

The Mandingo Question in Liberian History and the Prospect for Peace in Liberia; PART I

Liberian Observer

<http://liberianobserver.com/node/5778>

Publication Date: 16-21 April 2010

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Ethnic tension in Liberia had been nonexistent or at least dormant until Samuel K. Doe assumed the presidency. Doe's Government was dominated by his kinsmen, the Krahns, and manifestly supported by the Mandingo tribe. Perhaps as a consequence of the rivalry between president Doe and Thomas Quinworkpa, the two remaining strong men of the then People's Redemption Council (PRC) which toppled the status quo of the True Whig Party, the Civil War, waged by the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) under the leadership of Charles Ghankay Taylor, was conducted initially on tribal lines.

As the then Krahn-dominated Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) suppressed Thomas Quinworkpa's people - the Gio and Mano tribes of Nimba County during the reign of president Doe, elements of the Gio and Mano tribes who were the majority combatants of the NPFL seized the opportunity to avenge themselves against the Krahn and the Mandingo ethnic groups. Thus, as the war progressed to engulf the entire country, rebels of the NPFL and the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), a splinter group of the NPFL, continued to target Krahns and Mandingoes while the AFL focused its atrocities on Gio and Mano tribes in Monrovia, though not exclusively; as the Americo-Liberians were also singled out for harsh treatment including death. This situation was further inflamed by opportunists belonging to rival groups who proclaimed themselves as spokespersons and defenders of their respective groups. Thus ethnicity was encouraged by the formation of tribal warring factions such as the Movement for the Redemption of Mandingoes, founded and led by Alhaji G.V. Kromah, a Mandingo. He eventually merged with the Krahns to form the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO). ULIMO in turn became ULIMO-K (K - for loyalists of Kromah, a Mandingo) and ULIMO-J (J - for loyalists of D. Roosevelt Johnson, a Krahn). All attempts to end the crisis underscored the need for reconciliation between/among the various tribes of the nation. It is unfortunate that significant success has not been achieved in this regard even up to now when there is no more war and that the Nation has succeeded in bringing into being a democratically elected government. It can be said that conflicts between the Mano/Gio ethnic groups on the one side and the Krahn on the other have eased while there existed no tension, rivalry, or any sort of tribal conflicts between Americo-Liberians (Congoes) and other indigenous tribes in general except between the Mandingo tribe on the one hand and often, one of the other tribes on the other hand; especially tribes in Nimba, Lofa, and Bong Counties.

It is this recurring phenomenon that must amicably be resolved to ensure tribal harmony in Liberia. In order to successfully deal with this issue, government needs to supplement/complement the usual orthodox and futile approach exercised by previous administrations and

continued to date. The use of committees, with members drawn from the conflicting parties, religious bodies, and officials of government etc. has not so far yielded any fruitful results. Often though, reports from mediation efforts which always suggest that the 'palava' had been looked into and that the people have agreed to reconcile and live together as they did prior to the war are made not only to the authorities but also to the public in general. In spite of such efforts and pronouncements, there is continuous recurrence of violence between the Mandingoes and other tribes, especially in Lofa, Nimba, and Bong Counties.

Finding out why the utilization of the fact-finding and investigative committees remain an exercise in futility and why the numerous workshops that have been and continue to be conducted by civil society and non-governmental organizations throughout the country have made no positive impacts in the particular instance will immensely lead to an understanding of the root cause of the problem; a problem which may rightly be referred to as 'the Mandingo Question in Liberian History'.

Reasons for the Futility of Efforts

There are numerous reasons why efforts of mediation have not succeeded in bringing about forgiveness, reconciliation and peace between the Mandingoes on the one hand and other tribes on the other hand. In sincerity, bigotry, deceit, falsification of history, political intrigues, opportunism, etc. are all factors that have kept the so-called agents or advocates of peace, equality and democracy from realizing that merely invoking idealism about the rights of citizens to free movement; and right to home and property anywhere in the country cannot reconcile this particular adverse relationship.

Fundamental among what must be done to ensure tolerance are knowledge and appreciation of the history of West Africa, especially factors that led to the migration of the various tribes to the region now called Liberia are necessary for a resolution of the Mandingo Question.

The Mandingo

Mandingo is the word used to refer to a huge number of people who reside in most parts of West Africa as a distinct ethnic group. From Cassamance in Senegal downward along the coast to Cote d'Ivoire and beyond and from Mali in the north through the rain forest communities to the coast, Mandingoes are found well established mainly as traders and Islamic clerics. Also known as Malinke, Mandinka, Mende, Mande, Maden, etc., the Mandingoes belong to the Mande-speaking stock of Africans according to Joseph Greenberg's linguistic classification of the people of Africa. The Mande-speaking people are said to have evolved from family bands of hunters and gatherers who eventually united to become clans or kingdoms.

By the seventh century A.D, the Soninke or Sarakolle - another Mende-speaking group - spearheaded the first Mande expansion as builders of the ancient empire of Ghana. The Mandingo or Malinke came to prominence when Ghana declined and lost control over her subjects. This was in consequence of the Almoravid onslaughts. Other Mande-speaking people are the Soso, the Kuranko, the Koineagie or the Koniyanka, the Kono, the Kpelle, the Lorma (Torma), the Dahn or Mano, the Gio, the Timene, the Vai, etc

Saomoru (Sumuguru) Kante, the Soso, tried to take over the ruins of Ghana. There, however, followed a long period of internal crisis (1200 AD-1235 AD) because he was considered

ruthless and wicked. It is claimed that he was especially very wicked against the Manlinke or Mandinka because of their support and involvement in the slave trade and above all, their embrace and adoption of Islam. Given this rivalry, Saomoru was challenged and opposed by the Mandingoes. It therefore became necessary to unite all the Mandingo clans. First, two kingdoms merged. These were Do and Kiri. Do, which became known as Dodugu, comprised twelve towns inhabited by the Konde clan. Kiri became known as Mande and Traore clans. The Camara clans of Sibi and Tobon constituted the Bako Kingdom. It was the Mole or Keita clan that united the region. The Mandinka were now prepared to fight the Soso for control of the empire. In the end, Sundiata Keita emerged victor over Saomoru Kante at the battle of Kirina in A.D. 1235. This event marked the beginning of the second Mande expansion. It took the Mandinka clans from their original settlement in the Upper Niger basin area to other parts of West Africa. Through conquest, which was accomplished by trade and Jihads or holy wars against non-Muslim subjects, they were able to unify almost all of the Western Sudan into the empire of Mali.

The Mandinka and the other Mande-speaking relatives had lived in harmony with one another as agriculturists and pastoralists while being guided by their common African religion and other cultural norms prior to their adoption of Islam which was introduced into the region by Berbers and Twarigs. With their ascension to power and given the doctrines of their newly found religion, the Mandinka now saw themselves as superior and different from other tribes of the western Sudan. Unable to challenge the might of the Mandinka and unwilling to accept their religion, which meant a new way of living and a denial of one's own culture and tradition, most other people of the region ostracized themselves by moving further away from the center of power. The situation became worst during the reign of Mansa Musa when Sharia or Islamic laws were imposed on all subjects of the Mali Empire. Most tribes were either assimilated or were constrained to flee their original homeland.

By their adoption of Islam and their pilgrimages to Mecca, the Mandinka rulers of the empire of Mali introduced literacy and new institutions of governance. As Muslims, they now became town-dwellers engaged in trade and evangelism. From the point of view of Muslims, they were and remain great. Others who believe and adhere to their African cultural values and norms regard the Mandinka as traitors who waged war against them in the name of a foreign god thereby destroying their civilization.

The Liberian Mandingo

Given that typical Liberians, until recently, erroneously perceived any black Muslim as Mandingo and in that there are Muslims of other tribes and nationalities, Liberian-Mandingo is used here as an adjective and noun interchangeably in reference to citizens of Liberia who are Muslims. These exclude most of the Mende, Gbandi, Vai, and Gola who also accept Islam (submission to Allah). Accordingly, the Liberian-Mandingo ethnic stock can be categorized into three main groups. These groups are the Quadu-Gbondi, the Koiniagei or Koniyanika, and the Mandinka or Malinke.

The Quadu-Gboni

The Quadu-Gbondis are not Mandingo (Mandinka) as claimed by members of this community. Rather, they are a subgroup of the Lorma tribe known as GBONDI. Their classification as Mandingo is due to the fact that they chose to become Muslims and by doing so ostracized themselves to form the Lorma (Gbondi). It must be remembered that the impacts

of Islam on the various ethnic groups of the West African region was outrageous. Due to the imposition of Sharia or Islamic laws, many tribes fled the power of the Mandingo who had now become their life-time enemy. Such tribes as the Kissi, Lorma (Torma), Mande, Dahn, Gio, Kono or Vai and the Kpelle, in contact with one Nother as people governed by the institution of the Poro and Sande, moved downwards into the rainforest and settled in the regions they now occupy in present-day Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Naturally, any member or members of these tribes who chose the new way of life as determined by Islamic laws were seen as traitors and therefore considered Mandingo.

This was the case with some Gbondi-Lorma people who now call themselves Quadu-Gbondi and are happy to be referred to as Mandingo. They did not exist as a distinct tribal group in Liberia until during the 1970s in the administration of the late President William R. Tolbert, Jr. through the efforts of Dr. Edward Beyan Kessely, Jr., of Gbondi origin, who was then Minister of Information in the Tolbert administration, when they were politically recognized as a distinct subdivision of Lofa County.

Previously, Voinjama district in Lofa County consisted only of the Wubomain and Gbondi chiefdoms. The Quadu-Gbondi are referred to or classified as Mandingo (Mandinka) simply because they chose Islam and thereby condemned their original cultural and traditional norms as Lorma people. They are opposed vehemently to the Poro institution. The laws and training of the Poro guide and govern almost all Mande-speaking communities including the Mano, the Gio, the Kpelle and the Mel-speaking Gola and Kissi. The fact that the names of people and places of Quadu-Gbondi are Lorma words substantiates the claims that they belonged originally to the Lorma subgroup Gbondi. Their adoption of Arabic and Mandingo names is meant to prove that they are truly Muslims. Like the Koniyanika, the Quadu-Gbondi are not accepted by the real Mandinka tribal stock.

[To be continued]

The Koniyanika

A large number people throughout the region, especially among the Fulanis and Mandinka, hold the view that the Koniyanika are people with no particular roots and that their livelihood is characterized by confusion, deceit and violence wherever they reside. Being vehemently resentful of them, the Fulani and Mandinka do not attend the same Mosques for worship with them in spite of the fact that they are Muslims by faith. Albeit all this, there is a positive consideration of this stock of Mande-speaking people. It is believed that the Koniyanika are the descendants of those who stood against the imposition of Islam in their various communities. Many of these African defenders were captured in the wars that were waged against them by the Mandinka who were determined to ensure that all subjects of their empire, Mali, became Muslims. These captives who came from different tribal groupings, evolved into a slave community within Mandinka land and many of them were sold to the Arabs through the trans-Saharan trade initially; and later, to the Americas through the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Those who were not sold remained in Mandinka land where they were utilized as servants of the ruling class and wealthy Muslim merchants. Besides being used as domestic servants, the slaves now constituted the fighting forces that were so frequently used to expand and protect the Malian empire. Naturally, they were forced by circumstance to adapt and adopt the language and beliefs of their masters. Even though they became Muslims eventually, they continued to be seen and treated as slaves according to the Islamic principle

which hold that once captured/caught in a war of resistance against forces of any Islamic Jihad, the captives would forever remain slaves.

In the view of those who think and believe that the imposition of both Islam and Christianity on the people of Africa is responsible for the destruction of their civilization, disunity, and underdevelopment, the Koniyanika of today are the descendants of gallant and courageous men and women who chose to oppose foreign religion and control of their communities by outsiders.

The Mandinka/Mandingo

The Liberian Mandinka came/come mainly from the present-day countries of Guinea, Guinea Bissau, The Gambia and Mali. These people became Liberians initially through naturalization. Now, they are citizens either by naturalization or birth. Most Mandinka came or come to Liberia by way of the coastal air or seaports whereas the Koniyanika have come gradually through the rainforest communities. There are few non-Mandinka Africans who are Liberians and categorized in this group. These include the Soso, Sonike, Bambara, Hausa, Wollof, Jollof, etc.

What is noteworthy of all these people is the very important fact that they are all Moslems. This is an important reminder or alert when we recall the Muslim belief that anyone and anything in the abode of Islam is worthy of protection and salvation whereas anything or anyone outside of the abode of Islam is worthy of condemnation and destruction.

It would not be cynical or inappropriate to think that indigenous Liberians- the other fifteen tribes and other non-Moslem Liberians are challenged to review and reconcile their historical value system which is said to be based on Christianity. In view of the current social, economic and political realities of the time vis-à-vis the influx of Moslems into Liberia, it is crucial to address the Mandingo Question with objectivity that is meant to enhance nationalism for unity, peace and development.

The Mandingo Question

By way of definition, the Mandingo Question in Liberian history includes all of the factors, reasons, and causes that are responsible for the antipathy between the Koniyanika Mandingo on one hand and each of the other ethnic groups of Liberia on the other. The most important aspect of said question include the issues of historical relationship and misinformation about the Liberian-Mandingo; title to land; the desire or aspiration for recognition and inclusion in politics especially at the local level; and additionally, the differences in religious, cultural and customary practices.

Aspects of the Question

1. Historical Relationship

Inference from historical studies about the people of West Africa, including oral history, suggest that all the Mande-speaking people evolved as relatives in the same area around the Niger River basin in the Western Sudan. Accordingly, it is believed that all the Mande-speaking tribes of Liberia are related in one way or another. For example, according to oral history, the Mandingo are said to be nephews of the Lorma whereas the latter are said to be

nephews of the Kissi while they are small brothers of the Kpelle. Similarly, The Gbandi are considered small brothers of the Lorma. They all lived together as farmers and pastoralists.

Their social, economic and political relations were governed by the same African Laws based on common culture and tradition. This mutual relationship changed overtime with the introduction of Islam by Afro-Arab Berbers who sacked Kumba Saleh, the capital of the ancient empire of Ghana in AD1076. In order to protect their people, African Kings during this period chose to become Muslims. This was the case with Baranmindanah, the first Mansa or King of Mali who embraced Islam in AD1056. Mansa Baranmindanah urged his people that all succeeding Mansas become Moslems. Some of them, such as Mari Jalak who became famous in history as Mansa Musa, were very fanatical. The result of this initially was the eruption of conflicts between and among the vast majority of the African masses who refused to adopt Islam. Eventually, fanatical leaders decided to execute a ruthless program of forced conversion to Islam. This meant a declaration of war on time-honored religious beliefs and practices. However, the program of forced conversion failed as the non-Mandinka African masses who were of course regarded as infidels, could not yield and therefore had to flee the empire. In the end, Islam triumphed over the entire West African region. Thus the seeds of hatred that have grown among generations of relatives had firmly been sowed.

2. Misinformation about the Liberian Mandingo

Some historians, in their accounts about the indigenous tribes of the country, claim that the Mandingo tribe is one of the sixteen (16) ethnic groups met here upon the arrival of the Americo-Liberians in the early nineteenth century A.D. A fundamental implication of this claim is that the Mandingo, like the other tribes, were already settled as a community with title to the own homeland. This claim is refuted by the other tribes of Liberia but are agreed that few Mandingo people could be found here then. They maintain that the Mandingo met then were migrant-traders from the Sahel who moved from one community to another selling salt, manufacture wares, textiles, guns, etc. and buying gold, kola nuts, ivory and other forest products. This view may be credible since the Mandingo themselves consider several areas in Liberia as their original homeland. Some of them claim to be originally from the Bopulu area of present-day Gbarpulu County while others say they are from Lofa, Bong or Nimba Counties.

The claim of Bopulu comes from their belief that King Sao Boso was a Mandingo man and therefore it could be easily proven that Mandingo people come from Bopulu where he reigned.

However, Sao Boso was no Mandingo. He was a Gbandi who led an expeditionary force that mainly comprised Gbandi and Lorma people against the Golas whose original homeland is the community of Bopulu district, Gbarpulu County. Oral history in this area indicates that Sao Boso, having succeeded in defeating the Gola people, decided to share their captured land according to the ethnic configuration of his army. The captured territory was therefore shared mainly between the Gbandi and Lorma who fought the war against the Gola. As the fighters were accompanied by a Mandinka (Mori) whose task in the war was to pray and perform “juju” for the success of the expedition, he too was given a portion of the land, the most important booty at the time. The town built by this Mori is known today as Mandina which is just few miles from Bopulu. This may be why some Mandingo, especially the Koniyanika feel that Bopulu district is their original home in Liberia.

Although the Quadu-Gbondi are considered to be Mandingo merely because they adopted Islam, they have title to land in Lofa County as Lorma people. This is why the crisis between the Quadu-Gbondi and their kinsmen is not about land. Rather, the rivalry in this area has been about the desire of the Quadu-Gbondi to be recognized as a distinctive group. This may be due to the resentment and disrespect for the culture and traditional practices of the Gbondi-Lorma whom they regard as infidels or heathens. In that there is no town or territory in Zorzor district, Lofa County, Bong County, or Nimba County that can be said to have been established by the Mandingo, specifically the Koniyanika, it is glaring that they have all along been accommodated simply out of good will.

3. The Land Issue

The issue of land ownership between Mandingos and those among whom they live has become an impetus for repeated conflicts since the war. As migrant-traders, the Mandingos brought in needs that were not available locally in exchange for local commodities that were needed elsewhere. As such, the Mandingos were welcomed and accommodated as individuals in transit. They were later permitted as guests and eventually allowed to settle.

Initially, permission for permanent settlement was obtained through friendship with local leaders at the detriment of their people. This means and the right to a settlement in consequence of intermarriage were the most common and mutual path by which the Mandingo attained land-use rights. Another mutual means was the acquisition of land either for cash crop production or for dwelling from locals or citizens who failed to underwrite or settle their indebtedness to individual Mandingos. The claims that direct purchase of land from individual indigenes of the various tribal communities was made cannot be proven legally through Fee Simple deeds. Prior to the civil war, it was uncommon to hear about conflicts regarding title to land between Mandingos-collectively or as individuals- and those who gave them accommodations. Since the war however, and especially now when peace is being encouraged in the Country and that citizens are returning to their former homes, the Mandingo are being denied their claims to land or homes they had previously been allowed to own.

Different views are often presented as reasons for this action of denial against them. Some believe that the action is due to envy while others believe it is because the Mandingos are Moslems. Yet others hold that the current attitude is revenge or rather a reaction to the ruthlessness of the Mandingos against their host during the Civil War. Envy is suggested by some based on their thinking that the Mandingos had become wealthy among their hosts because of their industrious and unscrupulous character. This, they claim, has enabled the Mandingo to become dominant politically and economically in every community they reside.

Additionally, the financial power of theirs has also encouraged an imbalance in the social relationship between and among individuals of the communities. For example, it is noted that the Mandingo can love to or can take women of local origin but forbid their women to socially interact with their male hosts. According to other people, religious and cultural differences might be the reasons for the current attitude towards the Koniyanika Mandingo. Accounts of the civil war indicate that the fighters of ULIMO-K, who were predominantly Mandingo, deliberately targeted communities in which they had been settled for long and wantonly killed people who had accepted them out of goodwill for co-existence.

They are said to have also purposefully destroyed homes, farms, businesses and were bent on the desecration of shrines and other sacred places. All of these can only amount to a calculated design meant not only to frustrate their hosts but humiliate them further because of their opposition to Islam according to some commentators.

4. The Desire For Recognition And Inclusion Of The Koniyanika Mandingo

The desire for recognition and inclusion in the politics of the communities in which they reside is considered to be another main reason responsible for the recurring conflicts between them and communities leaders. This desire or aspiration was fulfilled at both the local and national levels long before the national civil crisis. The people of Lofa and Bong counties have even had Mandingo to serve them in the Legislature. This trend continues today at the national level where they are serving in government as ministers, directors, representatives, senators, etc. Thus their aspiration for recognition in politics cannot be a contributing factor for the rivalry that subsists between the parties.

5. Differences In Religious, Cultural And Customary Practices

Studies of tribal or ethnic groups living in the same communities indicate that differences in culture, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society, often lead to resentment and rivalry which at times result in violent destruction of life and properties by the contending parties. Recalling their historical relationship as explained above, it could be taken for granted that the Mandingo question is rooted in cultural differences, especially the religious component. The Mandingo, being Moslems by faith, are guided by the Koran, their holy book which dictates how they are to live and relate to non-Moslems. Majority of Liberians are neither Moslems nor Christians. These are Africans who are determined to not only maintain, but to preserve their culture which they believe is prescribed or, if you like, proscribed by God. The rest of the populations are Christians with few belonging to other religions such as Buddhism and Krishna.

Thus, without critical consideration of the Mandingo Question, it would seem that the diverse world view regarding God, man and nature presented by these religions as guide for the entire way of life of their respective adherents is the underlying factor responsible for the recurring conflicts that characterize the relationship between the Mandingo on one hand and each of the other ethnic groups in Liberia. There is, however, a counter view which suggests that the adverse relationship being considered herein is not due to religious differences per se. Those who hold this view argue that if it were so, then the relationship between most Vais, Gola, Mende and Gbandi on the one hand and tribes of Liberia other than the Koniyanika Mandingo on the other hand could have been marred by similar resentment and hostility. According to them, the other than the Koniyanika Mandingo on the other hand could have been marred by similar resentment and hostility. According to them, the Koniyanika Mandingo are not in fact accommodated by the Vai, Gbandi, and other non-Koniyanika Moslems inspite of both groups being adherents of Islam. They also point to the fact that in every community where they have settled over the years, the local elders and leaders have permitted them to exercise their religious freedom, including the construction of mosques prior to the war. It is therefore necessary, given the foregoing, to look elsewhere for the root cause(s) of the prevailing reality.

6. Socio-Economic Aspect

As much as the relationship which subsists between other ethnic groups and the Koniyanika Mandingo has always been characterized by misunderstanding, confusion, and conflicts that often result in the destruction of lives and properties, the antagonists continue to rely on each other for survival in response to the ever-changing political-economy of the region, especially at the local community level (villages and towns). Since differences in cultural and religious practices serve as barrier to mutual understanding and cooperation for peaceful co-existence, the only reason suggested for their interaction has to do with the need to respond to the imperatives of trade. After their cultural bond was broken by Islam, trade and commerce became the determined factor responsible for whatever relationships that have come about between them.

Accordingly, those who fled from the center of power as explained in the section on historical relationship above to become the first to settle in the area that is today Liberia were the same people who welcomed the Koniyanika as traders who brought in needed commodities in exchange for local products. For example, salt, snuff, manufactured wares, textiles, etc. were brought in by the Koniyanika-Mandingo in exchange for ivory, gold, kola nuts and other forest products. Based on personal economic interests of local leaders and the need of individual trades for permanent residence, the various communities they now claim as their original homes simply because of the foregoing development, there evolved an unequal social relationship that is latent with resentment that has grown into apathy and rivalry.

As traders in the midst of locals whose livelihood to date is attained primarily through subsistence agricultural activities, they were not, until recently, participants in the money-economy of the country. As a result of their economic power, therefore, the Koniyanika-Mandingo have always consider it an opportunity or privilege to take or obtain lovers or wives from among women of their benefactors while at the same time opposing and preventing similar or reciprocal relationship between their women and non-Mandingo men of the communities accommodating them. They claim that their religion forbids marriage between their females and men who are not Muslims. Another social relationship of advantage for or to the Koniyanika Mandingo is suggested by some commentators the attainment of official recognition that they are not foreigners in the various communities of the Country. The commentators observe that the financial capacity of the Koniyanika-Mandingo has enabled them to take advantage of said official recognition to become opinion leaders at the displeasure and disapproval of the original inhabitants of these areas. Of course, it is natural in such situation to see envy, competition, marginalization, and exclusion as reaction of the disadvantaged group; especially where it is dominant.

PATH TO RECONCILIATION

When the decision was made to undertake this write-up, an exercise of reflection about the possibility for peace and cooperation between and among all Liberians in general and in particular the Koniyanika-Mandingo on one side of the divide and the other ethnic groupings in Liberia on the other, it was hoped that a discussion as to what must be done to reconcile the Mandingo Question in Liberian history would be provoked between and among all stakeholders so that in the end a just, mutual, and definitive understanding that would not only resolve the ongoing ethnic anarchy, but would also end up evolving a national charter for peaceful coexistence.

The path for the realization of this dream-reconciliation and peaceful co-existence will have to begin with addressing the issues raised in the discussions above under the caption aspects of the question. Particular attention must be given to the history of the people; the rights of individuals to protect and preserve their culture; live according to their beliefs; the essence of local governments in the modern nation-state; and how title to land is obtained in Liberia.

The foregoing notwithstanding, there is the view that in a community of two or more tribes, it is the dominant tribe among them whose norms or traditions are eventually adopted and adapted to. Majority of Liberians are animists (for a want of name) or are people who adhere to their African traditional religions. In these various local communities, it cannot be strangers, especially strangers who had sought sanctuary there who will dictate their social, cultural, economic and political livelihood.

Some people suggest that guaranteed reconciliation would result if the Koniyanika-Mandingo were to choose to return to their chiefdom or chiefdoms in the instance the accommodation given them is now unacceptable for whatever reason or reasons there may be. Incidentally, they do not seem to have title to any chiefdom-the smallest political unit of society above the family- in the country. The fact that we are all Liberians must not be construed to mean that each Liberian has the right to enter another's home and do whatever pleases him or her there.

In my own view, Liberians will have to become sincere with themselves as a people desirous of building a new nation and become objective by putting a round peg in a round hole rather than putting a round peg in a square hole.