**Escaping the enemy from within - the political economy of postcolonial African diasporas lessons from Liberia**

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ABSTRACT

In light of the interest in the incorporation of the African diaspora as the Sixth region of the African Union, the paper examines the political economy of diaspora-led African development. The paper argues that the African diaspora now emerges as both a development and a security actor because of the continued failure of the dominant Western led liberal peace model of development and security. **It argues that a genuine inclusion of the African diaspora to the continental peace and development agenda must address the traps that bedeviled the liberal peace model which tacitly assumed that development can be ‘brought’ to the continent without addressing the structural weakness of the African state. This diaspora-led development must not be expected to fill the vacuum of the African state therefore “diaspora-led development requires wider and historical contextual focus of a critical political economy approach that takes in broader transformations in governance - the nature of the state and continuities evident in the exercise of this power; as well as the ‘historical geographies’ of transnational formations” (Davies 2010: 2). Using the historic inclusion of the Liberian diaspora into the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia in the United States, the paper examines the limits of the political economy of the post-colonial African diaspora. It argues that the Liberian TRC project in the diaspora can be seen as an instrument by which the Liberian government attempted to gain legitimacy for the TRC project which it lacked back in Liberia. In doing this the TRC process unraveled the unstable foundations of diaspora life whose public sphere continues to carry the baggage of conflict. The silence about the conflict in the diaspora and the subsequent usage of the diaspora to gain legitimacy for the TRC project in Liberia is illustrative of the continued problem in African statehood of using methods elsewhere to remedy the structural weakens of the post-conflict state. The paper concludes that** incorporating the African diaspora as a human security actor must be located within the context of needed attention to structural issues of governance and state transformation in Africa.

**Introduction: African diaspora-led development an alternative to the liberal development agenda?**

**Diasporas currently receive an enormous amount of international attention. Since 9/11 and in the aftermath of the Cold War, the profile of the diaspora as both a development and security actor has risen dramatically largely because of their supposed developmental benefits and contribution to the dominant liberal development agenda. Indeed, migration flows and above all transnational networks such as diasporas are now frequently aimed at promoting social reconstruction and conflict resolution (Davies 2010: 1).**

**There has been a growing understanding of the economic role of post-independence African diasporas in sustaining the lifeline of their home countries in times of conflict and during post conflict reconstruction. There has been a conservative estimate of “remittance inflows to Africa of about $20 billion annually” (Games, 2009: 44) while global remittances stand at $206 billion annually much of which come from the Chinese and Indian diasporas (Davies, 2010). The impact of diaspora communities in the development of their homelands is now firmly in the international development and security agenda as evidenced by the High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in September 2006, as well as the Global Forum on Migration and Development high profile meetings between states and non-state actors in the Philippines, Greece and Mexico. Indeed diaspora communities are now seen as legitimate actors in peacebuilding and development in the developing world.**

**As Davies (2010) argues “Africa has been at the forefront of the diaspora’s expansion into the mainstream of global development [and security] policy” (p. 1). Part of the transformation of the Organization of African Unity to becoming the African Union (AU) has seen the union taking several key steps in establishing and formalising the potential role of the diaspora beyond their economic value. The first Extraordinary Summit of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the AU, which was first to amend the Constitutive Act which officially established the AU Article 3(q), stipulates that the union “invites and encourages the full participation of the diaspora as an important part of our continent, in the building of the African Union.” As argued by the former chairperson of the AU Commission; Alpha Oumar Konare, persistent questions about inclusion of the African diaspora into the African development agenda has followed such questions as “who are the members of this African Diaspora? What would be their rights and duties? How would the process of relations be organized and what would be the optimal value of ensuing interactions?”**

**This was then followed by the Washington Forum in Washington DC in the United States in 2002, and the Decisions of the Executive Council in Sun City, South Africa in 2003 which were all attempts to establish the official Diaspora Programme. This also included the 2005 African Union-South Africa Caribbean Diaspora Summit, which focused on the developmental potential of the African Diaspora. It is notable that much of the examining of the potential role of the African diasporas as a Sixth region of the AU has been concentrated in the economic and technological potential of the relationship between Africa and the diaspora. This is also evident in the visible incorporation of the Diaspora in the statutes of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the AU (ECOSOCC). Evidently therefore the economic imperative of the Africa and Diaspora relations dominates the discussion at the continental and national levels as it will be demonstrated.**

**This paper argues that the growing nature and interest of the African diaspora cannot be understood outside of the failure of the dominant liberal development agenda in Africa in the past 50 years (Davies, 2010; Mohan and Zack-Williams, 2002; Ogom 2009). The very compositions of the diaspora whether outside of the continent or dispersions in the continent are largely a result of the post-Cold War shift witnessed in the rise of violent conflict from inter to intra state conflict which fundamentally changed traditional notions of conflict in International Relations (IR). According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM 2011), “in 2010, the number of international migrants in Africa is estimated to be 19 million representing less than 9 per cent of the total global migrant stock” most of which is intra-regional. Most of these migrants come mostly from war torn African countries which include and are not limited to:**

* **The 4 million Southern Sudanese that have been displaced over the course of the 21 years old war in Kenya, Uganda, Northern America and Europe (International Displacement Monitoring Center 2011)**
* **1.5 million displaced by the Congolese war in Central and Southern Africa (Refugee International 2011)**
* **The 2.5 million displaced by the civil war in Sierra Leone, 1 million in Liberia (Zounmenou, 2008)**
* **The 1. 5 million in Somalia (Refugee International 2011)**

Indeed as a result of this proliferation of conflict in the continent, Africa has preoccupied the attention of the United Nations (UN) Security Council. The UN completed “more peacekeeping operations in the 1990s than ever before in history” the majority which came from and continue to be peace missions in Africa (Commission on Human Security Report 2003: 2). **According to the *2010 Foreign Policy and Fund for Peace Failed States Index* the top 5 countries (out of 60) “failed states” areAfrican (Somalia, Chad, Sudan, Zimbabwe and DR Congo). While, out of the top 20 an estimated 11 are African (including Kenya, Nigeria, Niger, Guinea, and Cote d’Ivoire), and 30 African states out of the 54 African states are featured in the index. In 2010 no African country was defined as stable or most stable countries like South Africa, Botswana, Senegal and Ghana are defined as “borderline” (Foreign Policy and Fund for Peace, 2010).**

**The growing interest and legitimization of the diaspora in peace and security must be understood within this context of a continental search for an alternative to the liberal peace model which culminated in the securitization of development which intensified in the post 9/11 epoch as noted above. This paper however argues further that the security-development nexus is rooted in the development of the concept of human security pioneered by the groundbreaking United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report “*New dimensions of human security*” since 1994 which introduced the concept of “human security” which challenges traditional notions of state security positing that state security depends on human development has and consequently led to the affirmation of development as a tool for conflict prevention and resolution.** As such the report posited that the conception of security ought to change from an “exclusive stress on territorial security to a much greater stress on people’s security. From security through armaments to security through sustainable human development” which includes economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security (UNDP Report 1994: 25).

**The ‘security-development nexus’ asserts the interdependence and the mutual reinforcing nature of these two paradigms with the understanding that long-term development is regarded as hinging upon security, and lasting security depends upon ‘sustainable development’. Frene Ginwala notes** in the United Nations report “Human Security Now” (2003: 3), that “traditional notions of security, shaped largely by the Cold War, were concerned mainly with state’s ability to counter external threats. Threats to international peace and security were usually perceived as threats from outside the state. More recently, thinking about security has shifted. In Africa, for example such shifts can be traced to the internal struggles of African people against colonial rule and occupation…Views on security were shaped by the experiences of colonialism and neo-colonialism and complex process through which internal and external forces combined to dominate and subjugate people. The enemy came from within the state, and the conditions under which people lived every day placed them in chronic insecurity.”

**Post-conflict governments and international agencies now engage in peace-building which encompasses a broad array of activities including governance, economic and judicial reforms and security sector reforms. Peacebuilding thus brings the development and security paradigms together in a shift from state security to human security. This has led to the so-called 3-D approach: defense, development and diplomacy which developed concurrently with the human security/peacebuilding paradigms in which the objective, too, is to transform war economies in to peace economies (UNDP Report 1994, UNDP Report 1990; Human Security Now Report 2003; Roland 2001; Hurwitz and Peake 2004; Collier 2004; Cillier and Mbadlanyana 2010).**

**Africa remains beset by development challenges, constituting 70% of the societies of Paul Collier’s “bottom billion” which are trapped in a cycle of conflict and poverty and it comes as no surprise therefore that Collier states:“Africa is therefore the core of the problem” (2007:7). Indeed as Cillier and Mbadlanyana (2010: 120) argue “although it is not always clear between development and security, there is a broad consensus that conflict destroys governance institutions, devastates livelihoods and arrests prospects for economic growth.”**

**This paper argues that a genuine inclusion of the African diaspora to the continental peace and development agenda must address the traps that bedeviled the liberal peace model which tacitly assumed that development can be ‘brought’ to the continent without addressing the structural weakness of the African state and without the presence of the African state as an actor (Chabal 1999; Collier 2007; Davies 2010; Mkandawire 2001; Moyo 2009; Ogom 2009). Thus this diaspora-led development must not be expected to fill the vacuum of the African state instead “diaspora-led development requires the wider and historical contextual focus of a critical political economy approach that takes in broader transformations in governance- the nature of the state and continuities evident in the exercise of this power- as well as the ‘historical geographies’ of transnational formations” (Davies 2010: 2).**

**Indeed as Davies (2010: 4) continues to argue, “…the dominance of neopatrimonial networks and uneven spread of globalised liberalism which comprise Africa’s distinctive political culture provide the contextual backdrop against which the diaspora functions as a development actor.” This paper strongly posits that just as politicized as Western development intervention has been in the decades of the Cold War and post Cold War eras, the nature of the African diaspora is that of highly diverse and politicized actors, whose contributions to the continent must be judged with caution by engaging the diaspora as a political actor which is operating within a highly politicized and largely unequal global political economy (Omeje 2007; Ogom 2009; Davies 2010). Using the historic inclusion of the Liberian diaspora into the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the United States this paper will start by tracing the diaspora’s role in the Liberian conflict and the peace process of 2003 in order to examine the limits of the political economy of the post-colonial African diaspora.**

**However before proceeding further it is worth cautioning and noting that this paper is a revised and small part of the larger findings by the author on a Master’s thesis completed in June 2010 entitled “*The 16th County: The Role of Diaspora Liberians in Land Reform, Reconciliation and Development in Liberia*” at Ohio University in the US. In this qualitative study the author’s participants were from city Columbus in the state of Ohio, and the city of Minneapolis in the state of Minnesota. The total participants in the study were 23, about 15 from the Ohio, 7 from Minnesota and 1 official of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). The 15 Ohio participants were a combination of members from the board and executive leadership of the Liberians in Columbus Inc (LICI), a former minister of the Doe administration of 1980, a former national president of Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA) and ordinary members of Liberian descent. About 7 out of the 6 respondents from Minnesota (where the majority of the Liberian Diaspora in the US resides) were chosen because they had participated in the TRC hearings in Minnesota. While the 7th participant from Minnesota was chosen because he is an employee of the Advocates for Human Rights in Minnesota, the organization that facilitated the TRC process on behalf of the Liberian government in the US. The 23rd participant was not a Liberian but an official of the UNMIL who was interviewed upon an ad hoc visit to Ohio University. Participants came from 11 of the 15 Liberian Counties (states/provinces); of the 16 ethnic groups in Liberia, participants came from 9 ethnic groups. In this paper the author is drawing from some of those findings.**

**Unscattering the diaspora**

**If everyone is diasporic, then no one is distinctively so. The term loses its discriminating power – its ability to pick out phenomena, to make distinctions. This universalization of diaspora, paradoxically, means the disappearance of diaspora (Brubaker 2005: 3).**

Although migration is not by any means a 21st century phenomenon, interests in the politics of diaporas in IR and other fields of social sciences are visible from the 1980s. Indeed, the concept of diaspora has become a popular term in IR and Migration studies in recent decades sharing in the discourse analysis with other popular narratives of globalization and transnationalism which fundamentally challenge the traditional understanding of “nation and race and even class and gender and celebrate the energies of multiple subjectivities” (Zeleza, 2005: 35). For instance “diaspora and its cognates appear as keywords only twice a year in dissertations from the 1970s, about thirteen times a year in the late 1980s, and nearly 130 times in 2001 alone” (Brubaker 2005: 1). This has also led to contestations of how we define the diaspora and the temptation to universalize the term at the risk of losing its discriminating power as noted by Brubaker (2005).

In *Diaspora Politics*, Sheffer (2003) defines the diaspora as implying a “forcible dispersion” which is found in the biblical text Deuteronomy that defines diaspora as “scattering to other lands” (p. 266). Despite its linguistic origin in the Greek language, diaspora as a term has largely been defined and originated from the Jewish experience. According to Sheffer (2003) both Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary and the New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary respectively defined the term as “the settling of scattered colonies of Jews outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile,” and the dispersion of the Jews among the Gentile nations” (p. 9). Since then diaspora literature Sheffer, has grown to reflect a broad and encompassing definition referring to a “socio-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries” (Sheffer, 2003: 9) such as the Hindu Indians, Irish, Kurds, Palestinians, Tamils and others (Brubaker 2005).

Safran in Cohen’s “*Global Diasporas: An introduction”* (1997) lumps together several different communities in defining the Diaspora referring to “expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities” (p. 273). This extends the definition to include well known migrant communities scattered all over the world such as the Bangladeshi, Filipino, Greek, Haitian, Indian, Italian, Korean, Algerian, Mexican, Pakistani, Puerto Rican, Polish, Salvadoran, Turkish, Vietnamese and many others into the diaspora category. Armstrong (1997) goes on to label these diasporas such as the Greek, Armenian, Chinese, Indians, Lebanese as trading diasporas or otherwise “mobilized diaspora.”

Amongst several characteristics of the Diaspora Cohen (1997) outlines, a “dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions…a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements…an idealisation of the putative ancestral home and collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even its creation” (p. 274). The origins of the term diaspora therefore maintain an association with forced dispersion leading to the creation of “catastrophic or victim diasporas’ where the Jewish experience for instance “can be taken as a non-normative starting points for a discourse that is traveling or hybridizing in new global conditions” (Clifford 1994: 306).

In line with Clifford’s advocating for a “hybridizing” definition of diaspora, Mohan and Kale (2007) note that the original understanding of the diasporas has significantly evolved to a “looser” meaning to denote social groups that subvert the territorial logic of the nation-state system and it has lost its ‘victimhood’ mantle” while still to an extent referring to a sense of compulsion to migrate in many cases due to poverty which now extends to include other words such as “immigrant, expatriate, refugees, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community (Toloyan 1991:4). However, as Brubaker (2005:3) asserts above there is an obvious danger of losing the meaning of diaspora is: “**if everyone is diasporic, then no one is distinctively so” (Brubaker 2005: 3).**

**In defining the diaspora therefore this paper uses Brubaker’s (2005: 5) elements of the definition of the term which is similar to those defined by Cohen (1997) and constitute the three “core elements that remain widely understood to be constitutive of diaspora” which are: 1) dispersion - which implies a forced or otherwise traumatic movement from one state to other, 2) homeland orientation - thus ‘an orientation to a real or imagined ‘homeland’ as authoritative source of value, identity and loyalty which involved a collective maintenance of myth or memory about the homeland. Emmanuel Akyeampong (2000) in “*Africans in the diaspora: The diaspora and Africa*” argues that “imagining homeland is a potent force in the diasporic communities, and diaspora cultures ‘in a lived tension, the experience of separation and entanglement, of living and remembering/desiring another place’ (p. 185-186). However, people like Clifford (1994) have argued that an orientation to homeland must not necessarily imply a “teology of return” and thus a memory and myth about homeland does imply a commitment to returning to the homeland but rather a commitment to the maintenance and prosperity of the homeland; 3) Boundary maintenance - thus nationals identifying as a diaspora must preserve a “distinctive identity vis-à-vis a host society (or societies)…boundaries can be maintained by deliberate resistance to assimilation through self-enforced endogamy or other forms of self-segregation” (Brubaker 2005: 6)or as Kearney (1995: 559) puts it: members of the diaspora must “retain a myth of their uniqueness.”**

**These categories help us move beyond the trap of labeling any citizen living outside of their homeland a member of the diaspora and thus by attributing a stance, claim and practice we move beyond “symbolic ethnicity” (Gans 1979). Diaspora therefore as a “category of practice, ‘diaspora’ is used to make claims, to articulate projects, to formulate expectations, to mobilize energies, [and] to appeal to loyalties” (Brubaker 2005: 12).**

**Akyeampong (2000) argues that the “composition of the African diaspora have undergone significant changes over time: from the forced migration of African captives of the Old and New Worlds to the voluntary emigration of free, skilled Africans in search of political asylum or economic opportunities; from a diaspora with little contact with the point of origin (Africa) to one that maintains active contact with the mother continent…today Africans are found in non-traditional points of migration such as Israel, Japan, Taiwan, New Zealand and Australia (p. 183). However, Paul Zeleza (2005: 36) in “*Rewriting the African diaspora: beyond the Black Atlantic*” argues that“the African diaspora, together with the Jewish diaspora - the epistemological of the term diaspora – enjoys pride in the pantheon of diaspora studies. Yet despite the prolifiliration of the literature, our understanding of the African diaspora remains limited and marred by both the conceptual difficulties of defining what we mean by the diaspora in general and the African diaspora in particular, and the analytical tendency to privilege the Atlantic, or rather the Anglophone, indeed the American branch of the African diaspora, as is so clear in Gilroy’s seminal text [The Black Atlantic].” As Koser (2003) argues that the new Diasporas are those departing from what is known as the “original African diaspora [which] rose from the dispersal of Africans as a result of the slave trade” (p. 1). In essence the concept of Africa’s new Diasporas is concerned with “migrations from post-colonial Africa (arguably with the exception of Eritreans who fled before Eritrean independence) and usually in the last twenty years or so” (Koser, 2003 p. 4).**

**Extending on the evolution of the African diaspora, Akyeampong (2000: 186) argues that “going abroad in Africa has been extended from original conception of ‘overseas’ to going outside of one’s homeland…for the Ghanaian this could mean the Ivory Coast, Botswana, England or North America.”This is clearly supported by the migration numbers stated in the introduction reflecting the fact that the majority of migration in Africa remains intra continental. As previously argued, the majority of these migrations are forced due to the prevalence of violent conflict in their homeland and thus despite the dynamic nature of the African diaspora, this paper contends that the majority of the African diaspora presently remains a traditional diaspora of “forced” migrations as compared to trading diasporas such as the Chinese, Lebanese, Indians etc.**

**Akyeampong (2000) also notes that postcolonial African diasporas can be traced back to the migration of Africans away from the Sahelian drought between 1968 and 1974, the petroleum crisis of the 1970s and the rise of military coups in the 1960s. He notes importantly that “in this current dispersion, African migration is not necessarily towards the former metropolis. Sweden, because of its liberal policy towards political refugees, has become an attractive place for Eritreans, Ethiopians, Somalians, and Ugandans. Other studies such as Abdullah Mohamoud (2006) “*African diaspora and post-conflict reconstruction in Africa*” examine the homeland activity of the Congolese, Burundis, Eritreans, Ethiopians, Somalis, Rwandese and Sudanese in the Netherlands. While** Bodomo in his article *“The African trading community in Guangzhou: an emerging bridge for Africa-China relations”* (2010: 699) estimates that 100,000 Africans are located in the city of Guangzhou in Guangdong province in China leading to the city’s informal term “chocolate city.”

**Raphael Ogom (2009) in “*The African union, African diasporas and the quest for development: in search of the missing link”* notes that roughly 35 million immigrants of African descent living in the US collectively hold purchasing power of $450 billion per annum, “a sum that, if represented by a single country, would make it one of the 15 largest economies in the world” (p. 166). It is estimated that 4.1% of Nigeria’s GDP comes from remittances, 6.7% in Eritrea, while in countries like Sudan which rely on remittances the figures of the transfers go largely uncaptured (Ogom 2009; Tebeje and Sanger 2006).**

**Indeed African governments have begun to recognize the political economy of the diaspora, the Nigerian government provides its diaspora space in its Washington DC embassy under “Nigerians in the Diaspora Organization (NIDO)” which connects the diaspora community with government officials in Nigeria that are primarily focused on economic interventions. Another initiative is “Linkage with experts and academics in the diaspora (LEAD)” which is focused primarily at contributing to the development of the Nigerian university system through short-term academic appointments (Ogom 2009). While the South African government has the “South African network of Skills Abroad (SANSA)” which seeks to attract back to South Africa highly skilled South Africans especially in areas such as education, services, health etc. In Kenya, the minister for planning and national development regularly meets with Kenyans in the US and UK to maintain contact and devise potential avenues for collaboration. Ghana has a ministry of diaspora relations and the country also allows for dual citizenship (Ogom 2009: 168). While Somali president Sharif Sheikh Ahmed and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia regularly visit their respective country’s diaspora in Northern America and Europe. Johnson-Sirleaf has promised Liberians that they too like the Ghanian diaspora will have dual citizenship.**

**Ogom (2009: 171) correctly notes that the growing interest in the activities of the African diaspora as shown here is premised on the “presumption that once the diaspora supplies these [development] impulses, development is most likely assured. This is incorrect because a careful review of the possible ways through which diaspora can positively impact African development indicates that the diaspora has, and continues, to supply these impulses, yet not much development has resulted as a consequence as often assumed.” At the core of this paper therefore is the argument that power and agency must be taken seriously in examining the migration-development nexus in Africa especially against the backdrop of failing neo-liberal peace model and a continued neo-patrimonial state in Africa. The activities of the Liberian diaspora exposes the complicated political economy of the African diaspora.**

**A house with two rooms: lessons from Liberia**

**…since the reconstitution project was not intended to rethink, deconstruct, and democratically reconstitute the settler Liberian state, its neocolonial permutation retained its basic nature, mission, character, and policies anchored on an anti-people, anti-democracy, and anti-development foundation. In essence, the change from the settler to the neocolonial phase of the Liberian state was analogous to, using the proverbial expression “putting new wine into old bottles” (Kieh, 2008, p.167)**

**Located in West Africa, the hotspot of many of Africa’s deadliest conflicts, Liberia was the arena of one of the longest and deadliest wars in Africa from 1989 to 2003. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2003 in Accra ended the 14-year war and paved way for the eventual transition to the democratic elections in 2005 which led to the election of Africa’s first female president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (Zounmenou, 2008). It is important to note that with various peace agreements attempts the Liberian civil war had two phases: according to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia (TRC), the phases were from December 1989 to 1996 and from 1999 to August 2003 (TRC Final Report, 2009). Amongst the various failed peace agreements to end the civil war include the Bamako Ceasefire of November 1990, the Banjul Joint Statement of December 1990, the February 1991 Lome Agreement, the Yamoussoukro I-IV Accords of June-October 1991, Cotonou Accord 1993, The Akosombo Accord in September**

**1994, the Accra Clarification of December 1994, and the August 1995 Abuja Accord (**Alao, Mackinlay & 'Funmi**, 1999). It was Abuja I and II Accords that eventually led to the 70% disarmament of the state military and rebel factions, symbolizing the end of the first phase of war (Aloa et al, 1999). The success of this disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DRR) contributed to a new found shared belief by Liberians that peace can be possible in Liberia. Elections finally took place in 19 July 1997 where Charles Taylor received 75% of the votes, making him president whose violent and corrupt rule ended in 2003 with Taylor agreeing to leave Liberia for exile in Nigeria (Aloa et al, 1999).**

**Liberia undeniably provides a compelling political history, Liberia became the chosen home for the freed African American slaves who were repatriated back to the African continent in 1822 (Kieh, 2008; Zounmenou, 2008). On July 26, 1847, Liberia became the first African Black ruled Republic (Haiti being the first Black republic) when the freed slaves, the Americo-Liberians, assumed power over the indigenous population. There majority of the indigenous population was composed of three major ethnic groups with their own subgroups; these groups were the Mel, the Mande and the Kwa (Kieh, 2008). With the arrival and rule of the Americo- Liberians and their subsequent assumption of power, the indigenous groups of Liberia were subject to political, economic and social oppression until the military coup of 1980, which ended the Americo-Liberian hegemony of which some Liberian scholars have labeled as “Black apartheid” (Kieh 2008).**

**Therefore unlike any other African diaspora (with the exception of its neighbour Sierra Leone), Liberia carries a unique history in Africa of having been founded by slaves returning from the diaspora while encompassing both the old and the new diaspora. It is estimated that between 250,000 Liberians live in the United States (US), “**reportedly more than 30,000 in Minnesota alone” **(Liberians In Columbus, Inc, 2009; Liberia's TRC Diaspora Report, 2009). The numbers were increased by the civil war when thousands of Liberians went to the US seeking refuge from the war. Mary Moran (2005) in “*Social thought and commentary: Time and place in the Anthropology of events: a diaspora perspective on the Liberian transition*.” argues that most of these people of the Liberian diaspora compose of the “country’s educated elite and former political officials…far from passively observing events as they unfold in West Africa, these people have been actively organising to influence outcomes at home as well as American foreign policy toward Liberia” (Moran, 2005 p. 459). Vanessa Stevens (2007) in “*Diasporas, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation: A case study of the Liberian Diaspora*” states that the Liberian diaspora in the U.S has contributed to post-conflict Liberia in a number of ways such as remittances and hometown projects, and investment.**

**Using the Liberian crisis of 2003 when violence erupted once again in Liberia leading to Charles Taylors’ exile in Nigeria, Moran recalls a meeting in Bloomington, Indiana. This meeting was composed of Liberians who were mostly former government officials and American scholars of Liberia under the theme “the purpose is to begin a discussion designed to provide a deeper understanding of Liberian governance institutions and their potential to contribute to peace and democratic governance in Liberia” (p. 459). She states that while Liberians in Monrovia were dropping dead bodies of their loved ones in front of the US embassy in Liberia, diaspora Liberians “were earnestly and creatively engaged in trying to re-imagine governance in Liberia as *if* Charles Taylor had already been disposed of” (Moran, 2005 p. 460). Moran (2005) continues to argue insightfully that this meeting which was reconstructing Liberia was “quite clear, moreover, that the frank discussion of the kind that was taking place in Bloomington *could not* have occurred openly in Monrovia, where Taylor’s security apparatus maintained tight control and activists were routinely jailed and beaten…in this context, it was the displacement of the participants from the site of the “events” that made their intervention possible” (p. 460).**

**Furthermore, Moran (2005) argues that during the crisis of 2003 various organizations such as Liberian Studies Association were forced to examine their political purpose on whether or not they should make public statements about the crisis. After Taylor’s departure from office, 26 Liberians participated in a Liberia Peace and Democracy Workshop organized by the University of Pennsylvania that “sought to make recommendations to help the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) effectively implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement…” (Moran, 2005 p. 462). Recommendations from the workshop were also distributed to “key stakeholders of Liberia” such as the UN International Contact Group on Liberia, ECOWAS, the US State Department, the EU, AU, and NGOs (Moran 2005: 462).**

**Moran (2005) correctly concludes that it is unclear how the recommendations from this workshop influenced the final language of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) but “what is certain, however, is that those attending the conference in Accra knew that they were being closely watched by diaspora Liberians…” (p. 462). In addition Moran (2005) records a follow up meeting in Delaware in September of 2003, which led to several key organisers and participants travelling to Liberia to advise on new government positions for the transitional government National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL). Some became consultants of the government and the National Governance Reform Commission “ranging from Minister of Communications to President of the University of Liberia” (Moran, 2005: 463). As well Diaspora Liberians on February 2004 participated in a historic “Virtual Town Meeting” organized by the US Institute for Peace which featured a webcast conversation with** NTGL chairperson **Gyude Bryant. Indeed it is no coincidence that the government of Liberia refers to the Diaspora as the “16th County.”**

**However, Jonny Steinberg (2010) in “*A truth commission goes abroad: Liberian Transitional Justice in New York*” argues that the activities of the Liberian diaspora cannot be examined outside of the country’s brutal Americo-Liberian hegemony. Steinberg (2010: 8) argues that “it was widely said that when the old elite was overthrown in 1980, some of its members retreated into American exile where they spent two decades plotting their return to power, which included financing the military campaign that triggered the start of the civil war.” Therefore the Liberian TRC’s venture into the diaspora to investigate the ‘roots’ of the civil war set the stage to unravel the complexity of the actors that can be found in the diaspora and the heightened political life of Africans in the diaspora.**

**Steinberg (2010) argues that the sending of the Liberian TRC abroad was a way for the goverment to also escape the flawed nature of the commission back in Liberia. This is because the majority of the former perpetrators who were hostile to the commission were in fact key actors in the new goverment establishment who had wrongly assumed that the Accra peace agreement had granted them automatic amnesty. Therefore the Liberian daispora TRC Project can also be seen as a way to “distract attention from the impending scandal that those who perpetrated the war might emerge from Liberia’s transitional justice process as dominant figures in the post-war establishment” (Steinberg 2010: 6).**

**The Act to establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia was passed by the National Transitional Legislative Assembly on 12 May 2005. The TRC’s mandate was to investigate the truth regarding the human rights violations that occurred during the civil war. At the core of the TRC’s mission was to “promote peace, unity and reconciliation” by among others “investigating gross human rights violations of international humanitarian law” including massacres, sexual violations, murder, extra-judicial killings and economic crimes (such as the exploitation of natural or public resources to perpetuate armed conflicts), during the period January 1979 to October 14, 2003 (Liberians TRC Diaspora Report, 2009).**

**The US based non-governmental organization The Advocates for Human Rights (The Advocates) at the request of the Liberian TRC coordinated the work of the TRC in the Diaspora: US, UK and in the Budumburam Refugee Settlement in Ghana where the majority of displaced Liberians fled to during the war. ‘The Advocates’ was chosen because of its established relations with Liberian Diaspora as newly arrived Liberians in the US are represented by the ‘The Advocates’ in cases of human rights violations as it provided “free asylum legal services” with Liberian immigrants making up the largest single client group. About 1,377 statements were collected in the Budumburam refugee settlement and 253 statements in the US and the UK. The final report of the TRC Diaspora project titled “*A house with two rooms*” forms part of the appendix of the final TRC report released July 01, 2009.**

**The findings of the Liberian TRC Diaspora project reveal evidence of the “triple trauma” paradigm amongst Liberians in the diaspora. The triple trauma paradigm posits that “refugees experience trauma in the country of origin, during flight and in the country of refuge” (Liberian TRC Diaspora Report, 2009, p. 303). Liberians told traumatic tales of how they were forced to leave Liberia after witnessing brutal killings of family members, they tell of the hardship in trying to escape through Liberian borders that were overtaken by rebels and starting a new life in a country with no material assets, and a family that was either all killed or scattered over West Africa.**

**One victim at the TRC diaspora project revealed how he lost his family while trying to escape Liberia:**

**The river was filled with water. My mother, brother, and sister got in the canoe. I was too afraid to get into the canoe, and stayed on shore. The canoe capsized, and the canoe driver survived. My whole family died. However, other people still convinced me to cross the river (Liberian TRC Diaspora Report, 2009, p. 318. *Emphasis added*).**

**Many members of the diaspora reported how they still have no idea where their family members are or even if they are still alive. Liberians who found refuge in Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Ghana speak of experiences of xenophobia in the host countries. Liberians tell of the struggle to start all over again in French speaking Guinea and Ivory Coast where they did not understand the language and their professional qualifications could not be useful to them. Many Liberians also gave testaments of how while running away from home they became caught in the crossfire when civil war erupted in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Ivory Coast. Indeed many Liberians describe their time as refugees in neighboring countries as living under “concentration camp” like conditions (Liberian TRC Diaspora Report, 2009, p. 326). This is the reason a lot of Liberians ended up in Budumburam, Ghana where between 35 000 to 40 000 Liberians can still be found. Similarly Liberians tell of lost families, utter poverty, no education for children who have lived in the settlement for over ten years, xenophobic attacks from Ghanaians and “mental health consequences of trauma that go largely unaddressed” (p. 328).**

**While to a much less extent Liberians in the UK and the US profess to the same triple trauma paradigm. Other participants reported how they also came face to face with individuals who either killed their family or raped them in refugee camps. One participant in Minnesota found herself living in the same apartment complex as her rapist. Many people in such situations do not report these cases because of their inability to explain the cases to foreign police leading to a general state of helplessness that continues to incite high levels of trauma. Steinberg’s (2010: 13) case study of the TRC in New York exhibits the same culture of silence in the diaspora where discussions about the impact of the civil war back home when brought to the public sphere are “tailored for their audience” and are not always accurate due to persistent mistrust within members of the diaspora because “the most dangerous information one might share about oneself is one’s experience of war.”**

**Pointing to the same memory of war, respondents in Columbus and Minneapolis pointed to the prevalence of divisions within the Diaspora, especially among the older generation of Liberians. One respondent went as far as to state:**

Personally I think we are living parallel lives. On a personal level we have adopted the American lifestyle, but with tribal relations I don’t see changes. We are living separate lives. The two lives do not meet the American lifestyle and the Liberian identity. There is a lot of acrimony within Liberian organisations, for instance in ULAA people are fighting over political power on ethnic terms. People have never been able to come together. For instance ULAA [**Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas]** had elections; they caused a lot of tensions because people wanted the candidate from their group to win. Now another group has walked away to launch their own association. People go to war literally. Even our Ambassador, the Liberian ambassador to the US has not been able to intervene. People see themselves as first and foremost members of ethnic groups, they have a very weak national affinity… We have not changed, or moved away from our tribal identities; many people are still vehemently opposed to unity. Even with regard to the church experience, the political and social experience people still prefer small cliques. For instance we form 4-5 different churches in a small community because we cannot agree even at the spiritual level on serving one God (interview notes).

**Other Liberians also reported that being in a foreign territory has also opened a unique space for Liberians to marry outside of their ethnic groups and to raise children with multiple identities. Furthermore Liberians in the Diaspora reported of the positive influence of their experience in established democracies such as the US and the UK and how they wish to extend it to their homeland. What remains evident in these findings of the Diaspora project and interviews carried out by the author are the unmistakable presence of “little Liberia’s” all over the US.**

**According to Young and Park (2009) the Liberian Diaspora TRC project was to examine “whether Diaspora engagement should be a part of a transitional justice mechanism,” and they conclude, “the successful conclusion of the LTRC [Liberian TRC] Diaspora Project provides a generally affirmative answer. Moreover, there is a clearly wider interest in such inclusion…The Advocates [for Human Rights] has received inquiries about adapting the LTRC Diaspora Project in Kenya, Zimbabwe and the Somali Diaspora” (Young and Park 2009: 347). However, as Steinberg’s (2010) case study demonstrates as well as the author’s findings from participants in Columbus Ohio and in Minneapolis in Minnesota, the work of the TRC project in the diaspora can be seen as an extension to the diaspora community as way to gain the legitimacy that is lacking at home. While in doing so unraveling the unstable foundations of diaspora life whose public sphere continues to carry the baggage of conflict. The silence about the conflict in the diaspora and the subsequent usage of the diaspora to gain legitimacy for the TRC project in Liberia is illustrative of the continued problem in African statehood of using methods elsewhere to remedy the structural weakens of the post-conflict state.**

**Conclusion**

In light of the interest in the incorporation of the African diaspora as the Sixth region of the African Union, the paper examined the political economy of diaspora-led African development. The paper argues that the African diaspora now emerges as both as a development and a security actor as a result of continued failure of the dominant Western led liberal peace model of development and security. **It argued that a genuine inclusion of the African diaspora to the continental peace and development agenda must address the traps that bedeviled the liberal peace model which tacitly assumes that development can be ‘brought’ to the continent without addressing the structural weakness of the African state.**

**Thus the growing interest and legitimization of the diaspora in peace and security must be understood within this context of a continental search of an alternative to the liberal peace model which culminated in the securitization of development which intensified in the post 9/11 era which is rooted in the post- Cold War era that saw the a changing nature of conflict from inter to intra-state conflict, especially in Africa. Using the historic inclusion of the Liberian diaspora into the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia in the United States, the paper examined the limits of the political economy of the post-colonial African diaspora. Concluding that** incorporating the African diaspora as a human security actor must be located within the context of the needed attention to structural issues of governance and state transformation in Africa.

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