

# **At the Sources of the Contemporary African State: Late XIX Century Polity and Society in Monrovia and Freetown\***

by

Giampaolo Calchi Novati  
Department of Political Science and Social Studies  
University of Pavia, Pavia, Italy

Giampaolo Calchi Novati (cngp@unipv.it) is full professor of African History and Politics in the Department of Political and Social Studies at the University of Pavia, Italy. In the past, he has taught at the Universities of Pisa, Urbino, Mexico City, Addis Ababa and Nairobi. His last volume include: *Africa, la storia ritrovata* (with Pierluigi Valsecchi), Carocci: Rome (2005).

The political processes which were coming to an end in Africa on the eve of the colonial onslaught had either been manipulated, interrupted or destroyed by the Scramble. It is almost a commonplace to attribute the inauguration and organisation of the modern state in Africa to European colonialism. In just a few years the geopolitical map of Africa assumed a completely new profile adapting to the trends of the conquest, treaties with the African rulers, and bilateral or multilateral deals among European powers. However, the over-imposition of logics deriving from an external ratio did not eliminate all the internal dynamics that determined African history, since they too were affected by external inputs in various ways. The African way of thinking had to overcome difficult obstacles to bring about a consistent model of state. This resulted in societies developing around a group of former slaves that had returned to Africa from the Americas and England under the impulse of abolitionism and from which a landmark and a very instructive laboratory arose<sup>1</sup>.

Outstanding personalities emerged in the age of liberalism and nationalism, both in Liberia and Sierra Leone, as testimonials of the dramatic transformations needed to rid Africa completely of oppression, exploitation, degradation and distressful memory. They were blacks who belonged to two cultures and were, therefore, fully aware of the importance of interacting with Europe and the West. The cry raised from Africa was eloquent: "Come over and help us"<sup>2</sup>. Because of the moral and material devastation inflicted by the slave trade and slavery, spiritual elevation was "the highest ambition of our people"<sup>3</sup>. The Negro race was to be rescued for a special and imperative task in the future. They had to remove the malediction that was supposed to have been uttered against the descendants of Canaan justifying racism. "Europeans in the late eighteenth century had already had several centuries of contact with Africans [...]. Whatever their views in detail, one assumption was almost universal. They believed that African skin colour, hair texture, and facial traits were associated in some way with the African way of life (in Africa) and the status of slavery (in the Americas). Once this association was made, racial views became unconsciously linked with social views, and with the common assessment of African culture. Culture prejudice thus slid off easily toward colour prejudice [...]"<sup>4</sup>.

52

*The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.1, no.8, June 2007

---

\* Revised text of the paper discussed at the 20<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Historical Sciences, Sydney, July 2005.

The goals – after the pain and distress of an entire people – were not only rehabilitation and emancipation in terms of autonomy and independence, but liberation and salvation beyond the mundane categories of politics.

When in the second half of the XIX century, starting from West Africa, the African elite forged ideas and programs to release Africa and the Africans from European power; Ethiopia was an immediate term of reference. The myth of Ethiopia had to be put at the service of Africa. Traditionally, Ethiopia was celebrated as the Black Mother, the epitome of Africa and the Negroes at large, no matter where they dwelled or had been transplanted. Ethiopia had always had a special significance for black people and gave a psychological lift to oppressed blacks, above all in North America<sup>5</sup>. “People of African heritage venerated Ethiopia and were emotionally attached to it. American blacks perceived themselves as part of an extended Ethiopia”<sup>6</sup>. Ethiopia as a metonym for Africa went back to the Greek civilisation<sup>7</sup>. In the African literature that accompanied the re-birth of the Blacks, the terms of Ethiopia and Ethiopian were used as synonyms of Africa, Africans and blacks. Eminent examples in modern times are the pamphlet *Ethiopia Unbound*, that J. E. Casely Hayford, a pioneer of African nationalism, wrote in 1908 and dedicated “to the Sons of Ethiopia the World Wide Over”<sup>8</sup>, and the text “Ethiopia stretching out her hands unto God” which Edward Wilmot Blyden delivered as a speech to the American Colonization Society in May 1880<sup>9</sup>. James Johnson, another leader of the intellectual revolution that took place in the lands animated by the re-settlement of former slaves, condemned racism, advocated “Africa for Africans” and popularised the concept of Ethiopianism in his sermons and writings<sup>10</sup>. As the Indian scholar and diplomat K. M. Panikkar said, “the cult of Ethiopianism was, perhaps, the first struggle towards the rediscovery of the African Personality”<sup>11</sup>. The brave struggle of Ethiopia at the time of Menelik against the assault of Italian colonialism added new lynch to that resonant and demanding worth, although by itself the victorious battle of Adwa in 1896 was not sufficient to bring to a halt or hinder the Scramble for Africa<sup>12</sup>.

Only Egypt could compete with Ethiopia as far as reputation and glamour were concerned. The Nile was the basis of present-day civilisation<sup>13</sup>. Blyden postulated that the Sphinx at Gizeh – “looking out in majestic and mysterious silence over the empty plain where once stood the great city of Memphis” – had features “decidedly of the African or Negro type”<sup>14</sup>. Several decades later, Cheikh Anta Diop would eulogise Egypt as an integral part of the black civilisation<sup>15</sup>. The “new Jerusalems” established in West Africa were the offspring of a same archetype. Liberia – the very name proclaimed loudly to the world that the new community bore the torch of Liberty – was welcomed as the core of a West African state and the anticipation of an overwhelming redemption. “In the providential purpose no solution of the African problem was to come from alien sources”<sup>16</sup>. The vow about the rising of a black Jerusalem was reiterated by David Boilat, priest and educator, who recommended promoting the return also to Senegal of those who wanted to settle in Africa in order to exhort the resurrection of a “barbaric and savage” land<sup>17</sup>.

Abolition and colonisation went together. The abolitionists were the warriors and the politicians; the colonists, sponsored by the American Colonization Society, Sierra Leone Company or other similar associations, could be called the prophets and philosophers. All of them shared the feeling that the economic and political future of the Afro-Americans was bleak and that only Africa offered the possibility of personal or collective improvement.

The white-led American Colonization Society (ACS), which set up Liberia, was very active in the suppression of slave trade<sup>18</sup>. Sierra Leone was founded in the late XVIII century, while the humanitarian ideals were attacking slavery and “enlightening” Africa<sup>19</sup>. Granville Sharp, the inventor of Sierra Leone<sup>20</sup>, intended to mould “a nation of free black Christians”.

Ethics had a great part in the whole initiative, despite the fact that the Sierra Leone Company, disregarding Sharp’s noble purposes<sup>21</sup>, stained philanthropy and altruism because of the rashness, haste and ignorance of its directors<sup>22</sup>. Like Liberia, also Sierra Leone was conceived as a focus from which good administration, safety and commerce would radiate all over Africa through the actions of Westernised Negroes<sup>23</sup>. The newborn micro-states in Africa were partly inspired by the Utopia based on the pseudo-ethnography of the “noble savage” and partly moved by the search for commercial profits. The intention was always “moral”, for practising agriculture would have brought liberty and trading would have civilised Africa. Negroes would be more useful in Africa and Africa was to be rejuvenated by Africans<sup>24</sup>. A monthly magazine was launched by Ralph R. Gurley in 1825 aiming at swaying the US public opinion and boosting a national movement: each copy of the “African Repository” and “Colonial Journal” was a “salvo” for Liberia<sup>25</sup>.

The emigrationists sought repatriation rather than colonisation. Some of them scorned the initiatives backed and funded by “white racists”. Martin R. Delany, maybe the foremost Afro-American pan-Africanist in the XIX century, patronized emigration as an alternative to the black man’s plight in America, but to his way of thinking the political entity, built up by the ACS in Liberia, reliant on white American philanthropy for its existence, was not the most desirable answer<sup>26</sup>. “The object was not to remove the prejudice but to remove the Negro” even if, obviously, “to transport the entire black population [of America] at once was impractical”<sup>27</sup>. The members of the Society, in the words of a contemporary author, were a small number of respectable individuals, prompted only by philanthropic motives, such as charity, benevolence and patriotism, without political power and not immune from the prejudices of the community in which they lived<sup>28</sup>. The United States took ambivalent stances regarding the political developments on the African coast. The settlers were essentially American rather than African in outlook and orientation. The initiative of erecting “new empires” clashed with the spirit of the US institutions and raised major critics in America itself<sup>29</sup>. But, whatever its faults, colonization remains one of the more dynamic movements in XIX century American history: “It was a widespread scheme which cut across class, colour, sectional and political boundaries to amass financial support from practically every aspect of the American public, as well as from individuals in France and England”<sup>30</sup>.

Liberia started as a private venture and became a sovereign state. It was born technically as a colony of the American Colonization Society in 1822 with the assistance of the United States government<sup>31</sup> in order to settle “free” Afro-Americans desirous of fleeing the oppression of slavery and white racism and Africans rescued on the Atlantic Ocean from slave ships by the American navy<sup>32</sup>. At stake was the possibility of putting together a home in Africa that would extend the benefits of civilisation and religion to the local communities. “Elizabeth”, the first vessel which brought 88 colonists to the West Coast of Africa, sailed from New York in February 1820. Between 1820 and 1832 the expeditions from the United States to Liberia were 22. The colonisation had to perform a remedy to the “curse of Africa”<sup>33</sup>. “Land for settlement, trade and survival was what they wanted”<sup>34</sup>. These pioneers, picked from a large group of applicants, were by no means a homogenous group. Some of them had been emancipated specifically to be sent to Liberia, while others had had a longer experience as free men.

Only one out of four was literate<sup>35</sup>, the majority of them were poverty-stricken and unskilled, with no familiarity with work in trade, crafts or professions. The government was composed of Americans selected by the ACS, sided by several Liberian officials and a legislative Council elected by the colonists. In 1847 the territory was officially proclaimed an independent republic and endowed with a Constitution that formally outlawed any form of slavery<sup>36</sup>.

For Liberia, independence brought several concessions, the major one being the right to properly regulate foreign commerce, a target not far from the priority then pursued in Africa by the European powers. Liberia's political system derived from the US Constitution but it reflected the distinctiveness of the community that lived there. The United States did not recognise the Republic until 1862<sup>37</sup> and appointed its first envoy in Western Africa in 1871.

Needing land for farming, and faced with some competition from the British and the French seeking territories for their empires, the settlers greatly expanded Liberia's space from the nucleus in Monrovia and other very isolated areas on the rather inhospitable Atlantic littoral, initially leased to them by a few chiefs. Their methods were hardly different from those employed by European colonial powers in their territorial acquisition in Africa. No single ethnic group dominated the hinterland and no indigenous chiefdom was capable of defying the incursions of this "alien" people. The Afro-American politicians were afraid of being overshadowed by local tribes and for a long time they denied the natives the right to be represented in the national legislature. By 1900 about 15,000 Negro immigrants from America and over 300 from the West Indies settled in Liberia. In exchange for protection and schooling, the Africans living in the territories purchased by the Liberian Government were required to repudiate slave trade and traditional customs, to abstain from tribal wars, and to keep the path free for the movement of people and goods. Throughout the XIX century, the jurisdiction of the authorities did not extend beyond the immediate neighbouring of the main settlements. When Europe started the Scramble in the 1880s, Liberia – lacking funds, an army and competent personnel – was defenceless. It was doomed to lose portions of territory despite the efforts to penetrate the interior and establish effective occupation. The position of Liberia regarding the Scramble, as stated in June 1887 by the Secretary of State, Edwin J. Barclay, was that "Liberia is neither a European power, nor a signatory of the decision of the Berlin Conference; it was not invited to assist in those deliberations and is therefore not bound by its decisions"<sup>38</sup>.

The experience of Liberia, ostensibly untouched by European prevarication, was followed with sympathy by all the Africans committed to the recovery of black humanity. Liberia, with its population of Americo-Liberians which embedded an essentially Western culture in terms of life style, political institutions, use of the English language, individual ownership of land, and their adherence to Christianity and monogamy, was a nation that would win the admiration of the world. The settlement around the port-city of Freetown, a potential asylum not only for black escapees but also for white seamen, pursued the same functions as Liberia, but because of the subjugation to the English as a Crown Colony<sup>39</sup>, the air in Sierra Leone was less fresh and stimulating than in Liberia. Nonetheless, while the British navy freed as many as 40,000 Africans in Freetown<sup>40</sup>, the American navy freed only 2,000 of those recaptured in Monrovia. Thanks to the intermingling of the pioneers and freed slaves, "the Creoles of Sierra Leone were much more African in culture than were the Americo-Liberians"<sup>41</sup>. Freetown became the hub of the West Coast. When Mary Kingsley visited the town, in 1893 and again in 1896, she was struck by this "Liverpool of West Africa"<sup>42</sup>.

Especially in Liberia, the political discourse was pervaded by meta-historical and biblical images. In a sermon pronounced at Bristol to the Ladies' Negro Education Society, Alexander Crummell expressed the wish that with the help of Divine Providence the Negro race would rapidly resume life and vitality; in the meantime he admired "the lone star of the black Republic of Liberia"<sup>43</sup>. To describe the migration from America towards the West African shores, Crummell quotes the page of Deuteronomy (XXVI, 1-2) where Moses sums up the Exodus to the Promised Land and defines the colonisation "a pregnant one, and a sacred [one]"<sup>44</sup>. The people that sat in darkness saw a light.

The realization of the prediction was visible also in a literal sense through the role played by the missions for civil and religious progress of the African race and Africa's redemption<sup>45</sup>. At the banquet given when he retired from his service in Sierra Leone, Blyden mentioned Amos (9, Chapter 7): "The children of Israel are, in the sight of Jehovah, as the children of Ethiopia"<sup>46</sup>. Africa and Africans would be able to fulfil the prophecy of the psalmist – "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands" (Psalm, 68: 31) – provided "we begin to think continentally and nationally"<sup>47</sup>. Blyden was convinced that, although Africans were not familiar with the intricacies of science and technology, if anything owing to the climatic conditions of the black continent, and could not strive in the field of high politics in which the European was naturally gifted, they – men in their perfect state and angels – had tremendous responsibilities in speaking to and learning from the earth, dressing the garden and looking after it<sup>48</sup>. With the emigration from America, for the first time "the genius of the free government" has visited Africa<sup>49</sup>. The Republic of Liberia, with its independent institutions, was the synthesis of all these expectations. During his tour of some Muslim countries, Blyden engraved the word "Liberia" at the entrance to the Pyramids with his name and the date 11 July 1866 to ensure that "the name at least of that Republic will go down to posterity"<sup>50</sup>.

Slavery was the main concern of the XVIII century African political literature<sup>51</sup>. The African authors put forward theoretical arguments against slavery and slave trade on theological, humanitarian, and political grounds. The slave system was full of daily cruelties, brutality and abasement and, besides, it was inefficient in the fields of productivity and socio-economic development. One can comprehend the interests and emotions which surrounded the manumission of slaves and the dissemination of new communities of former slaves on the coast of West Africa. The end of slavery, education and emigration were different and successive moments of a single process of emancipation. The scheme of the American Colonization Society was supposed to accomplish a providential project. It was no accident that Edward Wilmot Blyden, the most illustrious emigrant of the ACS and the leading statesman-philosopher of his generation, born free in the Danish West Indies in 1832, chose Liberia as the place to live and as the focal point for his programs of African self-government. Unfortunately, the final outcome of the Liberian test would be widely disappointing for him too.

The idea of returning to Africa was very old in the New World Negro history<sup>52</sup>. Most of the African intellectuals active at this time – journalists, teachers, administrators, priests – tried to co-operate for the success of the experiment in Liberia (and in Sierra Leone). All of them were variously disturbed by what Robert W. July calls the "dilemma" of the Negro: "Eager to bring Western cultural and material attainments to the advantage of [their] people but mistrustful of the source of these accomplishments"<sup>53</sup>. The example of Europe was taken into particular consideration in economic matters. The African elite coming from America was enthusiastic about European standards: a glory of law and order. Free trade "seems about inaugurating, under the Divine Providence, a new evangel to men"<sup>54</sup>. Africa was cutting off the forest to unveil a pathway for the spade, the hoe, and the scythe.

In the work of Crummell, the gospel is next to and extends over the ordinary advancement of men and nations: progress was the manifest destiny of Liberia and commercial independence was the main task. The aim was “to set up a civilised nationality here, amid the relics of barbarism” and “to rescue a great continent from the dominion of superstition”<sup>55</sup>.

The peculiarity of the new states was represented by the qualities of Negroes who had been brought up and trained in the West. That predisposition was in itself the cause of its frailty. All the immigrants accepted the current view that Africa was the “dark continent” and that its progress depended on Western models.

The purpose of Liberia was to emancipate Africans and Negroes from their humiliating subjection to the West preaching a theory of Africanness based upon values and devices deriving from European standards: capitals, commerce, free enterprise, formal education, rule of law, and Christianity. Hence the fundamental contradiction of the “African dilemma”. Would it be possible to reconcile acceptance of European civilisation with Africa’s need for self-assertion and cultural recuperation?

Liberia and the other settlements, which aimed at granting a home for the dispersed and oppressed children of Africa, had been planned by an educated and articulate minority to benefit the “repatriated” Negroes. Not all the practices were democratic or even liberal. Control by the central authority was tight and perceived as alien by the natives, who, according to the opinion of the Westernised African, lacked a spirit of patriotism and self-sacrifice and desperately needed the assistance of white men for their own advance. The absolute priority was to replicate European models. The physical strength of the black man made him fit for work in Africa but it was indispensable to combine vigour with industrial know-how. Tropical exuberance was an inconvenience rather than a blessing<sup>56</sup>. The treatment of the aboriginal Africans was plainly paternalistic: the indigenes, though legally “persons of colour” (and none but persons of colour were in principle eligible as a citizen), failed to be considered fully members of the “people of the Republic of Liberia”<sup>57</sup>. The values of the immigrant oligarchy were supposed to be superior to anything existing locally. Everyone could seek naturalisation but only on certain conditions and only after having abandoned all forms of heathenism together with its customs, and superstitions. Of course, the higher offices in the social and political infrastructure were reserved to the colonists. In vain Blyden stressed that “our relation to the aborigines is no mere commercial relation like that generally of the Europeans who reside upon the coast; ours is a fraternal relation”<sup>58</sup>. He hoped that Liberia would solve its problems of development through intercourse with the tribes of the interior. Crummell lamented that the American minority had forgotten the national obligation to train, educate, and regulate, trusting foreign supply instead of securing native resources and skill, if necessary by force, since void theories of democracy were trivial when applied to “a nude people, incapable of perceiving their own place in the moral scale, or of understanding the social and political obligations which belong to responsible humanity”<sup>59</sup>.

States like Liberia and Sierra Leone were devised as a catalyst for the re-establishment of human dignity, emasculated by the ordeal of slavery and discrimination from which the Africans had been suffering for centuries: a plea which went well beyond Africa, concerning the world as a whole. In this way Liberia could be compared to Ethiopia, the Black Mother. Personally, Blyden – taught by Western missionaries and a Presbyterian minister himself, but not as prone to the magisterial teaching as Crowther, James Johnson and so many of the African Church leaders of the day<sup>60</sup> – propounded a positive image of Africanism: “We must cultivate pride of race [...]; we must have faith in the Negro race”<sup>61</sup>. He defended traditional institutions like polygamy.

“The African has developed and organised a system useful to him for all the needs of life”, in which the family is the basic unit of society, land and water are accessible to all, social life is co-operative or communistic, the tribes have laws which are known to all their associates, justice is administered by the chief in the presence of the entire people<sup>62</sup>. In order to keep all these customs alive, Blyden did not hesitate to criticise the dogmatic and sectarian propaganda of the Church<sup>63</sup>: Islam did not alienate the Africans from themselves in the way Christianity did<sup>64</sup>.

Bishop Crowther had warned the clergy and native pastors “against expecting too much from their converts, and not to force them to abandon what is perfectly natural and becoming in their life for a merely artificial imitation of the English”<sup>65</sup>. Any evolution would fail unless slow, gradual and brought about without abrupt breaks: “If judicious use be made of native ideas, the minds of the heathen will be better reached than by attempting to introduce new ones quite foreign to their way of thinking. Improved habits will keep pace with the Christian civilisation of the rising generation, whose education should be properly attended to as early as children can possibly be collected. Many awkward native habits may gradually be dropped and other more comfortable ones be introduced in their stead as matters of conscience; and thus the state of Society will be imperceptibly improved without forcing it. When once Christianity has taken a firm hold among the people then will follow in its train many attendant blessings”<sup>66</sup>. Pride of race had given a great vitality to another despised people: the Jews. Even a stern sponsor of Christian doctrine and Europe like Crummell (“our language is English, our religion is Protestant Christianity”) alleged that “the effectual revolutions in a people must be racial in their characteristics”<sup>67</sup>. A key step ought to be the foundation of a West African University to shore up the research of African characters. Sierra Leone was prompter than Liberia and the Gold Coast in this respect<sup>68</sup>.

Attracted by the strength and success of Europe, Africans were highly vulnerable to foreign suggestions. Blyden stigmatised the passive adoption of principles underlying the European social and economic order. The colonists, born and brought up under the aegis of the individualistic ideas coming from the West, were unable to see the force and indispensability of the African principles. Blyden – overlooking the effects of the impact of Europe’s expansion upon Africa’s elite and populations – was sure that “the egotistic and competitive system” which Europeans had been attempting to introduce into Africa was precarious<sup>69</sup>. The black man was engaged in a sublime task, namely, the discovery of his true place in creation along its own natural and rational lines. The progress of truth will be rapid in this “benighted and outraged Ethiopia”. Was the prophecy of the psalm near to its accomplishment?

The Liberian political system was undermined by double standards in democracy and by widespread corruption in public administration. Liberia remained “a sick country, perhaps the sickest part of Africa”<sup>70</sup>. The regime did not respect the rights of the indigenous people and did not acknowledge the validity of the ancestral traditions. It was a time of self-criticism: “Instead of raising slaves into princes, our influence has degraded princes to slaves”<sup>71</sup>. Blyden bitterly deplored the faltering of the Liberian dream into inefficiency and usurpation (by the Americo-Liberians). To the merit of Americo-Liberians, however, the Republic had scored a number of results: confidence and security instead of carnage and bloodshed, comfort and happiness, lawful traffic, the triumph of Christianity over atheism<sup>72</sup>. Blyden was still confident that the hour of Africa was approaching according to the word of God<sup>73</sup>. If the fascination of Liberia was in danger, the eclipse was only to be temporary and the star was to emerge anew from the gloom as brilliant as ever. A recovery called for courageous reforms, but the authorities were not available to carry out reforms voluntarily. Upon the occurrence of European offensive, the aborigines – living on the outskirts of civilisation, depressed, servile – sided with the foreigners against the government. Disaffection with the existing semi-colonial treatment exploded into riots: “Exploited by the American emigrants and their descendants, natives living in the colony’s back country grew restive. Confusion over political jurisdictions pitted the independent settlements against the Monrovia government”<sup>74</sup>. Even worse, despite the reputation of the back-to-Africa movement, the Negroes, either from other parts of Africa or from America, did not show any special disposition to go to Liberia<sup>75</sup>.

By around 1875-76, many hopes had vanished. The historical challenge of Liberia seemed to have fallen short. In America, too, the Liberian adventure had lost its primitive impetus and the dream of an African empire perished<sup>76</sup>. The government in Monrovia was in the hands of a coalition of mixed blood men who were venal, greedy, and inattentive to the necessities of the country. The customary chiefs did not easily accept being ousted; some resisted, but most “did not realise that they were ‘selling their country’”<sup>77</sup>. Blyden, biased by the current ethnological studies in Europe and America, deemed that “the ideas of a people depend [ed] largely upon blood”; his sympathy was with the black people and his contempt, so strong as to plan selective emigration, was for the “malignant progeny” of “mulattoes”<sup>78</sup>. The settlers concentrated on politics as the main road to success and wealth, and neglected business. Liberia had a European government that appeared incompatible with the mind and the idiosyncrasies of the Africans. “We have *nolens volens* taken up the White Man’s Burden and we need his aid to enable us to bear it with dignity and success”. There was something wrong in building up an African state in such a country<sup>79</sup>. The Republic was a British colony in everything but the flag<sup>80</sup>. Ironically, also the British authorities feared a breakdown as a consequence of a forced “acceptance of our constitutional system”<sup>81</sup>. British officials stated that the effective government of the “large area named Liberia is an utter impossibility so long as it remains in the hands of a number of grossly ignorant, inept and corrupt officials” and a British takeover, except for the enclave of Monrovia, was a possible option<sup>82</sup>.

From the very beginning Liberia had suffered from inadequate financing and inefficient management of its treasury causing a situation of unrest and instability. Britain and France established the frontiers of their possessions in West Africa eroding the Republic’s territorial integrity. Liberian authorities intensified the control of the hinterland in an effort of self-defence<sup>83</sup>. The pressures exercised by France were a serious threat not only to Liberia, but to the paramountcy of Britain in the region as well<sup>84</sup>. During the long struggle against the French advance, Samori’s army depended on Sierra Leone for weapons though Britain did not want to be involved in a diplomatic or military entanglement with another European power<sup>85</sup>.

The government of Liberia addressed Britain (receiving a loan in 1906 bolstered by the dispatch of custom officials and a Frontier Force) and later on, in 1909, the United States. In fact, Britain and France were ready to acknowledge the right of the United States – which held a quasi-parental relationship with Liberia – to interpose its good offices in view of an equitable arrangement of the boundary question<sup>86</sup>.

The American “hypothesis” pleased Blyden. “I hope it [the American Government] will assume not a ‘Financial Protectorate’ over the Republic as I see announced in the papers but that it will, without annexing it to the United States, assume in effect such control over it as it has over the Philippines”<sup>87</sup>. Reversing his own previous proclamations, Blyden coveted a complete Westernisation of the people of Liberia and its institutions under the shield of the old motherland: “Liberia was founded by American philanthropy, blind to the facts of Nature and of History. Philanthropy never builds up any state. Liberia is now waiting for American science and statesmanship to do what American philanthropy has failed to do – make the African an Anglo-Saxon”<sup>88</sup>. Crummell openly advocated a protectorate of the United States (“the many advantages of a colony without its disadvantages”) but wanted to save Liberia’s distinct nationality<sup>89</sup>. A mission was sent to Liberia by the American Government in June 1908, immediately after Monrovia rejected the scheme of reforms formulated by Britain, and another American delegation arrived in January 1909, giving the impression that Liberia was going to play off the United States against Britain. Blyden himself was abashed. Almost in the same days, he was courting Britain, as if the United States and Britain were complementary.

The agony of Liberia exerted a bad influence upon all the programs of liberty. Many of the merchants of the coastal cities, like their European counterparts, were damaged by the economic depression and expected to take profit from a drive towards a direct colonisation<sup>90</sup>. Colonialism was welcomed by Christian Africans as a substitute for non-Christian rulers. Crummell was particularly warm on England’s performance: “Having lived on the West coast of Africa, I have witnessed her grand and beneficent rule; I have seen the spread of her civilisation; the uprising, through her zeal and beneficence, of fine communities to civility and refinement”<sup>91</sup>. As the conquering of Africa progressed, and France was expanding more rapidly than anyone else, English-educated Africans aspired to British imperialism as the lesser of two evils. In order to fight slavery and unfold Western and Christian principles, the founders of the new states in Africa sought the assistance of the European powers even at the expense of independence. Blyden, albeit a “nationalist”, was confident that the British would follow a policy of amicable relations with the Africans, discarding their ethnocentrism<sup>92</sup>. “I am afraid that the reforms will not be voluntarily carried out by the authorities here. [...] The only hope of many is that Europe will at once interfere and put an end to this political absurdity”; to avoid civil strife, “an English expert should be placed in every department”<sup>93</sup>. Colonialism could be just a temporary arrangement. Appropriate reforms from above – “leaving the people otherwise, as far as possible, to themselves” and “putting Europeans in positions which require wide experience and executive ability” – were the best solution<sup>94</sup>. France was threatening to invade Liberia, but Blyden admired the efforts by France “to pacify West Africa”<sup>95</sup>.

In 1907, while close to leaving his public duties in the colony of Sierra Leone, Blyden candidly praised imperialism (a sort of Christian imperialism), a regime able to help the weak abiding by the principle of non-interference with the wholesome customs and religion of the natives<sup>96</sup>. A dozen years before, he had written just the opposite: “You will see from some Lagos papers I send that Liberia is attracting the attention of the leading natives all along the coast in the British colonies.

They begin to feel that these colonies cannot do for Africa and the African what Liberia can. An experience of several years both here and at Sierra Leone has convinced me that European Governments, by their present methods, are helpless to confer any permanent benefits upon the people of Africa”<sup>97</sup>. Blyden had already revealed his disposition to welcome colonialism in the speech he gave in 1903 at a banquet in his honour: “Our country [Africa] has been partitioned, in the order, I believe, of Divine Providence, by the European powers, and I am sure that [...] this partition has been permitted for the ultimate good of the people and for the benefit of humanity generally”<sup>98</sup>. On the same occasion, however, Casely Hayford stuck to the principle of identity (and independence?), stating that the African desired above all to preserve his own spiritual simplicity and faith, diversifying from Western materialism and doubt, looking for his true place in creation instead of attempting to portray himself as a man following dutifully the lines of progress of the white man<sup>99</sup>. Another outspoken advocate of Black emancipation, the Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, who supported the emigrationist movement and lived enough to watch the implementation of the Scramble, “feared that Europeans, who have once stolen Africans from Africa, would now steal Africa from the Africans”<sup>100</sup>. A Lagos editor in 1891 defined the submission of Africa to European command “a forcible possession of our land” which was going to take the place of “a forcible possession of our person”<sup>101</sup>. Revealing a certain ambiguity, J. (Africanus) B. Horton, a Sierra Leonean scholar and national leader, who spent part of his career at the service of Her Majesty’s Government on the Gold Coast and West Africa in the Army Medical Department, paid tribute to the mission performed by Britain in the fields of education, development and promotion, stating that “Africa has everything to gain whilst Britannia rules the world”<sup>102</sup>.

Living in a country dominated by the Whites, Africanus Horton’s adherence to the ideals of nation-making, that he and his peers could see as if through a half-opened door, was unsurprisingly slower than in the case of Blyden and the Americo-Liberians who worked in a free Black country, but their perspective was largely the same<sup>103</sup>. As Horton wrote in *West African Countries and Peoples*, which captured the imagination of his contemporaries, “the nations of Western Africa must live in the hope that in the process of time their turn will come”<sup>104</sup>.

For the time being, with the advent of colonialism, Liberia was no more a light for Africa and the Negroes. Africa ceased to “stretch out her hands unto God” in order to affirm her liberty and was obliged to endure a new chapter of humiliation<sup>105</sup>. The failure in preventing the intrusion of the European powers also in the new societies created in West Africa dashed the euphoria and spread sentiments of frustration and self-commiseration. The Utopian project was about to evaporate. The best out of the Liberians committed to the experiment were convinced that the white race had not allowed the Africans and New World Blacks a fair chance to show their capabilities.

In Sierra Leone, the early settlers encouraged the foundation of a society based upon a Christian middle-class emulating the social life in Britain. The chapels, inspired by the Nova Scotians, became the vital centres of public opinion and civic action. The ever larger number of recaptured modified the qualities of the population<sup>106</sup>. A new society, a blend of Western and African cultural backgrounds, began to flourish; the product was Sierra Leone Krio, a new language and a new people<sup>107</sup>. The guidelines were Christian God, economic development based on profit as incentive, Western experimental science joined with traditional African virtues of family solidarity, natural affinity for religious expression, and love for nature<sup>108</sup>. Education opened the way to the professions: pastors, teachers, doctors, lawyers<sup>109</sup>. Many members of the professional elite who were brought up in Sierra Leone belonged to the stratum of learned Creoles (or Krios).

It is the case of John Thorpe, who qualified as a barrister in 1850, followed by Francis Smith and Samuel Lewis. James Africanus Horton was the first Western-trained medical doctor. Samuel Adjai Crowther was the first registered student at Fourah Bay College and qualified as the first Sierra Leone bishop in 1864. The Krios achieved remarkable roles in civil senior posts all over British West African territories. In the 1880s the increase of the colonial weight, the multiplication of European and Asian presence in business at the expense of African traders and the rise of anti-Negro racism, but also the emergence of an educated Protectorate elite, accelerated a gradual decline of the Krios. They managed a cultural rebirth on their own which meant in many cases the rebuff of European names for African ones.

The expansion of colonial administration in the interior (the future Protectorate), where the population was fragmented into small groupings and polities within ill-defined boundaries, involved wide-range commerce, regional and trans-regional. The Government used a number of techniques to enhance their influence inland: diplomatic missions, friendship treaties with the chiefs, material assistance to the kings and, if necessary, force. The abolition of slavery upset the previous economy and undercut the power of the rulers. Missionary activities, facilitating the implantation of Europeans in the new lands and fighting native customs, fomented resentment and trouble. Many of the indigenous became Christian but Christianity always suffered from being “the white man’s religion”. Islam, strong for being renown as an African religion, was firmly entrenched in some regions. The majority kept ancestral beliefs and traditional behaviour. For all these reasons the integration between the two segments of the colonial possession, the Colony and the Protectorate, was never completed<sup>110</sup>.

Most of the Negro settlers had lost their African cultural heritage and had developed habits more suitable to meet the complex situation in the Western world<sup>111</sup>. The religious practice admitted a certain fluidity. Attending the Christian schools enlarged the possibility for a Muslim to have access to the civil service. A Muslim Creole did not think twice about adopting a Christian name to venture forth into the educational and commercial world of Freetown. Also “Muslim education developed in a context of intensive economic, social and political interaction which produced an interlocking network of indigenous and assimilated elite”<sup>112</sup>.

Sierra Leone emerged in the XIX century as “the earliest example of the general process by which traditional African culture made its adjustment to the technologically oriented society of Western Europe” and such a transformation “heralded a new era in the history of West Africa”<sup>113</sup>. It was a plural society by definition, a melting pot of Africans and Europeans with the same way of life and the same aspirations. The founders of Sierra Leone, Granville Sharp *in primis*, even more than the founders of Liberia, were intimately influenced by motives that stemmed from the XVIII century Enlightenment. The traditional and modern systems coalesced. Customary practices took on modern functions along new terms of reference<sup>114</sup>. A fake representation has victimised the Creoles as an extra-African, purely Western phenomenon, an aberration<sup>115</sup>, but they were a successful assortment of European and African cultures<sup>116</sup>. The distinction between natives and settlers gradually vanished into a new pattern with a wider variety of cultural experiences drawn from the rich reservoir of African tradition<sup>117</sup>. The spotlight was Freetown and its environs, where the contribution of the liberated Africans to the evolution of a single, dynamic society was more evident. Religion ceased to be a cleavage *vis-à-vis* the similarities of the Christian and Muslim groups living in the capital city. Within the revival of Yoruba nationalism, the stratification could be determined rather on the basis of social factors<sup>118</sup>.

Over the years, the inhabitants of the Colony, especially the Creoles born from settlers and liberated Africans, formed a West African version of Mid-Victorian society. Disparity in power, not a diverse stigma, was responsible for the distrust on the part of the forbearers of African nationalism.

By sending former enslaved and in general free persons of colour living in the US, Great Britain and the British colonial possessions back to their ancestral home, in the late XVIII and early XIX centuries, Europeans accomplished their own idea of what was “good” and “rational”. The situation of Africa was unfamiliar and nobody engaged a serious effort to shed light on the reality. Europeans placed more emphasis on humanity rather than on the people themselves. The disillusionment of Blyden and other liberals, once they recognized that freedom in Liberia and Sierra Leone had not achieved equality or integration, stimulated new analyses and a revision of the entire political project. More West or more Africa? W. E. B. Du Bois thought that the XIX century colonisation movement was “inadequately conceived and not altogether sincere”<sup>119</sup>. Delany admired the Republic’s contribution to the political destiny of the African race and highlighted the coincidence with Blyden’s advocacy for a true African, self-reliant nation, but he was sceptical on Liberia’s exemplarity<sup>120</sup>. Adding a weak black nation to the African landscape would be counterproductive for the emancipation of Negroes<sup>121</sup>. Liberia was Africa’s first republic and also – due to unfair relationship with foreign capital and expertise for the progress and government – the first “neo-colonial” state<sup>122</sup>. Other Pan-Africanists were more positive. Booker T. Washington praised Liberia’s independence and sovereignty as a part of Negro upheaval: he was not a vocal critic of European colonialism and had never visited Africa, but he expressed sentiments and undertook activities that made him one of the prominent black Diasporan exponents of his age<sup>123</sup>.

Colonialism was successful because the European administrators, whilst keeping the prerogatives of command and responsibility firmly with the colonisers, acknowledged Africa and Africans in their essence instead of chasing the reverie to convert the Africans and the Creoles into second class Europeans. “Early West African colonial governments seem to have based upon the principle that the native races had little or no rights other than to obey”<sup>124</sup>. African institutions were regarded as mere superstitions; the structure of power was totally shaped according to European standards. In Sierra Leone, colonialism “did not result in any articulate nationalism, in the way of hostility towards the colonial power or of identity among the colonised”, whereas in Liberia nationalism impersonated at the top mainly by Americo-Liberians was fostered by the spirit of survival of the lone black African republic throughout the Scramble<sup>125</sup>. In spite of the great relevance of Garvey, Garveyism and the Garveyites in the drive to the independence of Africa<sup>126</sup>, the “post-colonial” state all over the continent has been the continuation of the “colonised” section of the societies. The realm of imported prevailed on the realm of indigenous. The elite who led the process of decolonisation had all the credentials of Africanism, but they preferred to employ ideologies and political methods learnt through colonialism. The beneficiaries of the final collapse of colonialism will be the elite who had been close to the European way of life. In no area did the nationalist parties mobilize and co-opt the customary hierarchies in the movement. The current crises in a number of African states are a sort of repetition in the new political season of unease in coping with the “native” question. Liberian history is very important for Africa, “because modern independent African states face many of the problems faced by Liberia before 1914, and many of them are following similar paths to those followed by Liberia”<sup>127</sup>.

Liberia and Sierra Leone had been the theatre of a cultural, social and economic revolution with very special features in the African panorama. Their access to statehood implied an original path. In both countries, local leading groups had a very strong interest in maintaining the *status quo* and longstanding external connections rather than activating new indigenous elite to create a radical mass movement. But in the period of decolonisation in the second half of XX century a mishmash of educational and economic progress, freedom fighters elsewhere in Africa and liberal forces in Europe changed the political agenda for them as well<sup>128</sup>. In the dawn of African renaissance, collaborators with colonialism and heralds of nationalism were two sides, divergent but complementary, in the same predicament. The struggle of the black race had begun with the activity of abolitionists in Britain and America but was expected to end up in Africa. The supreme goal was a creative and self-reliant sovereignty aimed at exercising the power replacing the colonial masters and appropriating national resources. Again the myth of the Sphinx so dear to Blyden: “No; if we are to gather an analogy to Africa from ancient fable, the Sphinx supplies us with a truer symbol. The Sphinx was said to sit by the road side, and put riddles to every passer-by. [...] The Sphinx must solve her own riddle at last. The opening up of Africa is to be the work of Africans”<sup>129</sup>.

September, 30 2006

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Britain passed the Abolition Act on 27 February 1807 making slave trading illegal for British subjects. The great protagonist of the debate culminated in that vote was William Wilberforce, who campaigned also in 1833 for the abolition of slavery, approved in July 1834 after his death (Reginald Coupland, *Wilberforce*, Collins, London, 1945).

<sup>2</sup> Edward W. Blyden, *The African Problem and other discourses, delivered in America in 1890*, Whittingham, London, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Crummell, *Africa and America. Addresses and Discourses*, Willey, Springfield, 1891, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa. British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1964, p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> Alberto Sbacchi, *Legacy of Bitterness. Ethiopia and Fascist Italy, 1935-1941*, The Red Sea Press, Lawrenceville, 1997, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> William R. Scott, *The Sons of Sheba's Race*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1993, pp. 10-11. See also Ibrahim Sundiata, *Brothers and Strangers. Black Zion, Black Slavery, 1914-1940*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> The greatest of the Greek poets portrayed the gods as vacating Olympus every year and proceeding to Ethiopia to be feasted by its inhabitants.

---

<sup>8</sup> J. E. Casely Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound* [1911], F. Cass, London, 1969.

<sup>9</sup> The text of the speech was included as a chapter in Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* [1887], Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1967, pp. 113-129.

<sup>10</sup> A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1989, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> K. M. Panikkar, *Revolution in Africa*, Asia Publishing House, London, 1961, p. 108. See the sermon pronounced by Rev. Mojola Agbebi, an exponent of Ethiopianism, in Lagos, December 1902, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the African Church (in J. Ayo Langley, *Ideologies of Liberation in Black Africa, 1856-1970*, Rex Collings, London, 1979, pp. 72-77).

<sup>12</sup> Bahru Zewde, "The History of Ethiopian-Italian Relations: The Treaty of Addis Ababa of October 26, 1896", in Giampaolo Calchi Novati (ed.), *Il colonialismo e l'Africa. L'opera storiografica di Carlo Giglio*, Carocci, Roma, 2004, pp. 123-132. Referring both to Caulk and Giglio, the conclusion of Bahru's essay is that Menelik "came to be remembered not only as the victor of Adwa and the guarantor of Ethiopia's independence but also as the ruler who presided over the final severance of the Mereb-Mellah (Eritrea) from Ethiopia".

See also Richard A. Caulk, *'Between the Jaws of Hyenas': A Diplomatic History of Ethiopia (1876-1896)*, Harassowitz, Wiesbaden, 2002 and Carlo Giglio, "Il trattato di pace italo-etiopeico del 26 ottobre 1896", in *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa, 1966, vol. I, pp. 237-251.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Crummell, *The Duty of a Rising Christian State*, Wertheim and Macintosh, London, 1856, pp. 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> Edward W. Blyden, *From West Africa to Palestine*, T. J. Sawyerr, Freetown, 1873, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Cheikh Anta Diop, *Nations nègres et culture* [1955], Présence Africaine, Paris, 1964.

<sup>16</sup> Blyden, *African Problem*, cit., p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> David [Abbé P.-D.] Boilat, *Esquisses sénégalaises* [1853], Karthala, Paris, 1984.

<sup>18</sup> Early Lee Fox, *The American Colonization Society, 1817-1840*, The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1919.

---

<sup>19</sup> The very first expedition with 411 passengers, which founded the Province of Freedom, sailed on 8 April 1787 and landed on 10 May in the Temne country near the mouth of the Sierra Leone River (George E. Brooks Jr., *The Providence African Society's Sierra Leone Emigration Scheme, 1794-1795: Prologue to the African Colonization Movement*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", vol. 7, n. 2 [1974], pp. 183-202). The next important group of settlers that landed in the future Sierra Leone were the Nova Scotians who arrived in 1792 from Canada (most of them enslaved black people who had fought for the British in the American War of Independence) and in 1795 from Jamaica.

<sup>20</sup> The Sierra Leone estuary had been an important trading centre since the first period of contact of West Africa with Europeans in the XV century.

<sup>21</sup> A. P. Kup, *John Clarkson and the Sierra Leone Company*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", vol. 5, n. 2 (1972), p. 204.

<sup>22</sup> Robert G. Weisbord, *Ebony Kinship: Africa, Africans, and the Afro-American*, Greenwood Press, London-Westport, 1973, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> Civilisation was a potent image in its own right, but worked as an aspect of colonial ideology: "Having its roots in a lengthy European tradition, [the word 'civilisation'] came, under the influence of imperialism, to signify a process of human development very closely identified, though not synonymous, with the transformation from non-western social values towards a western, liberal, industrial ideal" (David Brown, *On the Category of 'Civilised' in Liberia and Elsewhere*, "The Journal of Modern African Studies", vol. 20, n. 2 [June, 1982], p. 287).

<sup>24</sup> Blyden, *African Problem*, cit., pp. 24 and 82-83.

<sup>25</sup> Gurley was a great colonizationist and above all in the 1830s was intensely dedicated to the cause despite polemics and attacks.

<sup>26</sup> Cyril E. Griffith, *The African Dream*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park and London, 1975, p. 44.

<sup>27</sup> Charles I. Foster, *The Colonization of Free Negroes, in Liberia, 1816-1835*, "The Journal of Negro History", vol. 38, n. 1 (January, 1953), p. 48.

<sup>28</sup> William Innes, *Liberia; the Early History and Signal Preservation of the American Colony of Free Negroes on the Coast of Africa*, Waugh and Innes, Edinburgh, 1831, p. 92.

<sup>29</sup> Supposedly, the colonisation wanted to establish a separate, black Christian empire in Africa which would ultimately parallel the white Christian empire in America (Leonard I. Sweet, *Black Images of America, 1784-1870*, W. W. Norton and Co., New York, 1976, p. 37).

<sup>30</sup> Frankie Hutton, *Economic Considerations in the American Colonization Society's Early Effort to Emigrate Free Blacks to Liberia, 1816-36*, "The Journal of Negro History", vol. 68, n. 4 (Autumn, 1983), p. 384.

---

<sup>31</sup> Monroe strongly endorsed African colonization at a Cabinet meeting on 12 March 1819 (P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1961, p. 51).

<sup>32</sup> M. B. Akpan, "Liberia and Ethiopia, 1880-1914: the survival of two African states", in Unesco, *General History of Africa*, vol. VII: Africa under Colonial Domination, 1880-1935 (ed. A. Adu Bohaen), Heinemann, London and University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985, p. 250.

<sup>33</sup> Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement*, cit., pp. 49-50.

<sup>34</sup> Abeodu Bowen Jones, "The Republic of Liberia", in J. F. A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder (eds.), *History of West Africa*, Longman, London, 1974, vol. II, p. 317.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas W. Livingston, *The Exportation of American Higher Education in West Africa: Liberia College, 1850-1900*, "The Journal of Negro Education", vol. 45, n. 3 (Summer, 1976), p. 248. Compared to the black population of the United States, where at that time approximately 5 per cent were literate, it appears a quite high proportion. According to other sources, two-thirds of the settlers from America to Sherbro could read and write (Charles Henry Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia*, Central Book Inc., New York, 1947, vol. I, p. 7). As far as the ex-slaves transported into Sierra Leone were concerned, practically none of them had any education or profession.

<sup>36</sup> The text of the Constitution in Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia*, cit., vol. II, pp. 852-864 and in Harry Johnston, *Liberia*, Hutchinson, London, 1906, vol. I, pp. 203-218.

<sup>37</sup> A Church representing thousands of Negroes in the United States expressed the sentiments of this people in a resolution adopted in August 1862 commending the recognition as a "noble act of the United States Senate" and a sign of "the hand of God in a movement which we regard as ominous of good for the race" (see Charles H. Wesley, *The Struggle for the Recognition of Haiti and Liberia as Independent Republics*, "The Journal of Negro History", vol. 2, n. 4 [October, 1917], p. 382).

<sup>38</sup> Despatch Barclay to Taylor, Monrovia, 8 June 1887, mentioned in M. B. Akpan, *Black Imperialism: Americo-Liberian Rule over the African People of Liberia, 1841-1964*, "Canadian Journal of African Studies", vol. 7, n. 2 (1973), p. 223 and footnote 39.

<sup>39</sup> Britain retained an interest in the settlement and the peninsula of Freetown passed from the Company to the colonial rule in 1808.

<sup>40</sup> Altogether, between 1807, when the British Parliament declared the slave trade illegal, and 1863, when the last shipload of the enslaved destined for the transatlantic market was brought to Freetown, 50,000 Africans were freed (Christopher Fyfe, *Sierra Leone Inheritance*, Oxford University Press, London, 1964, p. 131).

- 
- <sup>41</sup> J. B. Webster and A. A. Boahen (with M. Tidy), *The Revolutionary Years. West Africa since 1800*, Longman, London, 1980, p. 124. Being a Creole meant that one was a child of liberated African parents, an African born in Africa to parents born outside Sierra Leone usually assumed into the European modes of dress, speech, school and religion.
- <sup>42</sup> Mary H. Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa* [1897], Virago Press, London, 1982, pp. 15-25.
- <sup>43</sup> Alexander Crummell, *Hope for Africa*, Seeleys, London, 1853, pp. 2 and 10.
- <sup>44</sup> Crummell, *Africa and America*, cit., pp. 407-409.
- <sup>45</sup> Crummell, *Hope*, cit., pp. 29 and 32.
- <sup>46</sup> *Proceedings at the Banquet in honour of E. W. Blyden on the occasion of his retirement from his official labours in the Colony of Sierra Leone*, London, 1907, p. 22.
- <sup>47</sup> S. R. B. Attoh Ahuma, *The Gold Coast Nation and National Consciousness* [1911], quoted in Langley, *Ideologies of Liberation in Black Africa*, cit., p. 167.
- <sup>48</sup> Edward W. Blyden, *African Life and Customs* [1908], Black Classic Press List, Baltimore, 1994, p. 9.
- <sup>49</sup> Crummell, *Africa and America*, cit., p. 180. Crummell was quite emphatic: "Here, on this coast of Africa, is this grand opportunity, given of God, to men of the African race" (*ivi*, p. 197).
- <sup>50</sup> Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*, Oxford University Press, London, 1967, p. 47.
- <sup>51</sup> Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, T. Becket, London, 1787; Gustavus Vassa [Olaudah Equiano], *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* [1789], Heinemann, London, 1966.
- <sup>52</sup> Weisbord, *Ebony Kinship*, cit., p. 12.
- <sup>53</sup> Robert W. July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought*, Faber and Faber, London, 1968, p. 104.
- <sup>54</sup> Crummell, *Duty*, cit., p. 28.
- <sup>55</sup> Crummell, *Africa and America*, cit., pp. 132 and 309.
- <sup>56</sup> Curtin, *Image of Africa*, cit., p. 62.

---

<sup>57</sup> The essential author of the Liberian Declaration of Independence and of the Constitution of 1847 was Hilary Teague. Presumably the indigenous Africans were not included in Teague's definition of "the people of the Republic of Liberia". In his political arguing, Teague appeared to be talking exclusively about the emigrant Negroes from America (July, *Origins*, cit., pp. 98-99). The Constitution does not define the relationship between the colonists and the natives unless an allusion to the duty to the "improvement" and "advancement" of the native people. The word "people" does not include the white residents and the native or recaptured Africans inhabiting the commonwealth.

<sup>58</sup> In his correspondence with the British Government (this letter was written in February 1864), Blyden sought to provide an optimistic picture of the Negro Republic (Lynch, *Blyden*, cit., p. 44).

<sup>59</sup> Address delivered in Monrovia on 26 December 1870 (Crummell, *Africa and America*, cit., pp. 167-198).

<sup>60</sup> July, *Origins*, cit., p. 232.

<sup>61</sup> From Blyden's Independence Day address of 1865, "Our origins, dangers and duties" (Lynch, *Blyden*, cit., p. 45).

<sup>62</sup> Blyden, *African Life*, cit., pp. 10-11. Mark C. Hayford (*West Africa and Christianity*, Baptist Tract and Book Society, London, 1900) acknowledges Blyden's positions but believes that monogamic status was a more practical solution in the new conditions of life also in Africa.

<sup>63</sup> Edward W. Blyden, *The Problems before Liberia*, Phillips, London, 1909, p. 29.

<sup>64</sup> "So here the missionary has by his teaching mistakes created a gulf between aborigines and colonists and inspired the colonists into the belief, not intentionally, that they are equal to the whites and should be so treated. [...] The Mohammedans and pagans not having been so taught, have no such feeling" (letter to R. L. Antrobus [January 24, 1910], in *Selected Letters of Edward Wilmot Blyden* [ed. Hollis R. Lynch], Kto Press, Millwood, 1978, p. 499).

<sup>65</sup> Jesse Page, *The Black Bishop. Samuel Adjai Crowther*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1908, p. 299. Crowther was consecrated as a first bishop of Niger in the Canterbury Cathedral on 29 June 1864 (John R. Milson, *Samuel Adjai Crowther*, Oxford University Press, Ibadan, 1968).

<sup>66</sup> Page, *The Black Bishop*, cit., p. 300.

<sup>67</sup> Crummell, *Africa and America*, cit., p. 35.

---

<sup>68</sup> Fourah Bay College was founded in 1827 and affiliated to Durham University in 1876. The first students graduated in 1879. The native pastors were not convinced of the dangers of European civilization for the African but they would prefer to have as teachers Negroes from the West Indies. See Hollis R. Lynch, *The Native Pastorate Controversy and Cultural Ethno-Centrism in Sierra Leone, 1821-1874*, "The Journal of African History", vol. 5, n. 3 (1964), p. 409. Blyden had dreamed an institution close to the European model but not a copy of the European epistemology: the chair for History would teach universal history "with particular reference to the part Ethiopia had played in the affairs of the world" stressing that "Africa was the cradle of the world's systems and philosophies, and the nursing mother of its religions" (Appendix A, in Blyden, *African Life*, cit., p. 86). Casely Hayford had conceived a University for the Gold Coast and the Asante. At the end, Blyden, Johnson and others had been profoundly disappointed by the scarce commitment of the colonial authorities to promote qualified Africans to posts of responsibilities in Sierra Leone.

<sup>69</sup> Blyden, *African Life*, cit., pp. 36-37 and 33.

<sup>70</sup> Raymond Leslie Buell, *Liberia: a Century of Survival, 1847-1947*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1947, p. 2.

<sup>71</sup> Blyden, *Problems before Liberia*, cit., p. 17.

<sup>72</sup> Edward W. Blyden, *Hope for Africa*, from the "Colonization Journal", August 1861, p. 12.

<sup>73</sup> Letter to W. Lowrie (June 10, 1876), in *Selected Letters*, cit., p. 211.

<sup>74</sup> Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement*, cit., pp. 240-241.

<sup>75</sup> Buell, *Liberia*, cit., p. 15

<sup>76</sup> Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement*, cit., p. 249.

<sup>77</sup> Johnston, *Liberia*, cit., vol. I, p. 129.

<sup>78</sup> Blyden claimed that mulattoes were unsuited to the exigencies of a new country in West Africa (letter to W. Coppinger [May 1, 1891], in *Selected Letters*, cit., p. 422) and asserted that "decadent mulattoes in important positions accounted in part for Liberia's want of enterprise and progress" (Edward W. Blyden, "Mixed Races in Liberia", in *Smithsonian Institute Annual Report*, Washington, 1870, pp. 386-388). Blyden's attack to the mulattoes was exploited by conservatives and racist hardliners.

<sup>79</sup> Blyden, *Problems before Liberia*, cit., pp. 8 and 18.

---

<sup>80</sup> Edward W. Blyden, *West Africa before Europe and the addresses delivered in England in 1901 and 1903*, Phillips, London, 1925, p. 23.

<sup>81</sup> Baldwin to Gray, 2 May 1910, Public Record Office (PRO/FO 403/415, West Africa).

<sup>82</sup> Lamont, finance adviser of Liberia, to consul Braithwaite Wallis, 7 February 1908, Public Record Office (PRO/FO 403/398, West Africa).

<sup>83</sup> Barclay's Annual Message, 11 December 1906 (in Akpan, "Liberia and Ethiopia", cit., p. 260).

<sup>84</sup> See the pamphlet *France versus Liberia*, Liverpool, 1893, edited by the African Trade Section of the Chamber of Commerce of Liverpool, Public Record Office (PRO/FO 458/2, Liberia, 1890-1896). In principle, London was committed to guarantee the integrity of Liberia's territory. Henry Hamilton Johnston, a former official from the Foreign Office who kept contacts with Monrovia in an indeterminate position of interlocutor and adviser, maintained he had avoided a disintegration of Liberia (memo to Foreign Office, 18 September 1906, Public Record Office [PRO/FO 403/371, West Africa]). The project elaborated by Johnston, since London had no intention of formally annexing Liberia, in spite of the importance and the wealth Johnston attributed to her, proposed a vigorous assistance to "that country in many ways to assimilate its development and policy to those of Sierra Leone" (message to Foreign Office, 25 March 1907, Public Record Office [PRO/FO 403/386, West Africa]). Britain prepared a massive interference in Liberian affairs: finance, justice and police (memo dispatched by Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 27 August 1907, in preparation to the visit of President Barclay to England, Public Record Office [PRO/FO 403/386, West Africa]).

<sup>85</sup> Joe A. D. Alie, *A New History of Sierra Leone*, Macmillan Education, Oxford, 1990, pp. 120-121.

<sup>86</sup> The friendship treaty signed in 1848 between US and Liberia and the treaty of 22 October 1862 following the formal recognition of the Republic did not imply any stipulation guaranteeing the independence of Liberia, but the US government had frequently interposed its good offices to procure the adjustment of difficulties related to Liberia's survival and would strongly resent any attempt on the part of a foreign power to interfere with the independence of the Republic (memo Foreign Office, 12 March 1890, Public Record Office [PRO/FO, 403/129, Liberia]).

<sup>87</sup> Letter to J. C. Hemphill (March 21, 1910), in *Selected Letters*, cit., p. 502. Some years earlier Blyden had thought of making some concessions to France without ruling out a *de facto* joint Franco-British "protectorate" (memo Foreign Office, 23 May 1905, Public Record Office [PRO/FO 403/363, West Africa]). However, the president in charge was hostile to any surrendering of Liberia's independence (Johnston to Foreign Office, 2 August 1905, *ivi*).

<sup>88</sup> Letter to J. C. Hemphill (March 21, 1910), in *Selected Letters*, cit., p. 503.

<sup>89</sup> Crummell, *Africa and America*, cit., pp. 179 and 181.

---

<sup>90</sup> G. W. Johnson condemned the merchants who in the haste “to be rich” were willing to sacrifice African national interests (Webster-Boahen, *Revolutionary Years*, cit., p. 175).

<sup>91</sup> Crummell, *Africa and America*, cit., p. 314.

<sup>92</sup> Lynch, *Blyden*, cit., p. 191.

<sup>93</sup> Blyden to Antrobus, 30 January 1909, Public Record Office (PRO/FO 403/407, Liberia).

<sup>94</sup> Letter to G. Berkeley (February 12, 1874), in *Selected Letters*, cit., p. 163. In the meantime England was revising the approach to West Africa under the impact of the recommendations drafted in the report of the Parliamentary Committee of 1865 regarding “withdrawal” from the coast. The objective of the report was to gradually abandon Gambia, the Gold Coast and Lagos., which lacked a “regular and well defined system of administration”, immediately avoiding any extension of British sovereignty, but not Sierra Leone that, because of position and settlements, was the desired seat of a Central Government for West Africa (Report of the Select Committee on Africa [Western Coast], 26 June 1865, Public Record Office [PRO/CO 267/286, Sierra Leone, 1865, vol. 4]). The recommendations were not implemented because of local forces and changes in international environment (Gustav Kashope Deveneaux, *Public Opinion and Colonial Policy in Nineteenth-Century Sierra Leone*, “The International Journal of African Historical Studies”, vol. 9, n. 1 [1976], p. 57).

<sup>95</sup> Blyden, *West Africa before Europe*, cit., p. 14.

<sup>96</sup> *Proceedings at the Banquet*, cit., 1907, p. 44.

<sup>97</sup> Letter to W. Coppinger (May 1, 1891), in *Selected Letters*, cit., p. 445.

<sup>98</sup> Edward W. Blyden, *Africa and the Africans. Proceedings on the occasion of a Banquet, August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1903*, Phillips, London, 1903, pp. 33-34.

<sup>99</sup> The words of Casely Hayford, less compromised than Blyden with the Afro-American school of thought, in Blyden, *Africa and the Africans*, cit., pp. 14 and 51.

<sup>100</sup> Edwin S. Redkey, *Black Exodus*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1969, p. 36. Turner’s symbolic African nation embodied most elements of nationalism and the classic American dream. Turner visited both Sierra Leone, where he got a tumultuous welcome, and Liberia, that struck him in a similar way with the addition that Liberia was a free republic and not a colony. His letters from Africa appeared on the “Christian Recorder” and were collected later on in a volume (Mungo M. Ponton, *The Life and Times of Bishop Henry M. Turner*, Atlanta, 1917).

---

The relations between Blyden and Turner were not smooth. Blyden was afraid that Turner's distrust gave an erroneous impression of Liberia's influencing possible emigrants (letter to W. Coppinger, January 23, 1888, in *Selected Letters*, cit., p. 384). In another letter, the stance of Blyden was still sharper: he wished that Turner would not come back to Liberia, where he had deceived many people because of the lies he had said (letter to O. Wilson, September 17, 1889, *ivi*, p. 447).

<sup>101</sup> Webster-Boahen, *Revolutionary Years*, cit., p. 176.

<sup>102</sup> Africanus B. Horton, *Letters on the Political Condition of the Gold Coast* [1870], F. Cass, London, 1970, p. 15 (the date of the letter was 13 July 1861). The Fanti shared Horton's vision of a "new Africa", opposed to the "resistance" of Asante. In the words of Horton, "the Fanti Confederation was one of the earliest efforts by the African educated elite to seize the initiative in political leadership, through co-operation with traditional rulers" (*ivi*, p. 29).

<sup>103</sup> Davidson Nicol (ed.), *Africanus Horton. The Dawn of Nationalism in Modern Africa*, Longmans, London, 1969.

<sup>104</sup> James Africanus Horton, *West African Countries and Peoples* [1868], Edinburgh at the University Press, Edinburgh, 1969, p. 61. The focus of Horton's reconstruction, in a mood strongly anti-positivist and anti-racial, is that nations rise and fall, that in ages past Africa was the nursery of science and literature and that in the future the African people would have regained lost ground also thanks to the positive effects of missionary operations. Liberia was exalted as "the first self-governing civilized black community on the West Coast of Africa" (*ivi*, p. 12) in spite of the defects he pointed out in her Constitution.

<sup>105</sup> Facing to the reality of ongoing partition, Blyden knew that the European powers were not altruistic, however he clung to the transcendental belief that "Providence used men and nations for higher purpose than they themselves conceived" (Blyden, *Africa and the Africans*, cit., p. 34).

<sup>106</sup> Minute, 25 January 1826, Public Record Office (PRO/CO 267/71, Sierra Leone and African Forts).

<sup>107</sup> Alie, *A New History of Sierra Leone*, cit., p. 78.

<sup>108</sup> Robert July, "The Sierra Leone Legacy in Nigeria: Herbert Macaulay and Henry Carr", in Christopher Fyfe and Eldred Jones (eds.), *Freetown: A symposium*, Sierra Leone University Press, Freetown, 1968, p. 212.

<sup>109</sup> "Negroes appointed to the Liberian and Haitian posts were respectable, if unspectacular, men from all the professions" (Richard Bardolph, *The Negro Vanguard*, Rinehart and Co., New York, 1959, p. 148).

---

<sup>110</sup> The Colony was proclaimed in 1808 putting an end to the administrative responsibilities of the Sierra Leone Company. The Protectorate, proclaimed in 1896, covered the regions and populations of the interiors, the bulk of Sierra Leone on a modern map, whose social organisation at the time was exclusively tribal: the declaration, whilst uniting the country politically, divided it culturally and ethnically. Already in 1898 the application of a House Tax provoked an extended resistance that developed into open warfare in the north (J. D. Hargreaves, *The Establishment of the Sierra Leone Protectorate and the Insurrection of 1898*, "Cambridge Historical Journal", vol. 12, n. 1 [1956], pp. 56-80). See also Leslie Probyn, *Sierra Leone and the Natives of West Africa*, "Journal of the Royal African Society", vol. 6, n. 23 (April, 1907), pp. 250-258.

<sup>111</sup> Arthur T. Porter, *Creoledom. A Study of the Development of Freetown Society*, Oxford University Press, London, 1966, p. 11.

<sup>112</sup> David E. Skinner, *Islam and the Education in the Colony and Hinterland of Sierra Leone (1750-1914)*, "Canadian Journal of African Studies", vol. 10, n. 3 (1976), p. 520.

<sup>113</sup> John Peterson, "The Enlightenment and the Founding of Freetown", in Fyfe-Jones, *Freetown*, cit., p. 9.

<sup>114</sup> Darrell L. Reeck, *Innovators in Religion and Politics in Sierra Leone, 1875-1896*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", vol. 5, n. 4 (1972), p. 609. See also Robin Law and Paul Lovejoy, "The Changing Dimension of African History: Reappropriating the Diaspora", in Mc Grath-Jedrey-King-Thompson, *Rethinking African History*, cit., p. 190.

<sup>115</sup> Padmore, one of the fathers of Pan-Africanism, misled the nature of the Creoles, who appeared to him just a "Anglo-Saxon Black community" (Georges Padmore, *How Britain rules Africa*, Vishart Books, London, 1936, pp. 270-273). Also Edward Blyden and James Johnson condemned them for their European civilisation.

<sup>116</sup> Akintola J. G. Wyse, "The Krio of Sierra Leone: Perspectives and West African Historiography", in Simon Mc Grath, Charles Jedrej, Kenneth King and Jack Thompson (eds.), *Rethinking African History*, Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, 1997, pp. 201-226. Empirical studies in Sierra Leone in the period 1896-1939 readdressed the perception of the Western, colonial and capitalist expansion; Freetown imperial representatives incorporated some aspects of the precolonial social formations in order to facilitate colonial development (M. J. M. Sibanda, *Dependency and Underdevelopment in Northwestern Sierra Leone, 1896-1939*, "African Affairs", vol. 78, n. 313 [October, 1979], p. 484).

<sup>117</sup> John Peterson, *Province of Freetown: A History of Sierra Leone, 1787-1870*, Faber and Faber, London, 1969, pp. 283 and 299.

<sup>118</sup> John Peterson, "The Sierra Leone Creole: A Reappraisal", in Fyfe-Jones, *Freetown*, cit., p. 113. Blyden was very active in his aim "to end the mutual antagonism and mistrust between Muslim and Christian Negroes" (Lynch, *The Native Pastorate*, cit., p. 400).

---

<sup>119</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade of the United States of America, 1638-1870*, The Social Science Press, New York, 1954, p. 197. There were obvious parallels between Zionism and black nationalism as conceived by Bishop Turner, Garvey and other emigrationists, but “the differences between them sum up the weaknesses of African emigration as a solution to the American race problem” (Redkey, *Black Exodus*, cit., p. 302).

<sup>120</sup> The civilising mission of Africans in Africa seemed to Delany “the ebony version of Kipling’s white man’s burden” (Weisbord, *Ebony Kinship*, cit., p. 23).

<sup>121</sup> The French great colonial administrator Maurice Delafosse, who knew West Africa well, has always been a little critical of Liberia and Liberians. “He ridicules the effort of Negroes to run a white man’s government in Africa and thinks the Liberian experiment would have been happier and more respectable if it copied native African instead of a United States model” (Frederick Starr, *Liberia after the World War*, “The Journal of Negro History”, vol. 10, n. 2 [April, 1925], pp. 123-124).

<sup>122</sup> I. K. Sundiata, *Black Scandal: America and the Liberian Labor Crisis, 1929-1936*, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia, 1980, p. 158.

<sup>123</sup> Edward O. Erhagbe, *African-American and the Defense of African States against European Imperial Conquest: Booker T. Washington’s Diplomatic Efforts to Guarantee Liberia’s Independence 1907-1911*, “African Studies Review”, vol. 39, n. 1 (April, 1996), pp. 61-62. A similar contradiction permeated the thought of John Henry Smyth, a vibrant precursor of XX century Pan-Africanism and US minister to Liberia (Walter L. Williamson, *Nineteenth Century Pan-Africanist: John Henry Smyth, United States Minister to Liberia, 1878-1885*, “The Journal of Negro History”, vol. 63, n. 1 [January, 1978], pp. 23-24).

<sup>124</sup> George W. Ellis, *Liberia and the Political Psychology of West Africa*, “Journal of the Royal African Society”, vol. 12, n. 45 (October, 1912), p. 53.

<sup>125</sup> Christopher Clapham, *Liberia and Sierra Leone. An essay in comparative politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976, p. 18.

<sup>126</sup> Adelaide Cromwell Hill and Martin Kilson (eds.), *A propos of Africa. Sentiments of Negro American Leaders on Africa from the 1800s to the 1950s*, F. Cass, London, 1969. See also Frank Chalk, *Du Bois and Garvey Confront Liberia: Two Incidents of the Coolidge Years*, “Canadian Journal of African Studies”, vol. 1, n. 2 (November, 1967), pp. 135-142.

---

<sup>127</sup> Webster-Boahen, *Revolutionary Years*, cit., p. 136.

<sup>128</sup> Clapham, *Liberia and Sierra Leone*, cit., p. 120.

<sup>129</sup> *Selected Works of Edward Wilmot Blyden*, by Willie A. Givens, Robertsport, Liberia, 1976 [mimeo], p. 208.