words, unless Liberia is invaded and colonized, Liberia will remain a bona fide member country of the world community, and the burdens of developing Liberia will continue to rest on the shoulders of the group of people called “Liberians” and no one else!

The burdens of Liberian statehood and the responsibilities of Liberian citizenship, in a general sense, impose on every Liberian a set of intrinsic values and obligations that can never be traded for anything in the world or to any one, not even the most benevolent American, Nigerian, German, Briton, or Ghanaian. The burdens and responsibilities of Liberian statehood are entirely the burdens and responsibilities of Liberians, and the sooner Liberians recognize these natural obligations of statehood, the sooner Liberians will think twice about shifting the responsibility for developing Liberia to foreigners. Indeed, this was the very message that Sister Mary Laurene Browne, President of Don Bosco Polytechnic in Monrovia gave to Liberians in 2004 when she delivered the national oration to mark Liberia’s 157th independence anniversary. Sister Browne reminded the Liberian government and people thus: “Independence denotes sovereignty. A sovereign nation is self-governed. However, with all the factors that guarantee statehood, no nation can stand tall or sink low all by itself. Independence connotes interdependence. In our one world, there is a visible line between developed nations and developing nations. In the developing nations, the line of demarcation is stark between the minority rich and the majority poor; between the few literates, the numerous half literates and the too many illiterates. And let us all be reminded that whenever the majority of people anywhere remains systematically disadvantaged, that nation self-destructs morally. Consciences die. Tyrants emerge and seemingly prosper....” (theperspective.org, 28 July 2004).

In a way, Sister Browne reminded Liberians that the burdens of statehood or independence impose special responsibilities and complexities on a nation and its citizens that are far greater than the sheer recognition of the existence of an independent state. To Sister Browne, independence, sovereignty, and self-governance are highly inseparable, and that while collaboration with other nations are essential in recognition of the interdependence of the world, the fact remains that if Liberia must remain a “sovereign” and respectable nation within the

comity of world nations, then Liberians must be prepared to not just “govern” Liberia, but they must also work to make Liberia governable in terms of infrastructural development, strategic socioeconomic, politico-cultural, and educational developments, and rule of law. Generally, Sister Browne’s 2004 independence day message can be interpreted in effect to mean that if Liberians entertained the slightest notion that a benevolent “international community” will come and rescue Liberia and rebuild Liberia as Liberians sit supinely by doing nothing after Liberians destroyed their own country in a war of attrition for political power and control as if there was no tomorrow, then Liberians are threading on grave and unrealistic proposition from which recovery is unlikely anytime soon. This means that Liberians must come to grips with the facts that being Liberian citizens impose certain legal burdens and responsibilities as citizens which must not be neglected in anticipation of handouts from other countries within the “international community” of which Liberia is a part.

Liberians must therefore rise to the occasion of taking seriously the burdens and responsibilities of Liberian statehood by initiating policies and programs that seek to stimulate the Liberian economy and help improve the standard of living of the Liberian people. And the exercise of the burdens and responsibilities of statehood in Liberia must begin with the Liberian civil society movement which, by virtue of the variety of the professional training of its members should serve as the moral compass through which all national development policies and programs in Liberia must be channeled if it must have the least modicum of success. And this is why I wrote sometime back in an article about the role of civil society in the new Liberia that after 14 years of two brutal civil wars, an un-functional government bureaucracy, and an inefficient national governance structure, the role of the Liberian civil society cannot be overemphasized in the building of a new Liberian society of equal opportunities, meaningfully socioeconomic development, and rule of law, provided that the Liberian civil society first sought to establish its credibility as a viable alternative to the kind of political infightings and lack of insights that have continued to hamper the development aspirations of all Liberians. I said in that article that in order to be credible, the Liberian civil society needed to be in the forefront of efforts at mass education of the Liberian people, the promotion of free speech, free press, rule of law, equality before the law, equal access to employment and educational opportunities, and the protection of basic human rights, as well as individual, cultural, and religious practices in Liberia.

In essence, I said the Liberian civil society and Liberian politicians needed to be clearly distinguishable in both their social demands and approaches to national issues, and that the Liberian civil society needed to be professional at all times in dealings with governmental and non-governmental institutions and organizations in Liberia in a non-adversarial manner, but also in exhibiting itself as a good example of fiscal and management accountability in Liberian society. Otherwise, I said if the Liberian civil society fails to distinguish itself from Liberian politicians by inviting every Tom, Dick, or Harris, and a corps of failed politicians or politicians-in-waiting to masquerade as bona fide civil society leaders, then Liberians will find it difficult to distinguish between the “real civil society” and the “pseudo civil society,” and the problem of mistrust and apprehensions that have undermined the unity and development of Liberia in the last 160 years will persist and Liberians will continue to wallow in misery amid abundance while foreigners remain the main economic engines and powerbrokers in Liberia.

I had emphasized the role of the civil society movement in any reconstruction efforts in Liberia due to the fact that Liberians currently stand in dire need of new direction, new knowledge, new vision, new leaders, new attitude, and new national priorities in Liberia, in order to recover from the nightmares of the civil wars. But I also said that the choosing of such new direction will depend mostly on the goodwill and coordinated efforts of all Liberians, especially educated Liberians in the various professional organizations to ensure peace and stability in Liberia. Hence, I said the new Liberia must also be a place for the frank exchange of views and the cross-fertilization of ideas! The new Liberia must have no toleration for arrogant, insensitive, and politically motivated persons who generally flock to any social, economic, professional, or political organization conceivable, as a matter of political expediency, and not as a matter of service and conviction. The Liberian civil society, I said, can never be a key bridge to national unity, peace, stability, and development in Liberia if it is not seen to be neutral and professional, so I asked that the Liberian people must not grant a breathing space to a “pseudo civil society” either, to ensure that the civil society movement of Liberia remains apolitical and professional in all its actions and activities.

The burdens and responsibilities of Liberian statehood, indeed, mandate that all Liberians take concrete steps to develop Liberia in whatever ways each can. And this is why I agreed with a listserv post by Mr. Alexander Kekula that “in the rebuilding of our ravished country...Liberians must learn to redirect their energy in creative productivity for their country. Like the Asians, the Liberians should become aggressive in the re-engineering processes and transfer technologies and create jobs to their impoverished nation. The threat to Liberia is ourselves; because we talk and consume more than we can produce. If we turn the coin around, Liberia will become a productive shore to live on” (OLM\_Adm04 listserv July 2006). In the same view, Mr. Samuel D. Tweah, Jr. responded to Mr. Kekula thus: “It is true that the previous generation of political leaders placed undue emphasis on social and political processes unfolding in the country and relegated other productive spheres. Witness the ridiculously small number of Liberian professionals in international organizations or the lack of business and entrepreneurial know-how among Liberians, as evidenced by the dominance of Lebanese merchants in the Liberian economy. A generational shift towards entrenching business and technology would indeed be revolutionary but must not occur at the expense of sacrificing the watchdog role of grassroots social advocacy...” (OLM\_Adm04 listserv July 2006).

Beneath this frank exchange of views between Messrs Kekula and Tweah, though, lies the realization that the burdens and responsibilities of Liberian statehood rest entirely on the shoulders of Liberians and not on non-Liberians. It seems that Liberia has been saddled with a serious crisis of identity, class, education, culture, religion, politics, governance, and leadership from the time of Liberia’s founding in 1822 and declaration of independence in 1847 up to the present that it will take more commitment and creativity on the part of the Liberian government and people to develop Liberia than the country’s current reliance on outside handouts for its sustainability will do. And the first step in this regard is for Liberians to identify the cultural values and socioeconomic philosophies of Liberia and develop these values and philosophies into a unique set of Liberian values that every Liberian man, woman, and child will look forward to uphold and cherish as the concrete national burdens of Liberian statehood and responsibilities of Liberian citizenship.

I believe Liberian is enveloping through one crisis after another because Liberians currently have no unique cultural values to identify with and cherish in the time of peace, war, or reconstruction. Liberia has no national symbols around which everyone can rally in times of national distress because successive national leaders in Liberia, including members of the current government, are more concerned with playing lip-service in regard to peace, stability, and national developments in Liberia than with developing concrete plans and taking appropriate actions to effect the required changes. As a result, Liberia has no concept of national identity or race relations due to unnecessary exposures to and imitations of every foreign ideology imaginable, whether good or bad. For example, in mid July when the current president of Liberia endorsed the teaching of one of Liberia's sixteen major languages as a lingua franca in Liberia (the third or fourth time a sitting Liberian president has endorsed the idea of teaching Liberian language in Liberian schools), some Liberians were quick to protest that the nation's scarce resources should be spent on teaching Liberians to improve their English proficiency rather than develop a local Liberian language to teach in Liberian schools because such a scheme would grant the Native speakers of the language selected as lingua franca in Liberia an unfair "political advantage" over non-speakers.

And the last time I checked, some Liberians had substituted the name of the traditional female circumcision in Liberia for the stereotypical western concept, "female genital mutilation," and now we are gravitating toward the concept of "single parenthood" and later we would be celebrating "gay rights." Personally, I find nothing wrong with Liberians modifying foreign concepts and ideologies to suit Liberian realities, but I find it very disturbing that Liberians are willing to carbon copy everything foreign while neglecting their own cultural values. For instance, we now have an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Liberia as if Liberians lost their creativity or as if our American friends would forsake us if we did not carbon copy the name of the American EPA and establish a corresponding Liberian institution with the name, for instance, The Liberian Agency or Institute for Nature and the Environment.

I think that after 159 years of national existence as an independent country, Liberians need to come to grips with defining a national identity because I do not think Liberia can survive peacefully without a national identity. Liberians cannot indefinitely rely on the "international community" to appreciate them unless they put their house in order and appreciate themselves first. But we cannot appreciate ourselves as Liberians unless we learn to exploit our diversity as one group of people, unless we ensure that our leaders and ourselves obey the laws of Liberia in setting a national agenda for the country, and unless we realize that the burdens of Liberian statehood and the responsibilities of Liberian citizenship are key imperatives that make the promotion of peace, national reconciliation, and national socioeconomic development of a new Liberia the foremost obligation of all Liberians and no one else. Happy 160<sup>th</sup> independence anniversary.