

HOW SOCIAL DOMINANCE THEORY MIGHT CONTRIBUTE TO OUR
UNDERSTANDING OF THE LIBERIAN
CIVIL WAR (1989-2003)

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: How Social Dominance Theory Might Contribute to Our Understanding of the
Liberian Civil War (1989-2003)

Even though scholars and researchers have suggested that the Liberian civil war arose as a result of socioeconomic and political inequalities, oppression, discrimination, and marginalization of a certain group of people, Social Dominance Theory (“SDT”) suggests an alternate understanding: social group-based hierarchy is produced and maintained in society by legitimizing myths. SDT explains how these legitimizing myths tend to produce discriminatory and/or anti-discriminatory policies that are endorsed by dominant and subordinate groups, which, if left unattended, eventually lead to conflict.

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This thesis is dedicated

to

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And the approximately 200,000 people who lost their lives as a result of the catastrophic senseless 14 years civil war in Liberia, which aftermath left the country in shatters and ruin. May their souls, and the souls of all faithful departed rest in perfect peace, and light perpetual shine on them.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On Christmas Eve, December 24, 1989, a civil war erupted in a small country on the west coast of Africa called Liberia. The Liberian Civil War (1989-2003) lasted for 14 years, claimed over 200,000 lives, and displaced more than 1 million Liberians, most of whom fled to neighboring countries like Cote D'Ivoire, Sierra Leona and Guineas (Nmoma, 1997). Up to date, the Liberian Civil War is one of the most venomous and brutal civil wars that the African continent has ever experienced.

Since the war officially ended in 2003 after a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) held in Accra, Ghana, scholars and researchers have tried to suggest reasons and root causes that may have provoked the conflict that eventually led to the civil war in Liberia. Some scholars have suggested that colonialism (See, Ali et al, 1999), marginalization of citizens, corruption, poverty, and bad governance are the key factors. For example, Ballah et al (2001) states that the Liberian Civil War was the result of the economic and political exclusion policies implemented by the Americo-Liberians, since their arrival in the region in 1822. While all of the reasons and factors suggested by scholars are to be taken into account, their suggestions have failed to state exactly what factors may have created these conditions that eventually provoked civil war in Liberia.

This research reviews the history of Liberia (pre and post independence), and raises relevant questions to provide more clarity about what may have transpired in Liberia before the citizens were marginalized. What motivated the government to introduce policies that led to discrimination and unequal distribution of resources and

increased poverty? This thesis endeavors to explain how Social Dominance Theory (SDT), a psychological concept, might contribute to understanding the Liberian Civil War (1989-2003). The research explores how group-based social interactions in Liberia, which has been characterized by the maintenance and stability of group-based social hierarchies, may have created the underlying conditions. If proven that group-based social hierarchies exist in Liberia, one could assume that the Liberian Civil War was also a result of the group-based social hierarchies, which in return created dominant and subordinate class structures within the Liberian society, leaving one group dominating the other at all cost.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF LIBERIA, FACTS, AND ROOT CAUSES OF THE CIVIL WAR



Figure 1

Liberia is the first independent country on the continent of Africa. It is ideally located on the west coast, of the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. The country is bordered by Sierra Leone on the west, Ivory Coast on the east, Guinea on the north and the Atlantic Ocean on the south. *See Figure 1.*

Liberia is debatably the only American colony in Africa, however it was never claimed by America. Liberia was founded in the 1800s as slavery was being abolished in the United States. Some abolitionists and slaveholders feared the social consequences of the increasing free black population in America. As a result, these abolitionists and slaveholders decided to find a place in Africa that they could purchase to relocate freed slaves.

The first group of freed slaves left the shores of America from New York in 1820 under the banner of the American Colonization Society (ACS), with 86 freed slaves and three Americans on a ship named the *Mayflower* (also called *Elizabeth*). When this group arrived in Africa, they first settled on Shebro Island in present day Sierra Leone. While on the island, many were infected with malaria and yellow fever and died. They later left in search of a safe haven and landed on Bushrod Island at a place called the Grain Coast, or present day Liberia. When these settlers arrived at Bushrod Island, Natives/Indigenous people already occupied the land. These Natives initially did not welcome the settlers because they seemed different, as they had adopted America's culture and religion. This led to a conflict that ended in a battle between the two groups. The Natives eventually succumbed due to pressure exerted by the freed slaves through their weapons that were very new and strange to the Natives. As a result, the Natives eventually decided to give the settlers a portion of the land to settle and establish themselves - this was the birth of Liberia, at the time called the Commonwealth of Liberia. Following this period, the ACS continued to send freed slaves to West Africa from time to time, which eventually led to the establishment of many small colonies. In 1838, the majority of the colonies decided to come together as the Commonwealth of Liberia, while others joined later (Cook, 2003).

a. Americo-Liberian Rule, 1847-1980

Subsequently, from 1847-1980, a small minority of black freed slaves and their descendants, collectively known as Americo-Liberians, dominated Liberia. The Americo-Liberian minority, many of whom were mulattos or Afro-Americans, were generally richer than the Natives and exercised overwhelming political control. The Americo-

Liberians considered themselves to be superior to the Natives and as such they did not identify with them. They treated the Natives in the same manner and fashion as their slave masters in America treated them. The Natives literally became slaves to the minority group of Americo-Liberians. They were not allowed to participate in decision-making processes of the settlement and were assigned harsh jobs or work on the farms of the Americo-Liberians with little or no wages. Considering that the Americo-Liberians made up about 5% of the population of Liberia up to 2008, it was very interesting that the Natives who made up 95% of the population at the time were subjected to these conditions (Cook, 1974).

Currently, the sixteen tribes of Liberia constitute 99% of the people in Liberia; whereas the remaining 1% is composed of Americo-Liberians, which is divided into two groups. The two groups are the descendants of the freed slaves from America, and the “Congo” People - those from the Caribbean and other African countries. The two groups are generally referred to as Americo-Liberians/Congoes in Liberia. The reduction in the population of Americo-Liberian can be attributed to intermarriages – between Americo-Liberian and indigenous people, migration and other causes. (*See Figure 2*)

Distribution of the population of tribes and groups in Liberia

No.	Tribes /Group	Estimated Population	Percentage
1	Kpelle	750,554	22
2	Bassa	466,477	14
3	Grebo	348,758	10
4	Gio	276,923	8
5	Mano	273,439	8
6	Kru	209,993	6
7	Lorma	178,443	5
8	Kissi	167,980	5
9	Gola	152,925	4
10	Vai	140,251	4
11	Krahn	139,085	4
12	Mandingoes	110,596	3
13	Gbandi	105,250	3
14	Mende	46,413	1
15	Belle	26,515	1
16	Dey	11,783	0
17	Americo-Liberian/Other Liberian	20,934	1
	Total	3,426,319	100

Chart I. A table illustrating populations of tribes and groups in Liberia (2008, Population and Housing Census Final Report, Republic of Liberia)

b. Politics

Cook (2003) states that Americo-Liberians dominated then and continue to dominate the politics of Liberia even today. From 1869-1980, Liberia had one political party: the True Whig Party, supported by the rich people of color and by the mullattos from poorer backgrounds (American settlers and their descendants). But these two groups were considered as Americo-Liberians (Congoes) and the Natives were left out completely from the process without the right to exercise their voice. The Natives were

considered to be undeserving of the rights to be treated as equal humans and not to mention, their participation in decision-making processes that affect their lives—the right to education, property and to participate in electoral processes.

c. Society

The society was and is still largely dominated by Americo-Liberians. They created communities and social infrastructure based on American society, promoted English-speaking, American culture and also built churches and houses like those in the southern United States. Despite being only 5% of the population, they controlled all the nation's wealth giving them power over the Natives (Cook, 2003).

These historical snapshots as narrated above may have created conditions that initiated group-based social hierarchies and eventually provoked the Liberian Civil War. In order to adequately apply SDT as suggested earlier, this research endeavors to examine, in the next chapter, some of the root causes of the Liberian Civil War. The next chapter reviews some of the causes of civil war in Africa; and presents findings of the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on the root causes of the Liberian Civil War as well as revision of publications and articles on the subject.

CHAPTER III

FACTS AND ROOT CAUSES OF THE LIBERIAN CIVIL WAR

Civil wars in Africa have been and continue to be attributed to many causes by scholars and researchers. Some of these hypotheses are conditions of socioeconomic and political inequalities as well as the negative result of nations with abundant natural resources (e.g. Oil, Diamond, Gold, Timber etc.). Van Der Ploeg (2011) argues that natural resources can be a “curse or blessing.” Despite the fact that natural resources can be a source of economic growth and development if managed well, they can also be a major source of conflict and chaos. This is true in countries with abundant natural resources that lack adequate financial institutions to regulate transactions and that suffer from bad governance, which is usually characterized by corruption and marginalization of the citizens. The above stated conditions and other empirical reasons as outlined in Van Der Ploeg (2011), justify that “natural resources” could be considered a “curse or blessing.” For the purpose of this chapter, emphasis is placed on natural resources being a curse to the African continent, which eventually leads to conflict and subsequently civil unrest and or civil war.

As Africa’s first independent nation, Liberia cannot be excluded from all of the abovementioned circumstances. In fact, the history of the nation is characterized by some of the factors previously stated by scholars and researches as causes of conflict, including the hypotheses presented in Van Der Ploeg (2011). Despite being blessed with so many natural resources, Liberia’s population has remained poor and undeveloped since its independence in 1847. Liberian history is typified by socioeconomic and political

inequalities.

However, these conditions do not take place in vacuum. There must have been other factors/causes that led to the socioeconomic and political inequalities, oppression, discrimination and marginalization of the certain groups, which, when left unchecked and unhindered for many years, created the circumstances and conditions for the occurrence of civil unrest and civil war in Liberia. To fully understand what may have happened before these conditions, we must consider some historical facts.

The president of the Republic of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, in a special feature article written in spring 1991 and published in the Harvard International Review Journal, wrote “The Liberian crisis was long in its gestation. It was rooted first and foremost in the very foundation of the state. Founded in 1822 through the efforts of a private philanthropic group, Liberia was created to provide a home and haven where emancipated slaves could rejoin those of the land of their nativity in the exercise of freedom and self-determination. Liberia established a caste system in which the descendants of the settlers from America, the so-called Americo-Liberians or “Congoes”(a misnomer derived from the name given to those slaves originating from the Congo basin who were freed from their captors on the high seas and taken to any near port of call), monopolized power and privilege to the exclusion of the descendants of indigenous population- the so-called natives or “Country” people.” (Sirleaf, 1991, p. 33) She concluded by stating, “This social cleavage, although weakened considerably over time through education and intermarriages, remained a source of underlying friction in the society and provided the basis and justification for the tumultuous events surrounding

the April 12, 1980 coup d'état" (Sirleaf, 1991, p. 33)

This statement by President Sirleaf (debatably referred to as an Americo-Liberian) further strengthened the assumptions in this chapter. Despite the visibility of some of the factors listed as causes of the Liberian Civil War, some deeply-rooted issues between the Americo-Liberians and the Natives have existed from the foundation of the nation. These issues, which have been ignored for over a century, may have initiated the conditions and justification that may have led to the Liberian Civil War.

In addition to the root causes stated above, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission¹ (TRC) through a thorough examination of Liberia's historical antecedents also identified the following: socio-political Disparities between Settlers and Native Liberians: Historical Mutual Misconceptions (Pre-independence); and (2) the State-building and Co-habitation with Native Liberians: The evolution of socio-political inequalities (1847-2003).

Socio-political Disparities between Settlers and Native Liberians: Historical Mutual Misconceptions (Pre-independence)

The period before Liberia's independence in 1847 is suggested by the 2008 TRC report as the era that highlights the first significant root cause of the conflict. Contrary to the popular views held in Liberia, there existed a rift between the settlers (Americo-Liberians) and the Natives during this period. To characterize this rift as freed black slaves oppressing Natives understates the complexity. The notion that the Americo-Liberians premeditated to dominate and exploit the native Liberians from the very beginning is far fetched. The report claimed that the natives and settlers generated grave

¹ The Liberia transitional government in May 2005 enacted the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act, which was an offshoot of the August 18, 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) modeled after the South African TRC.

misconceptions, fears that subsequently developed to conflict in the end. Interestingly, the American Colonization Society (ACS) was identified to be responsible for the conflict that emerged between that Americo-Liberia and the indigenous people due to the policies they instituted, as well as, the way they used the freed slaves to protect their captured territories and suppress the Natives.

The ACS is accused of planting the seed of conflict in Liberia in part because of their use of force to acquire land from the Natives when they first arrived. In 1822, Captain Robert Stockton of the U.S Navy and Eli Ayers, an agent of the ACS, forced King Peter, a Dei Paramount Chief of Cape Mesurado, at gunpoint to sign a parcel of land over to the settlers without negotiation. This event would inform the perception that the Natives developed for the settlers (Americo-Liberians) that the settlers did not come in peace. As the news of the event spread across the west coast, the seed of the conflict that would haunt the nation for over a century was planted. The ACS representatives' actions, though acting in the interest of the settlers, provided the foundation for ensuing conflict between the Natives and Americo-Liberians. In complete disregard to the impact of the actions at the time, the ACS continued to take the land of the Natives by force and used coercive and authoritarian style of leadership to oppress them. Their actions further deteriorated the relationship between the settlers and the Natives on the ground that the ACS agents represented the settlers and their actions against the Natives were considered actions of the settlers.

State-building and Co-habitation with Native Liberians: The Evolution of Socio-political Inequalities (1847-2003)

The second root cause of the Liberian civil war as stated in the 2008 TRC final

report is the process of State-building and Co-habitation with Natives Liberia: The Evolution of Socio-political inequalities (1847-1980).

Despite the claim that the discrimination, oppression and exclusion of the Natives from socio-economic and political processes were the handworks of the ACS supported by the United States government, the settlers continued the same policies even after Liberia attained her independence. The need to establish democratic political bodies following independence became a growing pressure for the newly established government. The pressure created socio-political tension and the struggle for political survival between the settlers and the Natives. One could assume that this struggle was as a result of the ACS's "divide and rule" policies, which highlighted the period between 1822-1847. Contrary to this notion, the actual reality on the ground suggested that the tension was a result of the failure of the newly established state to exercise authority and legitimacy over the vast majority of the people governed.

This was also a period when Americo-Liberians exerted themselves over the Natives in all social, political and economic spheres of the country. Their domination over the Natives disenfranchised them from participating in the political and private sectors of the country. The Americo-Liberians, a diminutive portion of the population, were afraid that if the Natives were given the opportunity, they would take over the country and excommunicate them. Interestingly and ironically, this is the same reason for which they were brought to Africa as stated earlier. Consequently, the Americo-Liberians marginalized and oppressed the Natives, using every means at their disposal (wealth, education, laws, policies, and in some instances brutal force). The period was

characterized by individual and group discrimination as well as structural and institutional discrimination. The situation at the time continuously deteriorated and negatively affected the relations between the Americo-Liberians and the Natives. Natives were not considered “citizens” until 1904, 57 years after independence, when President Edwin Barclay eradicated legal discrimination. This account strengthened the view that Americo-Liberians premeditated to dominate and oppress the Natives, whereas the previous section blamed the ACS and its agents for the bad blood between the Americo-Liberians and the Natives.

The era from 1847 onward witnessed several violent conflicts between the Americo-Liberians and the Natives. The government of Liberia, controlled by the Americo-Liberians, was determined to extend and control its territories while the Natives preferred to remain independent. This period observed several wars between the Americo-Liberians and the Natives over territorial disputes as well as conflicts over human and commodity trading. The Bassa-Government of War of 1851 and Kru-Government War (1885) are results of the deteriorating relations between the Natives and Americo-Liberians. During this period, the Americo-Liberians instituted many extreme and stringent methods to address the Natives’ rebellion and disregard for the notion of a Liberian republic. In 1895, the Americo-Liberian government briefly relaxed their approach to more diplomatic engagement, but this reprieve proved temporary and soon the harsh old methods returned when the government of Liberia wanted to capture the southeastern part of the region. A new set of conflicts broke out with the natives of the southeastern kingdom, who had heard about what the Americo-Liberians have been doing

along the coast.

Following the Kru-Government in 1915, there was a relatively long period without conflict. This can be largely attributed to the economic growth of the republic and the policies introduced by President Edwin Barclay, which sought to rectify the mistakes of the past governments and compensate the natives for several decades of ill treatment and oppression. President Barclay, well skilled in mediation, initiated policies to resolve long-standing tension between Americo-Liberians and the Natives. This period was also followed by a similar reign of President William V.S. Tubman (1944-1971). The government of President Tubman introduced several measures that were geared toward obviating draconian methods targeting natives. His famous three-legged approach was “national unification”, which sought to unify both the Americo-Liberians and the Indigenous people; the “open-door policy,” that attracted foreign investment and development; and “integration”, which was intended to address several forms of inequalities and disenfranchisement of the natives from the political and economic life of the country. This period also witnessed the ascendancy of few wealthy Natives to the national legislature.

i. The end of Americo-Liberians Rule (1980-1990)

Despite President Tubman’s efforts to promote inclusivity and foreign investments, his government also laid the premise for political hegemony, conflicts and oligarchy. President Tubman became obsessed with power and decided to perpetuate himself in office. In 1951, with the backing of the national legislature, which was largely controlled by President Tubman’s True Whig Party, President Tubman amended the 1935

constitutional provision, which limited the presidential tenure to one eight-year term. The new provision accommodated one eight-year terms and successive four-year terms. This era was characterized by political intolerance and witch-hunting of opposition leaders that forced many of them into exile. One important development of this period was the contest between an Indigenous son, Didho Twe, and President Tubman. This further demonstrated the long-standing divide between the two groups. Today, President Tubman is known as the father of political control of the military and the use of democratic institutions to set limits for oppositions, to eliminate political opponents and their families. He is also regarded as the father of authoritarianism in Liberia.

During this period the military also became directly involved in political matters. President Tubman created the Liberia Frontier Force (LFF) to protect the Americo-Liberians and prevent any Native insurrection. This ideology was subsequently adopted by President Samuel Doe, the Native Liberian who overthrew President Tolbert in a coup d'état, when he surrounded himself with loyal tribal men and disregarded the other tribes and population.

President Doe and his administration besieged the nation with gross human rights violations against Americo-Liberians and two tribal groups (Gio and Mano) whom he assumed were regime collaborators following a failed coup led by one of their sons from the region. This era (1980-1989) escalated witch hunting and brought ethnic conflict to another level in Liberia. Indeed, nepotism, witch hunting, and ethnic cleansing were the hallmarks of President Doe's legacy.

The narrative in this chapter of the research summarizes the root causes of the

Liberian Civil War, taking into consideration factors suggested by scholars, a review the period of the arrival of the settlers (Americo-Liberians) in 1822, up to the end of the Liberian Civil War in 2003. Accounts highlighted in this chapter conclude that, from the very beginning, the Liberian state was set up to fail. Pre and post independence history of the country is characterized by the systemic efforts of the Americo-Liberians to discriminate against the Natives. The Americo-Liberians, backed by the ACS and the U.S. government, instituted individual, group, structural and institutional discrimination to continuously dominate the Natives by subjugating them. In closing, based on these historical narratives, it is fitting to conclude that the Liberian Civil War was the direct result of the long standing divide and hatred that existed and continue to exist between the descendants of the Americo-Liberians and the Natives.

While the above factors might have influenced the conditions that provoked war, there appears to be a lack of consideration of the psychological dynamics of the two major groups in Liberia's historical antecedents. This research proposes that a careful examination of the psychological dynamics of the groups in Liberia, using some form of psychological theory can provide a basis for the justification of conditions that provoked the civil war. For example, the Group for Advancement of Psychiatry, Committee on International Relations in a publication in 1978 called "Self-involvement in the Middle East" used the Realistic Group Theory to explain the Israeli and Palestinian conflict in the Middle East. In the same manner, this research seeks to investigate a psychological theory to contribute to what may have created the conditions that triggered the civil war in Liberia.

The next chapter of the research explores the psychological concept called “Social Dominance Theory” and its various tendencies, which the research proposes could contribute to an understanding of the Liberian Civil War. The chapter will provide a lengthy and in-depth summary of social dominance theory. The summary shall advance: (a) the structure and evidence of its basic claims, (b) how group-based social hierarchy is produced and maintained, (c) legitimizing myths, and (d) a description of social dominance orientation.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY OF SOCIAL DOMINANCE THEORY

To further explain and understand how group-based hierarchy is produced and maintained, Social Dominance Theory (SDT) was developed. According to Pratto & Steward (2011) “Social Dominance Theory is a multi-level theory of how societies maintain group-based dominance. Nearly all stable societies can be considered group-based dominance hierarchies, in which one social group – often an ethnic, religious, national, or racial one - holds disproportionate power and enjoys special privileges, and at least one other group has relatively little political power or ease in its way of life.”

Pratto et al (2006) also suggests that unlike other psychological theories of prejudice, (e.g. social identity theory, realistic group theory, etc.) SDT argues that it is necessary to understand the processes that involve the production of prejudice and maintaining the same as well as discrimination at different levels of analysis. This must include cultural ideologies and intergroup relationship, i.e., how individuals treat other individuals inside and outside of their group. It also includes the understanding of the psychological predisposition of individuals as well as the interaction between the involved psychologies of women and men. SDT happens to be more considerate because it attempts to integrate previous psychological perspectives of processes structuring human societies. It encompasses insights from theories suggested earlier such as (a) Realistic Group Conflict Theory (e.g. Blumer, 1960; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif 1961), and (b) Social Identity Theory (e.g. Tajfel & Tuner, 1986).

a. The structure and evidence of SDT basic claims

There are three structures, which SDT suggests are produced by stable economic surplus. This structure is referred to as the trimorphic of the group-based social hierarchy. The first group-based hierarchical structure is an age system with disproportionate social power over children. The second construct is a gender system- this is where men disproportionately outweigh women in terms of social, political and economic status. This also includes military power. The third social construct, which is the fulcrum of the research, is the arbitrary-set-system- this is when social groups are constructed arbitrarily where groups have negative or positive social value. These arbitrary-set groups may be defined by social status and distinction in terms of religion, ethnicity, race, class, nationality, origin, clan, etc.

It is a truism to say that human societies are universally constructed in trimorphic form but the severity of the hierarchy often varies across different places. An example is the age system, where what constitutes “childhood depends” depends on geographical norms. When a person is eligible to marry, get a job, and generally make choices differs across societies. In African Youth Charter, “youth” is defined as between ages 18-35, while the United Nations defines “youth” as between 15-21. The age criteria set may qualify or disqualify someone depending on their location and the document that takes preeminence. Also, there are essentially different degrees of gender inequality across various societies of different culture and tradition- even though it is universally agreed that men dominates women everywhere, there are women who grossly marginalized and underprivileged as compared to other women (e.g. women living in Africa versus women

living Europe and America; Christian women versus Muslim women living under the Shar'ria Law). Lastly, the way arbitrary-set system is defined may vary across societies.

b. How group-based social hierarchy are produced and maintained

“According to social dominance theory, group-based social hierarchy is produced by the net effect of discrimination across multiple levels: institutional, individuals, and collaborative intergroup processes. Discrimination across these levels is coordinated to favor dominant groups over subordinate groups by *legitimizing myths*, or societal, consensually shared social ideologies” (Pratto et al., 2006. p. 275).

Pratto & Steward (2011) posit that dominant groups in part use disproportional force against subordinate groups to maintain stable inequality. It also argues that, contrary to the proposed concept that inequality and oppression are maintained by threats and force, these conditions also give rise to democracies functioning as group-based hierarchies. Marginalization and oppression of groups sometimes produce liberation movements and grass-root organizations. It is from this background that SDT emphasizes the pivotal role of legitimizing myths, which is used for justification of oppression, institutional discrimination and as a disguise (Pratto & Steward, 2006).

c. Legitimizing Myths

As stated earlier, SDT suggests that group-based hierarchy is produced and maintained by discrimination across various levels: institutional, individual and collaborative (arbitrary set-system) intergroup processes. Legitimizing myths justify discrimination across multiple levels. The theory further suggests that human behavior and decision, the establishment of social practices and institutional discrimination, are

shaped by these Legitimizing myths. Legitimizing myths are values, cultural ideologies, tradition, beliefs, and stereotypes that are generally held. There are two legitimizing myths: hierarchy-enhancing myths and hierarchy-attenuating myths (Pratto & Steward, 2012).

Hierarchy-enhancing myths (HEM) are when traditional beliefs, racism, nationalism, sexism, stereotypes, rights of kings and queens (Royal Lineage), ideology, and extreme poverty are used to justify oppression of a particular group of people. Inequalities are also justified seen as normal by the society at large. Hierarchy-enhancing myths do not only sustain the dominance of individual, group and constructed institutional discrimination, but they also manipulate the subordinate groups to assist in the maintenance and sustainability of inequality and oppression. For example, the use of unjustified aggressive force by African-American law enforcement officers against African Americans or the aiding of Americo-Liberians in sustaining the dominance and inequality perpetuated against their own group. Pratto & Steward (2012) posit that hierarchy-enhancing myths in most instances directly or indirectly specify who is entitled to rights and privileges, and by extension who should be excluded from those rights and privileges.

In most societies, dominance as referred to by SDT is often contested. Groups that are discriminated against and/or oppressed often challenge the dominance of their oppressor. Ideologies that support efforts to counter social dominance are referred to as *Hierarchy-attenuating myths* (HAM). Hierarchy-attenuating myths are concepts and beliefs that promote universality, universal rights of men and women, inclusivity,

democracy, human rights, and equality. These concepts and beliefs compel subordinate groups to resist dominance and oppression. Legitimizing myths potency is determined to be enhancing or attenuating group-based social hierarchy by the extent to which both subordinate and dominance groups generally agree or have a consensus. SDT suggests that, holding everything constant, subordinates are likely to exhibit high levels of endorsement of HAM while dominants are likely to exhibit high level of endorsement of HEM.

In essence, subordinates will agree with the concepts and beliefs that support equality, anti-discrimination policies, universal human rights while dominants are likely to support concepts of racism, nationalism, inequality, sexism, institutional discrimination, marginalization. As stated earlier, the discrimination produced by these legitimizing myths can be described in three dimensions. These dimensions include institutional discrimination, individual discrimination and collaborative intergroup-based processes, all of which produces and maintains group-based social hierarchies in societies.

i. Institutional Discrimination

Similar to legitimizing myths, institutions can be categorized as promoting hierarchy enhancing or hierarchy attenuating myths. Institutions that promote hierarchy enhancing myths are prone to producing and sustaining inequalities by awarding certain privileges and preferences to the dominant groups, that is, apportioning positive social values to dominant and awarding less privileges and preferences to subordinate groups, which means, apportioning negative social values to the subordinates. This suggests that key

financial institutions and systems that endorse and perpetuate hierarchy-enhancing myths are likely to award loans and carry out transactions with dominant groups while disregarding subordinates or affording them limited access and opportunity. Higher institutions of learning tend to create conditions, policies, and stereotypes that limits subordinate enrollment, while encouraging dominant enrollment. The justice system contributes as well by prosecuting and convicting subordinates at a higher rate than it does dominants.

On the other hand, there hierarchy-attenuating institutions that promote equality, justice and fairness, such as civil rights and humans rights groups. Hierarchy-attenuating institutions are more inclined to reduce the consequences of hierarchy-enhancing institutions but rarely balance the impact on the society. Consequently, the imbalance in power that exists between hierarchy-enhancing institutions discrimination and hierarchy-attenuating institutions anti-discrimination interventions maintain hierarchy in society (Pratto et al., 2006).

Pratto et al. (2006) argues that there are several reasons why discrimination by hierarchy-enhancing institutions are powerful cause of group hierarchy. To begin with, unlike individuals, institutions have the ability to mobilize and distribute colossal amounts of resources. Secondly, the government as well as multinational and leviathan organizations have enormous influence and jurisdictions over their localities. The third reason is these institutions perpetuate discriminatory behavior across generations and, when confronted by groups or individuals, they defend their discriminatory actions as if they were defending the institutions themselves. Fourth, institutions, like government,

establish their own internal regulations and norms, which are used to manage individuals who work within the establishment, thereby homogenizing individuals' differences. That is placing individuals that are alike in groups for differential treatment. The fifth reason, suggested by Pratto et al. (2006), is that individuals working for these institutions are somehow not responsible for their actions and are protected by some extraordinary, that is, unusual legal status. In conclusion, institutional behavior is a vital determinant of the various levels of social hierarchy in societies. Notably, institutional discrimination targeting subordinates and women are very perceptible in sphere of health care, education, employment, housing, and market transactions (See Sidanius & Pratto 1990, Ch. 5-8).

ii. Individual Discrimination

Discrimination by individuals also tends to occur as one of the dimensions that describe legitimizing myths that produce discrimination. Individuals in powerful positions deny subordinates employment opportunities, benefits, and job promotions, or a judge gives a harsher verdict for a minor crime, as a result of one's religion, ethnicity, social class, nationality, race, gender or sexual orientation. An example is the preference of a Caucasian American over an African-American for a position by a Caucasian American executive director at a nonprofit in the U.S, or the harsh sentencing of African-Americans for conviction of a minor crime (Pratto et al., 2006).

The manner in which a society is structured often tends to accommodate and facilitate individuals who are considered to be part of a dominant group. For example, the chances of South African of color winning land litigation are more likely versus that of

white South African. Under this dispensation in South Africa, one could argue that this implies reverse racism perpetuated by South African of color against white South African.

Pratto et al. (2006) noted that the tendency of individuals to discriminate cannot only be attributed to their positions in social hierarchy. There is a possibility for individuals to react differently even if they are occupying the same position in a social construct. This would mean that individuals in the same position in a social hierarchy (construct) may choose to react differently to discriminatory laws, regulations, policies, egalitarian policies, regulations and laws. They may differ in the way they favor certain individuals over others, and the level of prejudice they hold against other groups. As suggested by SDT, these dissimilarities cannot be random attributes, but rather they are associated with group relations, which points to a psychological orientation called social dominance orientation (SDO) (to be discussed shortly).

iii. Intergroup-Based Processes in Discrimination

Interactions between dominant and subordinate groups are likely to produce and maintain group-based social inequality. This collaborative interaction may be classified as behavioral asymmetry. Behavioral asymmetries are the collaborative activities of dominants and subordinates that produce and maintain group-based social inequality. This asymmetrical behavior of dominants and subordinate groups can be divided into three major types-- asymmetrical ingroup-bias, self-debilitating behaviors among subordinates and ideological asymmetry (Pratto et al., 2006).

People have the tendency to prioritize their group over others. People are likely to

give preferences and or privileges to people with whom they share similarities, physical appearances, beliefs and qualities etc. and they are more likely to hold prejudices and discriminate against people with whom they assumed have no characteristics in common. Professor William Graham Sumner described this phenomenon as *ethnocentrism* in the early twentieth century. Since then the concept has evolved and has been extended to include other concepts and theories.

However, SDT suggests that group-based dominance is dynamic and as such, within a stable social hierarchical society, the extent of ingroup bias varies with status and power of the group in the society. This variation of the degree of ingroup bias is referred to as *Asymmetrical ingroup-bias*. Sidanius & Pratto (1999) argues that, holding all things constant, in a stable group-based hierarchical society, the system will have more dominant group members showing ingroup prejudice than will subordinate group members. In severe situations, asymmetrical ingroup-bias can be demonstrated as an outgroup prejudice among subordinates.

Sidanius & Pratto (1999) posit that *Self-debilitation* as a social construct is self-destructive. This occurs when subordinates see themselves as inferior and willingly contribute to the denigration of their own group. This type of behavior displays a high level of in-group violence amongst subordinates, abuses and drug abuse. These behaviors that are endorsed by legitimizing myths, which give rise to stereotypes that subordinates can never do better or be better in society and as such, subordinate group members exhibit behaviors that conform to legitimizing myth stereotypes. *Self-debilitation* to a large extent is self-pity and a feeling inferiority. It is important to critically look at the

perspective that social dominance present because it does not only support the oppressive behavior of the dominants and institutional discrimination against subordinates but it also uses stereotypes to induce and reinforce self-destructive behaviors amongst subordinates, which is far more damaging.

Sidanius et al. (1999) posits that *Ideological Asymmetry* are ideological and psychological forces that help produce and maintain dominance, which tend to favor dominant over subordinate groups. As suggested by SDT, legitimizing myths that shape behavior between subordinate and dominant groups are most likely to acquire the endorsement of dominant groups over that of subordinate groups. “The hypothesis that there is generally greater compatibility between psychological processes, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that facilitate group dominance among dominant group members than among subordinate group members is called *ideological asymmetry*” (Pratto et al., 2006, p. 281). The relationship between SDO and high ingroup identification as a function of group position can be termed asymmetry. Dominant groups are most likely to positively associate these two concepts while subordinate groups associate these concepts negatively (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The relaxation of the rule of law, the perception or treatment of someone as being of little worth and the discrimination of subordinate groups are likely to occur with the combination of the high SDO and high intergroup identification of dominant groups. (Overbeck, Sidanius, Pratto & Mitchell, 1994) As mentioned earlier, the discussion of asymmetry behaviors now paves the way for a thorough review of social dominance orientation, which will set the basis of my analysis.

d. Social Dominance Orientation

Pratto & Steward (2012) define “*Social Dominance Orientation* as an individual’s psychological orientation to group-based dominance.” The argument stated here is that people are most likely to identify and give preferential treatment to people they believe are similar to them in many ways. This endorsement produces and maintains social hierarchy that could be rejected by one and endorsed by the other. As stated earlier, subordinate groups are more prone to reject the social hierarchy while dominant groups are inclined to endorse it. However, this may vary grossly across societies and countries considering that there are several kinds of group-based discrimination, oppression and prejudices supported by hierarchy-enhancing myths, in this instance, policies. Individuals or groups with high social dominance orientation, correlate negatively with the concepts of fairness, equality, tolerance, and universal human rights. This is because these principles challenge the core establishment of social dominance, which is produced and maintained by social hierarchy-enhancing myths.

Pratto et al. (2006) suggests that SDO considers the degree to which individuals and groups desire individuals or group-based dominance, oppression of other individuals or groups and inequality. Individuals or groups high in SDO substantiate their dominance and oppressive behavior by a range of legitimizing myths, which affirm the idea that dominant groups are superior and subordinate groups are inferior in a social hierarchical society. Dominant groups are inclined to show more support for hierarchy-enhancing myths, which deviate from the principles of fairness, equal treatment, universal human rights and tolerance. They are also less prone to endorse hierarchy-

attenuating myths, proposes equality without prejudice and discrimination. They resent movements and efforts that seek to advocate for policies supporting justice for all, equal access to land, housing, healthcare and employment opportunities (e.g., Land Reform Act in Liberia). Hierarchy-enhancing myths often becomes more greater than hierarchy-attenuating myths and there is an established distinctions in SDO when comparing dominant and subordinate groups. “Social hierarchy is also reinforced by SDO and legitimizing myths. The higher the levels of SDO, especially among dominants, the greater the support for hierarchy-enhancing relative to hierarchy-attenuating legitimizing myths and social policies, and the greater the resulting level of social hierarchy” (Pratto et al., 2006, p. 282)

Social Dominance Orientation Illustrative Diagram

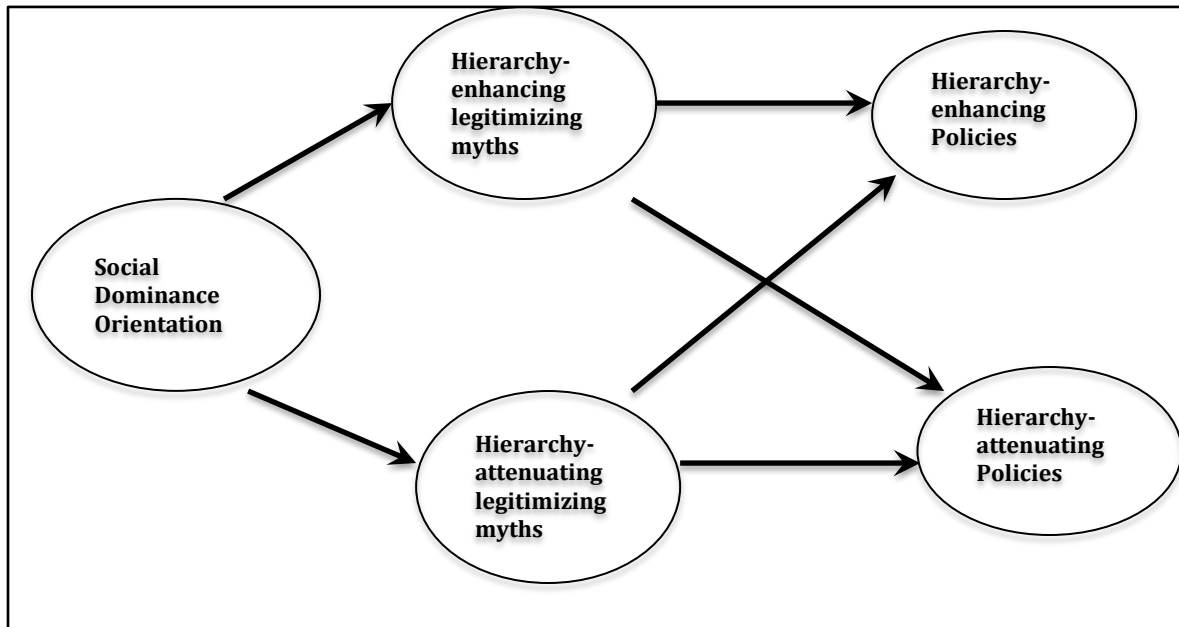


Figure 2. This diagram illustrates how social dominance orientation produces hierarchy-enhancing and hierarchy-attenuating policies through the endorsement of hierarchy-enhancing myths and the endorsement of hierarchy-attenuating myths, respectively (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 105).

Despite the fact that social dominance orientation was earlier theorized in this paper as an individual's psychological orientation to group-based dominance (Pratto & Steward, 2012), Sidanius et al., (2001a) conceptualized SDO as irrespective of the implication of ingroup domination or subordination. There is an expressed generalization of individual alignment and aspiration for imbalanced relations among prominent social groups. Pratto et al., (1994) suggests that there are two scales by which social dominance orientation can be measured. The two scales are the 14-items SDO5 and 16-items SDO6. The overarching requirements are that these scales should consist of items such as: (a) "Inferior groups should stay in their place" and (b) "Superior groups should dominate inferior groups."

Pratto et al., (2006) suggests that there is often a misconception that SDT should be concerned with the origins of SDO. However, SDT explains how social dominance is produced and maintained through group-based social hierarchy and it does not attempt to explain social dominance orientation as the cause of the social hierarchy. SDT uses SDO as tool to measure how hierarchy-enhancing myths and hierarchy-attenuating myth functions as theoretical ideologies. The research of Pratto et al., (2006), is mostly focused on the broad testing of the tendencies of SDT but listed five broad forces that influence the origins of SDO. According to Pratto et al., (2006), the five forces that influences SDO are: (1) Group position, (2) Social context, (3) stable individual differences in temperament and personality, (4) gender, and (5) socialization.

Group position as a force

It is established in this research that dominant groups have higher levels of SDO than subordinate groups. The position of a group influences the level of SDO, that is, the higher the socioeconomic status of a group in society, the higher the level of SDO and the lower the socioeconomic status of the group, the lower the level of SDO. Dominants are likely to have a higher level of SDO because they strive to sustain social status and access to wealth and resources that are accorded to their group as the result of its position.

The force of social context

Some scholars have suggested SDT as a personality theory as oppose to a theory of intergroup relations (e.g., Rubin & Hewstone, 2004; Turner & Reynolds, 2003). This assumption ignores the social context. As suggested earlier in this research, SDT operates on several levels surpassing individual prejudice. SDT in addition to individual discrimination, which is sometime attributed to “personality”, suggests discrimination can also be seen at the level of institutions and at the level of competing ideologies within society. Pratto et al., (2006) suggested that when tested, European-American scored higher than African-American on SDO. However, this difference was not interpreted as a result of inherent differences in genetic make-up and personalities, rather, it was attributed to the arbitrary-set group differences in their hierarchical relationship.

SDT argues that the variation in the gap between dominant and subordinate arbitrary set-groups is proportional to the variation in the group status in society. This means that group with higher social status have greater motivation to maintain their privilege and hierarchical position leaving their group advantageous over the other while

group with lower status are inclined to resist such social system.

Individual differences in temperament and personality

In addition to social context and group position, which are forces that influence SDO, differences in individual personalities and temperaments may also influence the level of SDO. Pratto et al., (2006) suggests that SDO reacts negatively to personality such as openness and empathy and reacts positively to vindictiveness, coldness, aggressiveness and stubbornness. According to recent research on SDT (e.g. Reynolds, Turner, & Veenstra, 2004), temperament and personality does not suggest situational invariance. However, it suggests while there may be a variation in the level of SDO as a result of situational influences, individuals with high level of SDO in a particular situation will also display high level of SDO in another.

Gender and Socialization effect on SDO

The fourth force that influences SDO, holding everything constant, is gender. Pratto et al. (2006) states that men are likely to have high level of SDO than women, which contradicts SDO variances in arbitrary set-groups that is largely dependent on the context. Gender SDO is less focus on the context.

Lastly, the fifth factor that influences SDO is socialization. People with different socialization experiences react differently to SDO. Such socialization may include orientation to specific doctrines, traumatic life experiences, multicultural dynamics, education as well as the competence of members of denigrated groups. Duckitt (2001) argues that detached or uncaring socialization indirectly leads to SDO.

Despite the urgency and strong need for empirical data to determine the level of

social dominance orientation exhibited by individuals and/or groups to draw a conclusion, the next chapter does not take into consideration the usage of any empirical data or the two SDO scales to apply the SDT. It uses secondary sources, which include journals, newspaper articles, speeches delivered by prominent stakeholders in Liberia, and my personal life experience growing up in Liberia - as a child of a marriage between my Americo-Liberian descended mother and my indigenous father. Using analytical reasoning, the chapter applies and suggests psychological arguments based on social dominance theory that may contribute to our understanding of the root causes and reasons that prompted the civil war in Liberia (1989-2003) in addition to others causes more broadly.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION OF SDT TO THE LIBERIAN CONTEXT

In this chapter, the research attempts to highlight some historical trends in Liberia from 1822-2003 and apply SDT to contribute and increase our understanding of the root causes of the Liberian civil war (1989-2003). This chapter looks at both actions of the Americo-Liberians and the Indigenous people and assesses if and how social dominance orientation is displayed in both group. It also attempts to illustrate which group is most likely to have a high trace of social dominance orientation, which leads to the construction of legitimizing myths that produce and maintain group dominance, discrimination and prejudice.

It is important to acknowledge that this analysis is not based on empirical data because the research did not take into consideration interviews and survey. Rather, its assumptions are squarely based on the literature review of historical accounts, journal, speeches, publications, reports, newspaper articles, and written testimonies of Americo-Liberians and Indigenous people in Liberia.

As stated earlier in the paper, social dominance orientation was earlier theorized in this paper as an individual's psychological orientation to group-based dominance. This happens when one group regard itself as superior to other group, forming beliefs supported by legitimizing myths that society is constructed hierarchically placing one group, that is, the dominant group, over the other, the subordinate group. This group-based social construct, as stated earlier, is produced and sustained by relatively two kinds of legitimizing myths. The first is the *hierarchy-enhancing myths* in which traditional

beliefs, racism, nationalism, sexism, stereotypes, rights of kings and queens (Royal Linage), ideology, extreme poverty are used to justify oppression of a particular group of people. Inequality is also justified and seen as normal by the society.

a. Application of Individual Discrimination

Reflecting on the actions of the Americo-Liberians when they first arrived on the West Coast, one can assume that their actions were based on some form of hierarchy-enhancing myths. Considering that they placed themselves above the Natives they met when they first arrived, there were assumedly some form of justification or belief that they held that prompted their actions. They harbored notions or stereotypes that the natives were savages and deserved to be treated as lesser human beings. This charge by the research can also be substantiated by the harsh policies against Indigenous people put in place by the ACS who supported and represented the Americo-Liberians. The history suggests that they regarded the natives as their subjects, which brings to bare the concept of royal lineage. Considering that the Americo-Liberians saw themselves to be better human being than the Natives, they considered as privileged and deserved special treatment as masters while the Natives, whom they assumed were lesser human beings to be treated as their servants; that is to say the Indigenous people were their subjects.

Another important factor to consider was the fact that Natives were denied the right to become citizens of their “own land” from 1847 to 1904, 57 years after independence. These behaviors and other actions toward indigenous people by Americo-Liberians largely points to tendencies of groups with a high social dominance orientation. The natives were disenfranchised and discriminated against repeatedly throughout the

course of Liberia's history. Imagine from independence in 1847 to 1980, all the presidents of the nation were either an Americo-Liberian or descendants of Americo-Liberia, which seemed to me, can be described as having characteristics of a monarchy. Despite the holding of quasi-elections, the system was always set up to ensure that an Americo-Liberian assumed the presidency. A monarchy is one of the beliefs that justify group-based social dominance. It is a legitimizing-enhancing myth, which suggests that the leadership of an establishment is the inheritance of a particular family or group. This seemed to be the situation in Liberia at the time. Americo-Liberians believed that their claim to the presidency was legitimate as justified by the beliefs and stereotypes they had about the natives.

b. Application of Institutional and Structural Discrimination

Historically, Liberia's first institution of higher learning (University of Liberia) was established to only accommodate Americo-Liberians and their descendants. Natives were not allowed to enroll for many years. This suggests the occurrence of institutional discrimination, which according to SDT, is supported by hierarchy enhancing or hierarchy attenuating myths. In the case of the University of Liberia, hierarchy-enhancing myths supported its actions. The university disproportionately attributed more positive social values or less negative social value to the Americo-Liberians, which in this case was the dominant group. This suggests that the institution promoted and sustained inequality. Natives or Indigenous people had to change their family name or be adopted by an Americo-Liberian family in order to have the privilege of acquiring higher education. For example, an individual with my family name "Weah-Weah" would not

have been afforded the opportunity to attend the University of Liberia at the time. I would have been forced to take on “Johnson or Wilson” to be considered an Americo-Liberian before being allowed to attend the University of Liberia.

During this period came the introduction of several draconian policies propagated through political institutions. Despite the granting of citizenship to the Natives in 1904 under the administration of President Barclay, Natives e still did not have the right to vote or stand for public office. At that time, the government’s requirement to vote or stand for public office was citizenship and ownership of property (land or house). Despite the fact that some natives were being allowed to be citizens, the possibility of owning property was very unlikely. To acquire property at the time required a land deed with the signature of the president who was an Americo-Liberian. The possibility of an indigenous person acquiring a land deed or even getting the president to sign it before voting or standing for public office was remote. The only political party at the time was the True Whig Party, overwhelmingly dominated by Americo-Liberians. Eventually, another party emerged called the All Liberian People Party, but it was again dominated by dark-skinned Americo-Liberians. The political system of the country at the time was such that no matter which party won, it was most likely that the president would be an Americo-Liberian because only Americo-Liberians were eligible to become members of the two political parties considering the set requirements.

Despite the quasi-acknowledgement of the Americo-Liberian’s group dominance by some Natives, there were many efforts to resist that dominance. These actions led to serious conflict and war between the two groups. This resistance according to SDT can

be attributed to *hierarchy-attenuating myths*, which are beliefs that promote universality, universal rights of man, inclusivity, feminism, concept of democracy, human rights, and equality, etc.

The Bassa Government War of 1851, the Kru Government War of 1855, the 1979 coup d'état are all examples of Indigenous resistance based on the principles of equal rights, sovereignty, and inclusivity. The resistance movement largely reflects the deep hatred that the Indigenous people developed for Americo-Liberians as a result their actions toward them. It is one thing to take away people's land but to enslave them in their own land after declaring that you came in search of freedom is atrocious.

The history of Liberia is characterized by SDT, which might explain why this great divide has existed and continue to exist in Africa's first independent nation. The struggle for prominence and dominance of the Americo-Liberians is very visible and runs deep in the historical antecedents of Liberia. The Natives, despite their role in all of this are known to be and have always been the worse victims in Liberia.

Unfortunately, as SDT suggests, some Natives believe that Americo-Liberians should be given more positive social status and privileges than their own group. This was demonstrated during President Tubman's government when he used Native soldiers as members of the Frontier Force to harass and collect taxes from the Natives. Perhaps, there may be other pragmatic reasons like monetary benefits, promotion, for which, the indigenous people colluded with the Americo-Liberians. However, this self-debilitating behavior of the natives is also a tendency of SDT. This is when a group sees itself as inferior and is willing to contribute to the denigration of its own. As painful and

disturbing as this may sound, this has been the reality in Liberia from 1847 to the present. Indigenous people in Liberia have been oppressed and discriminated against for 195 years (1822-2017), so how is it possible that the psychological dynamics of these groups have not been notably taken into considering when critically analyzing the context?

While this research suggests that the behavior of Americo-Liberian toward the indigenous people in Liberia from 1847 to present demonstrates that Americo-Liberians are high on social dominance orientation, it also takes into account SDT arguments about how group position, social context, individual temperament and personality, gender and socialization can influence SDO. For example the Americo-Liberians were privileged to be a part of a group that was largely supported by the American government, very educated, had enormous wealth, power and political control. These characteristics placed Americo-Liberians social status above the indigenous people who had little or no education, limited support and daunting economic status in the Liberian society. To protect and sustain the privileges enjoyed by the Americo-Liberians, while stabilizing the society, Americo-Liberians oppressed and discriminated against the indigenous people. SDT argues that if the possibility existed for the indigenous people to trade group status in the Liberian society, the likelihood is that indigenous people who have demonstrated high level of SDO as a result of the new social context. This can be used to explain why after the successful coup in 1979, which highlights Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe dethroning President William R. Tolbert, an Americo-Liberians and became the first indigenous president, for the period highlighted between 1980-1989. The behavior of President Doe and members of his tribe as highlighted by the TRC report demonstrated

tendencies of high level of SDO. As stated earlier in this research, during the period highlighted above, President Doe and his tribal people (Krahn ethnic group) committed gross human rights violation against Americo-Liberians and other tribal groups. The regime also witnessed the display of nepotism at its highest level – President Doe giving undue privileges and key government positions to his tribal people; the national army (The Arm Forces of Liberia), which quickly became dominated by members of the Krahn ethnic group carry out routine witch hunting and ethnic cleansing, targeting Americo-Liberians and all the other tribes. The group position of the Krahn ethnic people headed by President Doe changed and so did the social context, which seemed to favor the Krahn indigenous people. The justification of President Doe and his tribal people for the hideous crimes committed against the people of Liberia was that indigenous people have suffered at the hands of Americo-Liberians since 1847 and now it was time for them to take over the country as natives of the land, which they believed was legitimately theirs. As a result of the change of the group position and the social context, the Krahn ethnic group, which displayed low SDO like other indigenous tribes throughout the history of Liberia before 1980, was now displaying high level of SDO between 1980-1989. This further supports SDT argument presented earlier that group position and changes in social context in a hierarchical society influences the level SDO as narrated to be case of the Krahn ethnic group between 1980-1980.

Another key analysis of SDT that must be taken into consideration in the context of Liberia is the suggestion that group-based social hierarchy can also be used as stabilizing factor in any society. This argument can be used to explain the relatively stable period

highlighted from 1847 to 1989 in the history of Liberia. In addition to SDT argument about SDO production and maintenance of group-based social hierarchy in society, which provokes conditions that lead to conflicts, it also argues that group-based social hierarchy can also create conditions that stabilize society. One of the ways SDT suggests tendencies of SDO can stabilize a society is by *self-debilitation behavior* display by subordinate group. As stated earlier, this is when subordinates see themselves as inferior and willingly contribute to the denigration of their own group. This type of behavior displays a high level of in-group violence amongst subordinates, abuses and drug abuse. These behaviors that are endorsed by legitimizing myths, which give rise to stereotypes that subordinates can never do better or be better in society and as such, subordinate group members exhibit behaviors that conform to legitimizing myth stereotypes (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Sometimes this behavior can also be attributed to the fact that members of subordinate group are seeking financial or social benefits, and are willing to carry out instructions of dominant group even to the detriment of members of the own group. This dynamic largely explains President William V.S. Tubman use of the Liberian military to form the LFF - mostly indigenous people, to enforce the “hut tax” forcibly taking away the little resources of the indigenous people to finance the government’s debt to Great Britain between (1944-1971). In most instances the LFF use brutal force and imprisoned family heads in an effort to carry out their orders. SDT suggests these kind of behaviors exhibited by some members of subordinate group is likely to create stability over time with sporadic civic unrest, uprising and protests over the period. It must also be established that these group-based social hierarchy may exist in different society for a

long period without necessary resulting to civic war unlike the case in Liberia (e.g. United States, South Africa).

Another important factor to consider when applying SDT to the Liberian context is the possibility that some members of dominant group endorsing hierarchy-attenuating myths and some members of subordinate group endorsing hierarchy-enhancing myths. For example in Liberia, there are some efforts led by Americo-Liberians that deviate from the historical narrative of their behavior in Liberia. The President of the Liberia, Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is identified as a descendant of Americo-Liberian. However, her government's policies are informed by concept of inclusivity, universal human rights and equality. Famous amongst her accomplishments as President of Liberia is the establishment of the Independent Human Rights Commission (IHRC). According to SDT, the IHRC is squarely as a result of the endorsement of hierarchy-enhancing myths, which give rise to institutions that endorse hierarchy-attenuating policies. Despite the fact that President Sirleaf is an Americo-Liberian descendant, policies of her government are influenced more by the hierarchy-attenuating myths as demonstrated by the establishment of the IHRC. This confirms SDT argument about the possibility of some dominant group member exhibiting low level of SDO and vice versa. While the historical overview of Liberia highlights behaviors of Americo-Liberians, which endorse hierarchy-enhancing myths and Indigenous people endorsing hierarchy-attenuating myths, the possibility of outliers of both dominant and subordinate group can not be overemphasized as in the case of the establishment of the IHRC by President Sirleaf.

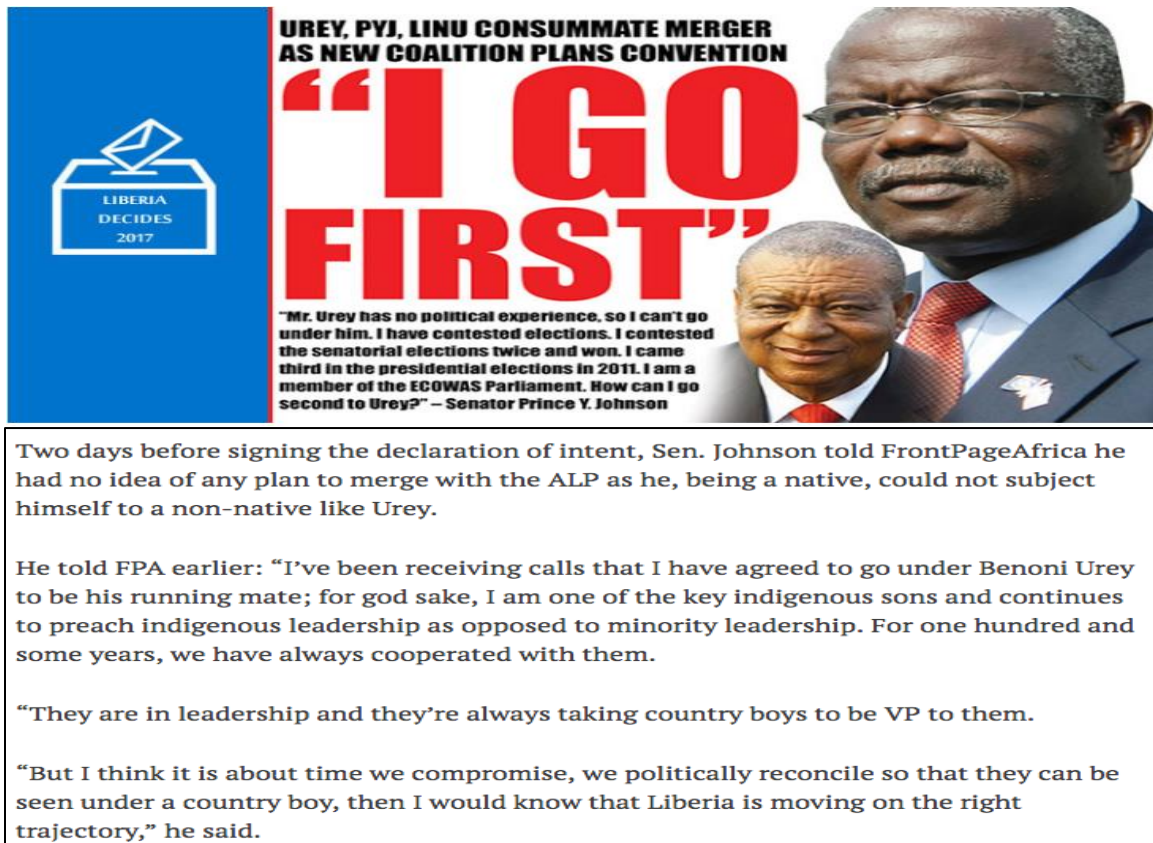
The situation in Liberia is very complex and complex situations have many ways of

being interpreted. This research does not in any way attempt to disregard previous publications and scholarly works that have endeavored to investigate the root causes of the Liberian civil war. Rather, it seeks to contribute and present a foundation for a more thorough and empirical investigation that links social dominance orientation tendencies with the behaviors of the two major groups in the historical context of the Liberia.

Based on the research conducted, one can infer that the root cause of the Liberian civil war can largely be attributed to the hostile relations between Americo-Liberian and the Natives in Liberia. These behaviors to a larger extent can be understood to be consistent with the tendencies and characteristics of social dominance theory, which is generally the concept that every society is structurally arranged in group-based social hierarchies. This structure exists in its basic form with one small group of dominant people structurally placed at the top and other groups considered to be subordinates. The dominant group is usually associated with *positive social values* and the subordinate groups are associated with negative social values (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). In the case of Liberia, one could assume that Americo-Liberians as suggested by the historical narrative provided in this research, exhibited high level social dominance orientation. This means that they exerted every effort to ensure their group dominance and endeavor to justify that dominance by perpetuating hierarchy-enhancing myths, which leads to the development of policies that discriminate against and oppress the indigenous Liberian, who are most likely considered low on social dominance orientation. Moreover, indigenous people resisted the dominance of the Americo-Liberians by countering their justification with ideologies and beliefs that promotes equal treatment and inclusivity (*See Figure 3*). This

interaction over a period of time might lead to conflict, and if the conflict is left unresolved, the situation might further deteriorate and possibly result to genocide, civil unrest or civil war etc. This, I suggest in the case in Liberia, led to the civil unrest and eventually a civil war that left the country in complete devastation.

Figure 3.



Two days before signing the declaration of intent, Sen. Johnson told FrontPageAfrica he had no idea of any plan to merge with the ALP as he, being a native, could not subject himself to a non-native like Urey.

He told FPA earlier: "I've been receiving calls that I have agreed to go under Benoni Urey to be his running mate; for god sake, I am one of the key indigenous sons and continues to preach indigenous leadership as opposed to minority leadership. For one hundred and some years, we have always cooperated with them.

"They are in leadership and they're always taking country boys to be VP to them.

"But I think it is about time we compromise, we politically reconcile so that they can be seen under a country boy, then I would know that Liberia is moving on the right trajectory," he said.

-FrontPage Africa's newspaper article highlights resentment between Americo-Liberians and Indigenous people.

Since, according to SDT, every society is structured in social group-based hierarchy creating dominant and subordinate groups and social inequalities and discrimination, one may question why civil wars occur in only a relatively small number of them. I suggest that there is resistance to and conflict caused by such social inequalities and discrimination in all societies. For example, in the United States and South Africa, there

has been violence, civil unrest, riots and protests in response to social hierarchy and inequalities. Eventually, if these conflicts are not addressed, they may lead to civil unrest, heightened protest, rebellion, and even civil war. Such, I believe, was the case in Liberia.

CHAPTER VI

RECOMMENDATIONS

The situation in Liberia is very volatile and fragile. Despite the fact that the war ended in 2003, that democratic elections were held in 2005 ushering in Africa's first woman president, and that she was re-elected in 2011, all is not well. The absence of war is not peace. The situation in Liberia today is not the same as 195 years ago, but the scars of the past and some of the factors that may have led to the civil war are still very visible today in Liberia. As a product of marriage between a descendant of Americo-Liberians (my late mother) and a Native (my father), I can attest to the confrontations and hostilities that have existed between both sides of my family. I believe this is true for most families in Liberia today. The fact that we as Liberians are going about as if division, hierarchy, and discrimination do not exist and that everything is okay does not help the situation.

Based on the information and findings revealed by this research, the following are my thoughts and recommendations as in the belief that increased understanding of the structure of the Liberian society as well as the causes of the civil war can foster a more just society and decrease the possibility of another civil war.

1. I suggest that there is a need to carry out empirical research to ascertain social dominance theory tendencies in Liberia's historical account.
2. It is important that Liberians acknowledge that we have a national problem and that there exist a serious division and hatred between the descendants of Americo-Liberians and Natives in Liberia.
3. Each group (Americo-Liberians and Natives) should acknowledge their roles in

- the conflict and be responsible for the actions committed by their group.
4. We must rewrite our country's history and create a national identity that every Liberian can identify with. As it is, our flag is modeled after the flag of United States, and our national pledge is modeled after the United States' pledge only with the replacement of the phrase "United States of America" with "Republic of Liberia." These national symbols resonate with only one group of people while disregarding the Natives.
 5. We need to move towards national reconciliation and the identification of a common goal and vision that resonate with both Americo-Liberians and Natives.
 6. Lastly, we must learn to love each other and see us all as Liberians first. This is not to disregard our historical origins but in a way that we promote patriotism and love for country as should be required by all citizens of their country.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Every society is structured as a social group-based hierarchy. This hierarchy creates group-based dominance that are produced and maintained by discrimination, oppression and perpetration of inequalities. The Liberian society is no exception. Over 170 years, since the West African nation gained her independence, the country has suffered a great divide caused by one group dominating the other at all cost. This divide as discussed in this research paper is noted as one of the root causes of the Liberian civil war. Americo-Liberians in Liberia have enjoyed positive social status and privileges as well as continued to exercise complete social, economic and political control over the nation, leaving the Natives vulnerable and helpless. This dynamics as described by SDT suggests that Americo-Liberians are high on SDO, which justifies why majority of their group members are likely to endorse hierarchy-enhancing policies. Howbeit, if the table is turned, Natives have also demonstrated their potential to endorse hierarchy-enhancing policies, which placed them in the same category as Americo-Liberians.

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