

## Chapter 6

### Growth in Diaspora and Decline in the Homeland

For a greater part of the nineteenth century, the Kru homeland and diaspora were deeply influenced by the social, political, and economic forces enacted by the Liberian state.<sup>658</sup> From its founding in 1822, the colony of Liberia excluded the Kru from citizenship. Thereafter, the Kru had to contend with the interests of the American Colonization Society in order to continue their labor migration with the British. The capital, Monrovia, became the unique site of two Kru diaspora communities that were linked with the British trade network and European factories, yet founded independently. Surfboats remained at the center of Kru activity in Monrovia as they transported people and commodities ship and shore-side and continued to obtain contracts for service on ships sailing the coast.

As the ACS established colonies in the vicinity of the Kru Coast in the 1830s, a series of treaties were negotiated to maintain peace between their communities and the Kru amid mounting tensions. However, the establishment of the Liberian state in 1847 increased political tensions through state-sanctioned land acquisition and the implementation of Port of Entry Laws, which imposed a tax on Kru laborers. Liberian State measures fostered competition between the British and French, which compelled some Kru to accept an increase in French contracts in Grand Bassam in order to evade an oppressive regime of taxation.<sup>659</sup> Legislation impeded the authority of the *krogba* and headmen, and by the 1870s led to a shift in the Kru economy towards increased palm oil production. Equally disruptive was the state strategy to support missions on the Kru Coast, which resulted in greater conversion rates to Christianity amongst the Kru. In response to all of these factors, Kru migration to their diaspora communities in ports in West Africa increased in the later decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>660</sup>

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**658** The ACS sponsored colony in Cape Mesurado was known as the colony of Liberia, or simply Liberia, in the period between 1822 and 1846. See Tom Shick, "A Quantitative Analysis of Liberian Colonization From 1820 to 1843 with Special Reference to Mortality," *The Journal of African History* 7, no. 1 (1971): 45.

**659** Henry Astbury Leveson, *The Forest and the Field* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1874), 272.

**660** Davis, *Ethnohistorical*, 47.

## Colony of Liberia

The creation of the colony of Liberia was welcomed by many American planters as an ideal opportunity for dealing with the United States' growing free Black population. Their population had more than tripled from 59,466 in 1790 to 186,466 in 1810.<sup>661</sup> By 1816, their number had increased to more than 200,000 compared with 1.5 million enslaved Africans.<sup>662</sup> Free Blacks were thought by some to pose a direct threat to the social order informed by the plantocracy in the southern states.<sup>663</sup>

At the heart of this colonial project was the ACS. Founded in 1816, it was an association whose proclaimed aim was "to colonize, with their own consent, on the coast of Africa or in such other place as Congress shall deem expedient, the people of colour in our country."<sup>664</sup> Founder of the ACS, Virginia federalist, Charles Fenton Mercer, applied for federal funds via the Virginia Assembly in order to establish the colony of Liberia at Cape Mesurado.<sup>665</sup> ACS agents closely observed the Colony of Sierra Leone and hoped to create a vibrant settlement of their own at Cape Mesurado that would foster trade and growth for a settler population.

Cape Mesurado was selected as the ideal location for trade and colonial expansion because it had served as a regular port-of-call for American commercial ships for at least a decade and European vessels for several centuries.<sup>666</sup> Kru seamen were recorded as being hired on European merchant ships at the Cape since at least the first decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>667</sup> Cape Mesurado served as a frequent port-of-call for Royal Navy ships engaged in the suppression of the trans-Atlantic slave trades where Kru seamen were regularly hired for service.

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<sup>661</sup> Thomas Shick, *Behold the Promised Land* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1980), 13.

<sup>662</sup> Charles I. Foster, "The Colonization of Free Negroes, in Liberia, 1816–1835," *The Journal of Negro History* 38, no. 1 (1953): 41.

<sup>663</sup> For a discussion on the politics informing the creation of the colony of Liberia and the ACS see George W. Brown, *The Economic History of Liberia* (Washington: Washington Associated Publishers, Inc., 1941), 9–10; Early Lee Fox, *The American Colonization Society, 1817–1840* (1919; repr., Whitefish, MO: Kessinger Publishers, 2007), 1–25; Allan Yarema, *The American Colonization Society: An Avenue to Freedom?* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2006), 1–14; Philip John Staudenraus, *The History of the American Colonization Society*, vol. 1 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1958), 1–75.

<sup>664</sup> Brown, *Economic History*, 9–10; Fraenkel, *Tribe*, 4.

<sup>665</sup> Mary Tyler McGraw, "Free Blacks and African Colonization, 1816–1832," *Journal of American Studies* 21, no. 2 (1987): 208.

<sup>666</sup> Swan, "Memoranda," 318–320.

<sup>667</sup> Fraenkel, *Tribe*, 71, 77.

The first settlers landed at Cape Mesurado on January 7, 1822. ACS agents labelled the settlers “Americo-Liberians” (a term with which they self-identified) in the colony based on their heritage in the Americas and their association with the newly formed colony of Liberia.<sup>668</sup> They received plots of land from ACS agents, established stores, and constructed buildings.<sup>669</sup> Agents provided tools to the settlers for cultivation.<sup>670</sup> When the colonists arrived at the Cape, there was a Kru migrant settlement in the southwest corner of Bushrod Island.<sup>671</sup> ACS agent, Jehudi Ashmun estimated the Kru population on Bushrod Island to be 50.<sup>672</sup> Fraenkel suggests that the Kru community dated to at least the first decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>673</sup> In 1822, Ashmun noted the following:

It is proper, in this place, to avert to a small hamlet placed on the beach one mile to the northward of the settlement, belonging to a people entirely distinct in origin, language and character, from all their neighbours. These are the Kroomen, well known by foreigners visiting the coast, as the watermen and pilots of the country. They originate from a populous maritime tribe, whose country is Settra-Kroo, near Cape Palmas.<sup>674</sup>

Ashmun was well aware of their reputation as seamen for hire. Their community was distinct from Krutown in Sierra Leone because it had developed independent of the British. The possibility of working for wages had led Kru residing between the Cestos and Grand Cess Rivers in the Proper Kru region to go west to Cape Mesurado, and find employment on British, French, Dutch, German, and American vessels and in factories.<sup>675</sup>

The composition of the Kru community gradually shifted in the nineteenth century as other *dako* besides the Proper Kru came to represent the majority

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**668** Shick, *Behold*, 72; Thomas Sabin, “The Making of the Americo-Liberian Community: A Study of Politics and Society in Nineteenth Century Liberia” (Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1974), 81.

**669** Paul Finkelman, ed., *Encyclopedia of African-American History, 1619–1895: From the Colonial Period to the Age of Frederick Douglass*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 58.

**670** Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 10; Richard West, *Back to Africa: A History of Sierra Leone and Liberia* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), 108–111.

**671** Breitborde, “Structural,” 70, 71, 112–114.

**672** Jehudi Ashmun, *History of the American Colony in Liberia from December 1821 to 1823* (Washington: Way & Gideon, 1826), 7.

**673** Fraenkel, *Tribe*, 71.

**674** Ashmun, *History*, 6.

**675** Svend E. Holsoe, “A Study of Relations between Settlers and Indigenous Peoples in Western Liberia, 1821–1847,” *African Historical Studies* 4, no. 2 (1971): 342; Ralph Randolph Gurley, *Life of Jehudi Ashmun, Late Colonial Agent: With an Appendix containing Extracts from His Journal and Other Writings; with a Brief Sketch of the Life of the Rev. Lott Cary* (New York: Leavitt, Lord and Co., 1835), 160, 238–239.



**Figure 6.1:** Krootown, Monrovia, c. 1886.  
Source: Johann Büttföcker, “Kroo Town bei Monrovia, mit einer Gruppe von Kronegern. Maker,” 1886, accessed on June 1, 2017, <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/460774605603362096/>.

of laborers in Monrovia including Jloh Kru from Sasstown and Gbeta Kru from Picaninny Cess on the Kru Coast.<sup>676</sup> Tonkin and Davis have suggested that their towns on the Kru Coast developed in the nineteenth century. The Jloh are believed to have migrated from east of the Cavalla River at an unknown date before eventually being associated with the creation of Sasstown around 1840.<sup>677</sup> The Gbeta Kru formed the town Picaninny Cess to the northwest of Grand Cess. They are believed to have emigrated from the St. John River in Bassa country before establishing themselves in Picaninny Cess.<sup>678</sup>

Kru were one migrant community amongst indigenous populations in the vicinity of Cape Mesurado which included the Dei, Gola, and Kondo. Samuel Wilkeson made an early reference to “Krootown” in 1825.<sup>679</sup> However, it was not until the 1830s that there were frequent references to a Monrovia Krutown in the *African Repository* and other writings of the period. The earliest known photograph dates to 1886 (Figure 6.1).<sup>680</sup>

Similar to the Krutown that developed in Freetown, Kru resided next to the waterside on the bank of the Mesurado River (Figure 6.2), which was essential due to the nature of their work. They fished for subsistence and sold their catch locally. Although, in 1872, Kru were discouraged from selling fish at the market because authorities were concerned about flooding the market and

<sup>676</sup> Fraenkel, *Tribe*, 77.

<sup>677</sup> Davis, *Ethnohistorical*, 106–107; Tonkin, *Narrating*, 22.

<sup>678</sup> Davis, *Ethnohistorical*, 130.

<sup>679</sup> Samuel Wilkeson, *A Concise History of the Commencement, Progress and Present Condition of the American Colonies in Liberia* (Washington: Madisonian Office, 1839), 20. Although Wilkeson published his book in 1839, he refers to Krootown in a section referring to events in 1825.

<sup>680</sup> “Municipal Legislation at Monrovia,” *African Repository* 12, no. 5 (1836): 163; *African Repository* 48 (1872): 186; *A Manual to Accompany Colton’s Missionary Map of the World* (New York: G.W. & C.B. Colton & Co., 1878), 53; “Elevation of the Natives,” *African Repository* 51, no. 2 (1875): 125.



**Figure 6.2:** Krootown, Monrovia c. 1903.  
Source: Unknown Photographer. Krootown, Monrovia, Postcard, Union Postale Universelle, 1903.

they confiscated fish sold in the colony during that period.<sup>681</sup> As seen in Figure 6.2, living on the riverbank allowed Kru easy access to European and American ships for trade and employment. The size of the Kru population in Monrovia in the early nineteenth century is unknown. Yet, it is reasonable to suggest that the population was far less than the number of Kru in Freetown because they were not employed on steady contracts with the British in Monrovia. Rather, their employment more closely resembled their hiring practices on the Kru Coast, which depended on passing or docking ships. Büttikofer estimated the population to be 1,000 in the 1880s.<sup>682</sup> Similar to Freetown, Krootown was administered by a headman known as the “Kru Governor”.<sup>683</sup> They played a similar role in Monrovia organizing labor and maintaining order.

Eventually, a second Krootown developed on the other bank of the Mesurado River.<sup>684</sup> It was smaller and was more akin to a makeshift settlement than an official Krootown. In 1886, Büttikofer differentiated the two communities:

Whereas the Krootown at Monrovia supplies the Dutch factory with labourers and sailors, the Woermann factory draws the same almost exclusive from the other, which therefore is also called German Krootown. It is smaller though, and now also built anew, as a couple of years ago the town stood quite close to the mouth of the river on the so-called *Kroo-point*.<sup>685</sup>

Beyond supplying British ships with seamen, both Krootowns catered to the labor demands of Dutch and German factories by supplying workers. The establishment of German Krootown suggests that Kru continued to live close to their workplaces and were willing to create new communities in any location where they

<sup>681</sup> Anonymous, “Liberian Intelligence,” *African Repository* 48, no. 6 (1872): 186.

<sup>682</sup> Büttikofer, *Travel*, 49.

<sup>683</sup> Fraenkel, *Tribe*, 89.

<sup>684</sup> Büttikofer, *Travel*, 49.

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

had the opportunity to earn steady wages. Their duties included transporting cargo from factory to ship before departure for Europe. Kru residing in German Krootown supplied docked ships with coal that was stored in the Woermann factory. Kru worked at many Woermann factories on the African coast between Monrovia and Swakopmund in South West Africa.<sup>686</sup> German companies tended to hire Kru laborers in Monrovia, which meant that most Kru working on contract came from the Proper Kru, Gbeta, and Jloh *dakwe*.<sup>687</sup>

Monrovia became the capital of the colony of Liberia in 1824, whose Constitution written in 1825 provided ACS agents with the power to enforce laws, defined Americo-Liberian settler rights, and laid the legal framework for future colonies.<sup>688</sup> Under the Constitution, the ACS would appoint a governor to head each colony as they were established on the coast, gradually forming a commonwealth. Americo-Liberian settlers could run for office, and it was their responsibility to elect a deputy governor in each settlement. The Constitution stipulated that as each colony was formed it would be allocated ten seats in a commonwealth government and the deputy governor held the power to enact laws, which could be subject to a veto by the governor.<sup>689</sup> However, Kru, Dei, Gola, and Kondo were excluded from the Constitution and, consequently, tensions between Americo-Liberians and indigenous peoples grew.

Besides Americo-Liberians, Liberated Africans were given the rights and benefits of citizenship. They established settlements in the colony, served in militias, and worked as domestic laborers in Americo-Liberian households.<sup>690</sup> They also labored as farmers and sold their produce in local markets.<sup>691</sup> Claude Clegg III has argued that their communities served as a “buffer zone” between Amer-

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**686** Kru worked on Woermann factories in Victoria, Doula, Cape Lopez, Gabon and Swakopmund. See Theodor Bohner, *Die Woermanns* (Berlin: Brücke zur Heimat, 1935), 133.

**687** Sundiata, “Rise,” 28.

**688** John Bernanrd Blamo, “Nation-Building in Liberia as Revealed by Symbol Analysis,” (Ph.D. thesis, Boston University, 1969), 43; Huberich, *Political*, 1: 212–213, 272–286, 2: 1029.

**689** Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 12; Archibald Alexander, *A History of Colonization on the Western Coast of Africa* (1846; repr., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 569.

**690** Harrison Akingbade, “The Liberian Settlers and the Campaign Against the Slave Trade, 1825–1865,” *Africa Rivista trimestrale di studi e document tazione dell’Istituto italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente* 38, no. 3 (1983): 342, 345; A. Doris Banks Henries, *The Liberian Nation* (New York: Herman Jaffe Publishers, 1954), 58; Anonymous, “Hostile Movement among the Natives of the Dey Country,” *Liberian Herald* 3 (1832): 3; Anonymous, “Mechlin to Gurley, April 1832,” *African Repository* 8, no. 5 (1832): 130–136.

**691** Anonymous, *African Repository* 8, no. 3 (1833): 93–94.

ico-Liberians and indigenous populations.<sup>692</sup> Ashmun established a settlement for Liberated Africans called New Georgia on Bushrod Island, separate from Kru-town and Americo-Liberians.<sup>693</sup>

Friction between Americo-Liberian settlers and Kru erupted in periodic skirmishes in 1825 in direct response to the Constitution.<sup>694</sup> Despite their differences, ACS agents and Americo-Liberian settlers understood the economic value of hiring Kru whom they viewed as “serviceable.”<sup>695</sup> In 1826, the “Kroo nation” signed treaties with ACS agents in Monrovia. The Kru received an annual tribute of 100 bars of iron in order to keep the peace and in recognition of their invaluable potential as a workforce.<sup>696</sup> Moreover, their recognition as a “nation” shows that the Kru had carved out a distinct homeland and diaspora in the nineteenth century that was recognized by ACS agents and Europeans alike.

Controlling the flow of Kru labor was a primary concern in the colony of Liberia. In 1835, Monrovia Town Council passed an ordinance declaring procedures that all Kru laborers had to follow upon their arrival at Krootown. In 1836, the ordinance was published and stated the following:

All Kroomen... residing, or who may hereafter reside at Krootown, on this side of the Mesurado river, shall pay annually, to the Town of Monrovia, the sum of one dollar and fifty cents, as a tax, and do any fatigue duty that may be required of them by the President of the Town Council... That all Kroomen... arriving at thus place for the purpose of laboring or residing, shall report themselves within five days after their arrival, to the President of the Town Council; and receive a certificate, – which certificate shall grant them permission to reside in Krootown, and for which certificate they shall pay the sum of one dollar and fifty cents.<sup>697</sup>

Kru had to pay an annual fee and obtain a certificate in order to reside in Monrovia. All Kru and other indigenous peoples who resided in Monrovia and were not employed by its citizens could be arrested and forced to serve hard labor.<sup>698</sup> The ordinance affected the mobility of the Kru diaspora community who had lived in the vicinity of Monrovia for decades before the arrival of the Americo-Li-

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**692** Claude Andrew Clegg III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 94.

**693** *Ibid.*, 93.

**694** Jehudi Ashmun, “Relations of the Colony with Kroomen,” *African Repository* 2, no. 3 (1826): 96–97.

**695** *Ibid.*, 96.

**696** *Ibid.*, 96–97.

**697** Anonymous, “Municipal Legislation at Monrovia,” *African Repository* 12, no. 5 (1836): 163.

**698** Huberich, *Political*, 2: 508; Fraenkel, *Tribe*, 13.



berian settlers. The council wanted to control their labor to ensure that the colony generated an income through taxation.

The ACS held legal authority over Kru laborers in the colony. Fines were listed as follows: “And be it further resolved, That no person or persons, are permitted to employ, Kroomen... without they have complied with the above resolution, unless they become responsible for their tax.”<sup>699</sup> Kru laborers risked a \$2.00 fine for failure to produce a work certificate and forced removal from the settlement. If they were unable to pay the fine, they were to perform public labor until it was paid.<sup>700</sup> Americo-Liberians, European and American ship captains who employed the Kru without proper documentation would be fined and forced to pay their tax.<sup>701</sup> The colony’s taxation policy was a precursor to state taxation legislature in the republic era following independence.

ACS expansion increased in the 1830s as settler colonies were established on the Kru Coast. Each colony was funded by state chapters of the ACS. “Maryland in Africa” colony was founded near Cape Palmas, and was supported by the Maryland Colonization Society in 1833.<sup>702</sup> In 1834, the New York and Pennsylvania societies established colonies near Bassa Cove. In 1837, the Mississippi and Louisiana societies founded the colony of Greenville at the Sinoe River.<sup>703</sup> The colony of Greenville forced Kru to vacate their land and move across the river to Blue Barre in 1837.<sup>704</sup> Two British traders, David Murray and Jack Purse, who traded in Settra Kru, created petitions and appealed to the British to protect them against Liberian encroachment, although the British government seems to have provided no assistance.<sup>705</sup> British employment and trade were central to the Kru economy. The risk of displacement threatened to undermine their free wage labor cycle.

In 1837, the Legislative Council ordered a trade policy on the coast that limited all trade to six official ports of entry in Harper, Grenville, Buchanan, Marshall, Monrovia, and Robertsport.<sup>706</sup> The policy was the precursor to the succession of Port of Entry Laws in 1849, 1859, 1865, and 1891, in the republic era that placed customs on all trade. The policy elevated tensions with British traders.

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**699** “Municipal Legislation,” 163.

**700** *Ibid.*, 163.

**701** *Ibid.*, 163.

**702** William D. Hoyt, Jr., “John McDonogh and Maryland Colonization in Liberia, 1834–1835,” *The Journal of Negro History* 24, no. 4 (1939): 440–453.

**703** *Ibid.*, 228.

**704** Davis, “Liberian,” 235; Fraenkel, “Social Change,” 156.

**705** Davis, “Liberian,” 235; FO 47/5, “Hamilton to Palmerstone May 9, 1851.”

**706** Brown, *Economic History*, 127.



Laurie Hamilton and Hatton Cookson of London were two firms operating on the Kru Coast.<sup>707</sup> Hamilton agent, David Murray, employed Kru in a factory in Settra Kru. In one episode, Ranger, a Hamilton-owned brig, was seized in Buchanan by Liberian authorities for not paying customs.<sup>708</sup> The incident not only intensified relations between the Kru and the Liberian colony, but also increased British traders' resentment towards the Liberian colonial government. Customs threatened both Kru and British trader returns.

The ACS proposed to establish the Commonwealth of Liberia in 1838 by uniting the autonomous colonies that dotted the coast.<sup>709</sup> Headed by Thomas Buchanan, head of the ACS envoy, a commonwealth was formed gradually. The commonwealth did not consider the possibility of citizenship for the Kru and other indigenous peoples until 1841, at which time there was a proposal for citizenship for those Kru who had lived in an ACS colony for a minimum of three years.<sup>710</sup> They had to be "civilized," which meant converting to Christianity and abandoning "all the forms, customs and superstitions of heathendom."<sup>711</sup> Americo-Liberians equated civilization with Christianity at the expense of indigenous religious practices. Despite the opportunity for the Kru to become citizens, they largely refused to convert to Christianity. Their response may have been a form of resistance against Americo-Liberian colonization, which required them to submit to the terms and conditions defined by the interests of the ACS and Americo-Liberian settlers.

"Mississippi in Africa," joined the commonwealth in 1842 and became the main hub of Sinoe County. Based in Cape Palmas, "Maryland in Africa" remained independent until 1857, after which it entered the Republic of Liberia as Maryland County.<sup>712</sup> Each colonial settlement gradually gained territory as a result of treaties with the local populations including the Kru.<sup>713</sup> Figure 6.3 is a map of the Commonwealth of Liberia in 1839, which illustrates the extent of ACS colonies between the Gallinas River in the west and the region to the east of Harper in Maryland Colony.

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**707** Anonymous, "Message of Governor Roberts to the Legislative Council, January 9, 1843," *African Repository* 19, no. 6 (1843): 176–184; Davis, "Liberian," 231.

**708** Davis, "Liberian," 231.

**709** Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 12. For an analysis of Maryland Colony see Hannah Abeodu Bowen Jones, "The Struggle for Political and Cultural Unification in Liberia, 1847–1930" (Ph.D. thesis, Northwestern University, 1962), 7; a study on Mississippi Colony includes Sabin, "Making of the Americo-Liberian Community," 81.

**710** Huberich, *Political*, 2: 724.

**711** Ibid., 724; Fraenkel, *Tribe*, 13.

**712** Fraenkel, *Tribe*, 15.

**713** Ibid., 15–16.

Part of the Liberian strategy to secure authority over the Kru Coast was to establish missions in all of the colonies. A variety of denominations responded, including Methodist, Baptist, Roman Catholic, Wesleyan, and Presbyterian missionaries. By 1838, Methodists had constructed missions in Sinoe County on the Kru Coast.<sup>714</sup> Missionaries were dealing with a sizeable Kru population. In 1840, Presbyterian missionaries Pinney, Canfield, and Alward published their population estimates on the main trading towns on the Kru Coast. The layout of Grand Cess was observed by Canfield:

Grand Sesters [Grand Cess] is 40 or 50 miles above Cape Palmas... There is one large town of near 500 houses, and some six and seven smaller towns are in the immediate neighborhood. We judge the entire population to be not far from five or six thousand...<sup>715</sup>

While Grand Sesters (Grand Cess) was reported to have a population of between five and six thousand, the wider population in the region was estimated at between 10,000 and 12,000 inhabitants.<sup>716</sup> Proper Kru towns including Little Kru, Nana Kru, King William's Town, Settra Kru, and Krubah were estimated to have between 400 and 600 inhabitants each.<sup>717</sup> In 1866, *The Missionary Magazine* later reported: "They [Kru] lay off their towns at right angles, and place each principal street under a chief or headman."<sup>718</sup> Kru organized the physical layout of their villages based on traditional hierarchal structures that also enabled for easy access to labor pools.

The entire Kru Coast was estimated to have a population of between 30,000 and 40,000.<sup>719</sup> When these numbers are compared with the number of Kru migrant laborers working abroad, which was estimated to be between 5,000 and 20,000 a year, the percentage of workers ranges from 16.6 percent upwards to 66.6 percent of a population of 30,000, and between 12.5 percent and 50 percent of a population of 40,000.<sup>720</sup> The numbers of between 5,000 and 20,000 laborers are reasonable when the whole Kru-speaking region between Cape Mesurado and the Bandama River is taken into account. It cannot be known, however, what percentage of the Kru Coast estimates provided by Pinney, Canfield and Al-

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**714** J. Wold, *God's Impatience in Liberia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 58; Lawrence Breitborde, *Speaking Social Identity: English in the Lives of Urban Africans* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 144.

**715** Pinney, Canfield and Alward, "Report," 213.

**716** *Ibid.*, 212.

**717** *Ibid.*, 182.

**718** "Miscellany," *The Missionary Magazine* no. 46 (1866): 120.

**719** *Ibid.*, 183; *The Missionary Chronicle* no. 11 (1843): 6.

**720** Davis, *Ethnohistorical*, 49.

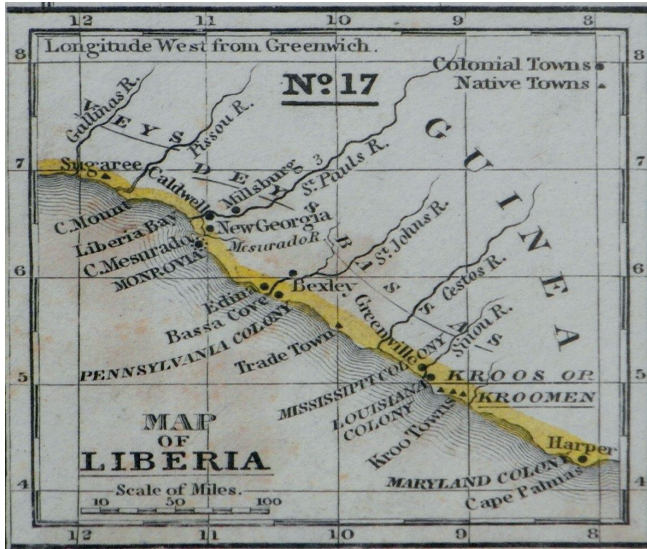


Figure 6.3: Map of the Commonwealth of Liberia, 1839.

Source: S. Augustus Mitchell, *Map of Africa: Map of Liberia*, no. 17, 1839. Engraved by J.H. Young. American Colonization Society, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., United States.

ward were male. Since workers purchased multiple wives it is reasonable to assume females outnumbered males.

In 1842, a Methodist mission was built in the vicinity of Cape Palmas.<sup>721</sup> “Coloured ministers” were sent by Presbyterian missions to Settra Kru and Sinoe (Greenville) in 1842.<sup>722</sup> In spite of these developments, the Kru remained largely resistant to conversion during the colonial era between 1822 and 1846. They may have perceived the missions as part of the ACS’s attempt to dominate their society and force them into the commonwealth. In 1844, one report concluded: “there never was an instance known of a Krooman being converted.”<sup>723</sup>

Americo-Liberians sought to become active trading partners with Europeans in camwood, palm oil, and gold, which effectively displaced the Kru’s traditional role as intermediaries in trade with Europeans along the Kru Coast. Conflict between these communities was exacerbated further by the Liberian colonial gov-

<sup>721</sup> Breitborde, *Speaking Social*, 144.

<sup>722</sup> Bliss, “Board of Foreign Missions,” 247; *Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian in the United States of America* 4 (New York: Presbyterian Church, 1841), 9.

<sup>723</sup> Pedro de Zulueta, *Trial of Pedro de Zulueta, Jun., on a Charge of Slave Trading* (London: C. Wood and Company, 1844), 77.

ernment's attempt to abolish the slave trade. The slave trade provided the Kru with a source of revenue that was deemed illegitimate because it could not be taxed by the Liberian government. Another source of tension was created by Americo-Liberian expansion in the vicinity of the Kru Coast, which led to a shortage of Kru land for cultivation and village development.<sup>724</sup> The government's attempt to tax Kru laborers and limit their employment opportunities to mandated ports created a further rift between Kru and the Americo-Liberian communities, who in contrast were not taxed in ports.<sup>725</sup>

In 1845, the Peace and Friendship Treaty called for the Kru to pledge to end their participation in slave trading.<sup>726</sup> The treaty stated the following conditions:

[The Kru]... bind themselves to abstain from all participation, direct or indirect, in the slave trade, that no foreign officer, agent or subject, except of the colony of Liberia, or the American Colonization Society, shall purchase, have, or in any way, by sale, lease or gift, obtain right to, or claim upon, the Kroo territory."<sup>727</sup>

As evidenced in the above passage, the Kru remained engaged in slave trading on the Kru Coast as late as 1845. Their continued participation in the slave trade was understood by commonwealth authorities as a hindrance to moral and economic progress. Kru were further instructed to not consider selling their lands to a foreign power. Based on the Kru's long-established practice of working on British contracts, the Liberian Commonwealth was naturally concerned that the Kru would form an alliance with the British and seek a British protectorate in their homeland. In the emerging political system, Kru remained at the mercy of the commonwealth government. They could not purchase land and did not have equal access to or protection of the law. As such, the option of leaving the Kru Coast for work abroad with the British or French may have seemed increasingly appealing.

The Liberian Commonwealth created stratified communities. Americo-Liberian settlers held little regard for the Dei, Gola, Condo, and Kru, who they perceived as "uncivilized" based on their non-Christian religious traditions and minimal attire.<sup>728</sup> In contrast, Dei including King Peter, Bristol, and Getumbe were recorded as not wanting to participate in attacks on the Americo-Liberian

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<sup>724</sup> Zulueta, *Trial*, 29.

<sup>725</sup> Brown, *Economic History*, 127.

<sup>726</sup> Frost, *Work*, 32; Brooks, *Kru Mariner*, 84, 90.

<sup>727</sup> Davis, *Ethnohistorical*, 46; Anonymous, *African Repository* 21, no. 2 (1845): 41.

<sup>728</sup> Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 1–10; Huberich, *Political*, 2: 724; Fraenkel, *Tribe*, 13.

settlers because they were “brothers based on same skin colour.”<sup>729</sup> Their perspective suggests an affinity with the Americo-Liberians based on racial connections, as compared with regular tensions between Dei and Kru, which was rooted in ethnic differences. A socio-economic hierarchy emerged that positioned Americo-Liberians as the dominant group at the expense of indigenous populations. Liberated Africans found themselves in the middle, and sided with Americo-Liberians in times of conflict with the Kru.<sup>730</sup> However, the ACS recognized the Kru’s important role in commerce and trade in the commonwealth.<sup>731</sup> Yuketiel Gershoni has argued that the creation of Liberia occurred through “a process of colonization.”<sup>732</sup> Although his position holds merit, Gershoni tends to place complete blame on the Americo-Liberian settlers rather than recognizing the role of the ACS as being responsible for fomenting a system of oppression against indigenous peoples.

## Transformations on the Kru Coast

On July 26, 1847, officials of Liberia declared independence and adopted a republican constitution, which divided the country into three counties: Montserrado (between the Farmington and Mano Rivers), Grand Bassa (between the Farmington and Sanguin Rivers), and Sinoe County (between the Sanguin and Grand Cess Rivers). Two districts were also created which included Marshall and Cape Mount. The Kru Coast was included in Sinoe County. Liberian authority in the region which had hitherto been rather minimal soon grew in intensity following independence.

Kru, Dei, Gola, and other indigenous peoples were not mentioned in the 1847 Liberian Constitution and no funds were allotted for their communities.<sup>733</sup> In contrast, Americo-Liberian settlements were assigned the status of townships with access to federal government and county financial assistance.<sup>734</sup> The dis-

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**729** Ashmun, *History*, 24; “Statement of Getumbe Recorded by E.W. Blyden,” vol. 15/1, 1870–1871, letter nos. 04853–5, *American Colonization Society Papers*, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., United States.

**730** Akingbade, “Liberian Settlers,” 342, 345; Henries, *Liberian Nation*, 58; “Hostile Movement,” 3; Anonymous, *African Repository* 8, no. 5 (1832): 131.

**731** Davis, *Ethnohistorical*, 46; *Missionary Register*, vol. 34 (London: Seeley, Jackson & Halliday, 1846): 19.

**732** Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 1–10.

**733** *Ibid.*, 13; Fraenkel, *Tribe*, 18–19.

**734** *Ibid.*, 19.

crepancy in access to government funds contributed to uneven economic development between Americo-Liberian townships and aboriginal villages in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Controlling coastal trade was a primary concern for the Liberian government. On December 26, 1849, the first Port of Entry Act was created with intention of limiting all trade to specific ports in Americo-Liberian communities, which included Monrovia, Buchanan, Greenville, and Marshall.<sup>735</sup> The legislation stated: “no vessel, which shall arrive from any foreign port, or the cargo on board, shall be entered elsewhere than at one of the ports of entry established by the government.”<sup>736</sup> Foreign traders had to supply a manifest with destinations for their cargoes in Liberia and the persons co-signed to the delivery.<sup>737</sup> European-owned factories could gain exemption in exchange for a fee.<sup>738</sup> The Liberian government did not have the military manpower to rigidly enforce the Act. British and French traders largely ignored the laws, and continued to trade in ports of their choosing, much to the displeasure of the Liberian state.

Tensions between Kru and Americo-Liberian community of Greenville erupted in 1855. Kru villages including Settra Kru, Little Kru, Blue Barre, Buto, and Tasi formed an alliance against the Americo-Liberian community in Greenville. The immediate cause for the conflict was the seizure of three Kru laborers working on the British brig *Ariel* in Sino Bay. In 1856, the conflict was described in the *African Repository*:

Fisherman from Blue Barre seized a canoe and 3 Croomen working for the British ship, *Ariel*, in Greenville harbor. County sheriff went to secure their release, but as he was leaving their village, a few mysterious fires broke out. There followed a dispute about who set them: Blue Barre said that the settlers did, settlers thought natives did or pretext for commencing hostilities. They then murdered a few settlers and attacked settlements (Readsville, Bluntsville, Louisa, and Upper Tannersville). Combining with the Booloo and Sinou tribes, they attacked Lexington. Settlers lost 8 killed and 6 wounded. Took place in Nov., 1855.<sup>739</sup>

The establishment in Greenville had forced the Kru to relocate across the Sinoe River and create a new settlement called Blue Barre. The *African Repository* report may have overlooked the possibility that the Fisherman was actually Kru.

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<sup>735</sup> FO 47/3, “Hamilton to FO January 3, 1850”; FO 47/3, “Roberts to Palmerston February 6, 1850”; Davis, “Liberian,” 234.

<sup>736</sup> Davis, “Liberian,” 234.

<sup>737</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>738</sup> FO 47/7, “Roberts to Earl of Malmesbury, July 21, 1852”; FO 47/7, “Malmesbury to Roberts October 12, 1852”; FO 47/7, “Roberts to Malmesbury October 13, 1852”; Davis, “Liberian,” 234.

<sup>739</sup> Anonymous, *African Repository* 32, no. 2 (1856): 59–60.

After all, many Fishermen belonged to the Kabor and Gbeta *dakwe*.<sup>740</sup> Since Kru villages were in competition, it is not surprising that they would seize the three Kru workers who belonged to another *dako*. In the aftermath of their forced removal to Blue Barre, they may have perceived the three Kru as taking their jobs after being offered employment via Americo-Liberian agents in Greenville. Regardless of who fired the shots first during their release, the Americo-Liberians or the Fisherman, Kru responded by attacking Americo-Liberian communities including Readsville, Bluntsville, Louisiana, and Upper Tannersville before surrounding Greenville.<sup>741</sup>

The Liberian government in Monrovia sent a military force to assist Greenville. Outnumbered and outgunned, the Kru surrendered. The government demanded that the Kru make payments for damages incurred during their assault on the settlements. Liberian authorities forced Kru to pay fines by placing an embargo on all foreign trade between Sanguin and Little Kru on the Kru Coast. Foreign traders were given until May 1856 to close operations. Unable to trade, Kru communities complied and the incident came to be known as the Sino War.<sup>742</sup> The Sino War ultimately arose from the ability of Americo-Liberian traders to displace the Kru as intermediaries in trade between coastal and interior communities.

Within a year, in 1856, hostilities between the Grebo peoples, who lived between the Grand Cess and Cavalla Rivers, and Americo-Liberian settlers evolved into a revolt. Americo-Liberian communities were dependent on the Grebo for their food supplies and local trade. Similar to the Proper Kru, Grebo served as middlemen in trade with the interior. Americo-Liberians sought to regulate and control prices on trade items such as rice, which equated to lower profits.<sup>743</sup> However, the greater issue was over land acquisition. Americo-Liberian settlers forcibly acquired land near Cape Palmas and established Harper. On December 22, 1856, Governor Drayton ordered the removal of Grebo peoples from Cape Palmas with an offer to purchase their towns.<sup>744</sup> He had heard the rumor that Grebo had massacred colonists with no evidence to support the claim. The Grebo refused to leave and Drayton ordered an attack. Americo-Liberians frequently em-

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**740** Sullivan, "The Kru," 282.

**741** Davis, "Liberian," 236; "Message of President Roberts to the Legislature, 20 December 1855," in Holsoe, "Study," 166; "Roberts to ACS," *African Repository* 32, no. 2 (1856): 60; FO 47/11, "Newham to FO, 31 December 1855"; *African Repository* 32, no. 2 (1856): 59–60.

**742** Davis, "Liberian," 237.

**743** Harrison Ola Abingbade, "The Settler African Conflicts: The Case of the Maryland Colonists and the Grebo, 1840–1900," *The Journal of Negro History* 66, no. 2 (1981): 93.

**744** *Ibid.*, 96.



ployed a strategy of divide and rule aligning themselves with one Grebo village over another in times of conflict as was the case when they supported Padee against the Naffau.<sup>745</sup> Drayton allied with the Rocktown and Cavalla people against the Grebo at Cape Palmas, who were their traditional enemies. In co-ordination with Cavalla and Rocktown forces, the colonial militia burnt their houses and killed Grebo in four settlements in Garaway.<sup>746</sup> The Grebo responded by setting fire to the Protestant Episcopal Mission at Mount Vaughn near Harper.<sup>747</sup>

Drayton appealed to the Monrovia government for assistance. On February 11, 1857, Liberia sent a force of 115 men commanded by General J.J. Roberts. The use of heavy artillery forced the Grebo to sign a treaty. On February 26, 1857, head of the Palmas Grebo and chiefs of the Garaway Grebo agreed to a treaty, which forced them to reside on the banks of the Hoffman River about four kilometers from their village at the Cape. The treaty was called the "Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Indemnification, between Liberia, State of Maryland in Liberia, and the Cape Palmas and Garaway Tribes."<sup>748</sup> The conditions stipulated that Americo-Liberians "settle on the Hoffman River, north of Harris' house."<sup>749</sup> The treaty demanded that the Grebo provide 12,000 pounds of rice or the equivalent value in cattle to the colonial government in Harper within seven months. In return, the Grebo were given a payment in goods that equated to \$1000.00.<sup>750</sup> The seventh stipulation declared that any future disputes were to be taken before the administration in Harper for settlement.<sup>751</sup> On April 6, 1857, the colony of Maryland was annexed by Liberia and became Maryland County. Based on their reliance on Liberian military forces, the conflict precipitated their amalgamation in the state.

In Liberia, a larger state with more counties and a growing population equated to an even greater potential to generate state revenue. As such, in 1859, the Liberian Legislature passed a new series of Port of Entry Laws. The laws ensured customs duties were collected from American and European ships trading on the Liberian coast.<sup>752</sup> However, in 1859, unlike the Port of Entry Act in 1849, the laws did not specify ports. Rather, Liberian authorities attempted to intercept ships and impose customs in all ports where possible. However, the state still lacked

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<sup>745</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>746</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>747</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>748</sup> *British and Foreign State Papers, 1856–1857*, vol. 48 (London: William Ridgeway, 1866), 586.

<sup>749</sup> Ibid., 586.

<sup>750</sup> Ibid., 586.

<sup>751</sup> Ibid., 578.

<sup>752</sup> Davis, *Ethnohistorical*, 47.

the military manpower to strictly enforce the laws. It was not until 1865 that all unregulated trade ceased, specific ports of entry were selected, and the law was fully implemented.<sup>753</sup>

The Port of Entry Law of 1865 was written by President Daniel B. Warner (1864–1868) and limited all foreign trade and export to six towns including Harper, Marshall, Buchanan, Greenville, Monrovia, and Robertsport.<sup>754</sup> All of these ports were Americo-Liberian settlements. Kru villages along with all indigenous settlements were excluded.<sup>755</sup> Significantly, Liberian traders were exempted from restrictions, and could call at any port of their choosing.<sup>756</sup> Although the laws limited trade to specific ports much in the same way legislature had attempted to influence trade in 1837 and 1849, unlike previous legislature in which ship captains landed and presented their itineraries, in 1865, trade was concentrated exclusively in the mandated ports.

One of the aims of the new law was to impede unregulated British and French trade on the Liberian coast. The new regulations led to a decline in foreign trade on the Kru Coast and became a major impetus for Kru migration.<sup>757</sup> The Kru's response to the laws was mixed. Settra Kru complied, but Picaninny Cess, Grand Cess, and Sasstown continued to trade illegally.<sup>758</sup> Kru residing in Krutown in Monrovia had no choice but to comply. Their location in the capital made it extremely difficult to circumnavigate the new laws.

Headmen experienced a major shift in their ability to negotiate contracts as a result of Port of Entry Law. Wages for contracts were negotiated between the headman and the employer before reporting to Liberian government officials. The shipper and laborer were required to pay a tax both at departure from and return to Liberia.<sup>759</sup> Upon departure and return, employers paid a fee at a rate of \$1.00 per Kru worker and \$2.00 per stevedore to the Liberian government.<sup>760</sup> The process for hiring Kru required that European and American ship captains submit "order books" containing the number of workers for contract, their special skills, work history, and information on whether or not they had

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753 Ibid., 47; W.A. Johnson, "Port Regulations of Liberia," *African Repository* 35, no. 4 (1859): 117–118.

754 Davis, *Ethnohistorical*, 47; Johnston, *Liberia*, 1: 392–393.

755 Ibid., 47; Ibid., 392–393.

756 "Message of President Warner to the Legislature 6 December 1864," in Holsoe, "Study," 167.

757 Davis, "Struggle," 239.

758 "Message of President Warner to the Legislature, 10 December 1868," in Holsoe, "Study," 168; FO 47/24, "King Tobey Settra Kru to FO, 12 December 1894."

759 Davis, *Ethnohistorical*, 49.

760 Martin, "Krumen," 13–14.

paid their taxes on previous contracts. Liberian authorities recorded the number of laborers and determined the amount of tax to be paid.<sup>761</sup> The headman hoped to secure the highest wages possible as they were now responsible to pay taxes to the Liberian government.<sup>762</sup>

The evolution of the headman's "book" or reference letter from its initial use on the Kru Coast as a means of securing contracts was transformed for use by the Liberian state to ensure they controlled Kru labor. Headmen faced the double task of negotiating beneficial wages with ship captains in a regulated system governed by the Liberian state. Their once powerful role was diminished as they sought approval on two levels before contracts could commence. Furthermore, headmen were still responsible for giving a portion of their earnings to the *krogba* upon the completion of a contract. The situation was even worse for regular Kru laborers who earned lower wages than the headman, and had to follow homecoming protocol.

Faced with increased taxation, it proved to be more profitable for many Kru migrant laborers to remain in their diaspora communities. The Port of Entry Laws seemed to have an immediate effect. In 1866, *The Spirit of Missions* reported: "They [Kru] have... ceased to work on board of ships, and are occupied chiefly in trade on their own account or as agents of foreigners."<sup>763</sup> The population of Grand Cess remained about the same as it was reported in 1840 at about 12,000 inhabitants, which suggests many Kru remained in their laboring communities for the time being.<sup>764</sup> Regardless of whether Kru decided to abandon migrant labor or remain in their diaspora communities, a disruption in the power relations that governed the relationship between the *krogba*, headmen, and regular workers perpetrated through state regulation and taxation threatened to undermine the Kru economy and social structure.

Port of Entry Laws not only influenced Kru migrant workers to remain in their diaspora communities, but also increased employment opportunities with the French amongst Kru speaking peoples to the east of the Cavalla River beyond the rigid policies of the Liberian government. While the Kru had traded with the French for centuries on the Kru Coast, beginning in the 1860s they found a new wave employment on French contracts in ports to the east of

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<sup>761</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>762</sup> Ibid., 49. Greenville operations appears in the FO 47/36, "Minutes of the Kroo Labour Conference," October 1, 1902.

<sup>763</sup> Anonymous, "Full Description of Our African Field," *The Spirit of Missions* 31 (1866): 76.

<sup>764</sup> Ibid., 76.

Cape Palmas in territory that would become Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>765</sup> The result was twofold: increased employment and competition between the British and French as they vied to hire the Kru on labor contracts and the creation of a Kru wage labor diaspora and network with the French in the Atlantic.

Where there had been minimal Kru employment with the French in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Anglo-French Treaty in 1845 ensured that the French Navy would supply 26 ships off the coast of West Africa in the attempt to stamp out the trans-Atlantic slave trades. The opportunity to obtain contracts with the French led Kru-speaking peoples in the region to migrate to Grand Bassam where they were routinely hired to work in such places Libreville, Brazzaville, Dahomey, Ouidah, and even as far abroad as Panama and French Guiana.<sup>766</sup> By the 1860s, the Kru formed a large diaspora community in Grand Bassam amongst Alladian, Appolonian, Fante, and Nzima populations.<sup>767</sup> In 1863, Captain A. Vallon observed the role of the Kru in Grand Bassam: "Dans le dagereux brisant de Grand-Bassam, un Krouman, porteur d'un magnifique poisson pris dans la lagune, essayait d'atteindre une embarcation du *Dialmath*."<sup>768</sup> Even more significant is that the *Dialmath* was one of the French Navy ships that embarked Kru in Grand Bassam and sailed for Libreville,

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**765** Des Bruslons, *Dictionnaire Universel*, 1059; Martinière, *Le Grand Dictionnaire*, 72; *Dictionnaire Universel de Commerce*, 640; Charles Athanase Walckenaer, *Histoire Générale Des Voyages ou Nouvelle Collection des Relations de Voyages Par Mer*, vol. 19 (Paris: Chez Lefèvre, 1830), 180.

**766** Henry H. Bucher, "Liberty and Labor: The Origins of Libreville Reconsidered," *Bulletin de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire*, 2nd series, 41, no. 3 (1979): 478–496; Peter P. Hinks and John R. McKivigan, *Encyclopedia of Anti-Slavery and Abolition*, vol. 2 (Westport: Greenwood, 2007), 432; Jeffrey Gunn, "Homeland, Diasporas and Labour Networks: The Case of Kru Workers, 1792–1900" (Ph.D. dissertation, York University, 2019), 237–241; John Hope Franklin, *George Washington Williams: A Biography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 201; Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Brazza et la Prise de Possession du Congo: La Mission de l'Ouest Africain, 1883–1885* (Paris: Mouton et Cie, 1971), 1–30; Bruce Whitehouse, *Migrants and Strangers in an African City: Exile, Dignity, Belonging* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 31; Behrens, *Les Kroumen*, 74, 80; A. Vallon, "La Côte Occidentale," in *Revue Maritime et Coloniale*, vol. 9 (Paris: Ministère de la Marine, 1863), 373–394; Schuler, "Kru Emigration," 174–183; Charles Rogers, "Report on the Panama Canal," *The Panama Canal* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1889), 43; Charles Rogers, "Progress at Panama," *Popular Science* 32 (1888): 453; Gary G. Kuhn, "Liberian Contract Labor in Panama, 1887–1897," *Liberian Studies Journal* 6, no. 1 (1975): 43–52.

**767** Walckenaer, *Histoire Générale*, 272; Henrique, *Les Colonies* 5: 203–204; Monica Blackmun Visonà, *Constructing African Art Histories for the Lagoons of Côte d'Ivoire* (London: Routledge, 2017), 51, 121.

**768** Vallon, "La Côte Occidentale," 388; "Établissements de la Côte D'Or et du Gabon," in *Revue Maritime et Coloniale*, vol. 9 (Paris: Ministère de la Marine, 1863), 41.

which shows a clear connection between Kru diaspora communities.<sup>769</sup> Kru resided in a quarter of the “native village.”<sup>770</sup> Kru or Kroumen, as they were more commonly known to the east of the Cavalla River, consisted of a number of Kru-speaking peoples including Grebo, Bété, Godié, and Dida laborers. Like the Kru working in Freetown, they too would have easily been able to distinguish community members based on dialect and village affiliation, while accepting the general label Kroumen in their workplaces.

Kru were hired for loading and unloading cargoes and were once again called upon to utilize their seamen skills transporting commodities and crew between shore and ship.<sup>771</sup> Working in Grand Bassam freed the Kru from Liberian regulation and taxation that burdened those who continued to seek contracts in their homeland on the Kru Coast. In Grand Bassam, their reputation for being “efficient and obedient” enabled the Kru to find increased employment on French contracts.<sup>772</sup>

As shipborne employment opportunities on the Kru Coast in Liberia became less attractive, Kru turned to agricultural production as an increasingly important source of income. The agricultural viability of Liberia as a mass exporter of crops had been under consideration since its formation. As early as the 1830s, one report proposed an agricultural system directed by Americo-Liberians as follows: “The Liberians might adopt the system, of procuring the aborigines, to aid in the cultivating their lands, with advantage and success. Such a connexion, between the colonists and them, was one of mutual dependence.”<sup>773</sup>

The Liberian government’s main concern was the lack of a labor force to produce agricultural commodities. Kru had traded in agricultural products for centuries in rice, plantain, grains, palm oil, and malagueta pepper.<sup>774</sup> Their experience made them the prime candidates for laborers tasked with the cultivation of Americo-Liberian lands. The proposal reveals the power dynamics in the relationship between Americo-Liberians, the owners of the land, and Kru, who worked the land. Increasingly, trade with Europeans was conducted by Americo-Liberian traders rather than Kru. The Liberian state was clearly forming a hi-

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769 Vallon, “La Côte Occidentale,” 388; “Établissements,” 41, 55.

770 Visonà, *Constructing*, 51, 121.

771 Leonard Chenery, *The West Coast of Africa: From Sierra Leone to Cape Lopez, Part 2* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1875), 125.

772 Robert Hamill Nassau, *My Ogowé: Being a Narrative of Daily Incidents During Sixteen Years in Equatorial West Africa* (New York: Neale Publishing Company, 1914), 398.

773 Anonymous, *African Repository* 8, no. 2 (1832): 53.

774 Elbl, “Portuguese Trade,” 516; Parliamentary Papers 12 (1842): 607.

erarchal system that placed Americo-Liberian and Kru in a co-dependent albeit uneven economic relationship.

However, it wasn't until the 1870s that the Kru Coast became the epicenter of Liberian palm oil production. The main palm oil and palm kernel trading depots were located in a series of villages on the Kru Coast and included Trade Town, New Cess, Trade Town Point, Timbo, Grand Collah, Settra Kroo, River Cess, Waupee, Nana Kroo, Neffu, and Sassa Town.<sup>775</sup> Kru were responsible for producing the palm oil and transporting it to Americo-Liberian settlements for sale to European traders.<sup>776</sup> European merchant ship captains praised the Kru for their ability to heat palm oil and pour it into casks before carefully transporting it on their surfboats and loading cargo ships.<sup>777</sup>

Kru participation in the Liberian palm oil industry led to a transformation in relationship between the *krogba*, headmen, and laborers that had developed on the Kru Coast. In some cases, the *krogba* agreed to "furnish the labour" for Americo-Liberian estates and factories that were established close to the vicinity of a Kru village.<sup>778</sup> This is significant in labor relations because it meant the *krogba* was tasked with supplying a labor force and not headmen who had traditionally been responsible for providing labor gangs on contracts with the British. *Krogba* negotiated the terms of the contracts. Since gift-giving protocol associated with the homecoming of migrant workers was in decline due to the impact of Port of Entry Laws, the *krogba* could potentially earn a higher profit by taking a cut of the workers' wages and cutting out headmen who served as the middleman in migrant labor. The change represents a shift in the hierarchal labor system that developed between the Kru and British, and more closely resembles earlier trade practices on the Kru Coast.

While Kru engaged in state-driven agricultural production, their communities saw a rise in the presence of missions. Until the 1870s, Kru conversion to Christianity had been a slow process. As late as 1851, William Fox lamented: "Next to the Mohammedans, I believe the Kroomen are the most difficult to be brought under the influence of the gospel."<sup>779</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century when the Kru diaspora cycle was in full effect, Kru may have seen little need to convert to Christianity and viewed it as an Americo-Liberian attempt to exact socio-political influence over their communities on the Kru Coast.

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<sup>775</sup> Anonymous, "Liberian Intelligence," *African Repository* 48, no. 6 (1872): 186.

<sup>776</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>777</sup> Martin, "Krumen," 411.

<sup>778</sup> Gurley, *Life of Jehudi Ashmun*, 331.

<sup>779</sup> Fox, *Brief History*, 609.

President Joseph Roberts (1848–1856 and 1872–1876) recognized the political advantage of establishing missions on the Kru Coast. He proposed increasing the number of missions for the purpose of “introduce[ing] into degraded and benighted Africa the blessings of Civilization and Christianity.”<sup>780</sup> Despite their inclusion in the state, Liberia did not yet have complete authority over Kru communities. Roberts hoped to work in tandem with missionaries in order to garner Christian converts that would lead to improved relations between Kru and the Liberian state. The government used a divide and rule policy by forming alliances with some Kru villages over others, while defending those communities with missions at all costs.<sup>781</sup>

Wesleyan and Methodist mission schools were established in Kru villages including Sinoe, Ebenezer, Settra Kru, Nana Kru, and Little Kru on the Kru Coast.<sup>782</sup> Reverend Edwin Munsell Bliss described an evangelical process based on “farming, teaching and preaching.”<sup>783</sup> Each mission focused on literacy, religious study, and maintenance through agriculture. Sunday was recognized as the Sabbath in the town of Ebenezer, and the chief had instructed the Kru to attend church service rather than work.<sup>784</sup> In Cape Palmas, *Dictionary of the Grebo*, published by Bishop Payne in 1860, played a role in spreading the gospel amongst Kru-speaking peoples in the decades that followed. Grebo spoke Kru and Payne hoped that many Kru would have access to the Bible via this dictionary.<sup>785</sup> Missionaries were gradually garnering influence amongst the Kru.

Kru in diaspora communities in West Africa may have also played a role in the expansion of Christianity through their homecomings. Mary A. Sharp’s mission in Krutown, Monrovia, played a significant role in converting Kru. Established in 1878, Miss Sharp’s Mission, as it was known, served as a religious and educational institution.<sup>786</sup> While preachers had attempted to convert the Kru in

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**780** Ibid., 237.

**781** Ibid., 237; FO 47/7, Roberts to Malmesbury, July 27, 1852.

**782** Reverend Eugene R. Smith, ed., *The Gospel in All Lands* (New York: Methodist, 1890), 41–42; Reverend Edwin Munsell Bliss, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Missions: Descriptive, Historical, Bibliography, Statistical. With a Full Assortment of Maps, a Complete Bibliography, and Lists of Bible Versions, Missionary Societies, and a General Index*, vol. 2 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1891), 389.

**783** Bliss, *Encyclopedia of Missions*, 389.

**784** Ibid., 389.

**785** David A. Shank, *Prophet Harris: The “Black Elijah” of West Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 40.

**786** John Morrison Reid, *Missions and Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1895), 247; “Kroo boys, Miss Sharp’s Mission, Monrovia,” *Liberia Graphic* (1900): 8; “Bishop Taylor in Liberia,” *The African Repository* 62, no. 3 (1885): 87.



Krutown as early as 1837, there is no evidence they had garnered any converts.<sup>787</sup> Missions not only encouraged conversion to Christianity, but also provided education. Sharp provided “school work for the Kroos.”<sup>788</sup> Sharp’s mission was also a center for baptisms. A Kru male and female were among 16 converted by Miss Sharp in 1885.<sup>789</sup> As converts, they could have possibly influenced family members to follow suit during their homecoming visits to the Kru Coast. An example is found in those Kru who formed part of the Methodist settlement called Jekwikpo. Many Jloh Kru, known as Jloh Methodists, had converted while on contracts on the West African coast and remained on the mission grounds after the death of the missionaries.<sup>790</sup>

By the 1880s, it seems that missionary efforts were paying off as religious conversion characterized many Kru communities on the Kru Coast. Missions were located in nearly every town on the Kru Coast including in Sasstown, Niffoo, Nanna Kroo, Settra Kroo, Garaway, and Grand Sesters.<sup>791</sup> Minister J. Wold suggested the Kru Coast experienced the “greatest rate of conversion to Christianity in Liberia.”<sup>792</sup> With a weakening economy that threatened to displace the traditional power dynamics between *krogba*, headmen, and workers, Kru may have been more receptive to Christianity and, in particular, missionary institutions that provided the opportunity to gain security and social standing in the emerging society that was influencing their villages.<sup>793</sup>

## Borders

Following the Berlin Conference between 1884 and 1885, in which European powers sought to establish formal colonies over vast regions of Africa, the primary concern for Liberia immediately became defining the extent of its national borders. Treaties between the Gola, Vai, and British in the region of the Gallinas

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**787** “Monrovia, December 21, 1836,” *African Repository* 12, no. 7 (137): 221.

**788** Reid, *Missions*, 247.

**789** Anonymous, “Bishop Taylor in Liberia,” *African Repository* 61, no. 3 (1885): 86–87.

**790** Tonkin, *Narrating*, 22.

**791** Smith, *The Gospel*, 41–42; see also *The Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (New York: Presbyterian Board, 1846), 14–16.

**792** Breitborde, *Speaking Social*, 82.

**793** One of the most important works of historical fiction that engages with the complex relationship between Europeans and indigenous communities through colonialism is Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958).

secured the Liberian border with Sierra Leone in the west.<sup>794</sup> Although British ships continued to trade without paying proper taxes to Liberian authorities, they recognized Liberian claims to the region.<sup>795</sup>

The border in the east was of much more concern because both the French and Liberia had claims to the territory between the Cavalla River and San Pedro River. The Liberian government believed that the only way to secure their borders was to establish new settlements in the region. It had been part of the colony of Maryland and continued to be counted as belonging to Maryland County at least in theory, but claims to the east of the Cavalla River remained contentious with the French. In 1884, President Johnson's expansionist position was clearly stated when he proclaimed "the first and principal measure to be adopted... is the establishment of the settlements."<sup>796</sup> Johnson suggested creating a new settlement at the mouth of the San Pedro River, which required treaties with local communities in the region.<sup>797</sup> He requested the ACS to encourage a new wave of Black immigrants and financial aid from the United States for the purpose of settlement in the region. President Johnson selected Cavalla and Nifu as two new ports of entry in 1885.<sup>798</sup> The race to secure Liberian borders has been recognized by Gershoni who argued: "The plans of President Johnson and decisions of the Legislature were in fact aimed at implementing effective control and seem to be an unequivocal response to the February 1885 resolutions of the Berlin Conference."<sup>799</sup>

However, the ACS's response was one of disinterest. Liberia's poor economy after 1871, when it was forced to take a loan from the United States coupled with the ending of the Civil War in 1865, meant that immigration from America slowed. The other obstacle was that the French had made agreements in the same region with Grebo and other Kru-speaking peoples near Bereby, east of the Cavalla River.<sup>800</sup> In 1886, Liberia decided to enforce their port of entry policy and tax all Grebo entering and exiting the mouth of the Cavalla River. Shortly

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**794** "Message of the President of Liberia, 5 December 1862," Presidential Message, Liberian National Archives.

**795** FO 403/6, "Smith to Lewis [Liberian Secretary of State], December 17, 1860"; FO 403/6, "Smith to Hill [Governor of Sierra Leone], 22 December 22 1860."

**796** "Inaugural Address of President Johnson, January 7, 1884," 118, Liberian National Archives.

**797** *Ibid.*, 119.

**798** "Message of President Johnson to the Legislature, 1884," Holsoe, "Study," 170.

**799** *Ibid.*, 298.

**800** "Legislation of the U.S., Monrovia, to the Secretary of State, Washington, December 7, 1885, no. 149, and Message of the President of Liberia, 18 December 1885," Enclosure No. 6, Diplomatic, 6, both in Diplomatic Dispatches from U.S. Ministers to Liberia, 1863–1906, vol. 10, May 4, 1885 – January 9, 1891.

thereafter, a Grebo revolt unfolded in the town of Half Cavalla near the Cavalla River. The Grebo sought protection against Liberian forces by requesting that the British governor in the Gold Coast intervene and form a protectorate in the region.<sup>801</sup> One rationale used by the Liberian government in support of their land claim was to include the region between the Cavalla and San Pedro River as part of the Kru Coast. Grebo inhabited the region on either side of the Cavalla River. They were known as Kroumen in Côte d'Ivoire and continue to identify as such in the twenty-first century.<sup>802</sup>

During this period, the reconceptualization of Kru Coast boundaries was politically and economically motivated. While the Liberian government regarded the Kru Coast as within Liberian borders in hopes of generating revenue through taxation, French and American officials extended the conceptual boundaries of the Kru (known as Krouman or Croumanes in French) homeland to include the towns to the east of the Cavalla River.<sup>803</sup> By 1874, Henry Leveson identified the towns of Cavalli, Half Bereby, Grand Lahou, and Grand Bassam, all in French territory, as belonging to the Kru Coast.<sup>804</sup> The urge to identify Grebo as Kru was most certainly an economic strategy to ensure that British, French, and Americans continued to hire their preferred Kru laborers beyond the restrictions imposed through Liberian customs and taxation.

In 1885, Élisée Reclus published a map of the Kru Coast or “Kru Territory” in which he limited the region between the Sinoe and King William’s Town. When compared with earlier maps, Figure 6.4 reveals that the Kru homeland underwent several conceptual phases of expansion and contraction. Reclus limited the Kru homeland within Liberia compared with Leveson who extended it much further east to Grand Bassam.<sup>805</sup> Indeed, Kroumen were hired in Cavally, Tabou, Bereby, San Pedro, Drewin, Sassandra, and Lahou at the Bandama River. Similarly, Francis Bacon defined the Kru Coast as the “one country” that extended 100 miles in the interior between Little Kroo and Tabou, east of

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**801** FO 47/20, “King of Chiefs of Cavally to the Governor of the Gold Coast, 27 January 1887,” The National Archives.

**802** Kroumen formed 8.5 percent of the total population in a demographic survey conducted in 2018. Accessed on May 1, 2017, [https://www.indexmundi.com/cote\\_d\\_ivoire/demographics\\_profile.html](https://www.indexmundi.com/cote_d_ivoire/demographics_profile.html).

**803** Reclus, *Universal Geography*, 233–234; Société de Géographie, *Comptes Rendus des Séances de la Société de Géographie et De La Commission Centrale* (Paris: Société de Géographie, 1897), 260–261; Chenery, *West Coast*, 114, 118.

**804** Henry Astbury Leveson, *The Forest and the Field* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1874), 272.

**805** *Ibid.*, 272.

the Cavalla River.<sup>806</sup> Tabou were perceived by some as belonging to the Kru Coast alongside Proper Kru and Grebo communities.<sup>807</sup>

While it is problematic that the Kru homeland experienced periods of expansion and contraction based on the exterior perception of European traders and the Liberian government who were informed by their own economic and political agendas, what is for certain is that those individuals who identified as Kru or at the very least spoke Kru continued to trade and find employment within and sometimes beyond these geographical parameters. What remained constant in map productions in the nineteenth century was the inclusion of what is claimed by Kru oral traditions as the original five Proper Kru villages.<sup>808</sup> Much in the same way that nations and homelands have been described by Benedict Anderson as “imagined communities,” the Kru homeland could be perceived as larger or smaller in geographic scale depending on whose perspective informed its construction.<sup>809</sup> Dimensions may have varied depending on whether Proper Kru, Grebo, Bassa, Godié, and Bété peoples or European ship captains were tasked with providing the details. Maps of the period can at best provide historians with an approximate sample of the Kru homeland when language and occupation are variables. However, understanding that the Kru Coast consisted of various segments of Kru-speaking peoples provides for more accurate analysis.

In 1891, French Minister of Colonies, Noël Ballay, presented French claims to the region between the Cavalla River and San Pedro River. France intended to establish a protectorate over the territory and agreed to void their treaties with Buto, Garawe, and other Grebo and Kru villages west of the Cavalla River in return for Liberia ending its claims on the territory between the Cavalla and San Pedro Rivers.<sup>810</sup> On December 8, 1892, the Liberian government and the French signed an agreement that set the boundary at the Cavalla River.<sup>811</sup>

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**806** Bacon, “Cape Palmas,” 196.

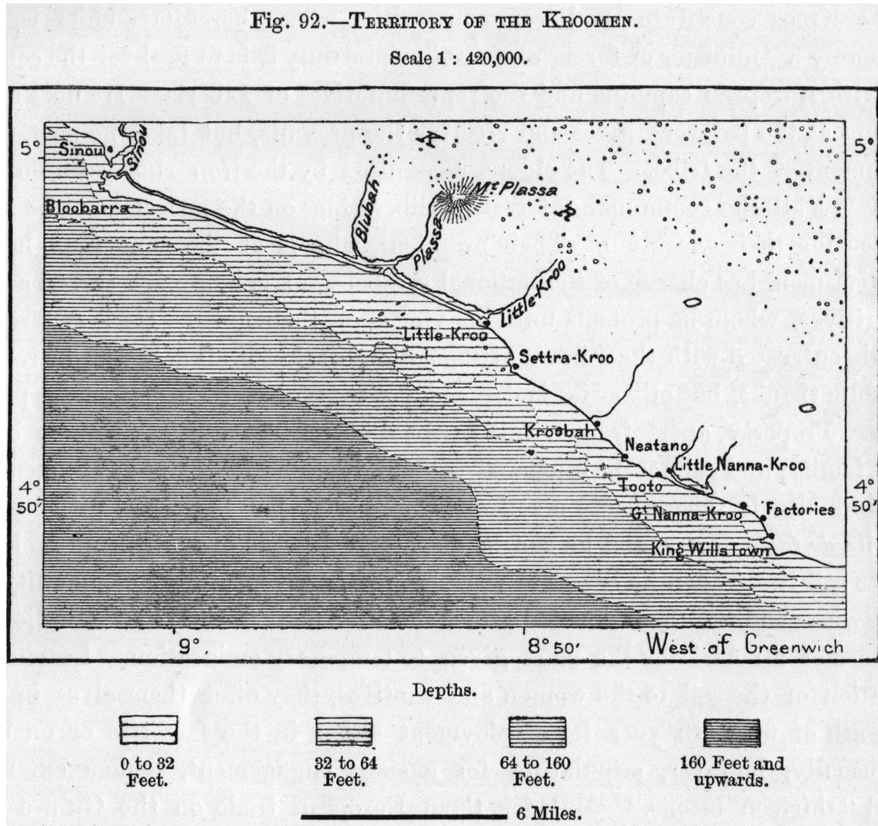
**807** Ludlam, “Account,” 43–44; *The Knickerbocker* 33 (1849): 337. See Ronald Davis map of Kru Coast in Davis, *Ethnohistorical*, v.

**808** Interviews with Chief Davis, Smith, and Deputy Governor Worjloh revealed that the Proper Kru towns were perceived as the heartland of the Kru homeland. See also Connelly, “Report,” 38–40.

**809** Benedict Anderson, *Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 5–8. See also McEvoy, “Understanding,” 62–80.

**810** “John Russwurm to J.H.B. Latrobe, 30 December 1845,” *African Repository* 22, no. 8 (1846): 205; Bernard Schnapper, *La Politique et le commerce Français dans le Golfe de Guinée de 1838 à 1871* (Paris: Mouton, 1961), 19, 42.

**811** Yuketiel Gershoni, “The Drawing of Liberian Boundaries in the Nineteenth Century: Treaties with African Chiefs versus Effective Occupation,” *The International Journal African Historical*



**Figure 6.4:** Kru Coast, 1885.

Source: Reclus, *Universal Geography*, 219.

During the same period of negotiations with the French, the Liberian government tightened its Port of Entry Laws. In 1891, the Liberian Legislature established the African Shipping Bureau. Kru labor was even more forcefully regulated, recorded, and taxed by the Liberian government.<sup>812</sup> While Kru were limited to where they could trade and hire themselves out for foreign contracts, Americo-Liberians were not restricted by the Port of Entry Laws and could trade in any port. Such restrictions and unequal treatment of Kru workers fuelled ten-

*Studies* 20, no. 2 (1987): 306; Pete John Murdza, Jr., "The Tricolor and the Lone Star: A History of Franco-Liberian Relations 1847–1903 (Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1979), 347.

<sup>812</sup> Martin, "Krumen," 416.

sions between their communities.<sup>813</sup> Many Kru violated the Port of Entry Laws, and, in many cases, continued to hire themselves directly from their coastal towns at the risk of penalties.<sup>814</sup> In response, the Liberian government imposed fines and in some cases burnt Kru villages.<sup>815</sup> Their marginalization continued in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, leading to numerous conflicts with the Liberian state.<sup>816</sup>

Tensions between Liberian authorities and French traders did not subside following the agreement. In 1893, the Liberian ship the *Goronommah* formed a blockade at Cavalla in French territory to ensure no ships could offload Kru workers without paying the labor tax.<sup>817</sup> In another incident, the *Goronommah* fired on and killed Kru on a canoe serving the *Ambriz* in *Settra Kru*.<sup>818</sup> Liberian vessels fended off German, French, and British ships attempting to trade on the Kru Coast at ports that were not recognized by the Port of Entry Laws. Liberian enforcement contributed to the decline of the Kru economy and regular returns in their free wage labor diasporas.

Interested in increasing the profitability of Kru labor, on January 11, 1894, the French government in Grand Bassam sought to regulate Kru workers by imposing tax at a rate of ₣25 per laborer.<sup>819</sup> Governor of Côte d'Ivoire, Louis-Gustave Binger, understood the economic potential of regulating and taxing Kru labor. However, as was the case in Liberia, the implementation of taxation proved to be difficult as Kru continued to be hired in a range of ports on the coast that were challenging to administer.

Faced with mounting pressures associated with Liberian taxation, some Kru began to establish settlements along rivers in the interior. In 1893, Reverend Ezekiel Smith observed their migration into the interior: "They [Kru] are beginning to settle along the rivers of the country and spreading themselves interiorward, where they engage in trade and farming."<sup>820</sup> Some Kru embarked on an internal migration as a result of the dire economic situation created by the Port of Entry Laws. Unlike their migration 100 years earlier from the Kru Coast to Freetown,

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**813** Davis, *Ethnohistorical*, 47; Behrens, *Les Kroumen*, 85.

**814** *Ibid.*, 48.

**815** *Ibid.*, 47.

**816** For a discussion on the Kru Revolts in 1915 and 1930 see Davis, *Ethnohistorical*, 51–64.

**817** Davis, "Liberian," 244; FO 47/18, "W.H. Willcocks, acting British vice-consul, to FO, 18 November 1893."

**818** Davis, 245; FO 47/19, "Cardew to FO, 16, 17, and 24 November, 1894."

**819** Archives Nationales, Section d'Outre-Mer Côte d'Ivoire, Vol. 14, 1a, Grand-Bassam, January 11, 1894. See also Behrens, *Les Kroumen*, 90.

**820** Anonymous, *African Repository* 48, no. 2 (1872): 52; "Address of Rev. Ezekiel E. Smith," *Liberia* 2 (1893): 29.

which accelerated and expanded the Kru free wage labor diaspora, Kru migrated in retreat out of necessity in the name of subsistence and survival in unfamiliar territory.

While some Kru continued to engage in direct trade with Europeans and Americans on the Kru Coast at the risk of financial penalties, many Kru decided to migrate for work and remain in the diaspora communities they had forged under British employment in Freetown, Lagos, Cape Coast, and later, Accra. Other Kru went to Monrovia and although it was within the authority of the Liberian government, they may have thought they would fare better with more ship traffic in the port than in their homeland communities based on the restrictions. All of these communities experienced rapid population growth from the 1890s when the Port of Entry Laws were rigidly enforced. By the early twentieth century, the Kru population in Lagos rose to 2,680 while Freetown had 1,551, Accra 13,000, and Monrovia 8,000.<sup>821</sup>

The social, economic, and political relationship between the Kru and the colony of Liberia between 1822 and 1846, and the Liberian state between 1847 and 1900, deeply impacted the Kru diaspora and created an unstable environment in their homeland that was forced to adapt to capitalist trade and colonial forces. The succession of Port of Entry Laws between 1837, 1849 1859, 1865, and 1891 gradually undermined the authority of *krogba* and headmen. Kru society had formed such a dependency on British free wage labor contracts that intervention by the Liberian state threatened to undermine their economy and the socio-political power structures that informed their communities. Moreover, the increased presence of missions on the Kru Coast and the shift to agricultural production were part of the Liberian strategy to extend political influence in the region.

The Liberian government's attempts to legislate restrictions on Kru trade through taxation inadvertently increased competition between the British and French. French contracts resulted in the establishment of a Kru diaspora community in Grand Bassam and elsewhere. Although Kru formed a diaspora with the French, it was never on the same global or numerical scale as with the British. Far more Kru served with the British in a variety of commercial and military contexts in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. The evolution of headmen under the British hiring system that emerged in the early nineteenth century in Freetown became the model for their employment that influenced other Europeans

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821 Estimates found in Martin, "Krumen," 406, 412; Crooks, *Records Relating*, 354.



including the French and Germans as well as the Americans in terms of pay structures, contract length, and the hierarchal nature of their service.<sup>822</sup>

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**822** Kru served on US Navy ships in the Atlantic tasked with intercepting slave ships in two periods between 1820 and 1822 and between 1840 and 1861. Kru rank and pay in the US Navy was directly influenced by the Royal Navy from whom the US took their lead in anti-slaving operations in the Atlantic. For a history of Kru service on US Navy vessels see Donald L. Canney, *African Squadron: The U.S. Navy and the Slave Trade, 1842–1861* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2006), 68; John Pentangelo, “Sailors and Slaves: USS Constellation and the Transatlantic Slave Trade,” in *Navies and Soft Power: Historical Case Studies of Naval Power and the Nonuse of Military Force*, ed. Bruce A. Elleman and S.C.M. Paine (Newport: Naval War College Press, 2015), 7; Charles Rockwell, “Sketches of Foreign Travel and Life at Sea,” *African Repository* 18, no. 11 (1842): 277–278; William Elliot Griggs, *Matthew Calbraith Perry, A Typical Naval Officer* (Boston: Cupples and Hurd, 1890), 307–308; *Correspondence Relative to the Naval Expedition to Japan 1852–1854* (1855), 2; Herbert Gilliland, ed., *USS Constellation on the Dismal Coast: Willie Leonard’s Journal, 1859–1861* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2013), 3. 1852–1854 (1855), 2; Herbert Gilliland, ed., *USS Constellation on the Dismal Coast: Willie Leonard’s Journal, 1859–1861* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2013), 3.