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Kronyan Nawin Jappah
Syracuse University

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Abstract

Mob justice refers to acts of violence meted out against an individual or individuals alleged to have committed a crime. Studies suggest that the inability of states to ensure equity, fairness, and impartiality within judicial proceedings facilitate mob justice. This study aims to explore causes, effects, and amelioration of mob justice in Joe Bar Community, Paynesville, Liberia. Data were collected using a survey questionnaire, focus groups and interviews from 300 community residents and legal practitioners in the Joe Bar Community.

The causes of mob justice in Liberia are multi-faceted. In addition to a weak judiciary, the country has a history of civil conflict and political instability, leading to widespread poverty, unemployment, and a lack of access to basic resources. Quantitative results of this study show that both men and women perceive that bribery of judicial officers is a common cause of mob justice. More than one-half (56% of respondents) reported fear among citizens as an effect of mob violence, with women in the 18-29 age group most likely to report fear among citizens as an effect of mob justice.

In this study, the qualitative results obtained from focus group discussions and interviews show a high level of perceived corruption within the judicial system, which erodes trust in the system. The respondents expressed frustration with the slow and expensive legal process; they reported that this process also contributes to the rise of mob justice. Delay in court trials and lack of judiciary support are recurring themes in these discussions. Despite the challenges, there is a shared aspiration for change among the respondents, indicating a community desire to seek alternatives to mob justice and to embrace legal solutions.

Focus group discussions highlight community members' grievances, particularly regarding the lack of support from law enforcement. The lack of trust in the judicial system is a

pervasive issue. Respondents believe that lack of trust leads some community members to take matters into their own hands and engage in mob justice. Interviews with stakeholders, including judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and police officers, reveal their concerns about the public's lack of trust in legal institutions; logistical challenges facing these institutions; and the need for adequate training of law enforcement officers to effectively address mob violence.

Mob justice undermines the authority and legitimacy of formal legal institutions, erodes trust in the state's ability to maintain law and order, and weakens the overall social fabric. The research recommends that the government should prioritize the eradication of corruption within the judicial system. Efforts should be made to foster a stronger bond between citizens and security personnel, and to build confidence between citizens, law enforcement and the judiciary. Further, educating citizens about the due process of law and the consequences of mob justice, and incentivizing professionalism among public authorities are imperative. It is also essential to ensure that those involved in mob justice are swiftly brought to justice.

Causes, Effects and Amelioration of Mob Justice in Liberia: A Case Study of Paynesville Joe
Bar in Monrovia

By
Kronyan Jappah

M.A., University of Liberia Graduate School, 2012

B.P.A., Cuttington University, Liberia, 2009

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Pan
African Studies

Syracuse University

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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem: Defining Justice and Mob Justice

The word justice is derived from the Latin word “jus” - meaning right or law. Justice as a concept is among the most important moral and political ideas and has broad definitions. Various literature present concepts of justice from different perspectives. Thus, the definition of justice is constantly evolving. For example, to scholars of law, justice means the application of the rule of law, while philosophers attribute this concept to the idea of morality.

According to Parnami (2019), justice speaks to a person receiving punishments for immoral actions – this immorality could mean breaking the law and/or moral code of conduct. “Justice as Fairness” is a widely used concept of justice which was proposed by John Rawls (1971) in his seminal work, *A Theory of Justice*. For Rawls (2001), justice means that offices/positions designed to address socioeconomic inequalities must offer each person the same rights and liberties as everyone else, to the fullest extent possible. Institutions and organizations such as the International Justice Project, International Criminal Justice Program, Human Rights Watch, International Court of Justice and many others have been designed to provide such liberties across the world.

In Liberia, operational institutions such as the Independent National Commission on Human Rights of Liberia, Movement for Justice in Africa (a Pan-African organization), and the Carter Center are dedicated to advocating for justice for Liberians. Despite these efforts, justice carried out outside of the justice system continues to be the norm across Liberia (New Dawn Newspaper, 2023; Tokpah, 2022).

Mob justice refers to acts of violence meted out by a group of people against an individual or individuals who are alleged to have committed a crime (Berg and Wendt, 2011). This action is often carried out with total disregard for due process of the law. Alston (2010) defines mob justice as an exercise in lawlessness; a return to practices based on a failure of the justice system to address serious problems perceived by the community. Alston (2010) and other researchers show how mob justice can be attributed to the failing of the justice system (Neimark et al., 2021; Salihu et al., 2018; Tei 2020). Helbling et al. (2015) describe mob justice in Kenya as extra-legal punishment, usually entailing death or severe physical harm, perpetrated by groups claiming to represent the will of the larger community.

Mob justice, also known as vigilante justice or street justice, refers to a situation wherein a group of people take the law into their own hands to seek retribution or deliver punishment to an alleged wrongdoer, without going through the formal legal system. To mob means to crowd about and to attack. In perpetrating mob justice, a mass of people, ranging from several dozen to several hundred persons, take the law into their own hands to injure or kill a person accused of criminal wrongdoing. However, mob justice goes beyond the act of gang violence. It occurs when an assembly of people unlawfully organize their own trial and judge suspects of crimes in the streets. Thus, a group of people (the angry mob) is responsible for inflicting a penalty on an alleged offender/criminal without proving them guilty of the offense within a competent court of law. As such, the masses judge a criminal act without a hearing or without giving the accused the right to defense. Mob justice often occurs when individuals feel frustrated or dissatisfied with the perceived inadequacy or slowness of the official legal process. Due process of the law, as administered through courts of justice by established and sanctioned legal principles and

procedures, and with safeguard for the protection of individual rights, is referred to as the law of the land.

Although protecting its citizens is among the primary responsibilities of a government, governments generally interpret the concept of security to mean the security of territory from extended aggression and protection of national interest, and the security of state officials and VIPs. Governments do not emphasize the assumption that individual security emanates from that of the state. However, in its 1994 Human Development Report, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) pioneered a new concept of human security, which stressed the need to account for the legitimate concerns of ordinary people who seek security in their daily lives.

Mob justice has been practiced in many societies in the world. In acts of mob justice, the victim's legal rights are secondary, since the mob serves as prosecutors, judges, jury, and executors. A significant segment of the Liberian population supports mob justice as a mechanism for self or collective defense against alleged criminals, since the justice system has failed them with its reliance on corrupt judicial practices and slow delivery of justice, for it is often said that “justice delayed is justice denied.” Acts of mob justice are dehumanizing and unconstitutional; they violate human rights, like the right to life, liberty, and movement.

Human rights refer to the fundamental rights and freedoms considered inherent to all individuals, regardless of nationality, race, gender, religion, or any other distinguishing characteristic. They are often considered universal and inalienable, meaning they cannot be taken away or surrendered. Human rights encompass various entitlements, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Protecting human rights is essential for social justice, which refers to the concept of creating a society that is fair, inclusive, and equitable for all its members. Justice involves recognizing and addressing the systemic and structural barriers

contributing to inequality, discrimination, and marginalization based on race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disability, and more. It is the fair and proper administration of laws conforming to the natural law that all persons have intrinsic human rights.

Mob justice is a social and public health problem that is growing in Liberia, West Africa. It frequently occurs after a public alarm is raised in a community, followed by massive mobilization of community members, and ends with violence against a person or persons assumed to be criminals. This violence includes beating, stoning, burning, and lynching, which frequently lead to severe injuries and death. Robbery is the primary cause of mob justice in Liberia. Mob justice is justice without trial, which is essentially injustice.

Counselor George W. Smith, Resident Circuit Judge of the 15th Judicial Circuit, River Gee County, Liberia, announced at the opening of the February 2023 Term of Court that, “Unfortunately, mob justice is now becoming rampant, uncontrollable in our country. Individuals suspected of wrongdoings are extra-judicially punished by being beaten and even killed by vigilantes or a crowd (New Dawn Newspaper, 2023).” Counselor Smith condemned continuing acts of mob justice, which were also highlighted in the United States 2022 Human Rights Report on Liberia. The report suggested that although mob justice targeted alleged criminals, due to the lack of capacity within the judicial system to pursue these cases, it was difficult to determine underlying reasons for attacks which often led to deaths (United States Department of State, 2023).

People in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, and various parts of the country are tragically subjected to frequent mob violence and torture, resulting in loss of lives. The aftermath often reveals a grim scene of lifeless bodies strewn across the streets. This harsh reality not only leads to distressing physical harm and loss of life, but also poses significant public health risks. For

example, the smoke from burning bodies can give rise to respiratory and other infections among residents.

People are tortured and killed by mobs in Monrovia and parts of Liberia almost daily. It is an abuse of democracy, and results in chaos, social unrest and social disorder. As a result, people live in fear. The problem of mob violence in Liberia undermines the due process of the law. Also, mobs sometimes break into police stations, seize the accused, and subject them to severe beatings. At times, the mobs set both the accused and the police station on fire. These incidents should not occur in a country that adheres to the constitutional principle of the rule of law. These harrowing events contradict the rule of law, which a nation should protect. In these situations, victims' rights are undermined. In Liberia, the prevalence of mob justice severely deteriorates the bedrock of due process within the legal system.

Research Questions

1. What are the causes of mob justice in post-war Liberia?
 - a) Do police officers in the Liberian justice system have the requisite training and experience needed to perform their duties during acts of mob violence?
2. What are the effects of mob justice in post-war Liberia?
 - a) Does the justice system discriminate in prosecuting cases related to mob justice?

These research questions hold substantial importance in understanding the dynamics of post-war Liberian society. Attention is devoted to investigating possible strategies to reduce mob violence. This research delves into the phenomenon of mob-driven justice within Liberian society. It concludes with recommendations for an active and reliable judiciary.

Hypotheses

Law enforcement officers still need to protect lives and properties. However, corruption has affected the police department, the courts, and other government agencies. Therefore, when a suspected criminal is apprehended and handed over to the police, they can negotiate their way out, using intricacies of the law or through corruption. This further alienates the public, who think that the police and the courts favor criminals.

When the populace harbors deep-seated mistrust towards the legal system due to perceived social disparities, rampant corruption, and other societal disorders, individuals who feel marginalized and disenfranchised may resort to mob violence. Many law enforcement officers have failed in dispensing justice, leaving citizens with a fear of inadequate protection from criminal actors. Corruption has been incorporated into police departments, the judiciary, and other governmental bodies, as evidenced by the Global Corruption Barometer (2019). For instance, when a suspected criminal is apprehended and handed over to the police, a significant number of criminals extricate themselves from detention by manipulating legal loopholes or via bribery. Such acts deepen the divide between the public and the institutions meant to protect them. The public may contemplate taking matters into their own hands as a more productive course of action.

Null Hypothesis: Mob justice is not associated with citizens' lack of confidence in the judicial system.

Alternative Hypothesis: Mob justice is associated with citizens' lack of confidence in the judicial system.

Methodology

This study was conducted at various locations in the Joe Bar Community, which include the Paynesville Market, Paynesville Community Town Hall, Paynesville Magisterial Court and Paynesville Zone 5 Police Station. Paynesville is a major suburb of Monrovia, known for its diverse ethnic communities and is the location of the Redlight Market, one of Liberia's largest commercial centers. These locations were selected based on the proximity of participants' places of residence and work.

This research used field research methods to investigate the causes and effects of mob justice within the Joe Bar Community. The data collection process involved the use of questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews to gather firsthand information from participants, thereby gathering detailed data to answer the research questions. As noted by Van de Ven and Poole (2017), field research provides a realistic opportunity for researchers to acquire in-depth knowledge, as it allows for direct observation of the environment and firsthand accounts from individuals who have encountered the problem at hand. The researcher randomly distributed questionnaires at these locations. In addition to the questionnaires, the researcher conducted three focus groups with community residents, legal practitioners, and police officers. The focus group questions are the same as the questions in the questionnaire. However, the focus groups allowed for more open-ended responses. The three focus group members all shared similar understandings of mob justice.

Participants

The study used purposive sampling to engage participants, whose insights informed the research questions. This sample included community residents, legal practitioners (comprising of judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys affiliated with the Paynesville Magisterial Court), and police

officers stationed at the Paynesville Zone 5 police precinct. Community members selected for participation had at least five years of residency within the Joe Bar Community. Eligible participants were aged 18 and above, and their involvement was entirely voluntary, based on an explanation of the study's purpose following initial contact and their signing of the consent form. The researcher requested consent from the participants and emphasized the confidentiality of their responses, and that they could withdraw their consent, choose to not complete the questionnaires, and end the interviews at any point. The researcher also provided contact information for the research faculty advisor to participants, in case they had concerns and/or complaints.

Data Collection

The study used three primary methods to collect data: a questionnaire, focus groups, and interviews. The questionnaire, featuring 25 items, was purposefully designed to address Research Questions 1, 2, and 4 (see page 11). The questions explored the root causes of mob justice and its effects on the community. Participants received copies of the questionnaire from the researcher, who subsequently clarified the study's objectives. Participants committed approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire, returning it on the same day.

Focus groups were arranged to follow up on the questionnaire findings, fostering open dialogues concerning the causes and effects of mob violence and participants' perspectives on the justice system's handling of such cases. The focus groups provided a platform for open dialogue and sharing of ideas among community members. The qualitative data contextualized the quantifiable data gathered via the questionnaire. For the focus groups, participants were organized into groups of 20 based on proximity to either their place of residence or work. Each

focus group session lasted for one hour, involving 20 participants on separate days. In total, 60 participants contributed to the focus group discussions, spanning three hours over three days.

Interviews were structured to address Research Question 3 (see page 11), providing an in-depth understanding of how the justice system addresses mob violence cases. The researcher met with practitioners responsible for handling these cases, namely judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and police officers. Participation in the study was conditional upon consent from these professionals, following a formal request from the researcher. Subsequently, interview dates were arranged. The interviews adhered to a semi-structured format, featuring a concise set of 'guiding' questions created in alignment with Research Question 3. Two judges, two prosecutors, two defense attorneys, and two police officers were interviewed. These interviews occurred at their respective workplaces, primarily after regular working hours. Each interview session lasted for 30 minutes. In total, 240 minutes or four hours constituted the cumulative interview time, dispersed across six working days.

Data Analysis

The two types of data analysis used in this study are simple percentages and thematic analysis. Simple percentages were employed to quantitatively summarize and represent key patterns identified in the survey responses (Coolidge, 2020). This method allowed for a straightforward presentation of the numerical data, enabling a concise overview of participant perspectives on specific aspects related to mob justice.

Thematic analysis was used to qualitatively identify themes embedded within the narratives provided by participants during focus group discussions and interviews (Terry et al., 2017). This approach involved categorizing the textual data to uncover a deeper understanding of the causes and effects of mob violence that can then lead to the amelioration of mob

justice. Items with the highest percentages from the questionnaire were constructed as the guiding questions for the focus groups and interviews. These items became categories or themes under which the textual data was analyzed. These comprehensive analyses allowed for a holistic examination of mob justice, thus integrating the strengths of quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a detailed description of mob justice in the Joe Bar Community.

Significance of the Study

A functional Liberian democracy that protects the rights of its citizens depends on respect for the rule of law and due process of the law. A functional democracy includes the right to personal security, without fear of being injured or killed by mob violence, and as enshrined in the Liberian Constitution. An active and reliable judicial system can secure these rights. The research highlights the increase of mob violence in Liberia and hypothesizes that mob justice can be attributed to citizens' lack of confidence in the judicial system. As such, the research seeks to identify factors associated with mob justice; to determine how frequently alleged criminals are caught, injured, and killed; and to determine the effects of mob justice on society. It has the potential to help the Liberian government, African governments (the Pan African world), other governments, civil society, other institutions, and the public in developing policies to lessen the occurrence of mob violence.

Organization of the Study

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction, which gives the statement of the problem, research questions, hypotheses, methodology, significance of the study, and organization of the study. Chapter 2 presents human rights as a theoretical framework and the literature review. Chapter 3 presents the roots of mob justice in Liberia. Chapter 4

provides results and discussion of the research, and Chapter 5 provides research conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Human Rights Framework

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled, often understood to include the right to life and liberty, freedom of thought and expression, and equality. A moral rejection of mob justice highlights the importance of protecting human rights. This framework emphasizes human dignity, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Arguably, mob justice moves from one wrong to another, and is synonymous with terror, moral decay, and the collapse of governmental authority. The consequences include eventual victimization of innocent and vulnerable people.

In Liberia, an individual can provoke mob justice to be meted out against a competitor or enemy, as a form of vengeance (Isser et al., 2009). In addition to minimizing human values and undermining human security, which are essential factors for national peace and stability, mob justice also dehumanizes both the perpetrators and the victims (Dodoo, 2021).

Based on a human rights framework, inflicting punishment on a person outside of the purview of the legal system denotes a society that is not governed by the rule of law. As such, mob justice signifies a descending spiral that culminates in the devaluation of the state, victims, and their families. Mob justice demonstrates the inability and failure of the state to respect its social contract with its citizens, which obligates government to guarantee the safety of its citizens. It denies victims closure from the conviction and sentencing of perpetrators. For society as a whole, it dehumanizes the population and destroys community and state life.

From a human rights perspective, much is wrong with mob justice, as it includes abuse of the right to life, the right to be treated with dignity, the right to due process of the law and the

right to be heard in a just and impartial court of law. In this regard, the presumption of innocence and freedom from torture, cruelty, inhuman and degrading punishment must also be observed.

Mob justice also contradicts natural justice, which advocates the right to a hearing, such that no person is condemned without a hearing. Natural justice demands that alleged offenders be treated with humanity and respect. There is consensus among modern legal traditions that the accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty (the presumption of innocence) (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 11, 1948; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14, 1966). To prove their guilt, a constituted court must find beyond reasonable doubt that the person committed the offense. Mob justice is thus ruled out, as it defies principles of natural law and justice and of international laws and conventions. Further, mob justice does not resolve threats to human security; rather, it exacerbates these threats. It is not a mechanism to resolve conflicts and maintain peace in a society. And yet, the lives of people are routinely threatened by high levels of insecurity, which contribute to mob justice.

Mob justice is not a new phenomenon. In the United States, mob lynchings against Black Americans, Mexicans, members of the abolitionist movement, unionists, and others were common across the nation during the American Civil War in the 1860s (Huggins, 1991). In Africa, although practices of mob execution subsided with the emergence of the colonial justice system across Africa, mob execution continued in some African communities during the post-colonial period (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014).

Medar et al. (2021) identified at-risk groups, common mechanisms of injuries sustained, and complications of injuries from mob justice fatalities in the Germiston Forensic Pathology Services medico-legal mortuary in South Africa, over a 10-year period (from 2006 to 2016). They found that mob justice fatalities accounted for 354 cases (1.27%) of fatalities, ranging from

28–49 cases per year, with all cases being Black individuals and being majority male (99.4%). Such fatalities are gross violations of human rights and reflect the history of Black targeted lynching and burning in South Africa. According to Medar et al. (2021), legal authorities charged with the responsibility for the safety of citizens should be empowered with adequate resources to curb these killings.

Tei (2020) explored how media in Ghana describe mob justice and how such description undermines legal authority. Results from this study show that media descriptions of mob justice undermine citizen's trust in the police and legitimize mob justice, as an alternative to ineffective policing. Similarly, in Nigeria, Salihu et al. (2018) examined how public dissatisfaction with the justice system contributes to mob justice. They found that mob justice in Lagos is a response to corruption and lack of equity in the Nigerian criminal justice system. These factors (i.e., poor policing and public dissatisfaction with the justice system) contribute to mob justice, which consequently undermines the human rights of the citizens of Nigeria.

Shodunke et al. (2023) explored mob justice issues and their intersection with human rights in Nigeria. Issues they address include lynching and burning of alleged perpetrators of theft, kidnapping, cultism, etc. They examine how these punishments can be considered as human rights violations, including the right to life, fair hearing, justice, and protection from degrading treatment. Their research shows that institutional problems and unethical practices in the criminal justice system aggravate public distrust, which leads to the occurrence of mob justice.

Byabashaija et al. (2016) investigated the relationship between legal requirements and mob justice in Kabale Municipality, in western Uganda. They reported that although 23% of their respondents agreed that legal requirements provided protection for the victim, respondents

also believed that these requirements were costly and a waste of time. While respondents believed that the existing legal system could potentially ensure justice for the victims, they also believed that the legal process was overwhelming and costly, such that mob justice became the alternative to satisfy the quest for justice.

The Rule of Law and Due Process of the Law in Liberia

The rule of law is a fundamental principle that underpins a just and fair society. It refers to the idea that every individual and all institutions and governments are subject to and accountable under the law. Due process of law is a legal principle that ensures fairness and protects the rights of individuals in the legal system. It is a concept associated with legal traditions worldwide. The right to due process of the law is referred to as the law of the land.

In Liberia, the due process of the law refers to the principle that the government must respect all the rights owed to every citizen according to the legal laws of the land, instead of respecting some or most of these rights (Constitution of Liberia, Article 11, 1986). The Liberian Constitution, Charter III Article 20 states:

“No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, security of a person, property, privilege, or any other rights except by the outcome of a hearing judgement consistent with the provision laid down in the constitution in accordance with the due process of the law. In a nutshell, no Liberian national or foreigner residing in Liberia has the right to take another person’s life, alleged of violation without giving that person an opportunity to be heard or answerable to charges made against him in a competent court of the law.”

The Contexts and Causes of Mob Justice

Mob justice is justice without trial, which frequently leads to violent, extrajudicial killings. In some societies, mob justice occurs due to societal biases. During the 19th century, based on racial

prejudices, Blacks were lynched as a penalty for committing acts considered criminal by the white population in America. Currently, in some countries, asylum seekers and migrants are increasingly exposed to mob violence executed by citizens of the host countries who are racist and xenophobic, and/or believe that migrants take away their jobs and income. In some European countries, citizens have beaten to death migrants from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe, who have migrated for political protection and/or employment opportunity (Ng'walali and Kitinya, 2006).

Socio-economic hardships in many African countries, including Liberia, have pushed many people out of their homes and into the streets as they struggle to survive, leaving countless people vulnerable to various forms of crime. Children are particularly at risk, as families and communities are no longer able to provide them with the safety nets they need. This has led to an increase in poverty, ultimately forcing many children to turn to street life and violence. High rates of unemployment and a lack of education fuel this vicious cycle of poverty and crime. The challenges of modern life, including work-related stress, domestic issues, and more, often lead to the rise of mob justice. Achieving a balance is difficult. People walking on the streets can be like ticking time bombs, ready to explode at the slightest provocation (Sherrington, 2007).

A main cause of the proliferation of mob justice in many African countries is the decline or erosion of state authority. When the legal system cannot be trusted due to perceptions of social inequities and corruption, it is not uncommon for angry mobs to engage in mob justice. The administration of mob justice against thieves who are incarcerated is often shown on television, as the government warns potential perpetrators. Mobs kill for numerous alleged offenses, including theft, armed robbery, rape, and murder. People complain that many thieves turned over to the police are released and found on the streets a few days after incarceration, and that these

criminals continue to harass citizens following their release. Lack of timely and effective justice contributes to negative views of the police. Many communities vindicate the use of mob violence as a deterrence to crime because the police and justice system have failed to them.

In Liberia, many law enforcement officers fail to protect life and property, and have been exposed as accomplices to criminals, which heighten the sense of insecurity and distrust of the police among citizens. Corruption has negatively impacted police departments, the courts and other government agencies. These acts further alienate the public, who believe that the police and courts favor criminals.

Mob justice occurs around the world. The world has witnessed genocide in Rwanda (Mamdani, 2001), and conflict in the Balkans (Roudometof, 2001) and among Catholics and Protestants in Ireland (Ruane, 2021). Supporters of mob justice perceive that it is an effective mechanism to resolve or curb criminal activities. They argue that because it is administered by the people (the masses), it can be considered as an appropriate form of justice. Further, they argue that frequent application of mob justice discourages crime (Kamma, 2015).

Using mob justice as a social control for crime is wrong. Sherrington (2007) describes it as a metaphysical form of protection that the state does not approve, although others argue that it should be seen as a form of social protest against the state for not upholding its duties and obligations to citizens. Further, mob justice is a manifestation of a failed judicial system and an extremely unequal economic system that favors the wealthy. These factors contribute to the development and dispensation of their own system of justice among groups. In Liberia, the rise in the incidence of crime typically overwhelms law enforcement agencies. The basic administrative structures, including the judicial system, are inefficient, thus creating a vacuum which contributes to conditions that lead the public to mob justice.

Civil conflict and wars also have a direct role in the occurrence of mob justice. Countries affected by civil conflict have a high number of illegal arms, which are cheap, easy to obtain and easy to operate. Used weapons are commonly traded in conflict-ridden regions. Rebels in Liberia and Sierra Leone were armed with assault rifles from conflicts in Mozambique and Angola (Stohl and Hogendoorn, 2010). These weapons remain in circulation after the cessation of conflict, causing a rise in the number of crimes. According to Stohl and Hogendorn (2010), “armed criminality is particularly violent in post-conflict countries where small arms and light weapons remain readily available and opportunities for unemployed youth are scarce.”

In Nigeria, increasing criminal activity is also linked to the increase in availability of small arms and light weapons. Increasing crime and widespread insecurity, and the associated demand for these weapons are also fueled by an overall decline in the standard of living and lack of basic amenities across the country (Idowu, 2020). In Kenya, the increase in access to weapons has exacerbated armed insecurity in pastoral regions, and political violence and crime in urban areas. In turn, these insecurities have resulted in the loss of life, destruction of property, population displacement and economic stagnation (Obwogi and Gulied, 2022). Widespread access to weapons inhibits economic development through the destruction of infrastructure, including roads, schools, and hospitals, and also inhibits agriculture, trade, and other economic activities (ibid.).

Chapter Three: The Roots of Mob Justice in Liberia

Overview of Liberia

The Republic of Liberia is located on the coast of West Africa, bordering Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Cote d'Ivoire. The nation's population is 5.2 million people (World Bank, 2022). Liberia was devastated by protracted civil war from 1989 to 2003, which resulted in the collapse of the Liberian state, extreme levels of violence, widespread poverty, and mass migration (Advocates for Human Rights, 2009). Over 200,000 people of the country's then-two million population were killed, and approximately 500,000 were displaced. Many others fled to refugee camps in neighboring West African countries (ibid.). Approximately two-thirds of the population lived in internally displaced or refugee camps during the civil conflict. The country's economic, educational, healthcare, public utilities, and other infrastructures collapsed during the war, resulting in economic stagnation, low educational attainment, and high mortality and morbidity rates (ibid.).

The Liberian civil wars fueled conflicts in the neighboring countries of Sierra Leone, Cote D'Ivoire, and Guinea, destabilizing the entire West African sub-region and undermining economic development in the region (Stohl and Hogendoorn, 2010). These conflicts in West Africa resulted in the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives, a cost of billions of dollars to the international community, and a continued lack of regional development (ibid.). Although the West African region is rich in minerals and other resources, it is among the world's most under-developed regions.

In her foreword to a report on the economic and human costs of armed conflict, former Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf noted the devastation that armed violence causes for African economies. Sirleaf observed that "in my own country, the conflict has led to the

squandering of rich mineral, agricultural, and human resources that should have benefited Liberia and its people. Although economic recovery has begun, it will take many years to recover from the destruction of infrastructure, the damage to businesses, and the loss of life and livelihood (p. 2).” This report estimates the economic cost of armed conflict to development in Africa since 1990 at approximately \$284 billion. Further, in Africa, an annual economic loss of approximately \$18 billion is attributed to insurgencies and civil wars, and a 15% decline in national economies is attributed to armed conflict. These estimates may be conservative, as they account for armed conflict and do not include armed crime (ibid.).

Johnson Sirleaf concludes that:

“This is money Africa can ill afford to lose. The sums are appalling: the price that Africa is paying could cover the cost of solving the HIV and AIDS crisis in Africa or provide education, water, and prevention and treatment for TB and malaria. Thousands of hospitals, schools, and roads could have been built, positively affecting millions. Not only do the people of Africa suffer the physical horrors of violence, but armed conflict also undermines their efforts to escape poverty (p. 2).”

In the 2017 presidential elections, George Weah succeeded Johnson Sirleaf as President of Liberia. His campaign focused on human capital development through free and compulsory primary and secondary school education, poverty reduction, and creating job opportunities, as promised in the 2018-2023 Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Economic Development (Government of Liberia, 2018). However, these achievements have not been meaningfully materialized. A high level of social unrest exists in Liberia, potentially spilling over into political unrest.

Transitional justice refers to the set of judicial and non-judicial measures which societies use to address and redress human rights violations, especially those committed during conflict or authoritarian rule. It promotes accountability, justice, and reconciliation as a society moves from a state of conflict or repression towards a more stable and democratic system.

Liberia's Legal Framework

Under Liberian constitutional law (Article 13.1), an accused has the right to leave police custody if there is no evidence to detain them. This law has been misinterpreted by citizens who perceive that the accused are released from custody because they bribe police officers, inciting citizens who already lack confidence in the police and judiciary to resort to mob violence. The police are sworn to maintain law and order, and to ensure the respect and protection of citizens (civil protection) and property. Like the judiciary, the police are often involved in corrupt practices that make them unpopular. Contradicting their responsibilities, the police extort money from business owners and private citizens, commit numerous security problems, and commit extrajudicial killings with impunity, and are thus responsible for gross human rights abuses (International Services for Human Rights, 2001). There are accounts of police failing to intervene when armed robbers attack neighborhoods. Some armed robbers even find it safer to steal from residences located in proximity to police stations (Ghoshal, 2010).

Aware of the inability of the police to ensure human security, citizens who can afford to do so employ private security. Primarily the affluent and bureaucratic elite can afford these security measures, and the majority of the population remain exposed to high levels of crime. When the state cannot provide security and protection to its citizens, the citizens are likely to withdraw allegiance to the state and turn to alternative forms of protection. The failure of the

state to provide human security, added to the desire of the population to control these conditions as a means of self and/or collective defense, contributes to rebellion against the state.

Based on its corrupt nature, the judiciary has deviated from the objective of upholding justice, and arguably, has become a center of injustice. Further, the slow delivery of justice, resulting from the lack of laws and enforcement mechanisms, lack of legal practitioners, and lack of logistics to combat crime, suggests the near collapse of the judiciary system.

In Liberia, in 2019, 53% of public service users reported that they had paid a bribe in the previous 12 months (declining from a 69% overall bribery rate in 2015). In 2019, 42% who had used the police in the previous 12 months reported having paid a bribe to the police (decline from 60% in 2015). Further, 62% of people think that most or all police officers are involved in corruption (decline from 77% in 2015); 49% think that most or all government officials are corrupt (decline from 70% in 2015), and 49% think that most or all members of Parliament are corrupt (decline from 68% in 2015). Most people who have used the police think that the police are corrupt, and the police are perceived of as the most corrupt public institution. Further, despite significant decline in perceptions of corruption between 2015 and 2019, in 2019, 43% of people thought that corruption levels had increased in the previous 12 months (Global Corruption Barometer - Africa, 2019).

In 2021, Liberia scored 29/100 on the Corruption Perceptions Index, ranking 136 out of 180 countries on the perceived level of public sector corruption. A score of 100 is very clean and a score of 0 is highly corrupt (Transparency International, 2021a). This high level of corruption can be attributed to “unresolved corruption allegations, a persistent culture of impunity, inadequate resourcing of anti-graft institutions and a weak judiciary (Transparency International, 2021b).” However, it is important to note that Liberia’s score of 29 significantly declined by 12

points from a score of 41 in 2012. This decline suggests that despite these challenges, mechanisms have been implemented to restore a positive image in the judiciary.

Under Liberian Law, Chapter 13.1, the accused has the right to leave police custody when there is no evidence against them. This right has been misinterpreted by citizens as bribery of police officers. The police also remain highly unpopular because of their failure to meet basic public expectations. The country is marred by the weak rule of law, and high levels of corruption and crime.

People have often marched to police stations to administer mob justice to prisoners. In 2021, reacting to the killing of a community resident which was not investigated by the police, a mob in Pleebo, Maryland County, stormed the local police station, overpowered the police on duty, freed 91 inmates, and set the home of the Speaker of the House of Representatives on fire (Dodoo, 2021). Dodoo attributes mob justice to the perception among citizens that criminals act with impunity and that the police and judicial authorities fail to investigate, prosecute, and punish crimes. Thus, lack of confidence in the police and judicial system and the absence of timely, appropriate and effective state justice contribute to the perpetration of mob justice among some citizens. Dodoo also notes that the authorities lack the resources to effectively prevent and punish crimes, including mob violence.

In April 2022, protestors blocked the entrance to the Liberian National Police Center in Monrovia, claiming that the police had delayed charging three men who had allegedly killed another man in an act of mob justice. The alleged perpetrators had accused the victim of theft. The alleged perpetrators' argument with the victim and his friend escalated into an assault against them. The police responded that they had charged the alleged perpetrators with murder of the victim and aggravated assault of his friend (Tokpah, 2022).

In March 2019, two men accused of the ritualistic killing of a baby were mauled to death in Ganta, Nimba County. Community residents complained that local authorities did nothing to apprehend the men, despite the increase in ritualistic killings in Nimba. The Nimba Women for Peace and Reconciliation urged the government to take action to prevent further violence, as community residents threatened mob justice. Thus, timely governmental intervention would avoid mob justice from residents who are highly frustrated and lack confidence in governmental authorities and local security forces (Front Page Africa, 2019a). The women's group attributed the increasing incidence of human rights abuses resulting from mob justice to Liberia's "contaminated judicial system and inefficiency, corruption, under-qualified lawyers and judges, lack of court facilities, transportation and other resources, inadequate police investigation, shortage of public defenders, and poor case management." They described the pervasive perspective among citizens that if they cannot get justice through the legal system, they will do it themselves. According to these citizens, mob justice ensures security and serves as deterrence to future abuses.

In 2019, the Liberian Bar Association issued a press statement against mob justice meted out against three women accused of witchcraft, with one woman dying because of the violence. The Bar called on the Liberian government to bring the perpetrators to justice, to serve as a deterrent of future acts of mob justice (Front Page Africa, 2019b). The Bar maintained that:

"Liberia is governed by the rule of law. Under our laws, when a person is suspected of committing a crime, the person is investigated by the Police, charged and forwarded to court for prosecution. Our law does not support, sanction, or condone, in any form and manner, individuals or institutions taking law into their own hands. The act against the women, whereby they are stripped naked and paraded in the streets by some citizens within the vicinity, is a gross

violation of the law, a perpetuation of jungle justice, and damaging to the high values of womanhood.”

Chapter Four: Research Results and Discussion

Participant Observations and Interventions

My first-hand exposure to mob justice in the Joe Bar Community provided me with insights into the gravity of the phenomenon and its profound impact on communities. It became clear that mob justice is deeply rooted, and stems from a complex interplay of historical traumas, systemic failures, and the urgent need for justice and legal reform. The experience of mob justice can be traumatic for individuals, family members and the community at large. It results in serious injury and/or death and undermines the functioning of the legal system. It diverts scarce resources of the police and legal authorities. Mob justice contributes to state insecurity and to the culture of impunity in Liberia, which further contributes to stalled post-conflict reconstruction and economic development. Each citizen is obligated to obey the law, however, citizens who engage in mob violence are breaking the law, even if they do so to protect their own lives and properties. Extra-legal violence is criminal.

I am aware of the importance of being objective and not intervening during observations as a researcher. However, it was ethically appropriate for me to act when I observed these acts of mob justice, rather than to observe as a bystander, as harm is done to another individual.

November 2015, Joe Bar Community

In 2015, I had an experience with mob justice. About 200 people formed a mob and surrounded the home of an elderly man in Joe Bar Community. At the time of the incident, he was the only person in his house. The mob was armed with knives, machetes, sticks, stones, and gasoline. They threw rocks at the house and broke the gate of the fence to make their way in. The leader of the mob lived in a neighboring community and came to avenge the death of his sister. The young man who lived in the surrounded house had stabbed the woman to death and then ran away. The

mob followed him. They believed that both he and the elderly man were working together to kill for ritualistic purposes. As the mob surrounded the house, neighbors went into their homes and locked their doors for safety, and commercial centers did the same.

I was awakened by my sister on that early November morning, as she shouted out my name. She warned me not to leave the house to intervene, as this could lead to the burning down of our home. She told me that the young man who lived next door had stabbed a girl to death at a nightclub. All the neighbors had fled into their homes, as the mob prepared to burn down our neighbor's house. As we talked, I could hear people running and shouting around the neighborhood. I went out to the scene and tried to talk to the mob. The leader told me that the young man who lived in the house had killed his sister a few hours ago. He could see that I felt his pain. I agreed to go with him to search for the accused. We were then told that the accused was in police custody at the J.F.K. Memorial Hospital in Sinkor, Monrovia. As we prepared to go to the hospital, the police finally arrived. They restored normalcy and people began coming out of their homes. The convict is currently serving 10 years of imprisonment at the Monrovia Central Prison. His action was unintended, but he did have a knife for protection and was under the influence of marijuana.

July 3, 2023, 3:00 AM, General Services Agency Road, Joe Bar Community

I also encountered acts of mob violence during my research externship during the summer of 2023. Early on a rainy morning, an angry mob of less than twenty people surrounded a 15-year-old boy, who begged them to spare his life. He was accused of burglary. He held a bag with chickens that he may have stolen, but he refused to tell where he got the chickens from. As he cried for his mother, the mob began to hit him and wanted to take him to an unknown destination

to pass judgment on him. The mob was inflamed and impatient because they had identified the boy as dangerous.

I approached the mob leader to talk to him. I promised to give him US\$5.00, if he would allow us to take the child to the police or to his home. Eventually, the mob followed us to the child's home. When his mother and neighbors heard the story, they could not stop crying and begging the mob not to harm him or burn down her house. The mob began to empathize, and the child's life was saved. I still wonder what would have happened to him if I had not gone to the scene.

July 2023, General Services Agency Road, Joe Bar Community

A mob surrounded a motorcyclist, slapping and punching the young man, as he tried to defend himself. Members of the mob put the man on a motorbike, under the pretext that they were taking him to the Paynesville Zone 5 Police Station. The mob consisted mainly of male motorcyclists, who are known for participating in mob justice because criminals often attack them to steal their motorbikes. In most cases, the motorcyclists sustain major injuries or lose their motorbikes and lives.

When I encountered this mob action, the mob was suspicious of me because I questioned them regarding their violence. They thought that I was an undercover police officer and said that they were taking the accused to the police station. However, upon my arrival at the police station, I did not see them. Immediately, I accompanied the police to search for the victim. We eventually found the mob in a different location. Surrounded by at least 100 persons this time, the victim was bleeding profusely, and his shirt had been torn off. The angry mob was investigating and torturing him near the Paynesville Joe Bar Market. They accused him of being

an accomplice in a foreign exchange bureau robbery. The police eventually rescued him and arrested the owner of the foreign exchange bureau, who was part of the mob.

Summary of Participant Observations

There is a deep-seated fear and insecurity that permeates the community, due to the prevalence of mob justice. Community members resort to unconventional and deviant means to achieve culturally prescribed goals when they face a disjunction between those goals and the legitimate means available to achieve them. Community members consistently emphasized how this climate of fear has far-reaching consequences, negatively affecting the safety of individuals, and eroding social cohesion and overall community well-being.

The fear of being wrongly accused or targeted by a mob has a negative effect on everyday life in Joe Bar Community. When people perceive threats to their immediate security, they often become fearful and intolerant, and are more likely to resort to mob justice. Alarm raised by shouts and cries of criminal activity incite the masses to descend on a person of questionable character, allegedly caught engaged in criminal activity. Armed with sticks and machetes, they hit and beat the suspect(s). This behavior contradicts the principle of the rule of law, which stipulates that no person is entitled to take the law into their own hands, and that all persons are presumed innocent until proven guilty. Mob justice undermines the fragility of the Liberian state, and worsens lack of confidence in the government, as criminals challenge the authority of the government.

Quantitative Results

The data contained in the tables below provide some answers to the research questions:

1. What are the causes of mob justice in post-war Liberia?
 - a) Do police officers in the Liberian justice system have the requisite training and experience needed to perform their duties during acts of mob violence?
2. What are the effects of mob justice in post-war Liberia?
 - a) Does the justice system discriminate in prosecuting cases related to mob justice?

Table 1. What are the causes of mob of justice in post-war Liberia? (Research Question 1)

| Themes | Age | Court trial expenses | Delay of court trials | Bribery of judicial officials | Poor judiciary support | Lack of civil education | Total |
|---------------------|----------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------|
| Questionnaire items | | Item 8 | Item 17 | Items 18, 25 | Items 22, 21 | Item 24 | |
| Male | 18-29 | 5 (10%) | 9 (15%) | 12 (15%) | 14 (22%) | 4 (8%) | 44 (14%) |
| | 30-39 | 9 (18%) | 20 (33%) | 15 (18%) | 5 (8%) | 9 (18%) | 58 (19%) |
| | Above 40 | 4 (8%) | 11 (18%) | 4 (5%) | 2 (3%) | 13 (27%) | 34 (11%) |
| Female | 18-29 | 7 (14%) | 6 (10%) | 16 (20%) | 28 (46%) | 7 (14%) | 64 (21%) |
| | 30-39 | 4 (8%) | 8 (13%) | 12 (15%) | 6 (9%) | 2 (4%) | 32 (11%) |
| | Above 40 | 21 (42%) | 6 (10%) | 22 (27%) | 6 (9%) | 13 (27%) | 68 (23%) |
| Total | | 50 (16%) | 60 (20%) | 81 (27%) | 61 (20%) | 48 (16%) | 300 |

Table 1 answers Research Question 1: What are the causes of mob justice in post-war Liberia? Table 1 shows that overall, fifty respondents (16% of the sample) reported court trial expenses as a cause of mob justice; 42% of women above 40 as compared with 8% of women in the 30-39 age group and 8% of men above 40 reported court trial expenses as a cause of mob

justice. Sixty respondents (20% of the sample) reported delay of court trials as a cause of mob justice; 33% of men in the 30-39 age group as compared with 10% of women above 40 and 10% of women in the 18-29 age group reported delay of court trials as a cause of mob justice. Eighty-one respondents (27% of the sample) reported bribery of judicial officers as a cause of mob justice; 27% of women above 40 as compared with 5% of men above 40 reported briberies of judicial officials as a cause of mob justice. Sixty-one respondents (20% of the sample) reported poor judiciary support as a cause of mob justice; 46% of women in the 18-29 age group as compared with 3% of men above 40 reported poor judiciary support as a cause of mob justice. Forty-eight respondents (16% of the sample) reported lack of civil education as a cause of mob justice; 27% of women above 40 and 27% of men above 40 as compared with 4% of women in the 30-39 age group reported lack of civil education as a cause of mob justice.

Table 2. What are the effects of mob justice in post-war Liberia? (Research Question 2)

| Themes | Age | Punishments without court trials | Fear among citizens | Support of mob activities | Total |
|---------------------|----------|----------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|----------|
| Questionnaire items | | Item 3 | Item 9 | Item 23 | |
| Male | 18-29 | 29 (40%) | 21 (12%) | 13 (23%) | 63 (21%) |
| | 30-39 | 5 (7%) | 7 (4%) | 5 (9%) | 17 (6%) |
| | Above 40 | 9 (12%) | 42 (25%) | 11 (19%) | 62 (20%) |
| Female | 18-29 | 3 (4%) | 60 (35%) | 11 (19%) | 74 (25%) |
| | 30-39 | 18 (25%) | 19 (11%) | 4 (7%) | 41 (14%) |
| | Above 40 | 9 (12%) | 21 (12%) | 13 (23%) | 43 (14%) |
| Total | | 73 (24%) | 170 (56%) | 57 (19%) | 300 |

Table 2 answers Research Question 2: What are the effects of mob justice in post-war Liberia? Table 2 shows that overall, seventy-three respondents (24% of the sample) reported

punishments without court trials as an effect of mob violence. Men were more likely to report punishments without court trials as an effect of mob justice, especially men in the 18-29 age group (40%), while women and especially those in the 18-29 age group (4%) were less likely to report punishments without court trails as an effect of mob violence. One-hundred and seventy respondents (56% of the sample) reported fear among citizens as an effect of mob violence.

Women in the 18-29 age group (35%) were most likely to report fear among citizens as an effect of mob justice, while men in the 30-39 age group (4%) were least likely to report fear among citizens as an effect of mob violence. Fifty-seven respondents (19% of the sample) reported support of mob activities as an effect of mob violence; 23% of women above 40 and 23% of men in the 18-29 age group were most likely to list this as a cause of mob justice, while only 7% of women in the 30-39 age group reported support of mob activities as an effect of mob violence.

Table 3: Perception of the justice system's handling of mob violence cases (Research Questions 1a and 2a)

| | Age | Very well | Well | Somehow well | Not at all well | No opinion | Total |
|---------------------|----------|-----------|----------|--------------|-----------------|------------|----------|
| Questionnaire items | | Item 4 | Item 5 | Item 6 | Item 12 | Item 13 | |
| Male | 18-29 | 11 (26%) | 19 (28%) | 12 (20%) | 33 (41%) | 20 (39%) | 95 (32%) |
| | 30-39 | 8 (19%) | 8 (12%) | 8 (13%) | 6 (7%) | 8 (16%) | 38 (13%) |
| | Above 40 | 10 (24%) | 13 (19%) | 3 (5%) | 21 (26%) | 11 (21%) | 58 (19%) |
| Female | 18-29 | 2 (5%) | 9 (13%) | 10 (17%) | 5 (6%) | 4 (8%) | 30 (10%) |
| | 30-39 | 7 (17%) | 5 (7%) | 10 (17%) | 11 (14%) | 5 (10%) | 38 (13%) |
| | Above 40 | 4 (9%) | 13 (19%) | 17 (28%) | 4 (5%) | 3 (6%) | 41 (14%) |
| Total | | 42 (14%) | 67 (22%) | 60 (20%) | 80 (27%) | 51 (17%) | 300 |

Table 3 answers Research Question 1a: Do police officers in the Liberian justice system have the requisite training and experience needed to perform their duties during acts of mob violence? and Research Question 2a: Does the justice system discriminate in prosecuting cases related to mob justice?

Table 3 shows that overall, forty-two respondents (14%) of the sample reported ‘very well’ as a perception of the justice system’s handling of mob violence cases; 26% of men in the 18-29 age group as compared with 5% of women in the 18-29 age group reported ‘very well’ as a perception of the justice system’s handling of mob violence cases. Sixty-seven respondents (22% of the sample) reported ‘well’ as a perception of the justice system’s handling of mob violence cases. These respondents were mainly men in the 18-29 age group (28%), with a small percentage (7%) of women in the 30-39 age group reporting ‘well’ as a perception of the justice system’s handling of mob violence cases. Sixty respondents (20% of the sample) reported ‘somewhat well’ as a perception of the justice system’s handling of mob violence cases. These respondents were mostly women above 40 (28%) and consisted of fewer men above 40 (5%). Eighty respondents (27% of the sample) reported ‘not at all well’ as a perception of the justice system’s handling of mob violence cases; 41% of men in the 18-29 age group as compared with 5% of women above 40 reported ‘not at all well’ as a perception of the justice system’s handling of mob violence cases, indicating a significant difference in perception based on gender and age. Fifty-one respondents (17% of the sample) had ‘no opinion’ about the perception of the justice system’s handling of mob violence cases. These respondents were mainly men in the 18-29 age group (39%). Only a small percentage (6%) of women above 40 had ‘no opinion’ about the perception of the justice system’s handling of mob violence cases.

Qualitative Results

Focus Group Discussions

Three hours were expected to suffice for the focus group discussions, with 60 attendees in total for the three groups. However, the focus group discussions lasted for about 4 hours, due to the late arrival of some attendees. The first focus group discussion had 20 attendees: 7 men and 13 women. The men were between the ages of 25 to 40 and the women were between the ages of 20 to 40. The second focus group had 18 attendees: 5 men and 13 women. The third focus group had 20 attendees: 9 men and 11 women. The age ranges for the men and women in the second and third focus groups were the same as for the first focus group. The focus groups also provided answers to the research questions.

Generally, community members attribute mob justice to the corrupt judicial system. This perception has eroded their faith in the system. Many respondents believe that judicial bribery is rampant, particularly when alleged criminals are released from custody. This perception fuels mistrust in legal processes and serves as a catalyst for mob justice. Participants also expressed their frustration with the intensity of the legal process as it pertains to lengthy and expensive legal proceedings. These factors are viewed as contributing to the rise in mob justice incidents, as community members believe that slow and costly legal processes often fail to effectively deliver justice.

During the focus group discussions, there was consensus among the attendees that mob violence was a prevalent issue facing the Job Bar Community, and that law officials were not addressing the issue in ways that decrease the threat. Delay in court trials and the lack of judiciary support that allows police to respond to mob violence incidents are themes that were frequently brought up by attendees during the focus group discussions.

More optimistically, participants reported that with appropriate interventions and support, they could work together as a community to address the deeply rooted issue of mob justice. Their aspiration for change shows the community's wish to seek alternatives to mob justice and to embrace legal solutions. The participants demonstrated a sense of community solidarity. Despite the challenges posed by mob justice, community members shared a strong bond and shared a commitment to each other's well-being. This deep sense of unity is an important asset to integrate into initiatives to bring forth positive community change.

Delay in Court Trials

Most attendees expressed that the court system was too slow in adjudicating cases. They believe that there are too many procedures to follow in making sure justice is served. For example, some attendees implied that most alleged criminals are held on bail outside of jail, rather than being detained before court trials, which are usually scheduled for weeks into the future. These alleged criminals continue to walk around the community, which does not appear to be fair to other community members. An attendee stated:

"I am frustrated with delays in the court system. Cases drag on for years, and it makes no sense to me at all. Mob violence is wrong, and it is not fair to wait while the person is in your face bluffing."

Some attendees implied that court delays are due to corrupt judicial practices. They stated that the judges intentionally scheduled long court dates when they are bribed. An attendee who expressed such frustration stated:

"... A girl was raped; I think it was in 2012 when that happened. The man who did it works with some NGOs and used his money to delay that case. We don't know how that case

ended and that man does not even live here anymore. That poor family is just living with shame.”

Lack of Judicial Support

Many attendees expressed the inadequacy of judicial support as a core factor that leads to mob justice. They blame the government for poorly funding the courts and police, which they said exposed judicial officers to bribery. An attendee with a level of empathy for judicial workers stated:

“Our government is corrupt. You have lawmakers making thousands of US dollars while judges and police officers make peanuts... the worst thing is that their salaries don’t even come on time... so we the citizens take all the trouble.”

Attendees also blame lack of funding for poor logistics, such that the police and court officers claim that they do not have the resources to adequately respond to cases. Most attendees shared their experiences reaching out for assistance and receiving none. An attendee stated:

“Every time you call police, they say they don’t have transportation, or you should buy fuel for them. Last time, a police officer even told me that I am responsible for transporting the criminal... the man steals from me, I catch him, then I should pay his way to the police station... just forget it.”

A common theme among the police is that they do not have any means of transportation to respond to mob violence, and when they do, there is no fuel.

Another attendee stated:

“I feel for the police, but they do not feel for themselves. Their pay is small, we all know, and the government does not even give them enough cars or even fuel for their bikes, but they are very demanding. You should pay their way, register the case and all that.”

Many participants had a strong sense of hostility towards perpetrators of mob justice. The community's skepticism toward the effectiveness of legal institutions fueled this hostility. They also shared that ordinary people are often mistaken for criminals, and with no opportunity to defend themselves, they are mobbed. The participants shared their experiences with the judicial system, most of which did not leave them with a positive perception of the system. Corruption has plagued the system, leading to delays in cases and poor responses when community members need assistance.

Interviews

Stakeholder engagement was a critical component of this research. The expected hours for interviews were covered as planned, although there were challenges in schedules, due to the busy schedules of judicial officers who agreed to sit for the interviews. Once we agreed on the dates and times, they made themselves available for interviews. These interviews provided an in-depth understanding of their perspectives regarding mob justice and provided answers to the research questions. During the eight different interviews with judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and police officers, it became clear that they were concerned about the lack of public trust in them and the institutions they represent, and were open to admitting the logistical challenges they faced. The common themes gathered across the interviews were an awareness of the public's lack of trust in the judicial system, lack of logistics, and lack of adequate training to meet the current needs of the public.

Lack of Trust in the Judicial System

Regarding causes of mob justice (Research Question 1), according to the judges, prosecutors, attorneys and police officers, lack of trust in the due process of the law is a critical reason why citizens turn to mob violence. For judicial officers, this is a perception of the public that they

have had to deal with since the devastating 14 years of civil war that led to lack of trust in the government's ability to protect its citizens. Judicial officers shared that the issue of trust is always brought up by plaintiffs, clients, and community members. Judicial officers try to encourage the public to trust judicial processes, especially when there is no public understanding as to which process is happening at the time. Generally, regarding the lack of trust in the judicial system, excerpts of the interviewees' responses are noted here:

Judge 1: "Mob justice is a symptom of a larger problem. It is definitely a result of the lack of trust the public has in the court and justice system at large. So, we see lots of people resorting to mob actions because they believe it's the only way to get justice."

Prosecutor 1: "I have cases where the evidence was weak, but the community was not willing to wait for further investigation and they felt convinced that the suspect was guilty because someone said that they witnessed the person stealing the item missing. As I tried to gather more details from other community members, one day the suspect was taking a walk around the community – a few citizens took matters into their own hands. I tell you my friend, it's a dangerous trend our country is taking, and it undermines our job and the whole legal process."

Defense Attorney 1: "Mob justice is a tragedy for both the accused and the community. It's a result of frustration with a justice system that is of course perceived as slow and inefficient. Of course, the cycle of violence and mistrust has become a challenge, and the government needs to do better."

Judges emphasized the importance of imposing strict sentences in egregious cases. They believe that strict penalties act as deterrents against mob justice. They also emphasized their commitment to upholding the rule of law and maintaining civil order in Liberian society. Judges

underscored the fundamental principle that the essence of justice is that everyone in society is equally subject to the law. They also stated their commitment to ensuring that justice is blind to factors such as social status, wealth and personal connections.

Police Officer 1: “We’re trying our best to address trust issues with the public daily, but it’s not easy. People often feel that reporting a crime won’t lead to any action, so they take matters into their own hands.”

Police officers report that alleged criminals are often released within 48 hours in compliance with the law, especially when there is no complainant or there is a lack of evidence. This practice contributes to community dissatisfaction, as the public feels that justice has not been served, and that bribery has undermined legal procedures. Police officers also acknowledge the public perception of judicial bribery and its effects on mob justice cases, which highlight the complexities of addressing mob justice, as law enforcement officers grapple with the challenges arising from public mistrust.

Lack of Logistics

The lack of logistics was an issue the interviewer brought up during conversations with judicial officials. This became a theme as interviewees constantly referred to lack of logistics as a primary factor for their poor responses in addressing cases of mob violence. Police officers expressed that lack of vehicles and often low supply of fuel make it challenging to get to the crime scene on time, and to prevent mob violence before it occurs.

A police officer stated:

“Sometimes we are on our way to the crime scene, then we run out fuel or the bike or car has a mechanical issue that causes us to stop. To get other transportation, mostly commercial transport, is difficult because there is a perception out there that police officers do not pay the

transport fare. So, even if you are in an emergency, you will have to argue or some time force people before they give you a ride to the place you are heading. All this is because we don't have enough fuel and we understand it is not easy on our government too."

Judges and prosecutors acknowledge that lack of logistics is a challenge, however they contend that despite these challenges, they continue to work hard to make sure that justice is served.

A prosecutor stated:

"The way I look at things, we need more resources to make our job easier and to be able to prosecute crimes in this district. No doubt we need more, from staffing to other things. But even without that we are still working and doing what we can to keep our people safe. The problem with logistics, you will have run behind things that the Ministry knows you need, yet they want you to run behind it.... Anyway, we are working."

Lack of Adequate Training

Among the interviewees, the lack of training was a theme identified as a cause of mob justice. It was primarily brought up by police officers. Training was mentioned 17 times by one police officer and 26 times by other officers during the interviews. When training was mentioned by judges and prosecutors, it was meant to highlight advocacy for training against mob justice. For defense attorneys, training was needed for the police, who they perceived were less trained to handle cases brought before them. The police did not necessarily agree with this assertion but agreed that training would better prepare them to address mob violence.

For example, a police officer stated:

"The way people want you to be the judge on the scene and lawyer, then police officer, it is hard to break up mob violence. Even when you try to stop mob violence, if you're not saying

who's wrong or right on the spot, the people say you are taking sides with the alleged criminal. I have colleagues who have been beaten badly by community members who said they were taking a side. We need training on how to handle these cases, because it's not always going to be just arresting people. Sometimes people want you to say something, and when we say the wrong thing, then we are in big trouble."

As effects of mob justice, the focus group discussions revealed a sense of injustice and fear, intensified by the prevalence of mob justice. However, they also illuminated a spirit of community solidarity that, if harnessed, could drive positive transformation. The interviewees frequently cited the lack of trust in the judicial system as a perceived cause of mob justice. There was fear among police officers and prosecutors to speak about logistical challenges, although they admitted that it is a challenge and if appropriately addressed, could boost their capacity to reduce mob violence. Lack of training is a prime concern for police officers. They look forward to training that could help them be safe in the communities, while they work to reduce mob violence.

Limitations

Confirmation Bias

Bias refers to any process at any stage of inference which tends to produce results or conclusions that differ systematically from the empirical evidence (Yarborough, 2021). Its impacts can be detrimental, negatively affecting the entire research process. Accordingly, research communities prioritize bias prevention. Confirmation bias refers to the process of seeking information to reinforce existing beliefs or hypotheses rather than challenging or disproving them (Cherry, 2022). An effective mechanism to overcome confirmation bias is to seek out opposing views and

to be willing to update or change existing beliefs based on evidence presented from these opposing views (ibid.).

My thesis posits that mob justice may be linked to a lack of trust in the judicial system among citizens in Liberia. To minimize confirmation bias in my research, the interviews and focus groups I conducted allowed space for open-ended discussion. This approach contributed to the sharing of diverse perspectives and consequently improved the validity and reliability of the research findings. Throughout the interview and focus group processes, I evaluated my assumptions and interpretations by rephrasing participant responses and asking for clarification and confirmation of these responses.

Researcher Positionality Statement

The term positionality both describes an individual's world view and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political contexts (Holmes, 2020). The researcher's world view is shaped by their geographical location (home country or nationality) religious faith, ethnicity, sexuality, values, and political allegiance, among other attributes. Holmes (2020) suggests that researchers should disclose their positionality to show how their beliefs may have influenced their research.

As a researcher connected to Liberia, my home country, my lived experiences shape how I conduct research and interpret data. Positionality is shaped by a person's cultural background, personal experiences, and academic training, among other factors. The acknowledgement of positionality provides an opportunity to recognize research biases and subjectivities. Growing up and living in Liberia has provided me with an intimate understanding of the historical context and socio-cultural dynamics of the Liberian population. While such personal experience can be a valued asset in research, it can also introduce potential biases.

Holmes (2020) notes that although there will always be some practice of bias in research, bias can be reduced by using reflexive approaches, which include consideration of diverse perspectives. Maintenance of reflexivity is critical to steering the complexities of research in my own country. Throughout the research process, I engaged in self-reflection, and questioned my positionality, privileges, and biases, to limit their influence over my perceptions and analysis of the research.

Research Setting and Questionnaire

Although mob activities occur throughout Monrovia, its surrounding areas, and other regions in Liberia, it was beyond the scope of this research to examine occurrences in multiple locations. As such, this research is restricted to the Joe Bar Community, Paynesville, Monrovia. A second research limitation is that the questionnaire did not allow for open-ended responses to questions about the causes and effects of mob justice. As such, respondents could only select among causes and effects from a limited list. While the questionnaire contributed to a broader understanding of the phenomenon of mob justice and of providing data for statistical analysis, it is also limited in its narrow scope of responses.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The null hypothesis states that mob justice is not associated with citizens' lack of confidence in the judicial system, while the alternative hypothesis states that mob justice is associated with citizens' lack of confidence in the judicial system. The results of both quantitative and qualitative analyses provide evidence that support the alternative hypothesis.

The research results show that a significant proportion of the population supports mob justice as a means of self-defense or collective defense against alleged criminals, due to the perceived failure of the justice system. Frustration with law enforcers who fail to administer justice often leads to mob violence, leaving people feeling unprotected. Mob justice has worsened human security in Liberia. Its usage is in defiance of natural, human, and legal rules and conventions. Although mob justice does not resolve conflicts nor maintain peace and security, it is important to acknowledge that people's lives and survival are threatened by the high rate of insecurity in Liberia. To curb this violent trend, the role of government is paramount. In summary, the research on mob justice in post-war Liberia, with a specific focus on the Joe Bar Community, illuminates the underlying causes, effects, and potential avenues for improvement regarding this pervasive issue.

The causes of mob justice in Liberia are multi-faceted. The country has a history of civil conflict and political instability, leading to widespread poverty, unemployment, and a lack of access to basic resources. These structural inequalities create frustration and hopelessness among the population, as they face significant barriers in achieving socially accepted goals like economic prosperity and security. The Liberian judicial system has also been historically weak, characterized by corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of resources. This undermines people's faith

in formal legal institutions and may lead them to seek alternative means of justice. High levels of impunity, where perpetrators of crimes often go unpunished, contribute to frustration and anger within the population. Traditional beliefs and practices may also play a role in mob justice, including beliefs in communal responsibility for maintaining order.

The effects of mob justice in Liberia are significant. Mob justice often perpetuates a cycle of violence, as acts of vigilante justice can lead to retaliatory acts. This undermines the authority and legitimacy of formal legal institutions, eroding trust in the state's ability to maintain law and order, further weakening the overall social fabric. Mob justice can also deepen divisions within communities, leading to rifts between those who support vigilantism and those who advocate for a more formalized legal system.

The thesis explores mob justice as a structural phenomenon that contributes to poor governance, abuse of human rights, and civil conflict. It examines what happens to a nation when its leaders and other policymakers ignore these sociopolitical issues and thereby drive citizens to engage in mass social disorder, potentially leading to civil conflict. Liberia has grappled with a series of national challenges since gaining independence, including a military coup in April 1980 and a civil war spanning from 1989 to 2003. Presently, substantive peace remains elusive. However, the time has come for innovation and a paradigm shift in the perception of nationhood, including how Liberians relate to one another.

The thesis engages national leaders and policymakers on issues that, if disregarded, can escalate into crises culminating in war, population displacement, mass migration, and loss of life, thereby stalling national economic progress. With advanced information and transportation technologies, nations are more interlinked than ever before. Consequently, these neglected sociopolitical and socioeconomic issues impact regional and global peace and security, as often

articulated by numerous regional and global institutions, such as the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union, and the United Nations. This thesis aims to contribute to a tangible engagement with the Liberian government, drawing upon ideas that not only theorize but also effectively bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Recommendations

Addressing mob justice is urgent, as it poses a significant threat to the fragile peace and security in Liberia following years of devastating civil conflict. As such, ameliorating the prevalence of mob justice in post-conflict Liberia is significant for the establishment of a robust judiciary during the ongoing transition towards peace and democracy. It is not only relevant to Liberia but also encompasses the West African sub-region, the African continent, and the global community at large. The thesis emphasizes that active social responsibility serves as a foundation for peace and security within any society. Collaboration between all sectors of society is essential for a nation's future stability. Additionally, the pursuit of rectifying social, political, and economic disparities is an existential imperative.

The research results show that mob justice arises from a lack of trust in the judicial system, highlighting a pressing need for reform. To address mob justice in the Joe Bar Community and Liberia at large, several recommendations are proposed. The government should prioritize the eradication of corruption within the judicial system. To achieve this goal, a comprehensive policy framework must be established, requiring both international support and a genuine commitment from the government. This multi-faceted approach includes combatting corruption and bribery within the judiciary to undermine the roots of mob justice; providing comprehensive training for judges to effectively handle mob justice cases within the Liberian judicial system; equipping the Liberian National Police with the skills and knowledge needed to

handle mob activities in compliance with legal procedures; treating citizen complaints about mob justice activities with the utmost seriousness, and ensuring that these complaints are thoroughly investigated. Legal practitioners should streamline legal processes, make them more efficient and accessible. These measures will begin to restore faith in the legal process and serve as crucial steps towards curbing mob justice incidents.

Efforts should be made to foster a stronger bond between citizens and security personnel, and to build confidence between citizens, law enforcement and the judiciary. The government should encourage active engagement between community members and local authorities, focusing on raising awareness about legal processes and ensuring access to affordable legal representation. It is also essential to provide comprehensive training for police officers in crowd control and crisis management, while simultaneously emphasizing transparency and accountability within the police force. Encouraging community policing practices and conflict resolution mechanisms can help rebuild trust between the community and formal law enforcement agencies. This includes training police officers in mediation and conflict resolution skills. Building trust through community engagement initiatives and transparent communication channels will help defuse potential mob situations. By implementing these recommendations, we can work towards a Liberia where the rule of law prevails, and mob justice becomes a relic of the past.

Educating citizens about the due process of law and the consequences of mob justice and incentivizing professionalism among public authorities are imperative. Education will empower individuals to seek legal avenues rather than resorting to vigilante actions. Public education campaigns, including community workshops, media campaigns, and school programs, can help raise awareness about the dangers of mob justice.

It is essential to ensure that those involved in mob justice are swiftly brought to justice. This accountability will send a clear message that such actions will not be tolerated in a just society. Efforts should be made to strengthen the formal legal system by investing in infrastructure and increasing resources. Addressing the underlying structural issues that contribute to strain and frustration is also important, which could involve initiatives to reduce poverty, increase access to education, and create economic opportunities. Implementing legal reforms can make the justice system more accessible, transparent, and accountable, which can help restore public faith in formal legal institutions.

Mob justice requires a collaborative and multi-pronged approach to resolve. By implementing these recommendations and fostering community engagement, police reform, and improvements in the justice system, the Joe Bar Community and Liberia can take significant strides towards building a safer and more just society. By implementing targeted interventions that address the root causes of mob justice, it is possible to reduce its prevalence in Liberia. It is my hope that this research serves as a wake-up call for all stakeholders to come together and address the pressing issue of mob justice, ensuring a brighter future for Liberia and its resilient people.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Research Questionnaire on Mob Justice

Respondent location:

Sex: Male Female Other

Age: 18-29 30-39

Questionnaire

1. Have you ever seen an incidence of mob justice?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

2. How often are alleged criminals caught in this community?
 - a. Daily
 - b. Weekly
 - c. Monthly
 - d. Never
 - e. I do not know.

3. When alleged criminals (thieves, armed robbers, others) are caught, what happens to them?
 - a. They are handed over to the police.
 - b. They are beaten.
 - c. They are beaten to death.
 - d. They are burnt alive.
 - e. Other form of punishment.

4. Do you trust the police to keep handed over criminals in jail?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. To some extent
 - d. No opinion

5. Have you or anyone you know ever bribed a police officer?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

6. Do you have confidence in the court system?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. To some extent
 - d. No opinion
7. Should alleged criminals be sent to court?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sometimes
 - d. No opinion
8. Court processes can be described as (select as many as apply):
 - a. Slow and corrupt
 - b. Fast and affordable
 - c. Expensive and difficult
 - d. No opinion
9. Do you think when walking through a community where you do not live, you could be mistaken for a criminal?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
10. What do you think the government should do to lessen the problem of mob justice in post-war Liberia?
 - a. Stop corruption and bribery within the judicial system.
 - b. Make court process speedy, affordable and fair.
 - c. Build confidence between the police and citizens.
 - d. No opinion
11. How would you describe the training that Liberian judges receive to conduct trials of mob justice cases in post-war Liberia?
 - a. Excellent training
 - b. Adequate training
 - c. Poor training
 - d. No opinion

12. How effective is the Liberian National Police (LNP) in handling mob activities, according to the law and legal procedures?
- a. Very effective
 - b. Make court process speedy, affordable and fair
 - c. Build confidence between the police and citizens
 - d. No opinion
13. How would you describe the level of control the police have over mob activities?
- a. Definitely sufficient
 - b. Probably sufficient
 - c. Probably not sufficient
 - d. Definitely not sufficient
 - e. No opinion
14. How would you rate the overall quality of the court and the police in handling mob activities?
- a. Excellent
 - b. Good
 - c. Poor
 - d. No opinion
15. Do the courts and the police have adequate records about mob justice activities?
- a. Definitely have adequate records
 - b. Probably have adequate records
 - c. Probably have inadequate records
 - d. Definitely have inadequate records
 - e. No opinion
16. How would you describe information about how to register a complaint about mob activities in post-war Liberia?
- a. Easily available
 - b. Somewhat available
 - c. Hard to find.
 - d. No opinion
17. Are citizens' complaints about mob justice activities taken seriously and investigated, or are they ignored?
- a. Complaints are investigated.
 - b. Complaints are ignored.
 - c. It varies.

- d. No opinion
18. If a citizen files a complaint about mob justice activities, are they ever made to feel intimidated?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sometimes
 - d. No opinion
19. When problems arise regarding the operational efficiency of the courts and of the police, how well does the judicial system respond?
- a. Very well
 - b. Well
 - c. Somewhat well
 - d. Not at all well
 - e. No opinion
20. Has the government ever threatened the public about mob justice activities in post-war Liberia?
- a. Sometimes
 - b. Rarely
 - c. Never
 - d. No opinion
21. What is the level of funding available to the state's trial courts, to adjudicate cases of mob justice?
- a. Definitely adequate
 - b. Probably adequate
 - c. Probably not adequate
 - d. Definitely not adequate
 - e. No opinion
22. What is the level of sufficiency of procedures available to the courts and police to prevent mob activities?
- a. Definitely sufficient
 - b. Probably sufficient
 - c. Probably not sufficient
 - d. Definitely not sufficient
 - e. No opinion

23. How do you feel about mob justice?

- a. I always support mob justice.
- b. I sometimes support mob justice.
- c. I never support mob justice.
- d. No opinion

24. What are three causes of mob justice?

- a. List any cause.
- b. List any cause.
- c. List any cause.

25. How can mob justice be stopped in Liberia?

- a. List any way.
- b. List any way.
- c. List any way.

26. Is there anything else you would like to say about mob justice?

Appendix 2. Participant Letter

Dear Participant,

I am Kronyan Jappah, a student in the Department of African American Studies at Syracuse University. I am conducting research for my thesis, titled, The Causes and Effects of Mob Justice in Post-War Liberia. I will use the Paynesville Magisterial Court and the Paynesville Zone 5 Police Station, Monrovia, Montserrado County, to conduct my research. My research has the potential to help the Liberian government, civil society, other institutions, and the public in developing policies to lessen the occurrence of mob violence.

I ask that you please complete the questionnaire. Any information you provide will not be shared.

Thank you,

Kronyan Jappah

Appendix 3. Consent Form

My name is Kronyan Jappah, and I am a graduate student at Syracuse University. I am inviting you to participate in a research study.

I am interested in learning about the causes, effects, and amelioration of mob justice in Liberia, the Joe Bar Community, Paynesville, Monrovia. You will be asked to read or listen to each question in the questionnaire and circle the correct answer to the best of your knowledge. This will take approximately 15 minutes of your time.

Involvement in the study is voluntary. This means that you can choose whether to participate and that you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please contact the research faculty advisor, Dr. Danielle T. Smith at +1315 - 443 - 2795.

By signing the consent form, you agree that you are 18 years of age or older, and you wish to participate in this research study.

Signature of participant

Date

Printed name of participant

Signature of researcher

Date

Kronyan Jappah

Printed name of researcher.

Title of Research Study

Causes, Effects, and Amelioration of Mob Justice in Liberia: A Case Study of the Joe Bar Community, Paynesville, Monrovia.

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VITA

Kronyan Nawin Jappah earned a master's degree in international relations from the University of Liberia and a bachelor's degree in public administration from Cuttington University (Liberia).

Thirsty for further education, in 2022, he enrolled in the Department of African American Studies in the College of Arts and Sciences at Syracuse University, where he worked on an M.A. in Pan-African Studies. While pursuing his degree at Syracuse University, he worked as a Graduate Teaching Assistant in the Department of African American Studies. His overarching research focused on examining the role of historical events and how they inform contemporary African diplomacy and the role of Africa in global governance. He is also interested in gender and development issues in Africa.