Toward a Sociology of Colonial Subjectivity: Political Agency in Haiti and Liberia

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Abstract

The authors seek to connect global historical sociology with racial formation theory to examine how antislavery movements fostered novel forms of self-government and justifications for state formation. The cases of Haiti and Liberia demonstrate how enslaved and formerly enslaved actors rethought modern politics at the time, producing novel political subjects in the process. Prior to the existence of these nations, self-determination by black subjects in colonial spaces was impossible, and each sought to carve out that possibility in the face of a transatlantic structure of slavery. This work demonstrates how Haitian and Liberian American founders responded to colonial structures, though in Liberia reproducing them albeit for their own ends. The authors demonstrate the importance of colonial subjectivities to the discernment of racial structures and counter-racist action. They highlight how anticolonial actors challenged global antiblack oppression and how they legitimated their self-governance and freedom on the world stage. Theorizing from colonized subjectivities allows sociology to begin to understand the politics around global racial formations and starts to incorporate histories of black agency into the sociological canon.

Keywords

colonialism, postcolonial, transnational, racial formation, citizenship

The French and American revolutions are seen as emblematic of political modernity, overthrowing the authority of the king and colonial overseers. They located power in the hands of "the people" and asserted the right for popular self-determination. Yet both revolutions denied these same freedoms and rights to their racialized populations. The language of freedom and self-government was premised on a white body politic, and the racialized populations were seen as outside the political realm. In this context, Haiti and Liberia sought to claim freedom and self-governance for formerly enslaved populations: Haiti through revolution and Liberia by gaining independence over an initial American colonial project. On the basis of their particular experience of colonial subjecthood, these actors made claims to freedom that were not anticipated in the American and French political declarations. The actions of Haitian revolutionaries and the framers of the Liberian postcolonial state proclaimed their freedom in response to a racialized global order. To claim freedom, they had to legitimize their self-determination to a global world order that sought to deny them their existence. In this article we demonstrate how modern politics was shaped in opposition to black subjects, and we suggest that in order to study race, racisms, and the legacies of slavery, it is necessary to understand how colonized and enslaved subjects responded to colonial structures and sought avenues to escape them.

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It may appear that the Haitian revolution (1791–1804) and the development of Liberian republicanism (1822–1847) are purely oppositional. Whereas the Haitian Revolution is recognized as the paragon of anticolonial revolution during the Enlightenment era (Dubois 2004; James 1989; Sala-Molins 2006), the formation of an independent Liberia is often regarded as the model example of an American colonial project retreating to colonial recidivism perpetrated by the formerly colonized (Appiah 1993; Fairhead et al. 2003). Yet in this article we theorize practices by which Haitian revolutionaries and early Liberian American intellectuals justified their visions of antiracist nationalisms to a larger world system that saw any nonwhite self-determination and self-governance as a political impossibility, unacceptable within the postrevolutionary domains of France and the United States (Jefferson [1785] 2011; Sala-Molins 2006; Stoler 2011), and philosophically unthinkable in the Enlightenment confines of antiblack racial orders of the time (Buck-Morss 2009; Hegel [1830] 2005; Hume [1758] 1987; Kant [1777] 1997, [1764] 2003; Sterling 2015). Given the context of global racial slavery, how did the Haitians and Liberians justify their antislavery stance and independence? How did these strategies and emerging political claims differ from Enlightenment projects at the time?

This article demonstrates how the Haitian and Liberian American subject positions gave them different epistemic perspectives from those of the political actors in the colonial metropole. These early anticolonial actors recognized their inability to be free in the French Empire and in the United States. They therefore fostered radically different justifications for freedom and independence and instituted themselves as novel subjects in the world system, as free, self-governing black people. The liberated Haitian state, surrounded by islands where colonial slavery was in full swing, constructed citizenship on the basis of a politically anticolonial—black—position. It also acted as an abolitionist actor, offering itself as a home for all black people, thus extending the idea of citizenship beyond its national boundaries. Liberia, though ultimately falling to a deeply oppressive paternalistic colonial regime that mirrored imperial projects across Africa except with Liberian African Americans at the top, produced through its claims to independence from America and in its early intellectual traditions a nascent pan-Africanism that would form the crucible for similar movements in the twentieth century.

INTERROGATING THE ROLE OF COLONIZED PEOPLE IN THE MAKING OF MODERNITY

Universalism's Limits

The French and American revolutions are seen as the defining events of political modernity, situating ideas of rights and freedom within "Man." Yet these universal ideas were racialized, as they depended on recognizing one's humanity. The French Revolution overthrew the authority of the king by locating the power for governance with "the people." The American Revolution was a war of independence against Britain through which the United States asserted its right for self-determination. As the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789) suggests, the political authority of the king cannot encroach upon Man's "natural, inalienable and sacred rights," and the American Declaration of Independence (1776) proclaims, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." Yet at the time of the publication of both declarations, France was a colonial empire and the United States a slave-owning nation. Although the rights guaranteed by the declarations were granted to those seen as part of the body politic, this universalism was restricted (Hunt 2008).

Although the founding contradictions of the United States are often discussed (Du Bois [1935] 1998), France still too often operates on an analytical bifurcation, separating metropolitan from colonial politics (Bhambra 2011; Go 2014a; Vergès 2010). During the first French Empire in the Caribbean, the Code Noir (Sala-Molins 2006) regulated the livelihoods of the enslaved and actively reified the lack of rights of the black colonial subject in the law. The island of Saint-Domingue, now Haiti, was the world's most profitable colony in the eighteenth century. Laurent Dubois (2000) recounted that on the French Caribbean islands, "an order based on the enslavement of 90 percent of the population produced sugar and other commodities for metropolitan consumption, powering the economic transformations of eighteenth-century France and the emergence of a new merchant bourgeoisie" (p. 21; Klooster 2009).

And yet despite these important social and economic linkages between Western metropoles and the colonies, modern political thought tends to exclude the colonial space as foundational to its inception (Bhambra 2007; Connell 1997; Vergès 1999, 2010). Political philosophy of the period

embraced a vision of the hierarchies of races justifying the exclusion of Africans and African descendants from European civilization (Garrett and Sebastiani 2017; Hegel [1830] 2005; Kant [1777] 1997, [1764] 2003). John Stuart Mill (1859), for example, argued that in our thinking on freedom and rights, "we may leave out of consideration those backward states of society in which the race may be considered as in its nonage" (para. 10; Mehta 1999). Benjamin Constant (1816), writing shortly after the French Revolution, unironically suggested that "thanks to commerce, to religion, to the moral and intellectual progress of the human race, there are no longer slaves among the European nations" (para. 11). Moreover, Jefferson, being on the same territory as enslaved populations, discussed the work of race and sought to prevent racial mixing. He wrote, "This unfortunate difference of color, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people" (Jefferson [1785] 2011:XIV).

The legacy of this racial exclusion from modern political vocabulary suggests that modern politics itself rests on a white European ontology (Hesse 2007). What is more, race acted as a justification to separate the modern from the nonmodern; it naturalized this exclusion and made the free colonial subject unthinkable. The literature on "racialized modernity" suggests that our political vocabulary, our ideas of liberty, equality, fraternity, rationalization, civilization and the modern, came about through the very disavowal of the colonial other and in the specific cultural context denoting the European from the non-European (Connell 1997; Eze 1997; Grovogui 2011, 2015; Hesse 2007; Mignolo 2002; Valls 2005; Wynter 2003). Bogues (2005:35) writes that modern politics institutionalized a particular kind of human that could not register the humanity of the colonial other. Our conceptual vocabulary is marked by race as a structuring fissure: the body politic operates as a racial contract (Mills 2014), the modern state was historically created as a racial state (Goldberg 2001), and the global world order is a system of global racial formation (Winant 2001). This means that modernity cannot be understood without thinking of the colonial as an integral part of its very inception.

Racial Formations

Two strains of sociology have explored the dynamics of race and colonialism, albeit in divergent directions. Global and historical sociology has examined the role of empire in the making of the modern world and called for a reconnection of metropolitan and colonial politics (Go 2014b; Go and Lawson 2017). These literatures demonstrate how the occlusions of colonial histories reinforce parochial and at times methodologically nationalist understandings of processes that spanned the globe. This scholarship has examined the importance of empire to economic development (Frank 1979; Go 2011; Wallerstein 1974, 2011) as well as the practices of exploitation practiced upon colonized populations (Magubane 2005). However, rarely does this literature encounter race and the global dynamics of slavery as a structuring or causal force mediating actions on a global stage (see Magubane 2017 as an exception).

Conversely, the literature on racial formations has shown how, far from epiphenomenal to capitalist structures but in fact acting in interaction with global economic hierarchies, race has acted as a structuring force in the making of the modern world. Racial formations go hand in hand with colonial projects, and racial classifications have served to both justify and perpetuate a social, economic and political global order (Winant 2001). With the development of racial capitalism came a particular kind of social and cultural infrastructure rendering the enslaved subject as property, as both capital and labor. A process of abstraction connotes the process of *en*slavement: rendering the subject equal to numbers in a ship's logbook (Smallwood 2009), as exchangeable with nonhuman commodities in slave auctions, and as the subject of slave codes regulating plantation life.

Césaire (2000) equated the process of colonization with thingification, the process of turning the subject into a thing: "Between colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation" (p. 6). Thingification rests on a construction of the body as a racialized body, whereby the body itself is the site and expression of colonial structures. We build on this notion but point out how thingification is never complete. What our empirical cases show is how the enslaved responded to this form of interpellation. In analyzing the cases of Haiti and Liberia we seek to connect global historical sociology and racial formation literature to explore how revolutionary actors in Haiti and Liberian founders understood the structuring force of race and developed novel forms of governance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most important, theorizing political action from this subject position—from the position of the racialized or enslaved person—allows epistemic insights that were foreclosed in modern political vocabulary. To do so, we develop a sociology of colonial subjectivity.

Colonial Subjectivities

That race was a basis of exclusion from the modern body politic is of course not surprising and has been shown by writers in the black radical tradition (Césaire 2000; Du Bois [1935] 1998, 2006; Fanon 1952 [2008]; James 1989; Robinson [1983] 2000; Wynter 2003). We argue that this literature carries important insights for the sociology of race: it suggests that race is neither outside nor subverted to our conceptual political architecture but written into it. In other words, race cannot be thought outside its political structures. This has a series of implications. It is insufficient to point to individualized, demographic characteristics, even if one emphasizes the social construction of corporeal or cultural signifiers of race. Race cannot be thought of solely as a social attribute, separated from colonial power structures. Restricting colonial subjects from accessing the category of the human, race-making came about as and was perpetuated by a colonial, relational, political project. Thus, we need to engage the long history of creating subjects outside the category of humanity and theorize from the position of those who have been excluded from our modern political lineage. This sociology of colonial subjectivity asks, how do those deemed outside the category of modern politics envision their self-determination? How do colonial subjects resist when discourses of liberty silence their existence? How does this resistance upset political structures?

Drawing on the black radical tradition brings into sociology a subaltern standpoint theory (Go 2016). Go suggested that we begin sociological theorizing from the perspectives of the periphery, from the social standpoint of the (globally) oppressed. Subalternity enables a particular epistemic insight that might otherwise be obscured. Emphasizing the subaltern standpoint in the sociology of race would mean starting our theoretical insights from the perspectives of the colonized or racialized, to see how they make political claims and constitute their political world (Dubois 2006). In privileging the voices of colonial racialized subjects in self-determination projects, we gain distinct insights into the struggles against racialized slavery. From the perspectives and positionality of the actors involved in revolutionary or anticolonial struggle we can understand their root motivations and justifications for action.

Du Bois's ([1935] 1998) *Black Reconstruction*, for example, counters conventional arguments about the inability of blacks to govern themselves, as he meticulously documented the role of the enslaved population during the American Civil War and the Reconstruction period. Similarly, C.L.R. James's (1989) *Black Jacobins* shows how the French Revolution was intricately tied to the Haitian Revolution and highlights how Toussaint L'Ouverture sought to overthrow "the aristocracy of the skin" (p. 120). Both pieces emphasize the agency of the (formerly) enslaved populations to two of the most important historical episodes of political modernity (Itzigsohn 2013). In the same vein, Cedric Robinson ([1983] 2000), who built on an often forgotten sociologist, Oliver Cox (1948), suggested that revolutionary action cannot come from the white proletariat, but radical ideas of freedom must start from the thought and action of globally oppressed subjects. Robinson argued that slavery and race were not residual forms of capitalism, as Western Marxism proclaimed, but in fact central to it, so its overthrow must start from the perspective of the enslaved.

Drawing on this black radical tradition, a sociology of colonial subjectivity can overcome the epistemic bifurcation between modern politics and race. Modern politics, emerging from a standpoint in metropolitan Europe, rests on the nexus of citizenship-nation-territory. The basis for freedom and rights is citizenship and one's belonging to the body politic, but the requirement for citizenship is the recognition of one's humanity. For the enslaved and racialized subject then, liberal conceptions of rights could not be the language within which they could assert their freedom. Although black freedom and self-determination were unthinkable to the white colonial world and within our conventional modern political vocabulary, the Haitians and Liberians asserted their right to self-governance. Theorizing from the position of the enslaved and racialized opens up the space to investigate how these actors forged political projects, applied strategies to establish their self-governing states, and formed a new political vocabulary.

METHODS

We examine the strategies for self-determination with two examples, the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) and the development of Liberian republicanism (1822–1847). A series of writings of the past decade have sought to correct the elision of the Haitian Revolution from scholarship on the age of revolution (James 1989; Lawson 2016; Mulich 2017) from theories of universalism (Bhambra

2015, 2016; Dubois 2000; Fick 2000; Getachew 2016) and from meanings of freedom and emancipation (Bogues 2012). Building on this literature, we use the Haitian case to emphasize how the Haitian revolutionary struggle had widespread implications across both the African diaspora and the white colonial world. Moreover, even though the revolutionary actions of Haitians to form an antislavery independent state amid a system of racial slavery is unique, it is part of a larger struggle. Therefore, although less known and with mixed implications, we also investigate how early Liberian American intellectuals justified their visions of antiracist nationalisms to a larger world system that saw their project of self-determination as unthinkable.

As an analytical framework, we use that of the Black Atlantic (Dubois and Scott 2010; Gilroy 1995). We analyze the two cases relationally as opposed to comparatively, because they existed in a global circuit of ideas and cannot be conceptualized as discrete entities (Go and Lawson 2017; Lawson 2015). In both data collection and coding, we coexamined sources that were aimed at justifying the independence movements to their former colonial overseers as well as the wider global community. We pursued this strategy to understand the tactics used to legitimate their independence to the world. To analyze how formerly enslaved people narrated and gave meanings to their actions, we draw on a series of political writings. We borrow this emphasis on discursive signification from William Sewell (1996), who suggested that the storming of the Bastille gained significance because it was associated with the will of the people. In a series of political writings, the Haitians and Liberians signify their political actions through discursively introducing black self-determination, which made black freedom thinkable.

As data, we draw on the constitutions and declarations of independence published during the revolutionary struggles in Haiti as well as letters, correspondence, and parliamentary speeches in the French legislature to examine the geopolitical justifications for revolution in Haiti. Archival data drawn from the drafting documents of the Liberian Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and postindependence speeches given to European and American powers written between 1845 and 1860 provide the basis for the Liberian case. Furthermore, the writings, speeches, and secondary analyses of Edward Blyden (1832–1912), one of the foremost Liberian intellectual leaders, also provide the data for locating the justifications and understandings of

anticolonial resistance to the United States. Most writings are publicly available and reprinted in documentary history readers (Geggus 2014; Hunt 2008). Alongside secondary historical literature, these writings provide an insight into colonial subjectivities. Such perspectives allow us to make a theoretical contribution to the sociology of race, by showing how the epistemic position of a racialized subject in a regime of global slavery necessitates different political strategies, justifications, and imaginations than other political revolts of the time.

HAITIAN FREEDOM STRUGGLES

In 1791, two years after the publication of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, a large-scale revolt broke out in Saint-Domingue, which was comparatively larger in scale than previous acts of rebellion. Enslaved people, particularly in the northern part of the island, protested the use of violent punishment practices, such as the use of the whip, but these protests eventually grew into a movement seeking the abolition of the institution of slavery (Blackburn 2006; Dubois 2004; Fick 2000; James 1989). A local eyewitness, whose account was read to the French legislature on November 30 to solicit military support to quell the revolt, observed,

> The plunderers continued to Clément's plantation, where they killed the owner and the refiner. Day began to break, which helped the miscreants to join up with one another. They spread out over the plain with dreadful shouts, set fire to houses and canes, and murdered the inhabitants. (Archives Parlementaires, 35:460–61, in Geggus 2014:81)

White planters were overwhelmed and angered at the military strategies used by enslaved peoples who may have had considerably more military experience than Europeans because of experience in warfare in Africa. A white royalist planter in Léogane, for example, wrote in his journal on February 12, 1792,

> The number of slaves in rebellion is increasing excessively. . . . They are well armed. . . . They are not disciplined and don't know how to make war, but they are excellent hunters and they use cowardly tricks. . . . They know no other laws than their own whims. . . . They look on the pillaging of our towns as a right owed to their strength, and they are so convinced of it that they even regard it as an act of justice, telling

themselves that they are the cause of our wealth. (Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, D2c/99, "Livre d'Ordres," in Geggus 2014:96)

The planter's writings here suggest that the revolutionaries placed their military acts in a context of historical justice.

Despite news of the uprising in northern Saint-Domingue, abolitionism made slow progress in metropolitan France. The debate regarding slavery and emancipation demonstrates how arduous this process was, particularly in arguments that were driven by the fear of losing the slave labor force in Haiti and anxiety of possible spillover effects to other colonies and the feared loss of profit throughout the empire. Kersaint, a former naval officer, who generally spoke in favor of abolition, expressed how the abolition of slavery could have effects on colonization in general:

> It cannot be denied that when the French nation proclaimed these sacred words, "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights," it did not break the chains of humankind. . . . The fears of our colonists are therefore well founded in that they have everything to fear from the influence of our Revolution on their slaves. The rights of man overturn the system on which rests their fortunes. (Kersaint 1792, in Hunt 1996: 112–15.)

These writings show how much colonial political and economic structures depended on Saint-Domingue and how an antislavery revolution would upset a global world system.

Yet mounting military pressures mobilized by the enslaved made slavery increasingly more difficult to maintain. By 1792, the male *gens de couleur* were granted civil rights; by 1793, Jean-Baptiste Belley, a mulatto, became the representative for the northern provinces of Saint-Domingue in the French National Assembly; and finally, in February 1794, slavery was abolished (Fick 2007). To be clear, because Saint-Domingue remained a dominion of France, it makes sense to think of the first part of the Haitian Revolution as one against slavery, which nevertheless maintained a colonial relationship with France. Toussaint L'Ouverture, formerly enslaved, had led the Saint-Domingue revolutionaries in a military conflict that would lead them to combat not only the French army but also invasions by Britain and Spain. After abolition, Toussaint governed Saint-Domingue and reiterated that the institution of slavery had forever been annihilated, in the Constitution of 1801. Article 3 states, "There can be no slaves on this territory; servitude has been forever abolished. All men are born, live and die there free and French" (Marxists Internet Archive n.d.). One of their earliest revolutionary demands was the banning of the whip and the increase of time to work on their own agricultural lands, thus suggesting that even during the early stages of the revolution, the enslaved formulated a kind of political imaginary that envisioned life beyond slavery (Getachew 2016).

Given the destruction of plantations, the primary governing problem for Toussaint was the attempt to find a way to maintain high levels of agricultural production for exports to France and elsewhere on the basis of a system of free labor. Faced with poor economic conditions, he decided to rebuild the plantation economy and sought in Article 73 of the 1801 Constitution to entice white plantation owners to return to lands (Marxists Internet Archive n.d.) in order to galvanize agricultural production without slave labor. Yet liberated slaves sought to leave behind the plantation economy and its harsh working conditions to focus on small-scale proprietorship and subsistence agriculture. In short, Toussaint encountered a struggle between enhancing black freedom while at the same time maintaining colonial links to France (Gaffield 2007). Foreshadowing history, Toussaint suggested to French generals that were France to attempt to reenslave the population of Saint-Domingue and take away its hard-won freedom, the island would defend its freedom "with the constitution in one hand" (L'Ouverture, 1797, in Geggus 2014:144).

An Independent Antislavery State

In 1802, Napoleon Bonaparte sent the largest French army ever to be sent abroad with the (then still covert) intention of reinstituting slavery. By then, it was clear to the leaders of Saint-Domingue that black freedom would require a break with France. At the heart of Haiti's path to freedom lay the realization that black freedom—the very allowability of black personhood—was opposed to its colonial relationship to France. The formation of the Haitian state was jointly linked to the making of black personhood. The ensuing military conflict was grueling and led to heavy losses on both sides, but the revolutionaries forced the French to surrender a second time in November 1803. By January 1804, Jean-Jacques Dessalines had become the first governor general of the independent Haiti, the name given to the island by its indigenous Taino peoples, a name that symbolically rids the island of European influence.

The Declaration of Independence (January 1, 1804), composed by Dessalines's secretary, Louis Boisrond Tonnerre, addresses the "people of Haiti" to proclaim its independence to ensure freedom:

> Citizens, it is not enough to have driven out of your country the barbarians who have blooded it for two centuries. It is not enough to have put an end to the persistent factions that, one after the other, made sport with the figment of freedom that France dangled before your eyes. With one final act of national authority, we must ensure forever the reign of liberty in the land where it was born. We must deny the inhuman government that for long has held our minds in humiliating thralldom any hope of reenslaving us. In short, we must live independent or die. . . . Take therefore from my hands the oath to live free and independent, and to prefer death to anything that might tend to reenslave you. Swear to hunt down forever traitors and enemies of our independence. (Tonnerre, 1804, in Geggus 2014:180)

An independent Haiti stood in opposition to the dominant principle of the world order at the time: it established itself at a time when slavery and the slave trade were still at their heyday within the global system.

As opposed to the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen or the American Declaration of Independence, the 1804 Haitian declaration does not use the language of rights as rooted in a conception of "Man" but underlines the birth of the Haitian state from its antislavery struggle (Geggus 2014:180). The declaration's heroism bears the imprint of the country's violent past, seeking to put into writing the making of the free black person. Freedom, to Dessalines, who governed the young Haitian state while confronting the continual threat of French reinvasion, was not an abstract right but a daily project that reestablished Haitian livelihoods and to remove the threat of French attack. The early Haitian state was intent on preserving its freedom:

> Know that you have achieved nothing until you have set a terrible but just example to other nations of the vengeance a people must take when it is proud to have regained its freedom and is determined to maintain it. Let us strike fear into all those who would dare to try and snatch it away from us! (Tonnerre, 1804, in Geggus 2014:180)

For the neighboring imperial powers, the fear of the spread of a revolution by the enslaved was palpable. Although the declaration proclaimed that Haiti did not intend to export the revolution, it is questionable how reassuring this statement was to surrounding imperial powers so deeply invested in slavery.

On February 22, 1804, Dessalines launched a campaign of executions of colonials involved in massacres during the revolution. Dessalines compared Haiti with Guadeloupe and Martinique, where the French had managed to reestablished slavery (Dessalines, in Geggus 2014:182). The executions were

> to warn all the nations that while we give refuge and protection to those who act toward us with good faith and friendship nothing will deter our vengeance against the assassins who have taken pleasure in bathing in the blood of the innocent children of Haiti. (Jean-Jacques Dessalines, "Lois et Actes sous le Règne de Jean-Jacques Dessalines," in Ferrer 2014:194)

These executions fed into the "black threat" rhetoric in imperial metropoles and produced sensationalist headlines in European and American media, suggesting the "massacre of whites in St. Domingue" (Gaffield 2007). "Gripped by fear of contagious slave uprising," Sheller (2000) wrote, "Europeans articulated their claims to 'whiteness' and 'civility' in contradistinction to Haitian 'barbarism' through a set of stories that can be collectively referred to as the 'Haytian Fear'" (p. 71).

Haiti, the first black independent and antislavery state, was shunned by the global community. The French prevented ships from trading with Haiti, not a single government recognized Haitian independence at the time of the declaration, and for decades after, Haiti was not an invited guest at diplomatic tables (Ferrer 2014; Sheller 2000). However, the Constitution of May 20, 1805, reasserting the establishment of an antislavery Haiti, was widely publicized in the United States (Fischer 2004; Gaffield 2007). It proclaims, once more: "Article 1: The people inhabiting the island formerly called St. Domingo, hereby agree to form themselves into a free state sovereign and independent of any other power in the universe, under the name of empire of Hayti" (Corbett 1999). Establishing itself as an "empire" suggests that Haiti sought to insert itself as a free and sovereign state into a global community of empires. Article 2 reiterates, "Slavery is forever abolished" (Corbett 1999).

The 1805 Constitution formulated principles that rejected the influence of imperial powers, which had occurred via the plantation economy.

For this reason, Article 12 declared that "no white person, of whatever nationality shall set foot on this territory with the title of master or proprietor nor, in the future, acquire property here" (Corbett 1999). That was a way of delinking proprietorship and white power. Article 14 abolished "distinctions of color" whereby all Haitian citizens were to be declared "black." Blackness did not refer to a phenotype but to a political, anticolonial position during the revolution, thus including those who had fought on the side of the enslaved (e.g., as Article 13 suggests, the white wives of Haitians). By abolishing racial categories, the constitution strove to eliminate the grounds for racial discrimination while at the same time elevating blackness as the unifying position of those obtaining citizenship to the Haitian state (Bhambra 2015, 2016).

Haiti's Global Influence

As Genovese (2006) argued, the Haitian revolution served as an inspiration for freedom for enslaved people across the Atlantic system. What is more, the Haitians had established themselves with an independent state, reigning over a territory, building state institutions, and proclaiming its mission of antislavery amid a global system premised on racial slavery. As Julius Scott (1986) detailed in "Common Wind," news of the Haitian Revolution traveled throughout the African diaspora via ports, ships, and other economies of exchange. The following song was heard on the streets of Kingston, Jamaica, in 1799: "One, two, tree, All de same; Black, white, brown, All de same: All de same" (Renny, 1807, p. 241, in Geggus 2014:188). Just as in Jamaica, news of the revolution spread to enslaved people in Venezuela, where the chorus "They'd better watch out!" was sung amid its black population (Venezuelan song, 1801, in Geggus 2014:188). Similarly, Ferrer (2014) documented,

> Subversive mentions of Haiti in sugar houses and on street corners, the appearance of medallions of Dessalines in Brazil in 1805 or printed images of Christophe passed hand to hand in Havana in 1811, surely suggest the circulation of Haiti, materially culturally, and spiritually. (p. 209)

The position of Haiti in the middle of the Caribbean islands, an area still dominated by slavery, was in itself a profound upset to this world order.

To the colonial world, however, Haiti's existence on the international stage was deeply scorned. The revolution's violence and the specter of slave revolt allowed the French to build a picture of Haiti as a "savage nation," incapable of being part of an international community. In his doctoral dissertation "The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America 1638–1870," W.E.B. Du Bois ([1896] 2007:73–75) highlighted how American states sought to stem the tide of trade among the United States, the West Indies, and Africa to avoid news of the revolution reaching the American enslaved and prompting mass uprisings. The United States did not recognize Haiti as an independent nation until 1862 (Blackburn 2006).

In resignifying blackness as a political stance against slavery, Haitians saw Haiti as a safe haven for all black subjects, granting asylum to "all Africans and Indians, and those of their blood" (Fischer 2004; Getachew 2016). According to Getachew (2016), about 6,000 to 13,000 African Americans took refuge in Haiti. This suggests that whereas citizenship rights were tied to nationhood in France, black freedom was a transnational institution. They pointed out how the discourses of rights in France and in the United States had been limited to the white population and therefore forged a much more universal conception of rights-bearing personhood. However, in a climate of international hostility, Haiti entered a period of severe hardship and economic and political restrictions that were to haunt the nation for centuries.

LIBERIA'S CHECKERED INDEPENDENCE

Although the Liberian process toward independence from the United States did not follow a revolutionary trajectory in the same manner as Haiti, Liberian independence and the settlement of West Africa by formerly enslaved black Americans was no less a striking out against a world system. European- or American-controlled spaces rejected the possibility of black freedom, so Liberian Americans sought to find an avenue to make this thinkable. Liberia represents a case that does not fit easily into standard motifs of settler colonialism, nor does it parallel the lofty ideals of the Haitian Revolution. Although the establishment and ultimate freedoms created in the Liberian Republic by its year of independence in 1847 provided rights and liberties to the African American colonists residing there, it suppressed and stripped the indigenous populations of theirs entirely, leading to brutal tactics of colonization (Kazanjian 2011). However, the history of Liberian settlement must be understood within the context of slavery from which Liberian Americans sought to escape (Clegg

2004:6). The founding documents of Liberian independence, their declaration and supporting early propositions, demonstrate a claim to freedom that links humanity and self-determination. This agency speaks not only to national sovereignty but to a sovereignty that allows being black and free within a global system still very much connected to slavery.

Convergent Desires for Expatriation: Colonialism and Emancipation

The germination of Liberian-American colonization blossomed from several divergent imperatives. In the 1800s, the young United States remained deeply rooted in the Atlantic international and internal domestic slave trade. As calls for abolition rose domestically, in the Caribbean, and in Europe (Dubois 2004; James 1989), abolitionists and slaveowners alike sought to find a solution to their concern over free black mobility, citizenship, and free existence (Fairhead et al. 2003; Jefferson [1785] 2011). Much like during the Haitian Revolution, when the United States feared revolutionary ideas seeping into its own land, abolitionists, although resentful of the institution, feared the consequences of untrammeled black agency, not least in its implications upon white racial purity (Clegg 2004).

Colonization provided a convenient method of removing the now free black population to a space away from and out of reach of American enslavement while preventing racial mixture in social or biological spheres (Clegg 2004; Fairhead et al. 2003:8). Although abolitionists feared the possibilities of black freedom in America and lamented the equality that would come with it, slaveholders also warmed to colonization as they feared emancipation and the revolting capabilities of their formerly enslaved to rise against them (Abasiattai 1992; Fairhead et al. 2003; Gershoni 1985). Another group, religious evangelicals, saw the possibility of black repatriation to Africa as an opportunity for an American civilizing mission.

However, a third group also reflected a nascent and novel political position that saw black revolutionary freedom as accessible only in Africa. This group recognized the racist sentiment in the United States that emancipation would not bring the liberal freedoms desired from the state. Blyden (1905) highlighted the social and interpersonal limitations of black existence presented to the African in Europe or the United States:

But the man of the country [Africa] is still an unapproachable mystery to the outside world. He is everywhere prima facie a stranger. Nowhere can he by any simulation of look, by any remote resemblance be lost in a foreign crowd. In Asia, Europe, and America, he is at once "spotted" as a peculiar being—sat generis. . . . During a visit to Black pool many years ago . . . I noticed that a nurse having two children with her, could not keep her eyes from the spot where I stood. . . . After a while she heard me speak to one of the gentlemen who were with me . . . "Look, look there is a black man and he speaks English." . . . To me the incident was an illustration of what I am now endeavoring to point out to you—the impression made by the colour of the Negro upon the unsophisticated of a foreign race. (p. 134–35)

For Blyden, this impossibility of recognition, foreshadowing heavily the writings of Fanon, suggested the incommensurability of the embodied black experience in Europe or the Americas without a distinct African nationalism. In this moment Blyden highlighted the perpetual otherness of the black person in Europe, always read first as "Negro," separate and apart from the civilization of Europe. This duality underlies Blyden's pan-Africanist charge. For Blyden, and what is evident in the claims to Liberian sovereignty, race as a global signifier flattens any nuance of experience of those considered Negro, limiting any authentic, agentic action as humans among humans (Tibebu 2012:18). However, the formation of African spaces for Africans would, Blyden thought, allow a unification and an embrace of the shared experience of oppression and the freedom to reflect the diversity of African cultural experience freed from the universal signifier of Negro.

This call for black resettlement, echoed by the first Liberian settlers and encapsulated by Blyden in Africa, was met with support from some free blacks in the United States. Some recognized the limitations of their citizenship in the United States and searched for new opportunities, whereas others felt it to be a surrender to the oppressive ideologies of the nation to which they had provided free labor, for which they had bled and died. Those who did emigrate, however, viewed the mission as a black nationalist one, akin to Blyden, to build a nation run by freed slaves. All but 200 of the first 3,000 African Americans destined for the settlement of Liberia were from slave states and were emancipated only through an agreement to leave the country as part of the Liberian colonization project. Later settlers in Liberia saw the threat of being captured and enslaved once more under the Fugitive Slave Law of 1852 as a major impetus for departure (Fairhead et al. 2003:10).

In 1816 the American Colonization Society (ACS) was formed, originally under the name Society for Colonizing Free People of Color in the United States (Fairhead et al. 2003). Liberia was chosen as the region for colonial settlement by the ACS, and much propaganda highlighting the benefits of that land was distributed. In 1822, the voyagers on the *Elizabeth* settled at Cape Mesurado, known today as Monrovia, the capital of Liberia.

Along with the resettled African Americans, the first voyages to Liberia brought with them a constitution drawn up by the ACS stipulating that all executive, legislative, and judicial power over the colony be retained under authority of the colonial governor, appointed by the managers of the ACS itself. These governors were white men, and although the constitution made dispensations that all rights and privileges of U.S. citizens would be afforded to the settlers and laid the groundwork for some ultimate withdrawal of the ACS as the colonial authority, this arrangement contradicted the hopes of the settlers, who fully intended for Liberia to be governed for and as a free black republic (Abasiattai 1992:112).

Settlers lodged grievances against the ACS as early as 1823 regarding the unlimited power of the governor to set land and labor rights and led a large-scale protest, seizing the ACS's arsenal and food store (Abasiattai 1992:112). This event prompted the revision of the constitution, which provided a vehicle for adult men to elect a colonial council for the purposes of creating new legislation. However, the colonial governor still possessed total veto power over the council. In the 1830s, the repatriates once again challenged the ACS for greater self-determination, attacking the veto power of the governor and his right to appoint public officers and levy taxes. A third constitution was written, amending the veto power in 1839 and establishing the colony as a commonwealth, through which franchise could be defined and rights delineated more completely (Gershoni 1985:12). In 1841, the ACS appointed its first black governor, ostensibly ceding total power over the inner workings of the domain to the repatriates. However, the challenges facing the sustainable future of the Liberian project were hardly ameliorated at this point.

Legitimating Independence

For several decades, Liberia had struggled to establish itself as an effective trading entity within the larger Atlantic system. The demise of white control in Liberia occurred at the same time that the ACS in the United States was growing disinterested in the colonization project and most of all its internal affairs (Abasiattai 1992). Internal self-determination was largely achieved within the Liberian commonwealth. However, in the eyes of wealthy trading nations, Liberia's position as a colonial satellite meant that it could not impose any taxes or duties upon trading vessels entering its ports (Abasiattai 1992). They argued that Liberia was not a political entity and had no right to impose laws as if it were (Gershoni 1985:13). In 1845, Liberia confiscated a British trading vessel for refusing to pay duties. In retaliation, the British Navy seized a Liberian ship off the coast of neighboring Sierra Leone. The Liberian governor, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, filed a letter of protest with the British government, and the U.S. government responded by informing Britain of its relationship with Liberia, requesting that it recognize its sovereignty. Britain responded that it would not recognize the sovereignty of Liberia, as it was not a state for which its laws could be honored.

In January 1845, the Liberian Colonial Council passed a resolution requesting formal independence from the ACS, which accepted and suggested that the council publish a declaration of independence declaring Liberia's character as a sovereign and independent state (Abasiattai 1992:114). A national referendum on independence was held, and in 1847 Liberia declared itself a sovereign nation. Although the dual pressures of internal domination by the former ACS governors and the external threats to sustainable trade and global relations were the primary causes for the claim to independence, the Liberian Declaration of Independence itself speaks much more to the character of the independence mission and vastly different basis from which the repatriated Liberians drew their claims to a sovereign state.

In the Declaration of Independence, Liberia's founding figures put forward a claim to sovereignty that justified their statehood through claims that connected their Liberian experience to those preceding, rooted in the Atlantic slave trade and American slavery. In making similar claims to those successfully revolted nations of France and the United States to life and liberty, to institute government and hold property, the Liberians made a claim to freedom first from the United States and then from the ACS:

> We respectfully ask their [the United States] attention to the following facts: . . . We, the people of the Republic of Liberia, were

originally inhabitants of the United States of North America. In some parts of that country we were debarred by law from all rights and privileges of man—in other parts, public sentiment, more powerful than law, frowned us down. (Teague 1847:1)

The Liberian framers initially claimed similar grievances to those of the United States. They claimed that they were not represented in government and were taxed without representation, while also drawing explicitly on their experience as enslaved and oppressed:

> We were compelled to contribute to the resources of a country, which gave us no protection. We were made a separate and distinct class, and against us every avenue of improvement was effectively closed. . . . All hope of a favorable change in our country was thus wholly extinguished in our bosoms, and we looked with anxiety for some asylum from the deep degradation. (Teague 1847:2)

To claim sovereignty for Liberia, the framers had to also justify their leaving the United States at the outset. Concurrently, they demonstrated how their position within the American system of governance did not and could never guarantee the full rights of citizenship despite emancipation and formal complaint. In the Liberian plea to asylum from the degradation and dehumanization of the United States, they asserted the human need for black self-representation in Liberia, and with the ascension of a black governor to Liberia, the founders reflected that this self-determination had been largely gained:

> For years past, the American Colonization Society has virtually withdrawn from all direct and active part in the administration of the government, except in the appointment of the governor, who is also a colonist, for the apparent purpose of testing the ability of the people to conduct the affairs of government, and no complaint of crude legislation, nor of mismanagement, nor of mal-administration has yet been heard. (Teague 1847:2)

However, the immutable and enduring claim and justification for independence in the case of Liberia lay not solely in the right to self-determination over the domain of Liberia and the right to colonize (Armistead et al. 1848) but in the recognition of that self-determination in the community of nations across the world.

Directly referencing the British claims against Liberian sovereignty, the founders wrote,

> As our territory has extended and our population increased our commerce has also increased. The flags of most civilized nations of the earth float in our harbors, and their merchants are opening an honorable and profitable trade . . . as they have become more frequent and to more numerous points of our extended coast, questions have arisen which, it is supposed, can be adjusted only by agreement between sovereign powers. (Teague 1847:3)

What the Liberian founders made painfully clear in their declaration is that for a black republic to persist, it is not sufficient to be both black and self-determining, but that right to self-determination must be recognized, not only by the nation or entity from which that independence is gained but also the world at large. Self-determination alone, with all the rights understood to be inalienably entitled to man, rights deprived of them through the subject status of slave and then race more purely in the United States, was not sufficient either to achieve sufficient independence or maintain that freedom. Whereas the American Declaration of Independence requested freedom from George III and Great Britain and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen rejected the powers of the king and demanded that power rest with the people, the Liberian declaration made a double move. They claimed independence from the United States and the ACS on the basis of past grievances and oppression suffered under slavery. They also made their appeal to the larger world system, on which they knew they had to rely in order to remain integrated in the global economy. To the Liberian framers, their self-determination rested in the global recognition of that right as both a state and an economic actor in global trade. These two strivings, for self-determination and global recognition, are the pivots upon which Liberian independence oscillated. Thus, the possibilities of a black republic, "an asylum from the most grinding oppression" (Teague 1847:2), could be possible only if Liberia were a global actor, free to lobby for trade, demand customs and taxes, and operate according to existing international trade practices of the time.

CONCLUSIONS

Haiti's and Liberia's struggles for self-determination demonstrate how enslaved and formerly enslaved actors rethought modern politics at the time,

instituting themselves as free, self-governing black people. Prior to the existence of each of these nations, self-determination by black subjects in European colonial spaces was impossible, and each sought, through differing tactics, to carve out that possibility in the face of a transatlantic structure of slavery. In this article we demonstrate how Haitian and Liberian American founders responded to colonial structures, though in Liberia reproducing them for their own ends. In doing so we demonstrate the importance of colonial subjectivities to gain insights into oppression and counter-racist action.

We highlight the ways in which the drive for self-determination challenged global antiblack oppression and was legitimated on the world stage. In opposition to the legacy of Western modern politics, which systematically excluded racialized subjects from freedom, we turn to these cases to see how they made their claims. We demonstrate the understanding on the part of Haitian and Liberian American actors of how modern politics was shaped in opposition to black subjects, and we suggest that to study race, racisms, and the legacies of slavery, it is necessary to study how colonized and enslaved subjects responded to colonial structures and sought avenues to escape them. It is hardly surprising that ideas of abolition were trafficked globally among the enslaved, the formerly enslaved, or the people of Africa before it was ever made a reality in the eyes of Europe. Nevertheless, more historical sociological work needs to take up the mantle of examining these networks of revolutionary thought and practice, as they will likely highlight unrecognized forms of anticolonial action that have not yet been theorized in existing scholarship.

Finally, the ways in which black protest and dissent are made legible to power is especially pertinent in our current historical moment. As movements struggle to demonstrate exhaustively through myriad strategies that black lives do or should matter in the face of overwhelming violence, scholarship must turn its attention to such pressing questions. The critical importance of colonial subjectivities in the production of the modern world deserves critical and deep sociological inquiry.

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